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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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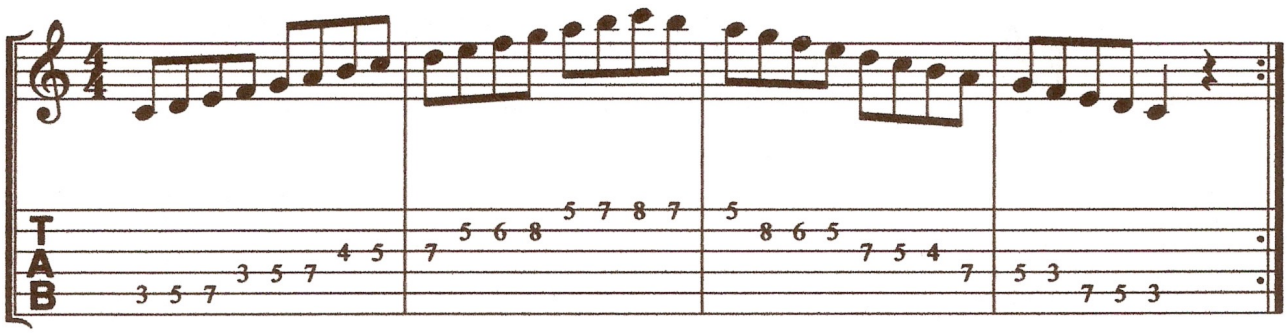
WHAT IS A MODE?

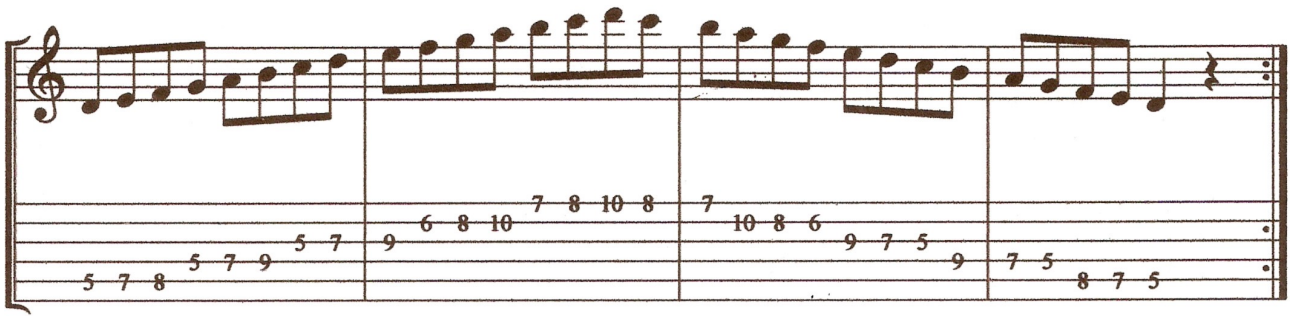
A mode of a major scale is just basically an INVERSION of that scale. This means that it is the same scale starting on a different note. What would be the point of this you may ask? Well each mode has its own unique flavour and corresponding harmony.

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?

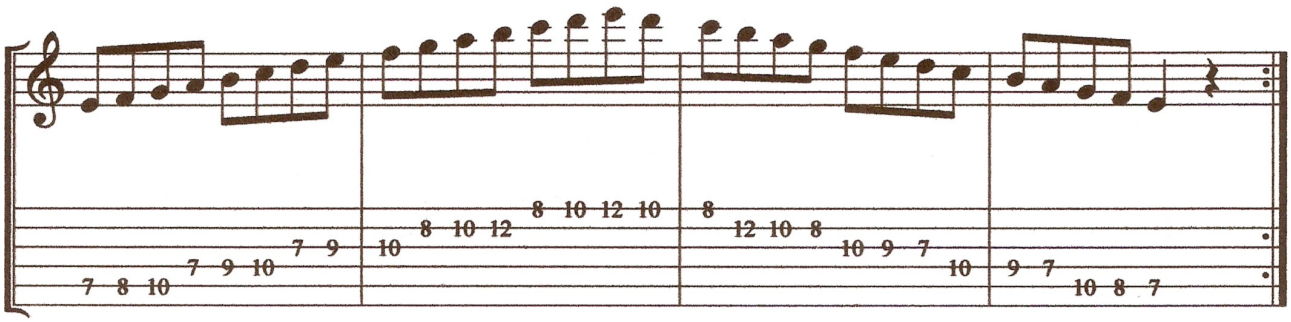
First lets have a look at the Modes in C major, C major [or C Ionian]



