Pentatonic scales contain **5 notes**.

Whilst different 5 note scales exist, the term 'pentatonic scales' most commonly refers to **major & minor pentatonic scales** which have been used in a wide variety of music from all over the world for a long time.

Pentatonic scales & blues scales are extremely useful for musicians to know. They're used regularly in improvisation as well as to create memorable melodies, riffs and licks in many styles of music such as blues, jazz, country, funk, rock, soul, reggae, pop, gospel, folk plus lots of other world music too, the list goes on.

They're a fantastic way for musicians to **get started improvising** as they're often easier to use and become comfortable with. With pentatonic scales (as opposed to a full scale), we often have less chance of hitting any 'wrong' notes that may sound bad or clash as the chords change. This makes it easier to start sounding good on your instrument and develop a sense of musicality early on.

Major & minor blues scales are essentially those same pentatonics, plus one extra note.

The extra note is sometimes referred to as a 'blue note'. Using the blue note can add some tension to the music and help create a 'bluesy' sound (when used tastefully of course).

It's important to point out 2 things:

- There are many musical elements that make something sound 'bluesy', not just the blues scale.
- When you hear people say '**the**' blues scale, they usually mean the minor blues scale. There is a major blues scale too but it seems as though less beginners are taught about this one.

What's included in this sheet

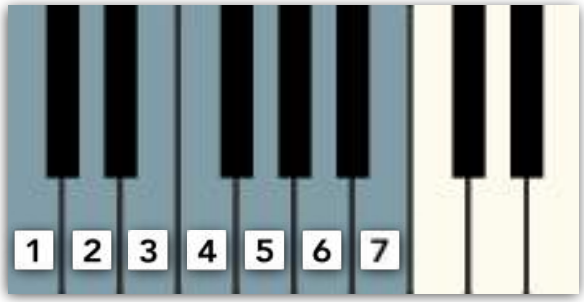
- Theory breakdown of each scale & how to find them on piano
- Relative majors & minors
- Glossary of every major & minor pentatonic & major and minor blues scale

This sheet does not include finger numbers because running up and down these scales (like we do with regular major and minor scales) is not as useful in this case. It's more beneficial to learn the notes and the patterns and then practise using them musically. For that, of course, the fingers will vary depending on what you're trying to play.

The best way to learn how to use these scales musically is by learning melodies and imitating licks and fills that use them. This will help you build up a real musical vocabulary in the style you're trying to learn which you can combine this with your own experimentation and simple improvisation.

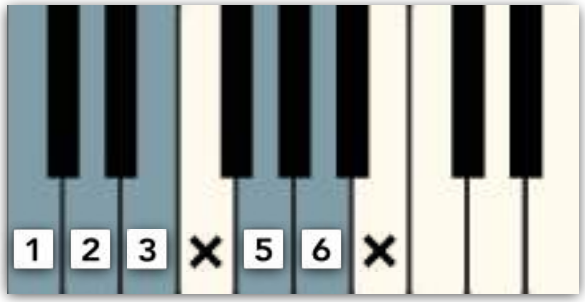
A major pentatonic scale contains 5 out of the 7 notes in a full major scale. We can **remove the 4th and 7th** degrees of the scale like this:

C Major Scale



C D E F G A B

C Major Pentatonic Scale



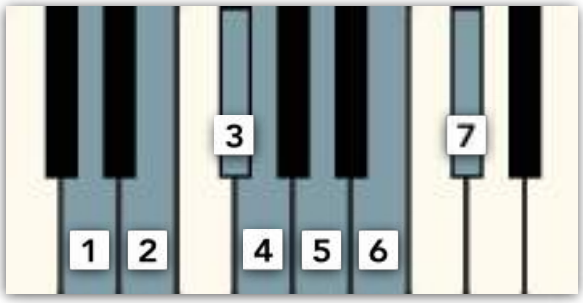
C D E G A

The best way to describe how a scale is built, is to list the intervals it contains:

Major Pentatonic Scale 1 2 3 5 6

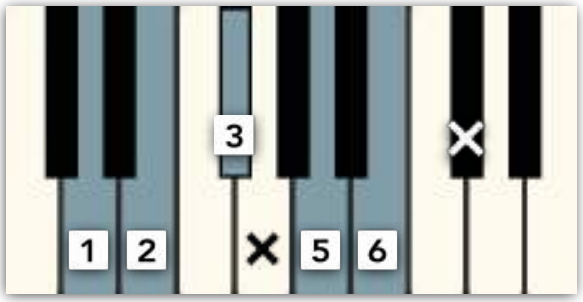
Tonic Major 2nd Major 3rd Perfect 5th Major 6th

D Major Scale



D E F♯ G A B C♯

D Major Pentatonic Scale



D E F♯ A B

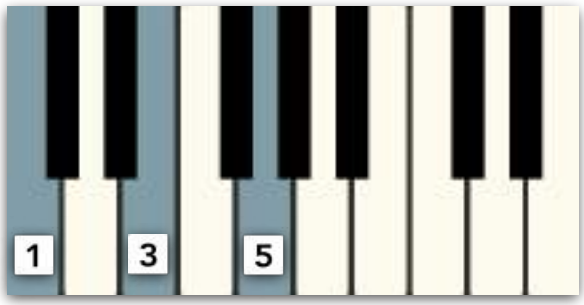
- By removing the 4th and 7th degrees of the major scale, we no longer have any half steps (semitones) in the scale and none of the tension that brings. The remaining notes are easier to use, melodically, and make sound good in an improvisation, even over diatonic chord changes (chords that stick inside the key).
- We could think of these as our safe 'go to' notes in a major key but of course that doesn't mean they will always work. We must still use our ears and remain aware of moments when the harmony may clash with any notes in the pentatonic scale, particularly if a chord goes out the key.

It's important that we're able to recognise the notes and the shape of a scale quickly and confidently on the keyboard in order to move around the scale and use it effectively without getting mixed up. We can use the major scale method above but we can also **use a familiar chord shape as a framework** to help us see all the notes we need. I usually find this to be easier, visually.

Once you know a major chord (in root position), a major pentatonic just needs **2 more notes**.

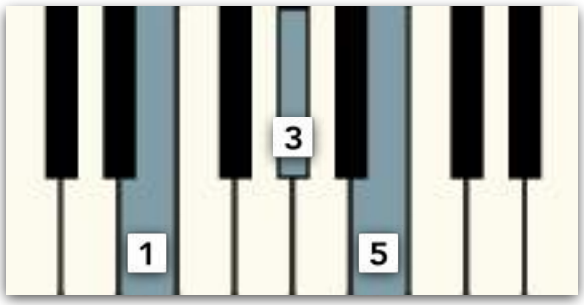
- A **whole step** in between the root & 3rd
- Then another **whole step** above the 5th

C Major Triad

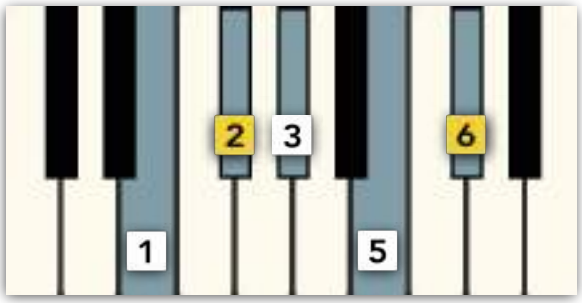


C Major Pentatonic Scale

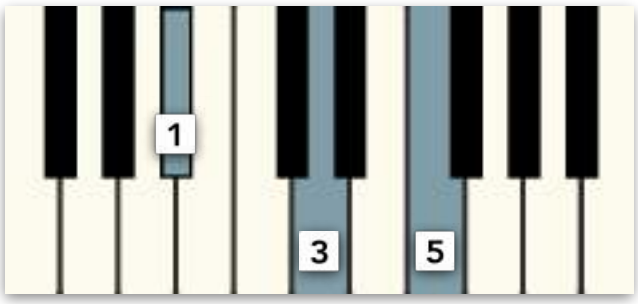
E Major Triad



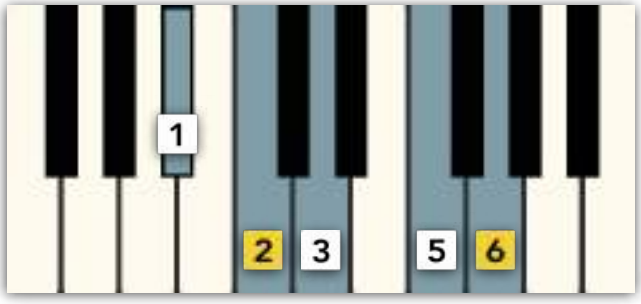
E Major Pentatonic Scale



B♭ Major Triad



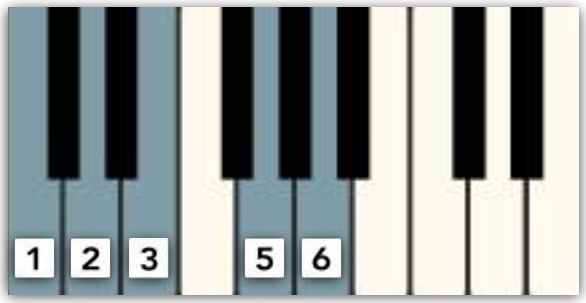
B♭ Major Pentatonic Scale



The major blues scale is a major pentatonic scale plus 1 extra note, the flat 3 (♭3).

