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Hi and Welcome!

Many students of music have problems “Understanding” the basic modes of the major scale. This is generally due to a lack of understanding of the corresponding harmony and the application and transposition necessary to reach this goal. Forget the myths, it’s actually quite easy and logical.



Please note: This book is only dealing the the modes of the Major scale and not the melodic minor etc

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WHAT IS A MODE?

A mode of a major scale is just basically an INVERSION of that scale. This means that it is the same scale starting on a different note. What would be the point of this you may ask? Well each mode has its own unique flavour and corresponding harmony.

Many Guitarists/Musicians look at the Modes through the key of C major. This tends to leave them very “Confused” when for example someone says play C Locrian. Here many musicians will just play a scale of C major starting on a note of B natural when in fact they should be playing a Db major scale starting on a note of C natural. Why is this?

First lets have a look at the Modes in C major, C major [or C Ionian]

The image shows the C major scale (C Ionian mode) in 4/4 time. The top staff is a treble clef staff with a 4/4 time signature. The scale is written in a single line, starting on C4 and ending on C5. Below the staff are three guitar strings labeled T (Treble), A (Middle), and B (Bass). The fret numbers for each string are: T: 3 5 7 3 5 7 4 5 7 5 6 8 5 7 8 7 5 8 6 5 7 5 4 7 5 3 7 5 3; A: 3 5 7 3 5 7 4 5 7 5 6 8 5 7 8 7 5 8 6 5 7 5 4 7 5 3 7 5 3; B: 3 5 7 3 5 7 4 5 7 5 6 8 5 7 8 7 5 8 6 5 7 5 4 7 5 3 7 5 3.

D Dorian starts on 2nd degree of the C major Scale

The image shows the D Dorian mode in 4/4 time. The top staff is a treble clef staff with a 4/4 time signature. The scale is written in a single line, starting on D4 and ending on D5. Below the staff are three guitar strings labeled T (Treble), A (Middle), and B (Bass). The fret numbers for each string are: T: 5 7 8 5 7 9 5 7 9 6 8 10 7 8 10 8 7 10 8 6 9 7 5 9 7 5 8 7 5; A: 5 7 8 5 7 9 5 7 9 6 8 10 7 8 10 8 7 10 8 6 9 7 5 9 7 5 8 7 5; B: 5 7 8 5 7 9 5 7 9 6 8 10 7 8 10 8 7 10 8 6 9 7 5 9 7 5 8 7 5.

E Phrygian starts on the 3rd degree of the C Major scale

Musical notation for the E Phrygian scale. The top staff shows the scale in treble clef, starting on E4 and ending on E4. The bottom staff shows the fretboard with fingerings: 7 8 10, 7 9 10, 7 9 10, 8 10 12, 8 10 12 10, 8, 12 10 8, 10 9 7, 10, 9 7, 10 8 7.

F Lydian starts on the 4th degree of the C Major scale

Musical notation for the F Lydian scale. The top staff shows the scale in treble clef, starting on F4 and ending on F4. The bottom staff shows the fretboard with fingerings: 8 10 12, 9 10 12, 9 10 12, 10 12 13, 10 12 13 12, 10, 13 12 10, 12 10 9, 12, 10 9, 12 10 8.

G Mixolydian starts on the 5th degree of the C Major scale

Musical notation for the G Mixolydian scale. The top staff shows the scale in treble clef, starting on G4 and ending on G4. The bottom staff shows the fretboard with fingerings: 10 12 14, 10 12 14, 10 12, 14, 12 13 15, 12 13 15 13, 12, 15 13 12, 14 12 10, 14, 12 10, 14 12 10.

A Aeolian starts on the 6th degree of the C Major scale

The diagram shows the A Aeolian scale on a guitar. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The scale is written in four measures. The bottom two staves show fret numbers for the strings. The fret numbers are: 12 14 15, 12 14 15, 16, 13 15 17, 13 15 17 15, 13, 17 15 13, 16 14 12, 15, 14 12, 15 14 12.