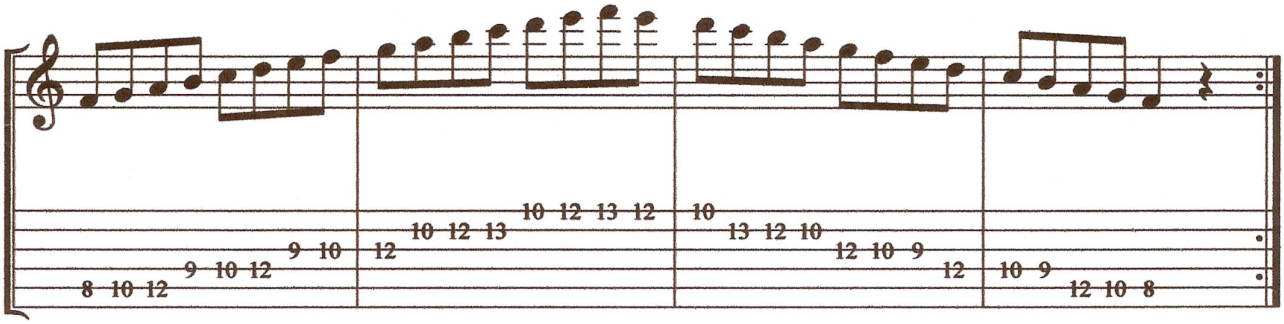
D Dorian starts on 2nd degree of the C major Scale



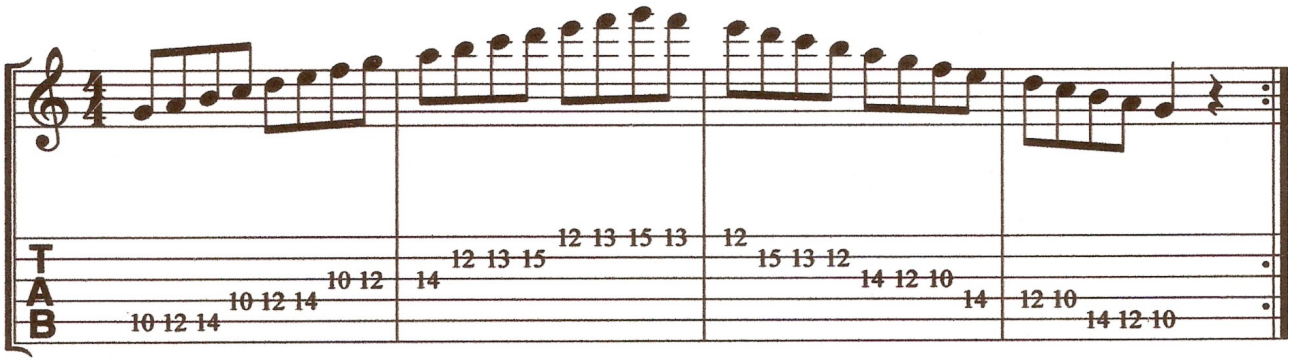
E Phrygian starts on the 3rd degree of the C Major scale