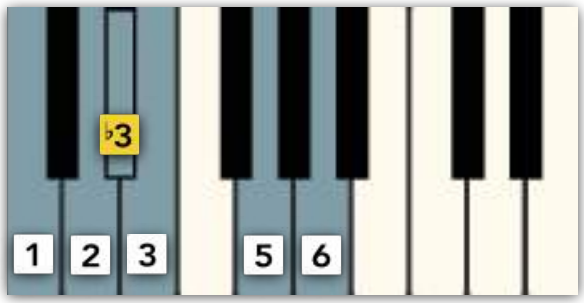
The ♭3 is quite straight forward to find as it's just **a half step in between the 2nd & 3rd** notes in the major pentatonic scale. We sometimes call this a 'blue note'.

C Major Pentatonic Scale



C D E G A

C Major Blues Scale

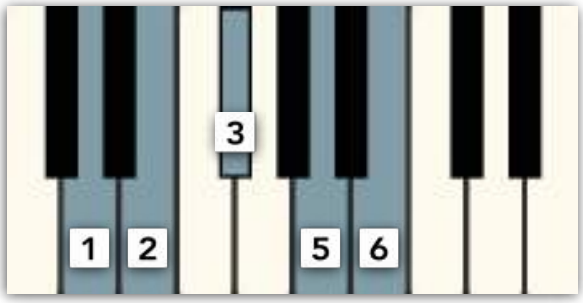


C D E♭ E G A

Major Blues scale 1 2 ♭3 3 5 6

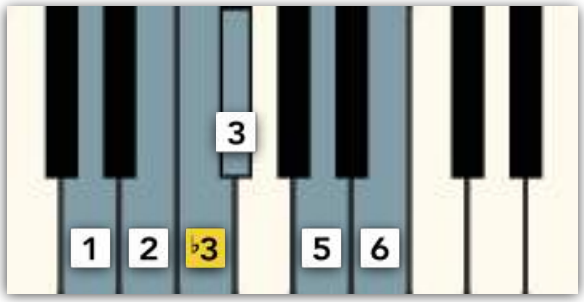
Tonic Major 2nd Minor 3rd Major 3rd Perfect 5th Major 6th

D Major Pentatonic Scale



D E F♯ A B

D Major Blues Scale

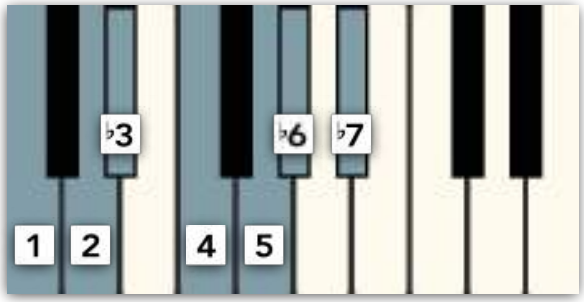


D E F F♯ A B

- The flat 3 adds some tension back into the scale and can help create that distinctive bluesy, soulful sound. The major blues scale is often used in a major key but you have to be careful how the 'blue note' is used as it will usually need to be resolved to a more stable note. Learning some bluesy riffs & phrases really is the best way to learn how to use this scale effectively.
- **The ♭3 will always use the same letter as the major 3rd** because they're both a type of 3rd. For example, a lowered G becomes G♭ (not F♯) or a lowered D♯ becomes D.

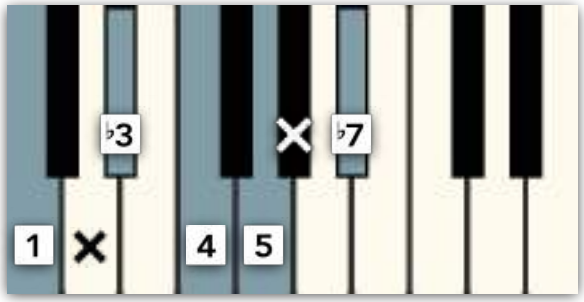
A minor pentatonic scale contains 5 out of the 7 notes in a natural minor scale. We can **remove the 2nd and 6th** degrees of the scale like this:

C Natural Minor Scale



C D E♭ F G A♭ B♭

C Minor Pentatonic Scale

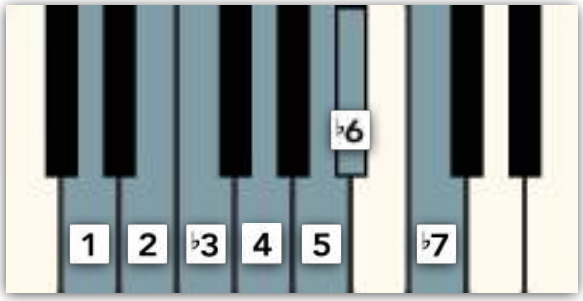


C E♭ F G B♭

Minor Pentatonic scale 1 ♭3 4 5 ♭7

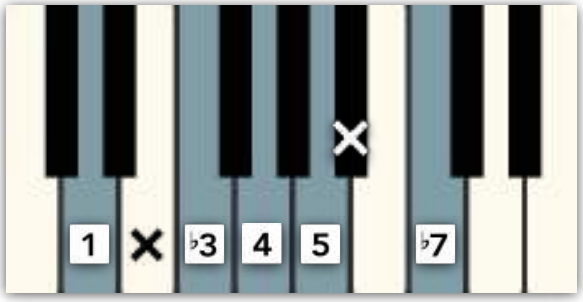
Tonic Minor 3rd Perfect 4th Perfect 5th Minor 7th

D Natural Minor Scale



D E F G A B♭ C

D Minor Pentatonic Scale



D F G A C

- Just like the major pentatonic scale, we no longer have any half steps in the minor pentatonic scale and so these remaining notes are usually easier to use, melodically in improvisation.
- We could think of these as our safe 'go to' notes in a minor key but again, that doesn't mean they will always work and we must still use our ears and be aware of moments when the chords may perhaps clash with any notes from the scale. It's common to use the **major 7th** interval sometimes in a minor key, in a chord or a melody (this comes from the harmonic/melodic minor scales), so in those moments, you may need to avoid using the ♭7, for example.

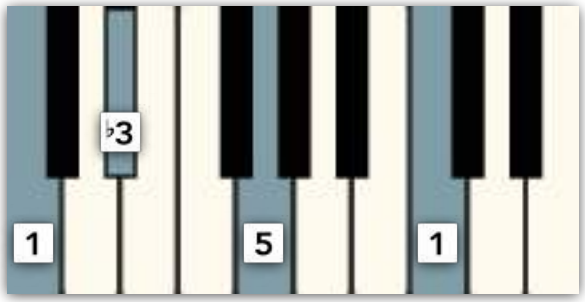
Once again, it's important that we're able to recognise the notes and the shape of these scales confidently. We can also use a familiar chord shape as a framework to help us see the notes in a minor pentatonic scale more easily.

Once you know a minor chord (in root position), a minor pentatonic just needs **2 more notes**.