B Locrian starts on the 7th degree of the C Major scale

The diagram shows the B Locrian scale on a guitar. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The scale is written in four measures. The bottom two staves show fret numbers for the strings. The fret numbers are: 14 15 17, 14 15 17, 14 16, 17, 15 17 18, 15 17 19 17, 15, 18 17 15, 17 16 14, 17, 15 14, 17 15 14.

SIDE NOTE:

PENTATONIC SCALES WITHIN THE C MAJOR SCALE

Also within the most used scale in western music is the most used scale in Pop and Rock. **The minor and major pentatonic.** [Again, you could start the pentatonic scale on any other degree of the major scale].

Guitar Cliches

A minor Pentatonic

1

3/4

8 5 8 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 8 5

C Major Pentatonic

1

3/4

8 10 7 10 7 10 7 9 8 10 8

Intervallic Relationships

C to D=1 tone

C to E=Major third

C to F=Perfect fourth

C to G=Perfect fifth

C to A=Major sixth

C to B=Major seventh

HOW TO REMEMBER THEIR NAMES IN ORDER

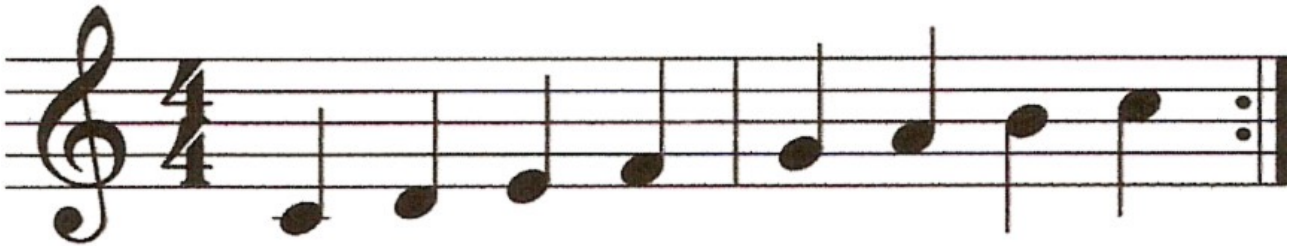
Ionian Dorian Phrygian Lydian Mixolydian Aeolian Locrian

“If Dora Plays Like Me Al Listens”

TRANSPOSING THE MODES OF THE MAJOR SCALE

If we count up one whole tone [2 half steps] from C then we have a note of D the 2nd degree of the C major scale. From this D note we begin the D dorian mode.

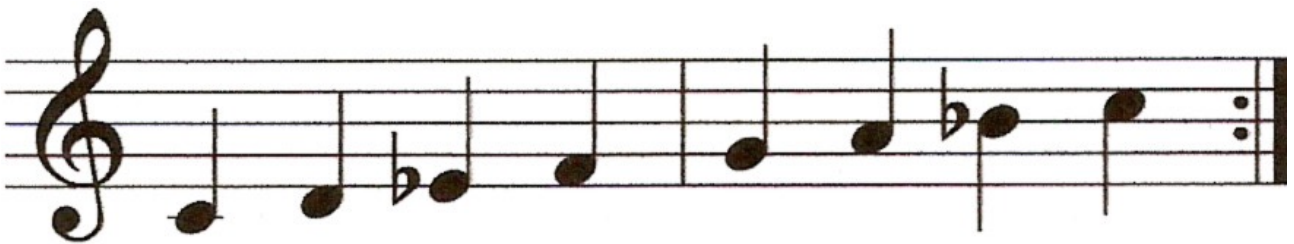
D dorian -----



So if the note D is the second note of C then what is C the second note of? Answer = Bb. You can either count down two half steps from C or up two half steps from Bb. So C dorian will have the same notes as Bb major and starting on its 2nd degree note of C [see ex.1]

EX.1 C Dorian

1 2 **b3** 4 5 6 **b7** C dorian 2 octaves



1 2 **b3** 4 5 6 **b7**

If E Phrygian is the 3rd degree [or a Major 3rd up from C] then what is C the 3rd degree of [or a Major 3rd up from]. Answer Ab. You can either count down five half steps from C or up five half steps from Ab.