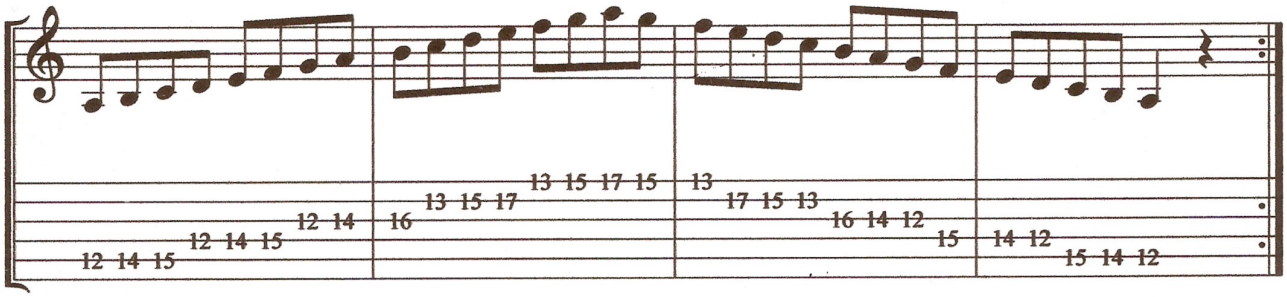
F Lydian starts on the 4th degree of the C Major scale



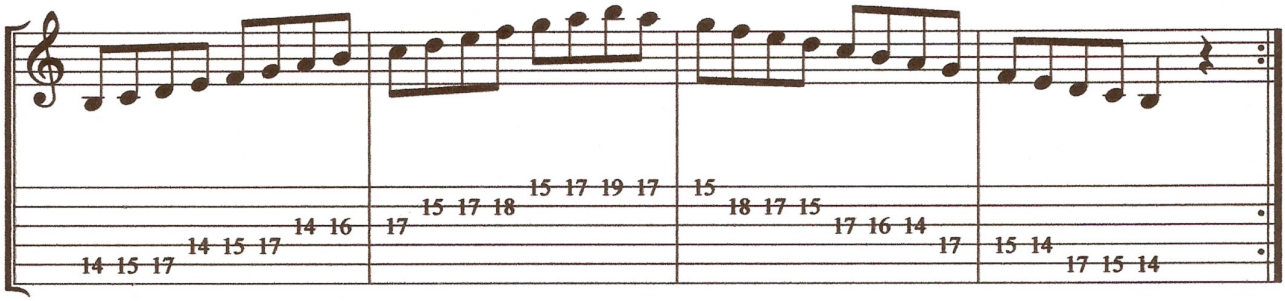
G Mixolydian starts on the 5th degree of the C Major scale