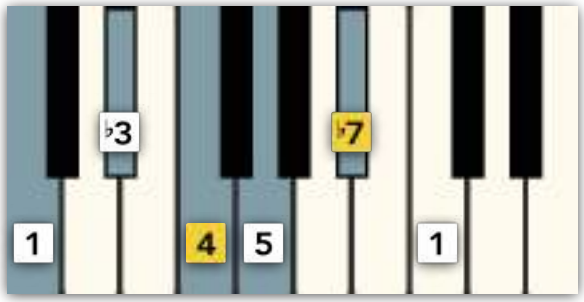
- A **whole step** in between the ♭3 & the 5th
- Then another **whole step** below the octave

It's helpful to picture the octave in the chord this time

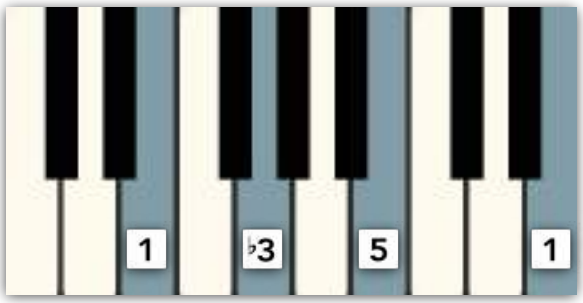
C Minor Triad



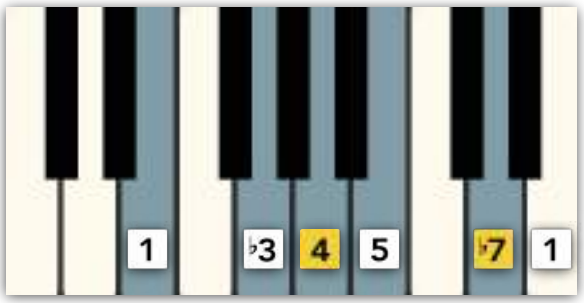
C Minor Pentatonic Scale



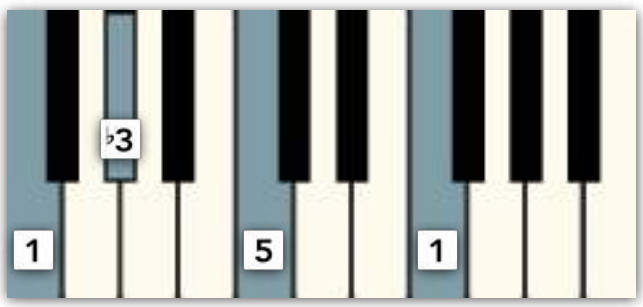
E Minor Triad



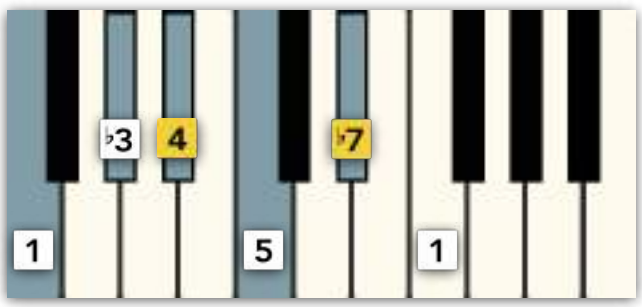
E Minor Pentatonic Scale



F Minor Triad



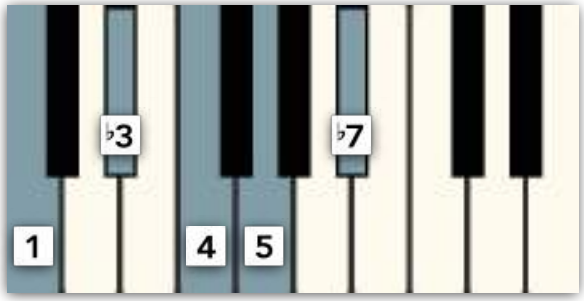
F Minor Pentatonic Scale



The minor blues scale is a minor pentatonic scale plus 1 extra note, the flat 5 (♭5).

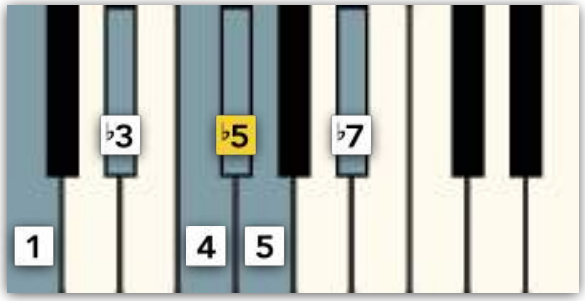
The ♭5 is quite easy to find as it's just a **half step in between the 4th & 5th.** We often call this a 'blue note' too.

C Minor Pentatonic Scale



C E♭ F G B♭

C Minor Blues Scale

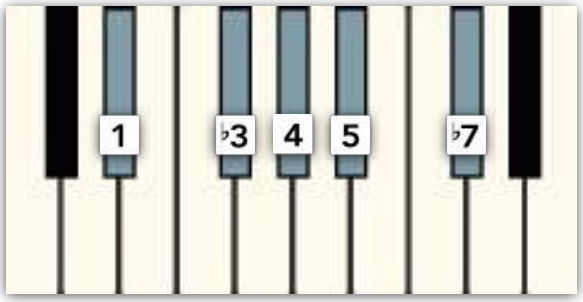


C E♭ F G♭ G B♭

Minor Blues scale 1 ♭3 4 ♭5 5 ♭7

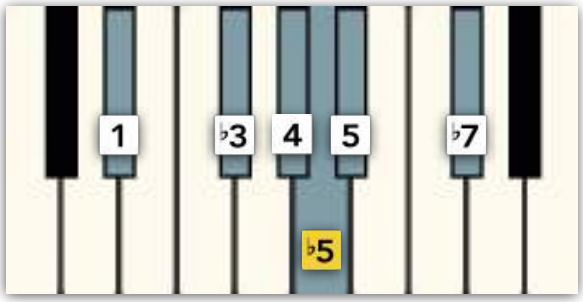
Tonic Minor 3rd Perfect 4th Flattened 5th Perfect 5th Minor 7th

D♯ Minor Pentatonic Scale



D♯ F♯ G♯ A♯ C♯

D♯ Minor Blues Scale



D♯ F♯ G♯ A A♯ C♯

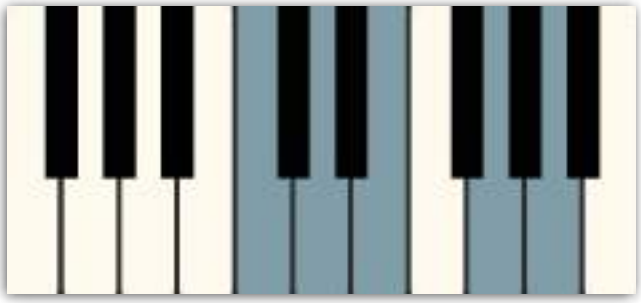
- The tension from the flat 5 can be used to help create that distinctive bluesy sound. The minor blues scale will often be used in a minor key but can also be used at the right moments to inject some some blues in a major key too. Again though, you must be very careful how this 'blue note' is used as it will usually need to be resolved, often leading up to the 5th or down to the 4th.
- You may also see this called a sharp 4 (♯4). Either is ok in this particular case but for consistency, I will stick to the ♭5 spelling. **The ♭5 will always use the same letter as the perfect 5th**.

Just like regular 7 note major & minor scales, every major pentatonic has a relative minor pentatonic and every major blues has a relative minor blues. **The relative minor contains all the same notes, but begins on a different note**. Likewise, we can say that each minor has a relative major. The new starting note becomes the new tonic and so even though the notes are the same, the intervals are different because they now describe the distances of each note from that new starting note.

- The relative minor begins on the 6 in the major pentatonic/blues scale
  Which is a minor 3rd (3 half steps) below the tonic
- The relative major begins on the ♭3 (minor 3rd) of the minor pentatonic/blues scale

