

Make Up Cool Chord Progressions Easily

by [Dennis Winge](#)

This article assumes you know [how to create harmonized scales](#) in both major and minor keys, and are familiar with them enough to [create simple chord progressions](#). To review, the major harmonized scale is:

Scale Degree	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Triad	maj	min	min	maj	maj	min	dim
7 th chord	Maj7	Min7	Min7	Maj7	7	Min7	Min7b5

And the minor harmonized scale is:

Scale Degree	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Triad	Min	dim	maj	min	min	maj	maj
7 th chord	Min7	Min7b5	Maj7	Min7	Min7	Maj7	7

The fun really starts when you use both scales in the same chord progression. For example in the key of A major we have:

Scale Degree	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Triad	Amaj	Bmin	C#min	Dmaj	Ema	F#min	G#dim
7 th chord	Amaj7	Bmin7	C#min7	Dmaj7	E7	F#min7	G#min7b5

And the A minor harmonized scale is:

Scale Degree	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Triad	Amin	Bdim	Cmaj	Dmin	Emin	Fmaj	Gmaj
7 th chord	Amin7	Bmin7b5	Cmaj7	Dmin7	Emin7	Fmaj7	G7

Suppose we were to take a few chords from the major and then mix in a few 'bluesy' or 'darker' sounding chords from the minor. An example would be:

|| A | E | D | A |

| G | D C | A | A ||

The bluesy quality comes in bars 5 and 6 where the G and C chords are taken directly from the minor scale. How can we just blindly mix the two like this? In short, it's because our Western music has derived from both European classical music and the songs that came from Africa via the slave trade in the United States from which styles such as blues and gospel derived. In places like New Orleans in the early 1900's, these two distinct influences melded together. Now, over 100 years later, our ears have no problem with the amalgamation.

A good example of this is in the traditional song “I Know You Rider” which goes:

	: D	%	C	G
D	%	%	% :	
	F	C	F	C Em
D	%	%	%	

The song is clearly in D major not D minor, and yet the C, G, and F chords are predominant, with the only other chord besides D major that is from the major harmonized scale being Em and only takes up 2 beats.

When you start to become more familiar with mixing these two harmonized scales, you can create more ‘soulful’ progressions such as:

section 1

||: A | C#m | D | % :|| play 3x
| C | Bm | A | % ||

section 2

	G	D/F#	F	A/E
F#m	G	E/G#	A	
G	D/F#	F	A/E	
Bm	%	Dm	%	

And speaking of soul, how about “[Soulshine](#)” by Warren Haynes? I’ll tell you what: instead of just spoon-feeding you the chords, I’m going to give you only the roman numerals, and tell you that the key is Bb. You should analyze the progressions above in terms of roman numerals, and keep a journal of progressions you hear and like, analyzed in Roman Numerals so that you can really internalize them and play them in different keys.

intro

||: I | V | VI bVIIImaj | I :||

verse

|| I V | IV I | I V | IV I |
| I V | IV I | I V | VI bVIIImaj ||

chorus

|| I | V | IV7 | I |

| I | V | VI bVIIImaj | I ||

bridge

|| VI | IV | % | I |

| III | IV | bVIIImaj | V ||

(song form: intro, verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, solos on chorus and bridge, multiple choruses with vocals and solos)

Two technical notes:

1. When analyzing a chord progression that mixes major and minor harmony, use the major scale as the basis of your analysis, and use the “b” symbol to indicate if a chord is flat and “#” if something is sharp. Also, name the quality of the chord if it’s different from what it is in the major scale.

What I mean is, if you’re in the key of C and you have a Bb chord, the key of C major’s 7th degree is Bmin7b5, so not only is the Bb a “flat 7th” to the key (i.e. Bb is a half-step lower than B, the key’s natural 7th), but the Bb chord is a major chord (as opposed the 7th scale degree’s natural tendency to be min7b5), so the proper analysis of the Bb chord in the key of C is : bVIIImaj. Similarly, the chord Eb would be bIIImaj.

2. Generally, the mixing of the major and minor scales is best done by starting with the major and adding some spice with the minor chords, rather than starting with minor and adding major. This is because, as explained above, our ears are used to hearing the soulful strains of minor within a major context, but if you throw in a deliberately major chord in a minor progression it can sometimes just sound plain weird.

An example in Dm would be | Dm | F | G | F#m |. The 4th chord, taken from D major, is out of place, unless of course you’re going for a surprise effect. And, this isn’t to say that some chords taken from the major harmonized scale won’t sound good while in a minor. For example, the Beatles used a Bmin in the turnaround of “Come Together” in Dm with great success:

| Bm | G A | Dm ...

“come together, right now, over me”...

There is a ton of content to explore here, so have fun and send me a sample of your work! :)

About the author: Dennis Winge is a professional guitarist, composer, and teacher living in the Finger Lakes Region of New York State. If you are interested in taking [Guitar Lessons in Ithaca](#), NY, then be sure to contact Dennis!