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



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

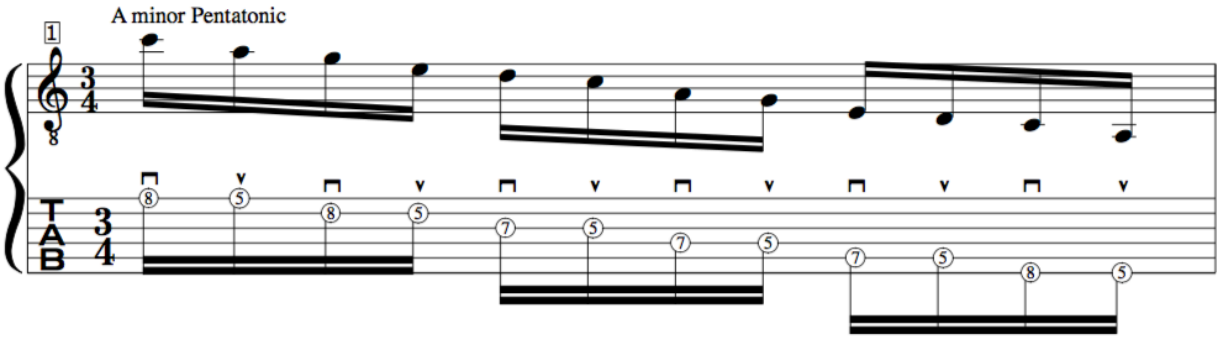


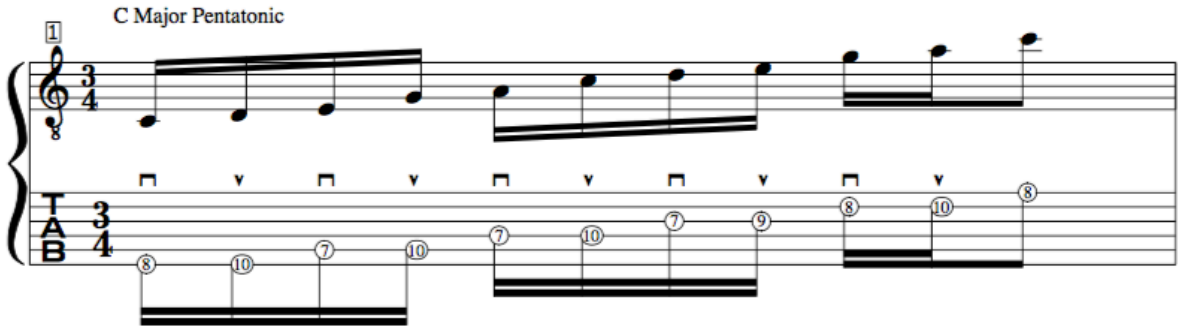
SIDE NOTE:

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





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

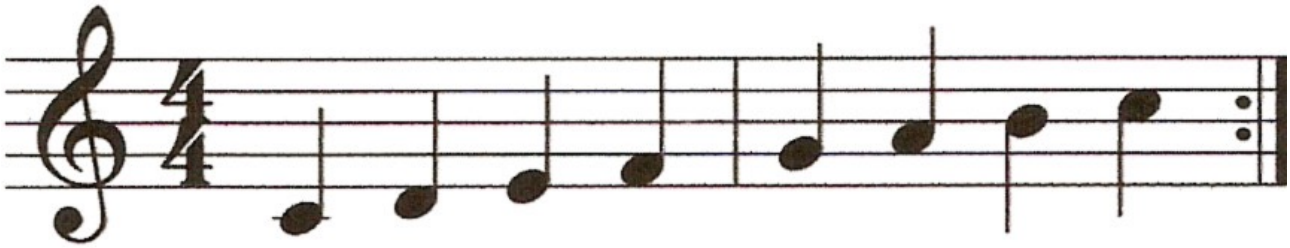
HOW TO REMEMBER THEIR NAMES IN ORDER

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.

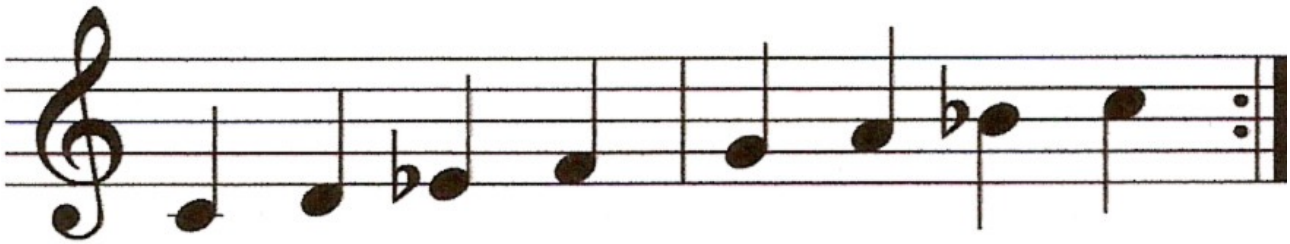
D dorian ----------



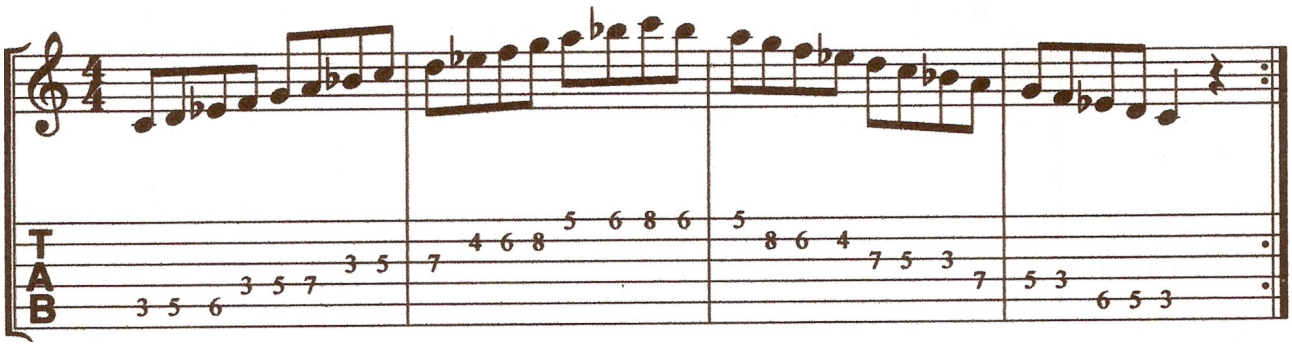
So if the note D is the second note of C then what is C the second note of? Answer = Bb. You can either count down two half steps from C or up two half steps from Bb. So C dorian will have the same notes as Bb major and starting on its 2nd degree note of C [see ex.1]