C Major Pentatonic contains the same notes as A Minor Pentatonic

C Major Pentatonic Scale

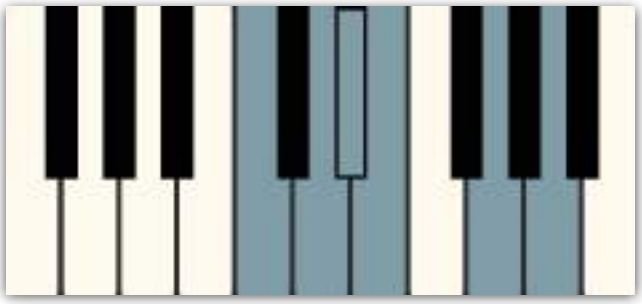


C D E G A

1 2 3 5 6

C Major Blues contains the same notes as A Minor Blues

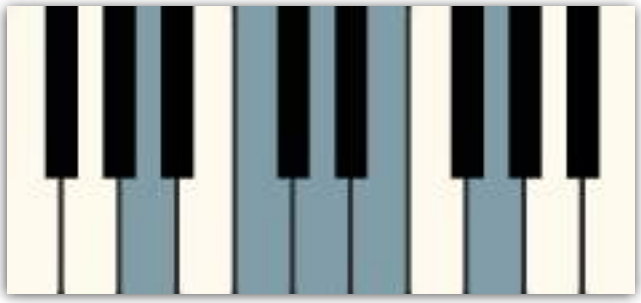
C Major Blues Scale



C D E♭ E G A

1 2 ♭3 3 5 6

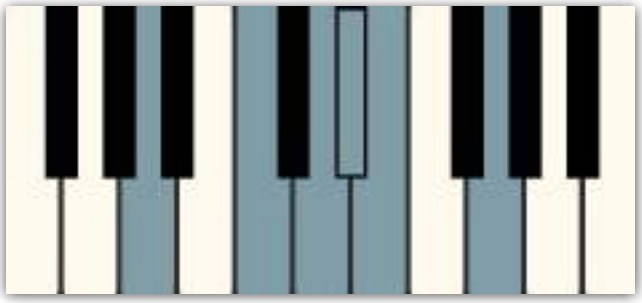
A Minor Pentatonic Scale



A C D E G

1 ♭3 4 5 ♭7

A Minor Blues Scale



A C D E♭ E G

1 ♭3 4 ♭5 5 ♭7

- You can think of each major pentatonic as being paired up with a minor pentatonic and each major blues as being paired up with a minor blues.

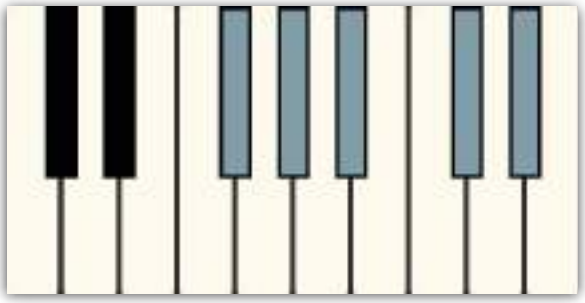
- C major and A minor pentatonic/blues are useful to learn in the beginning but perhaps the easiest to start using and improvising with would be F♯ major and D♯ minor.

- These pentatonics only use the black keys, making it easier to avoid getting lost and mixed up with other notes and allowing you to concentrate more on learning how to use them, musically.

F♯ Major Pentatonic contains the same notes as D♯ Minor Pentatonic

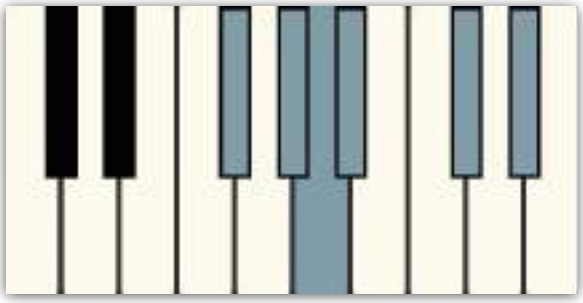
F♯ Major Blues contains the same notes as D♯ Minor Blues

F♯ Major Pentatonic Scale



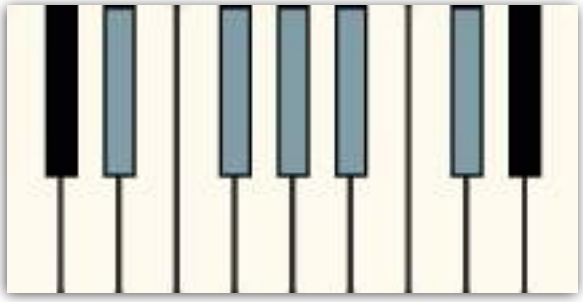
F♯	G♯	A♯	C♯	D♯
1	2	3	5	6

F♯ Major Blues Scale



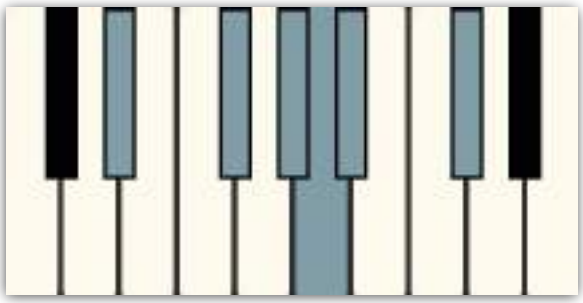
F♯	G♯	A	A♯	C♯	D♯
1	2	♭3	3	5	6

D♯ Minor Pentatonic Scale



D♯	F♯	G♯	A♯	C♯
1	♭3	4	5	♭7

D♯ Minor Blues Scale

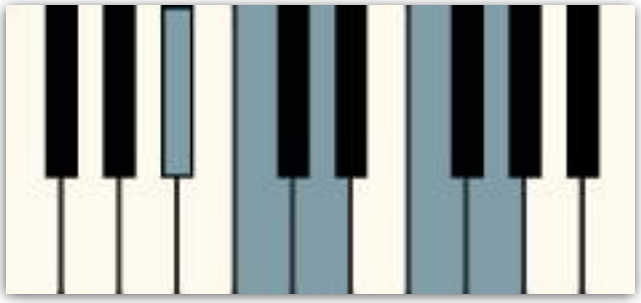


D♯	F♯	G♯	A	A♯	C♯
1	♭3	4	♭5	5	♭7

B♭ Major Pentatonic contains the same notes as G Minor Pentatonic

B♭ Major Blues contains the same notes as G Minor Blues

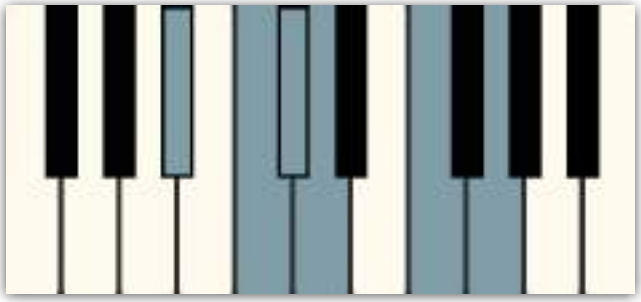
B♭ Major Pentatonic Scale



B♭ C D F G

1 2 3 5 6

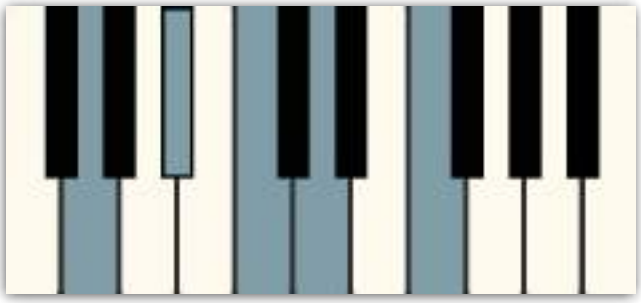
B♭ Major Blues Scale



B♭ C D♭ D F G

1 2 ♭3 3 5 6

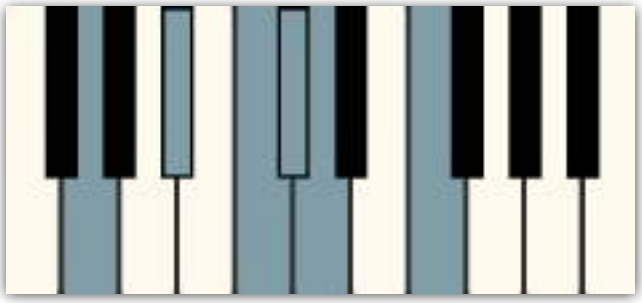
G Minor Pentatonic Scale



G B♭ C D F

1 ♭3 4 5 ♭7

G Minor Blues Scale



G B♭ C D♭ D F

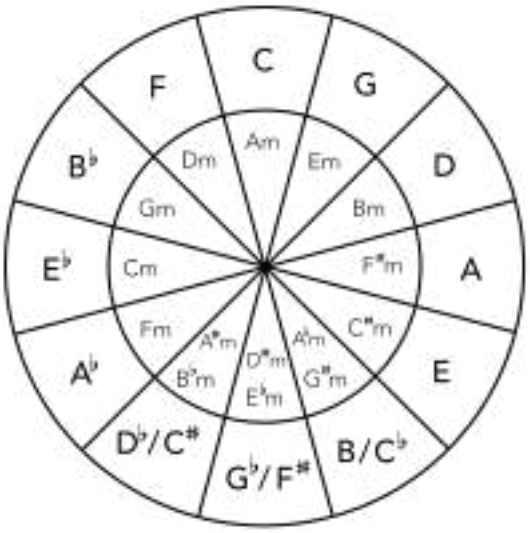
1 ♭3 4 ♭5 5 ♭7

All The Relative Major & Minor Keys

Each relative major & minor pairing is the same for pentatonic scales, blues scales as well as regular 7 note major & minor scales.

