

The Diminished Chord

Which scale on which diminished chord?

As the diminished chords can be transposed in minor thirds and you get the same chord in four different inversions there are three different diminished chords. Let's have a closer look at these three chords in the key of C.

key of C major

B^{°7} B^{°7} D^{°7} F^{°7} A^{b°7}
 VII^{°7} VII^{°7} II^{°7} IV^{°7} bVI^{°7}
 F^{#°7} C^{°7} E^{b°7} F^{#°7} A^{°7}
 #IV^{°7} I^{°7} bIII^{°7} #IV^{°7} VI^{°7}
 C^{#°7} C^{#°7} E^{°7} G^{°7} B^{b°7}
 #I^{°7} #I^{°7} III^{°7} V^{°7} bVII^{°7}

VII^{°7}

The most common diminished chord is probably the one on the VIIth degree. It occurs as a diminished chord on the II, IV, bVI and VII degree.

To find out which scale to play over this chord we use *harmonic embedding*: we fill the gaps between the chord tones with notes from the key we're in, in this case C major

key of C major

VII^{°7}

The scale we get is the C major-scale with an Ab starting on B. This scale is called major b6 or harmonic major (according to harmonic minor). So we could call this scale *HarmMaj7* (=Harmonic Major Scale starting on the 7th degree).

So over a VII^{°7} chord (and its inversions) in major we play B *HarmMaj7*.

Practical experience shows that B *HarmMin7* also sounds good, probably because VII^{°7} is borrowed from the key of C minor.

Let's do the same in C minor:

key of C minor

B^{°7} *The notes of the chord filled with notes of the scale (C minor)*

VII^{°7}

The resulting scale is C harmonic minor starting on B, so B *HarmMin7*.

#IV°7

The next form is #IV°7, I rather see #IV°7 as the basic form of this inversion than I°7, bIII°7 or VI°7.
Again we apply *harmonic embedding*:

key of C major

F#°7



#IV°7

The resulting scale is *F# HarmMaj7*.
Again *F# HarmMin7* sounds good, too.

key of C minor

F#°7



#IV°7

The resulting scale is *F# HarmMin7*.

#I°7

key of C major

C#°7



#I°7

The resulting scale is *C# HarmMin7*.

key of C minor

C#°7



#I°7

The resulting scale is *C#????* (found no common name for this scale). Practically *C# HarmMin7* sounds ok.