EX.1 C Dorian

1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7 C dorian 2 octaves

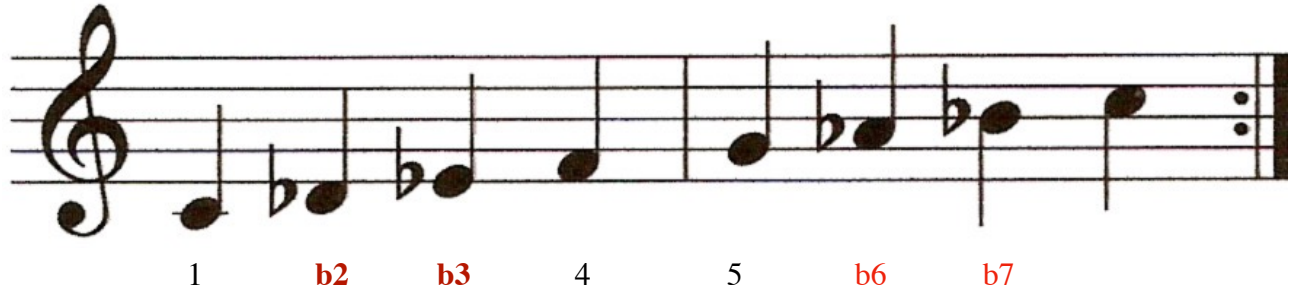


1 2 **b3** 4 5 6 **b7**

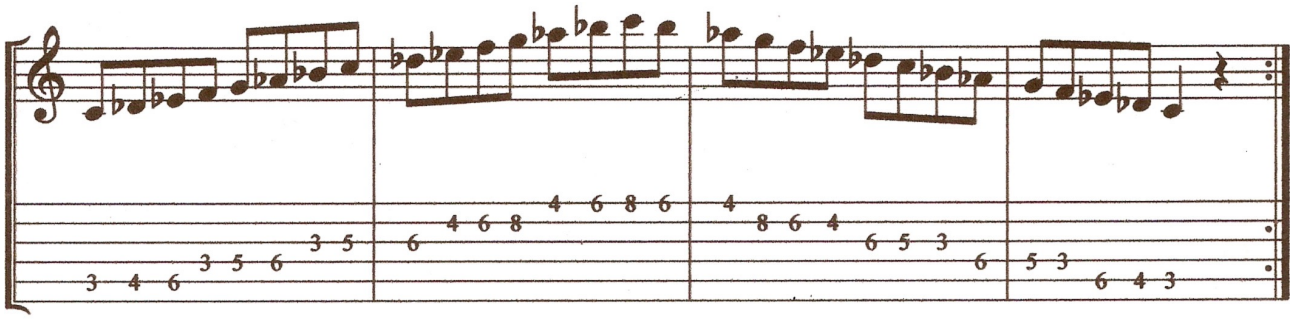


If E Phrygian is the 3rd degree [or a Major 3rd up from C] then what is C the 3rd degree of [or a Major 3rd up from]. Answer Ab. You can either count down five half steps from C or up five half steps from Ab.