EX.2 C Phrygian



Musical notation for the C Phrygian scale in treble clef. The scale is written as a sequence of notes: C, Bb, Ab, G, F, E, D. The notes are labeled with their scale degrees: 1, b2, b3, 4, 5, b6, b7.



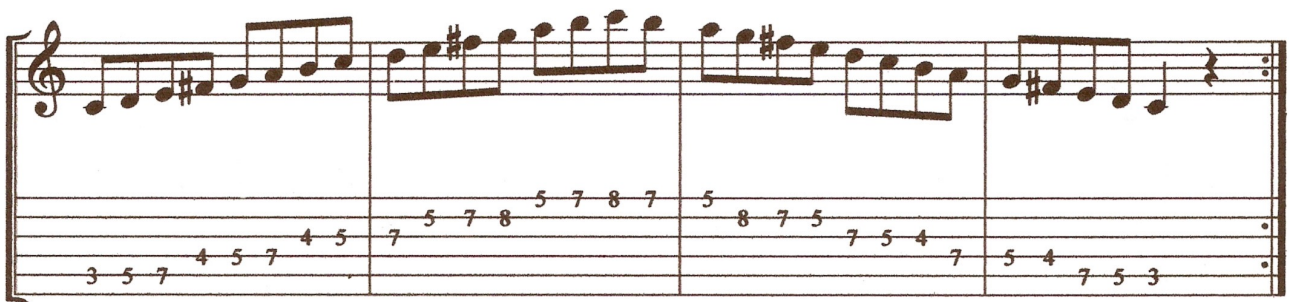
Musical notation for the C Phrygian scale with guitar fingering. The notation includes a treble clef staff with the scale notes and a guitar staff with fingerings. The fingerings are: 3 4 6, 3 5 6, 3 5, 6, 4 6 8, 4 6 8 6, 4 8 6 4, 6 5 3, 6, 5 3, 6 4 3.

If F Lydian is the Fourth degree of C [or a perfect fourth up from C] then what is C the fourth degree of [or a perfect fourth up from]. Answer is G.

EX.3 C Lydian

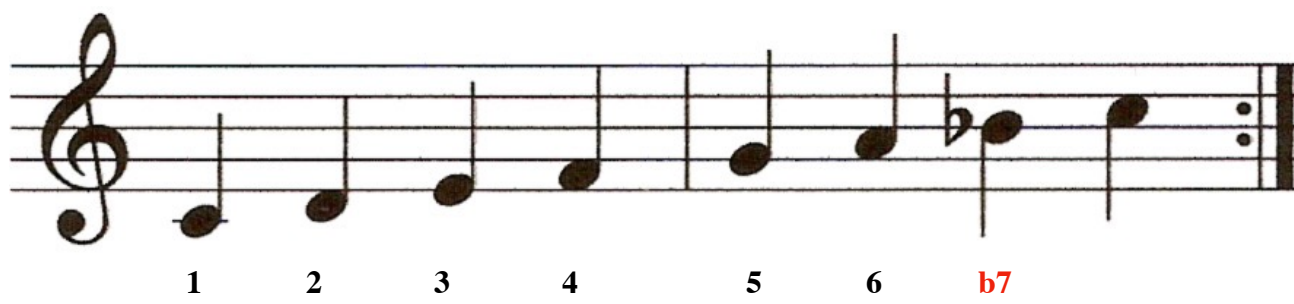


C Lydian 2 octaves



If G Mixolydian is the fifth of C [or a perfect fifth up from C] then what is C the fifth of [or a perfect 5th up from]. Answer is F.

