

## 7 Minor Jazz Standards

Most Jazz songs are in a major or a minor key, and Minor songs are a great place to learn several things that you need in Major as well, so it is a good idea to really dig into studying some minor songs.

In this article, I am going to go over 7 songs that are in a minor key that you want to have in your repertoire because knowing them will improve your playing.

### Jazz Standards

I don't know if you ever thought about it, but most Jazz standards are in a major key. Some pretend to be in minor but then turn out to be in major. I don't want to single anyone out, How Deep Is The Ocean, You'd Be So Nice To Go Home to, What Is This Thing Called Love.

Anyway... The first song you probably already know, but maybe a few of the other ones will be a surprise, and later in the article I will also talk about why So What is not on the list.

### #1 Autumn Leaves

Probably one of the most well-known Jazz standards, and even though the old Berklee Realbook has it in Em, then the most common one in Jazz is G minor.

A little fun trivia is that the Miles Davis "riff" is also a part of the original arrangement with that clear m6 sound.

### What do you learn?

When you are working on Autumn Leaves then you are working on the two main cadences, the major tonic and the minor tonic cadences (highlight in sheet music). It is also a great place to explore how to play tonic minor since you really have the melodic minor sound in both the melody and the arrangement with the Gm6 riff.

#### Illustrations: Autumn Leaves Sheets, Gm6 riff

Let me know in the comments how many of these you know, and if I missed some important ones

### #2 Blue Bossa

Another famous and simple song that is often among the first 3 tunes that you learn is Blue Bossa. Mainly because it is a short 16-bar form and has really basic harmony in the key of C minor only taking a short detour to Db major, which you could describe as a cadence for the neapolitan subdominant, even though the melody maybe suggests otherwise.

## **Famous Versions**

There are quite a few famous versions of this song to check out beyond the original recording by Joe Henderson. Especially George Benson and Pat Martino's interpretations are worth checking out!

### **#3 Bernie's Tune**

I think this is maybe the least known tune in this list. It was actually difficult to find songs that are in a minor key and also not too difficult, but this song is really pretty simple and covers some basic chords in the key that you want to master, especially the tonic minor and the tritone substitute of the V of V. The chords are also lasting a little longer so you have a bit of space to develop your vocabulary and really get into those melodic minor sounds and how beautiful they are.

The melody of this song is also based on a great swinging riff using 3/4 on top of 4/4. Lots of stuff to learn from this one, it will fit your playing like a glove, or a pair of knitted mittens

### **#4 Softly As In A Morning Sunrise**

This is in a way a minor version of Rhythm Changes, mainly because the A-parts are built around a minor turnaround, which is of course the most important progression in the key. It is usually played in the key of C minor.

There are many fantastic versions of this song, both Jim Hall and Emily Remler are important Jazz guitar versions to check out. Emily Remler also includes a beautiful reharmonization of the melody going away from the minor turnaround, but still going back to the usual progression later in the solo.

The bridge is a short trip to the relative major: Eb and then with a few diminished chords back to Cm.

### **#5 Minor Blues**

The Minor blues is really the re-invention of the 12 bar blues of the Hardbop era. The most famous examples are probably Coltrane's Mr PC and Equinox, but of course there are other great examples out there. Mr PC and Equinox are great examples of the extreme range of tempos that you play blues in with one being very fast and the other very slow.

While the minor blues is a great progression to check out how to use different minor sounds, so really dig into melodic minor or Dorian and it is also a great exercise in playing the most common variation to the minor II V which uses a tritone substitution for the V of V instead of the II chord

## #6 Summertime

Geschwin's Summertime is a beautiful song that is actually a bit modal in the sound. It is a great example of a short-form song that still manages to get around the tonic, subdominant, dominant and relative major. It is also a good vehicle for other meters like Jonathan Kreisberg's amazing 5/4 version of the song, also an awesome example of a dynamic solo guitar performance.

And what many people don't realize is that Wes Montgomery's song Four on Six is in fact written on this chord progression with some common reharmonizations.

## #7 Solar

In a way this is a Parker Blues version of the minor blues. It is actually also a Bebop composition written by Chuck Wayne and then later stolen by Miles Davis, who we all know as the composer, and even has a bit of the melody on his tombstone.

Solar is a great song to study because it has a melody that is quite clearly using tonic minor and also a lot of typical bebop movement with a long series of "how high the moon II V I" meaning that the tonic chord becomes a m7 to become the II in a II V going down a wholestep.

The famous recordings of this song would probably be Pat Metheny trio and Brad Mehldau trio both are amazing! A great composition on these changes is Jerry Bergonzi's On Again Off Again with some interesting shifting melodic minor scales by Mick Goodrick in his solo. He also recorded it with John Abercrombie on a later album.

## Honourable Mentions

As I already said, most Jazz standards are in minor, and I actually asked a few colleagues about suggestions for this list and didn't really get something that I thought was easy and famous enough. Maybe it was because they were both bass players?

Some of the songs that are quite common, and in a minor key that are maybe not exactly easy would be Alone Together, Beautiful Love, Angel Eyes and You Don't know what love is. They are all worth checking out because even if they are not exactly what I consider easy

**Alone Together**

**Beautiful Love**

**Angel Eyes**

**You Don't Know What Love Is.**

Please let me know if you have other suggestions for easy songs in a minor key! It is always great to have suggestions for songs!

## **Why No "So What"?**

So why isn't So What on the list? I get the question "what about So What" very often on my 10 easy standards article, and I understand why that would seem to fit both there and also here, it is a song with very few chords for a jazz song. But to me, it is more logical to have a list of songs where studying one will help the other, and So What is a completely different type of sound and song than these. In fact, it is not really in a traditional key. There are no cadences or really moving harmony, so in that way, it is a something else.

That does not mean that it is not a good song, that I don't like it or that it won't be useful to study, but, to me, it is something else and not anymore related to these songs than it is to How High The Moon.

## **Get Started Learning The Songs!**

Learning Jazz is learning Jazz songs, and if you want to explore these songs and start playing them then check out this playlist with lessons covering improvising over many of these songs, so that you can go out and play some music.