They can all be seen on the circle of 5ths. The outer circle shows the major keys, the inner circle shows the relative minor keys.

Each relative major & minor key are a minor 3rd apart from each other (3 half steps).



Major Pentatonic Scale

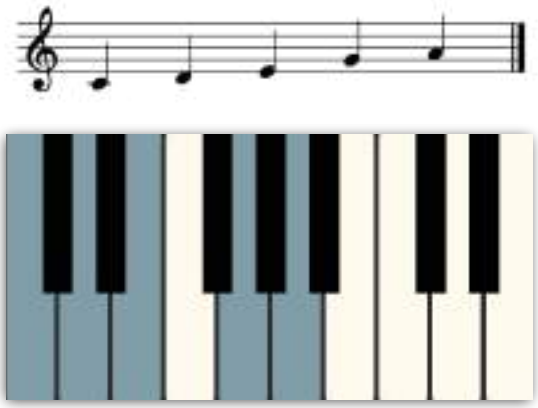
(1 2 3 5 6)

Major Blues Scale

(Just add the ♭3)

C

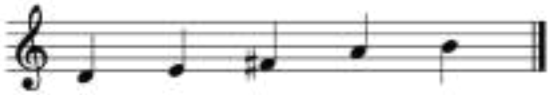
C D E G A

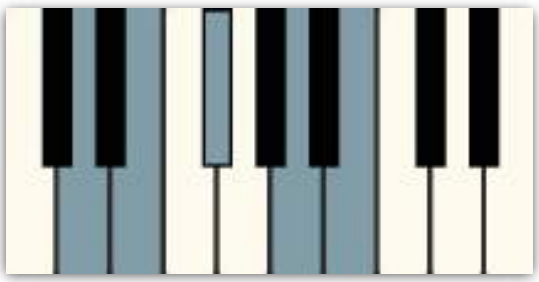


C D E♭ E G A

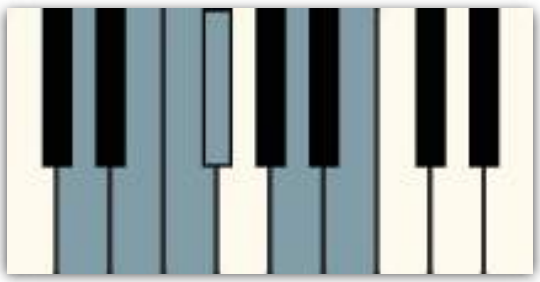
D

D E F♯ A B



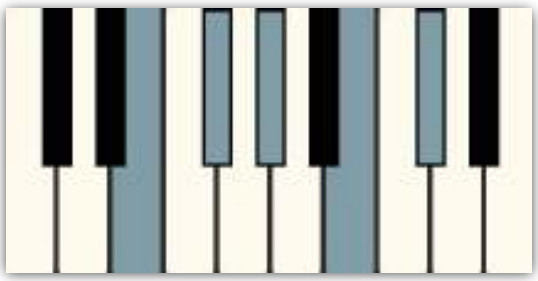


D E F F♯ A B

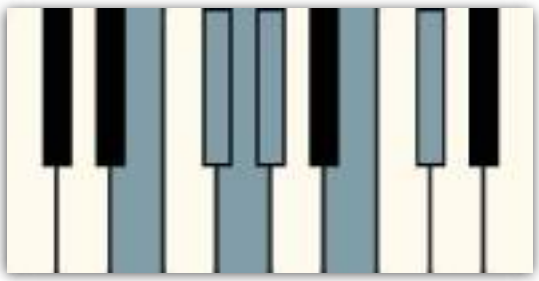


E

E F♯ G♯ B C♯



E F♯ G G♯ B C♯



Major Pentatonic Scale

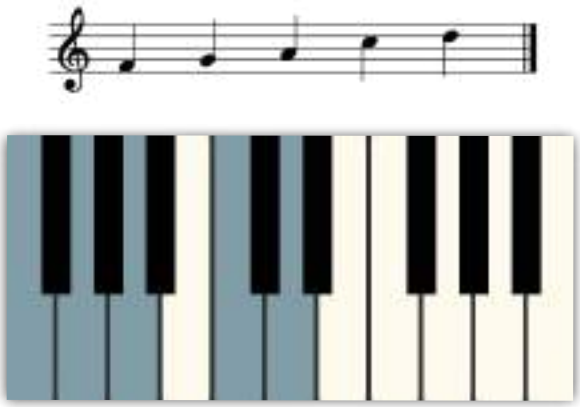
(1 2 3 5 6)

Major Blues Scale

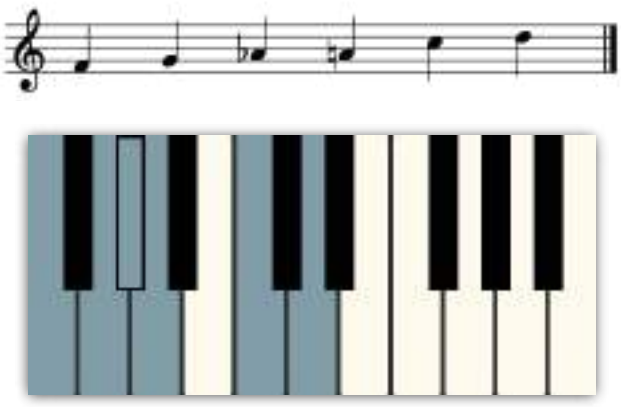
(Just add the ♭3)

F

F G A C D

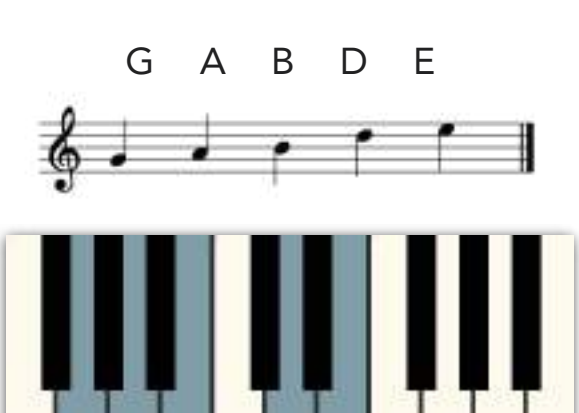


F G A♭ A C D

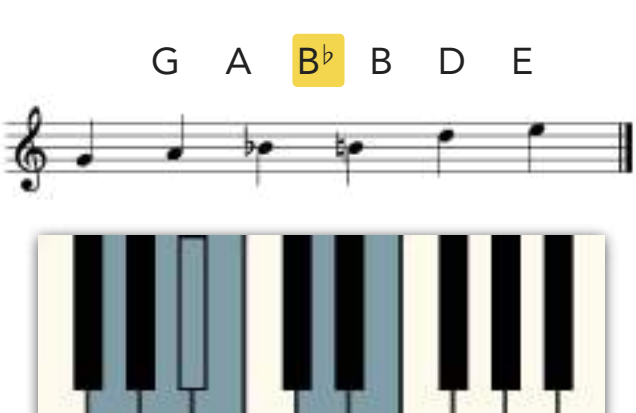


G

G A B D E

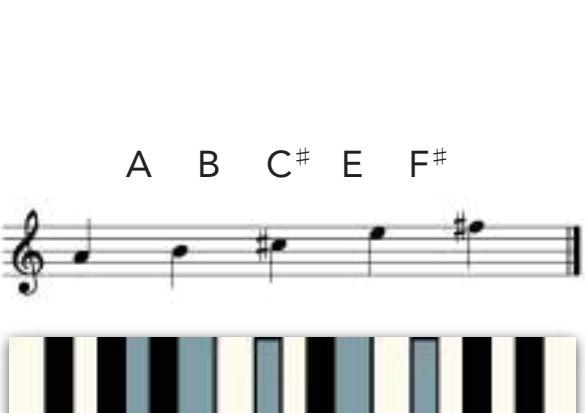


G A B♭ B D E

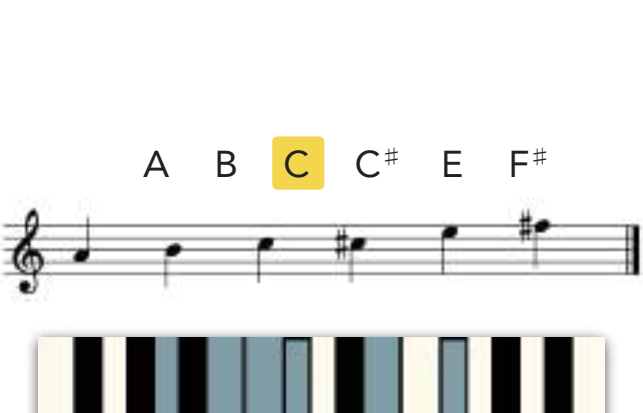


A

A B C♯ E F♯



A B C C♯ E F♯



Major Pentatonic Scale

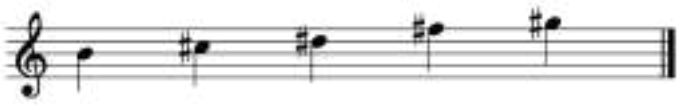
(1 2 3 5 6)