EX.4 C Mixolydian



A musical staff in treble clef showing the C Mixolydian scale. The notes are C, D, E, F, G, A, Bb, C. Below the staff, the scale degrees are numbered: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and b7. The 'b7' is written in red.

C Mixolydian 2 octaves



A musical staff in treble clef showing the C Mixolydian scale over two octaves. The notes are C, D, E, F, G, A, Bb, C, D, E, F, G, A, Bb, C. Below the staff, the scale degrees are numbered: 3 5 7, 3 5 7, 7 5 6 8, 5 6 8 6, 5 8 6 5, 7 5 3, 7, 5 3, 7 5 3.

If A Aeolian is the sixth of C [or a major 6th up from C] then what is C the sixth of [or a major 6th up from] Answer is Eb.

EX.5 C Aeolian

1 2 **b3** 4 5 **b6** **b7**

C Aeolian 2 octaves

3 5 6 3 5 6 3 5 7 4 6 8 4 6 8 6 4 8 6 4 7 5 3 6 5 3 6 5 3

If B Locrian is the seventh of C [or a major seventh up from] then what is C the seventh of [or a major seventh up from]. Answer Db.

EX.6 C Locrian

1 **b2** **b3** 4 **b5** **b6** **b7**

B locrian 2 octaves

3 4 6 3 5 6 3 5 6 4 6 8 4 6 8 6 4 8 6 4 6 5 3 6 5 3 6 4 3

LOOKING AT HARMONY FOR TRANSPOSED MODES OF THE MAJOR SCALE

These next examples are played over a C Pedal Note in the bass to establish the Harmony and flavour of each mode. This is also useful for putting together little Vamps for practicing the Modes.

C Ionian

C Dorian

Cmaj7 G/C F/C G/C Cm9 Bb/C Eb/C F/C

Mode	Chord	T	A	B
C Ionian	Cmaj7	5	4	5
	G/C	3	4	5
	F/C	1	2	3
	G/C	3	4	5
C Dorian	Cm9	3	3	1
	Bb/C	3	3	3
	Eb/C	3	4	3
	F/C	1	2	3

C Phrygian

C Lydian

Ab/C Eb/C Db/C Eb/C Cmaj7 D/C G/C D/C

Mode	Chord	T	A	B
C Phrygian	Ab/C	1	1	3
	Eb/C	3	4	3
	Db/C	6	6	3
	Eb/C	3	4	3
C Lydian	Cmaj7	5	4	5
	D/C	2	3	3
	G/C	3	4	5
	D/C	2	3	3

C Mixolydian

C Aeolian

Bb/C C7sus4 C7 F/C | Ab/C Bb/C Eb/C Ab/C

1 3 3 3 | 6 3 5 3 | 5 3 5 3 | 1 2 3 3 |

1 1 1 3 | 3 3 3 3 | 3 4 3 3 | 1 1 1 3 |

C Locrian

Ab/C Db/C | Ab/C Gb/C

1 1 1 3 | 6 6 6 3 | 1 1 1 3 | 2 3 4 3 |

BEING CREATIVE WITH THE MODES

Back to Basics: To explore the “Harmony” of the modes we need to look at the arpeggios/chords contained within them. We will look at the C major [Ionian] for simplicity’s sake.

Arpeggios contained within the C Ionian Mode [or C Major]

Cmaj7 Dm7 Em7 Fmaj7 G7 [Dominant]

Am7 Bm7b5

C major Pentatonic

A minor Pentatonic

EXTENDING THE CHORDAL ARPEGGIOS: C IONIAN

With this in mind we can now extend the C Major [Ionian] arpeggios contained in the harmony. [Starting on the 4th degree F as it opens out the whole fingerboard for us].

Fmaj7 Dm7 Bm7b5 G7 Em7 Cmaj7 Am7 Fmaj7 Dm7

Bm7b5 G7 Em7 Cmaj7 Am7 Fmaj7

This is how we start to create improvisation with the modes rather than just playing a scale over some chord or the other. In truth if you miss the harmony then you miss the value of the modes altogether both as a composer and as an improviser.