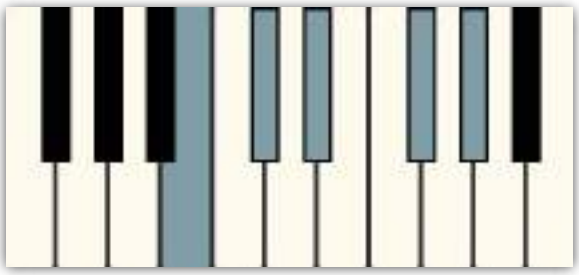
Major Blues Scale

(Just add the ♭3)

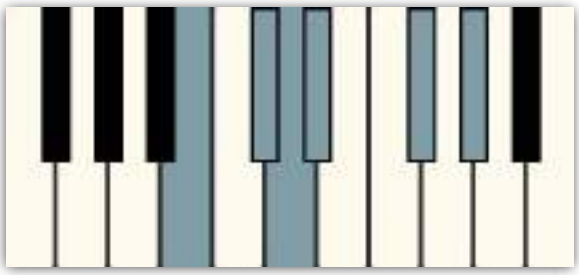
B

B C♯ D♯ F♯ G♯



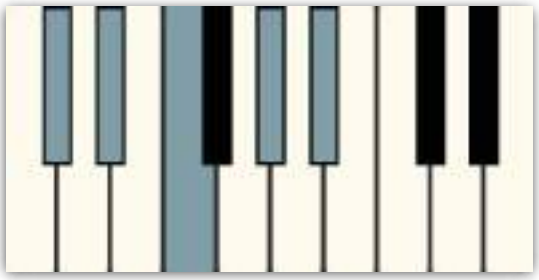


B C♯ D♯ F♯ G♯

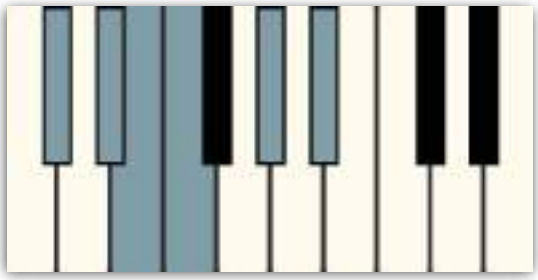


D♭

D♭ E♭ F A♭ B♭



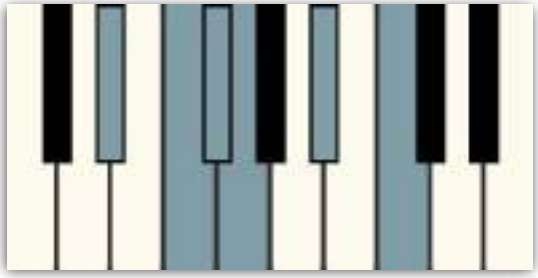
D♭ E♭ F♭ F A♭ B♭



E♭

E♭ F G B♭ C

E♭ F G♭ G B♭ C



Major Pentatonic Scale

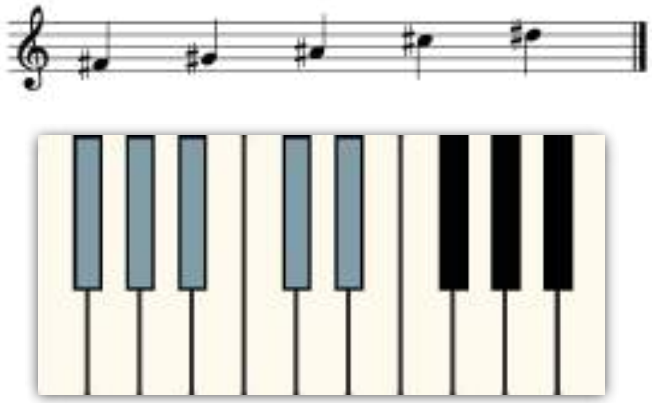
(1 2 3 5 6)

Major Blues Scale

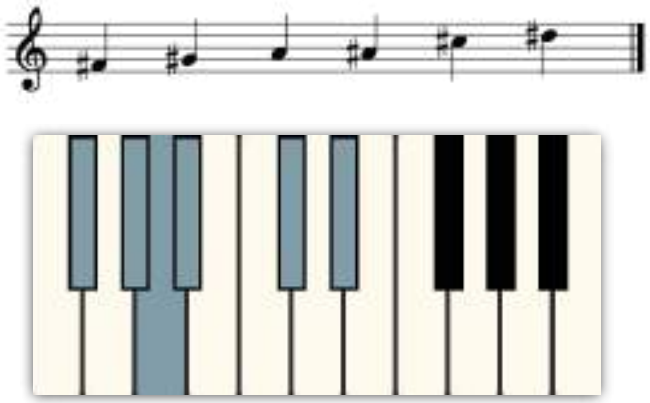
(Just add the ♭3)