MODES AS QUARTAL HARMONY

It is quite common to employ Quartal Harmony. This harmony in 4ths gives a very intense jazzy sound as used by John Coltrane and McCoy Tyner. [This is only one way of harmonising this, but it is quite common amongst jazz musicians].

The image shows a musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). Above the staff, six chords are labeled: Cm7⁴, Dm7⁴, Ebmaj7b5, F7⁴, Gm7⁴, and Am7⁴. Below the staff, a guitar fretboard is shown with fret numbers for each string (1-6) for each chord. The fret numbers are: Cm7⁴ (1, 2, 1, 1), Dm7⁴ (4, 3, 3, 3), Ebmaj7b5 (6, 5, 5, 5), F7⁴ (8, 8, 8, 8), Gm7⁴ (10, 10, 10, 10), and Am7⁴ (13, 12, 12, 13).

CONSTRUCTING SIMPLE REPETITIVE VAMPS FOR PRACTICE:

From the chords of the harmony above here is a simple “Dorian Mode” vamp.

The image shows a musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb) and a 4/4 time signature. Above the staff, four chords are labeled: Cm7⁴, Dm7⁴, Cm7⁴, and Dm7⁴. Below the staff, a guitar fretboard is shown with fret numbers for each string (1-6) for each chord. The fret numbers are: Cm7⁴ (4, 3, 3, 3), Dm7⁴ (5, 5, 5, 5), Cm7⁴ (4, 3, 3, 3), and Dm7⁴ (5, 5, 5, 5). The word "TAB" is written vertically on the left side of the fretboard.

DORIAN MODE IMPROVISATION

Below are a couple of pentatonic ideas to get you started. If we look at these elementary examples we can already see that within this modal scale there is much creative room for pentatonic and motivic development.

Cm9 [C dorian]

Typical Pentatonic flourish

SUPERIMPOSITION

In this final Example [Using C dorian again] we can Exploit the Mode by Superimposing and flowing through its triads. [Starting on Bb to open up the Full finger board for us].

Bbmaj7 Cm7 F Eb F Gm Dm Cm7

Note: *You can also make “Triad Pairs” From the above exercise*

C PHRYGIAN MODE

The Phrygian Mode has a “Spanish” Flavour to it. Play through the little example below and hear the semitone from the tonic to the supertonic that creates this distinctive Spanish sound

Classic sound Phrase

Jazzed up

Musical notation for the C Phrygian Mode, showing two phrases. The first phrase is labeled "Classic sound Phrase" and the second is labeled "Jazzed up". The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and a 4/4 time signature. The first phrase consists of a descending eighth-note scale: C4, Bb4, Ab4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The second phrase is a more complex, jazz-influenced line: C4, Bb4, Ab4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, Bb4, Ab4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, Bb4, Ab4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. Below the staff, the corresponding fret numbers are provided: 5 6 8 6 5 8 5 for the classic phrase, and 8 5 6 6 9 6 8 6 8 for the jazzed-up phrase.

Longer Phrygian Mode line.

Musical notation for the C Phrygian Mode, showing a longer line. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and a 4/4 time signature. The line consists of a descending eighth-note scale: C4, Bb4, Ab4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, Bb4, Ab4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, Bb4, Ab4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, Bb4, Ab4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. Below the staff, the corresponding fret numbers are provided: 8 6 4 6 8 5 6 8 6 5 6 5 8 5 6 8 6 5 6 4 6 9 6 8 9 6 8.

C LYDIAN MODE

Here we will look at the Lydian mode of C. Below this is a Variation of the same exercise but in plain C major [C Ionian]. Notice the difference that the F# adds to the flavour and harmonic content of C Lydian as opposed to the F Natural of C Ionian [C major].