F♯

F♯ G♯ A♯ C♯ D♯

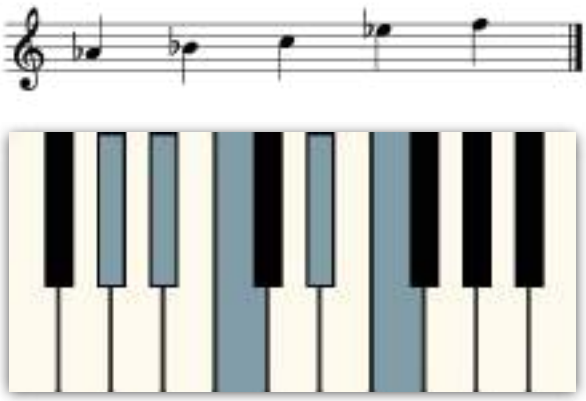


F♯ G♯ **A** A♯ C♯ D♯

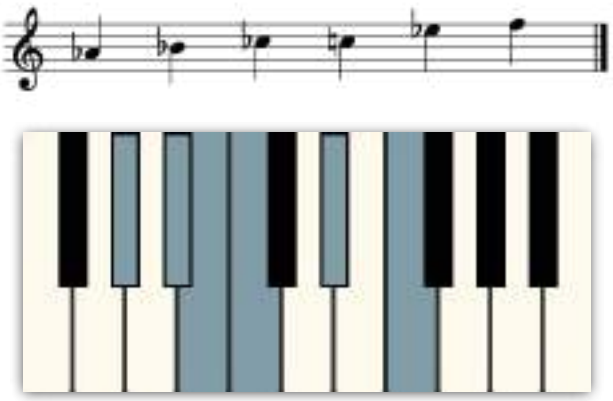


A♭

A♭ B♭ C E♭ F

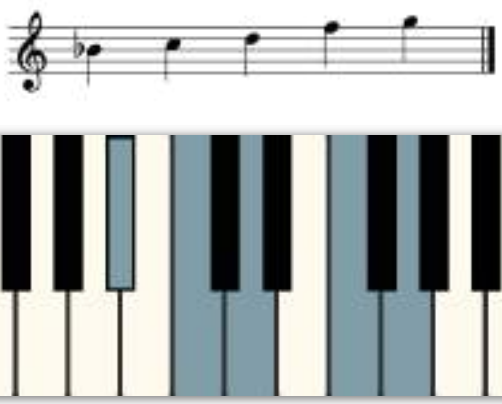


A♭ B♭ **C♭** C E♭ F

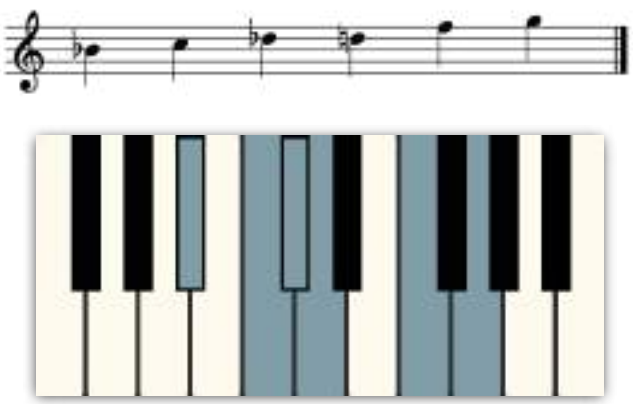


B♭

B♭ C D F G



B♭ C **D♭** D F G



Minor Pentatonic Scale

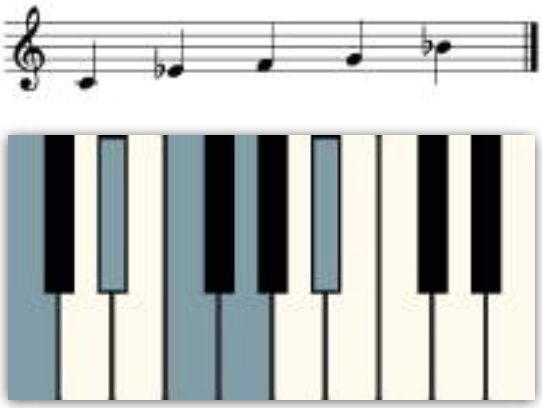
(1 ♭3 4 5 ♭7)

Minor Blues Scale

(Just add the ♭5)

C

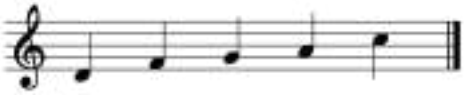
C E♭ F G B♭



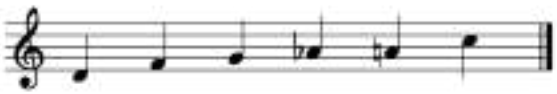
C E♭ F **G♭** G B♭

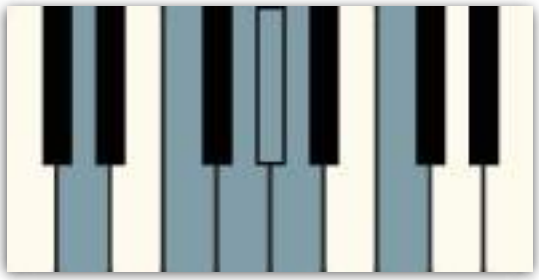
D

D F G A C



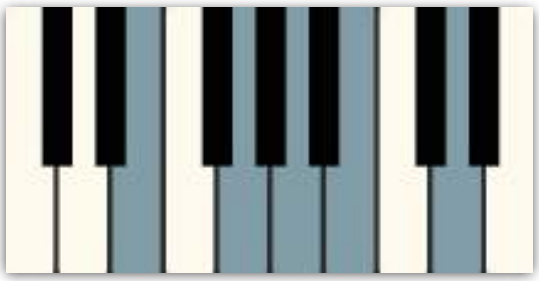
D F G **A♭** A C



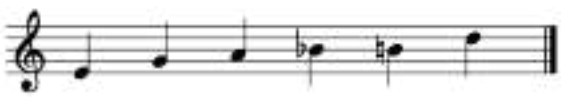


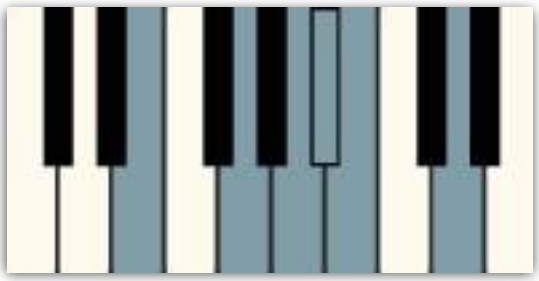
E

E G A B D



E G A **B♭** B D





Minor Pentatonic Scale

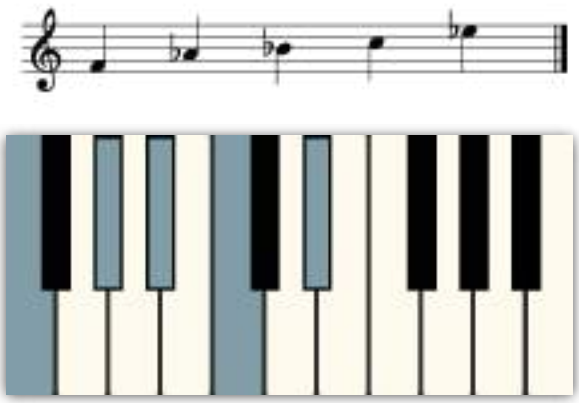
(1 ♭3 4 5 ♭7)

Minor Blues Scale

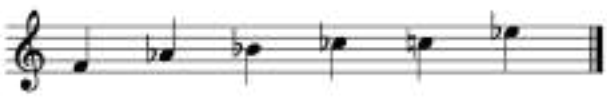
(Just add the ♭5)

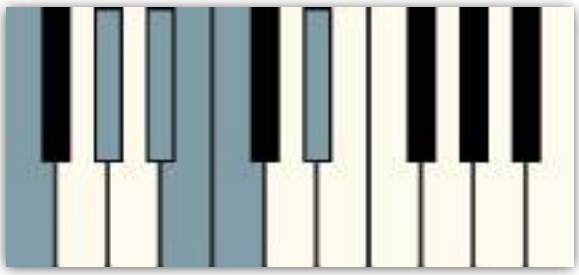
F

F A♭ B♭ C E♭



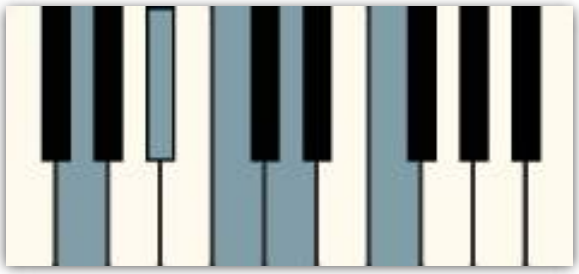
F A♭ B♭ **C♭** C E♭



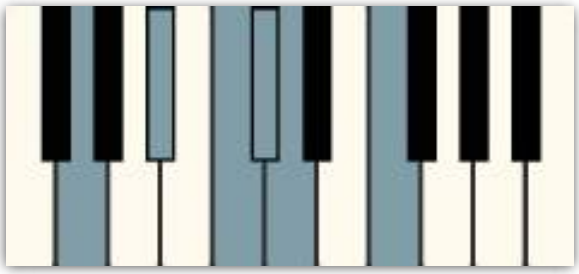


G

G B♭ C D F

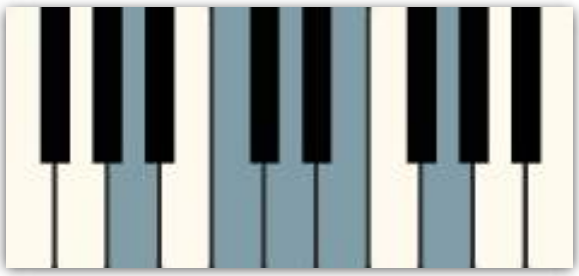


G B♭ C **D♭** D F

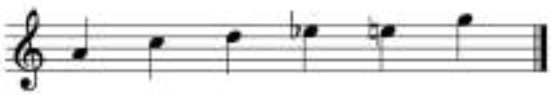


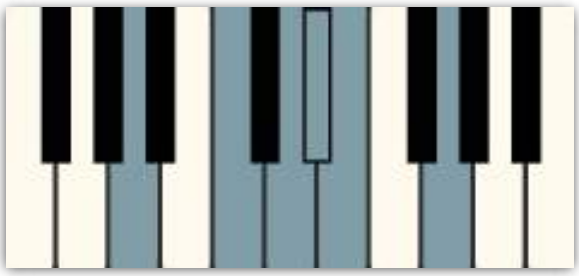
A

A C D E G



A C D **E♭** E G





Minor Pentatonic Scale

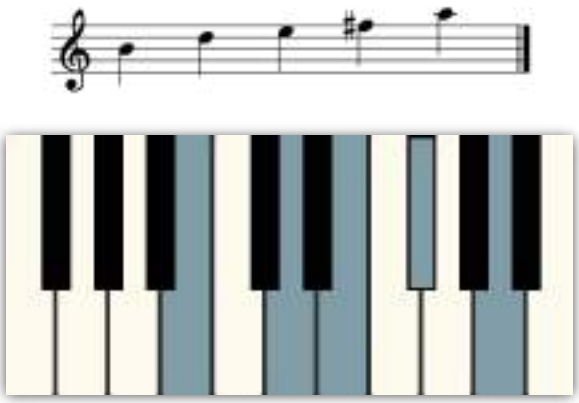
(1 ♭3 4 5 ♭7)

Minor Blues Scale

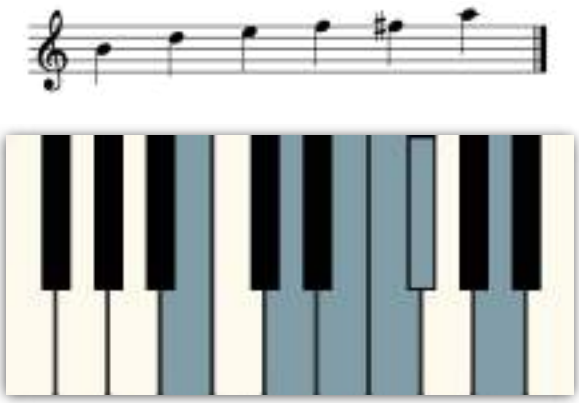
(Just add the ♭5)

B

B D E F♯ A

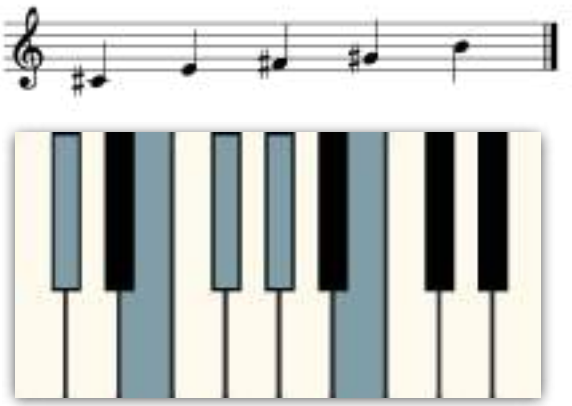


B D E **F** F♯ A

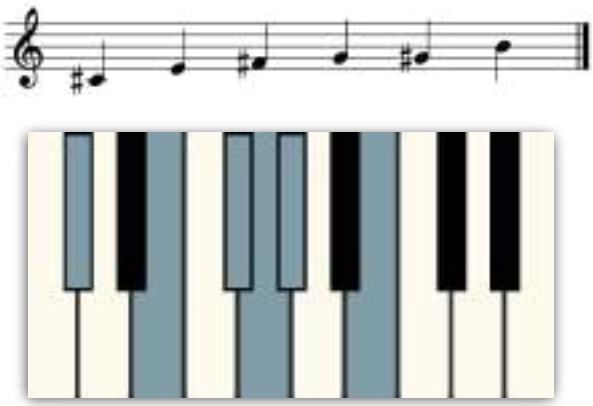


C♯

C♯ E F♯ G♯ B

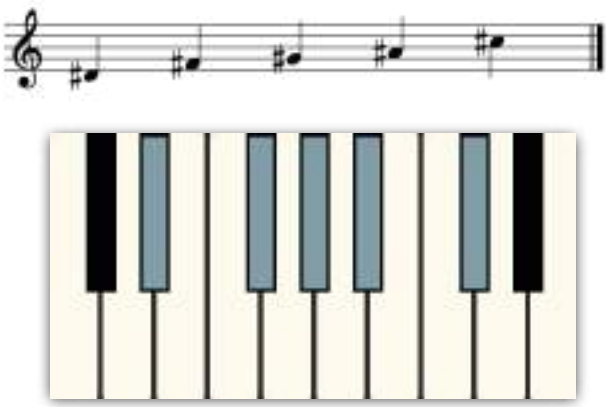


C♯ E F♯ **G** G♯ B

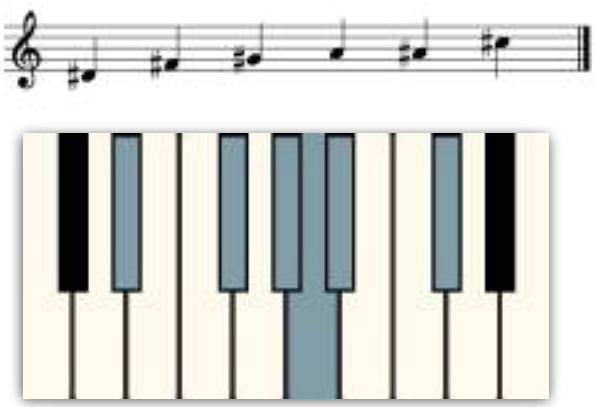


D♯

D♯ F♯ G♯ A♯ C♯



D♯ F♯ G♯ **A** A♯ C♯



Minor Pentatonic Scale

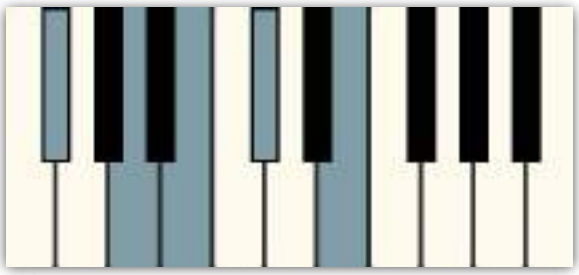
(1 ♭3 4 5 ♭7)

Minor Blues Scale

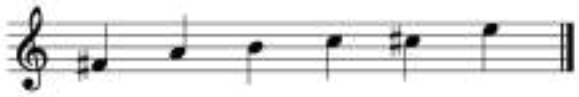
(Just add the ♭5)

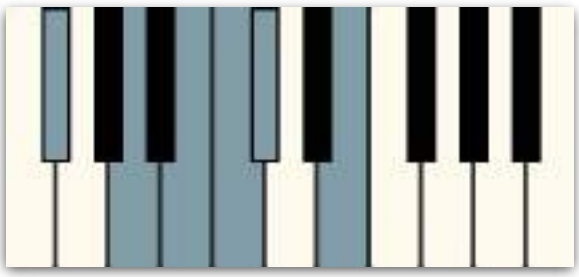
F♯

F♯ A B C♯ E



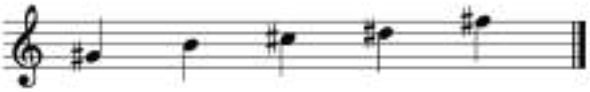
F♯ A B C C♯ E

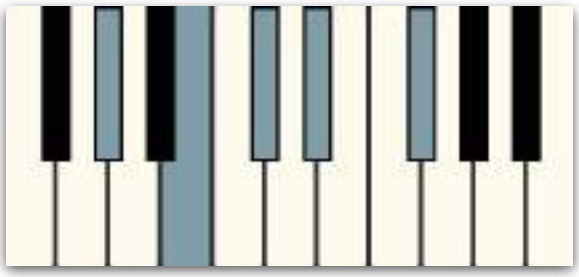




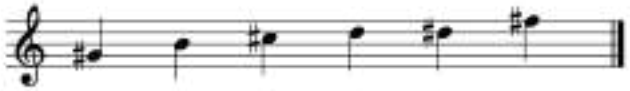
G♯

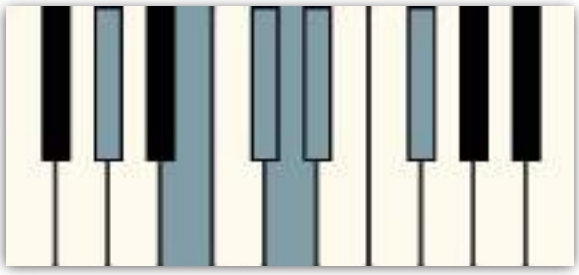
G♯ B C♯ D♯ F♯





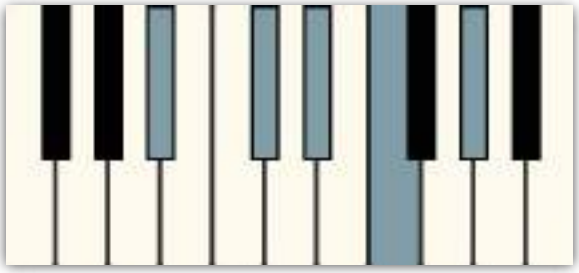
G♯ B C♯ D D♯ F♯





B♭

B♭ D♭ E♭ F A♭



B♭ D♭ E♭ F♭ F A♭