C LYDIAN MODE

85 bpm

Cmaj7 9b5 D/E D/E D/C C/D Bm6/E Cmaj7

T 2 3 3 5 8 7 5 5 5 7 3 2 3

A 4 4 2 4 5 4 3 7 7 7 7 5 3 3 5

B 2 3 5 4 4 5 4 7 7 8 5 2 2 3

0 0 0 8 0

C IONIAN MODE

85 bpm

Cmaj7 Dsu4/E Dm/C C/D Bm7b5 Em7sus4

T 5 5 8 7 5 5 5 5 3 1 0

A 4 4 2 4 5 4 3 6 6 8 8 6 5 3 3

B 2 3 5 4 5 4 5 6 7 7 7 5 2 2

0 0 0 8 5 2 2

0 0 0 8 0

MIXOLYDIAN FOR DOMINANT 7THS

This scale can be used like a modulating scale. This is the Mixolydian. This is because whenever you have a Dominant 7th chord you will need to change the scale. E.g From C major C D E F G A B - to C7 you would need a Bb [b7 to resolve to the major 3rd of the new chord/harmony] , so, you would have - C D E F G A Bb or C Mixolydian.

Below we can see this scalic approach in action.

C MIXOLYDIAN

F MIXOLYDIAN

	C9	Fmaj7	F9	Bbmaj7
T	3	5	8	10
A	3 2 3 5	5	8 7 8 10	10
B	3	7	7	12
		8	8	13

C AEOLIAN MODE

In this example Listen to the sound of the Harmony as you play through this simple Vamp. You will hear that the “Dominant” Chord is Minor and Not Major. I have left out the G note to create a C chord riff as you would hear in much AOR Rock/Pop Music.

Cm Ab/C Gm [Bb/C] Cm

Below is a simple Triplet Arpeggio idea of the above. Again listen to the sound of the Minor Dominant Chord in the last bar.

This last Aeolian example is a modern fusion-esque approach

C LOCRIAN MODE

The next example is an angular phrase as used by guitarists like Robert Fripp.

The image displays a musical score for the C Locrian mode. It consists of two staves: a standard musical staff and a guitar tablature staff. The key signature is one flat (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The melodic phrase in the treble clef is: C4 (quarter), B3 (quarter), Bb3 (quarter), Ab3 (quarter), Ab3 (quarter), Gb3 (quarter), Gb3 (quarter), F#3 (quarter), F#3 (quarter), E3 (quarter), E3 (quarter), D3 (quarter), D3 (quarter), C4 (quarter). The guitar tablature below shows the fret numbers for each note: 3, 4, 5, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 6, 7, 6, 5, 6, 8, 4, 3, 4, 1, 2, 1, 4. A double bar line with repeat dots is at the end of the piece.

LASTLY,

Blues through the modes of C major for improvisation practice

The image shows three staves of musical notation, each containing four measures of chords. The chords are written in a 4/4 time signature and are represented by diagonal lines in the staves. The chords are as follows:

Staff	Measure 1	Measure 2	Measure 3	Measure 4
1	Cmaj ⁷	B ^b /C	D/C	C/D
2	E ^b /C	A ^b /C	D ^b /C	Cmaj ⁷
3	E ^b /F	F/B ^b	Bm ^{7b5}	Fm ⁶ /G

Record yourself playing the chords and then improvise over the top using the relevant modes for that chord. For example, Cmaj⁷ use C ionian [Or even C Lydian]. For B^b/C use C dorian or C Aeolian etc.

It's amazing how quickly all of this makes sense when you practice this way. It's also amazing how quickly you develop new and creative ideas from this.

THANKS FOR READING THIS BOOK!

Thank you so much for taking the time out to study this E-Book. There is so much more that I wanted to add, But, due to the nature of studying the modes sometimes a less is more approach is necessary when it comes to comprehending and putting into practice the element of transposition for improvisational/compositional purposes. I hope that this book has helped to get across the flavours that the modes give in regards to their harmonic and melodic content.

Always remember that without looking at the harmony and the harmonic implications the value and the creative aspects of the modes tend to get lost

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