EX.2 C Phrygian

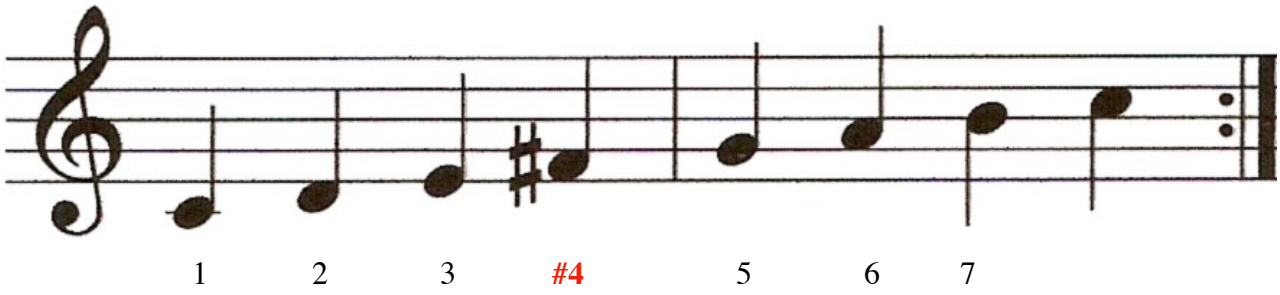


1 **b2** **b3** 4 5 b6 b7

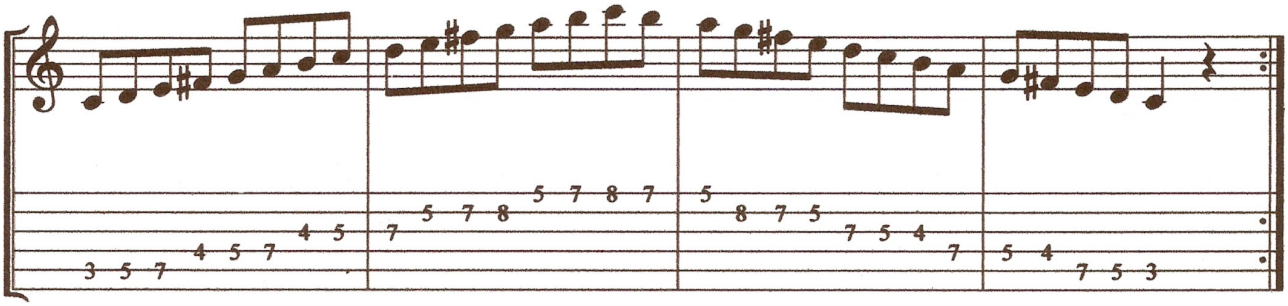


If F Lydian is the Fourth degree of C [or a perfect fourth up from C] then what is C the fourth degree of [or a perfect fourth up from]. Answer is G.

EX.3 C Lydian

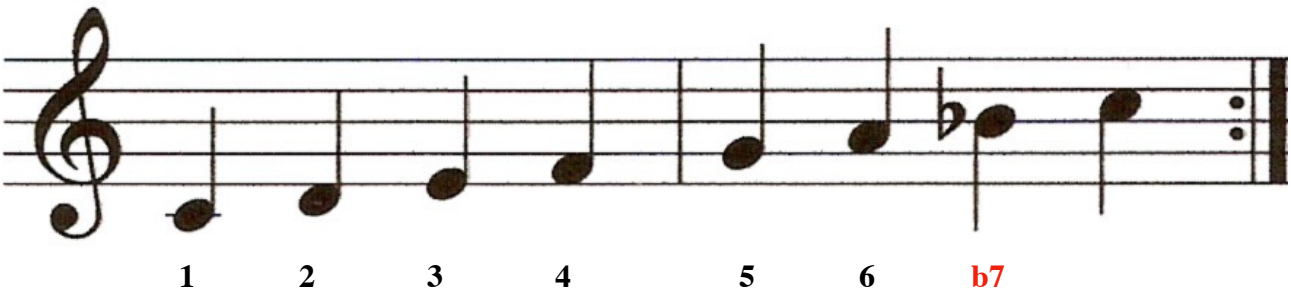


C Lydian 2 octaves

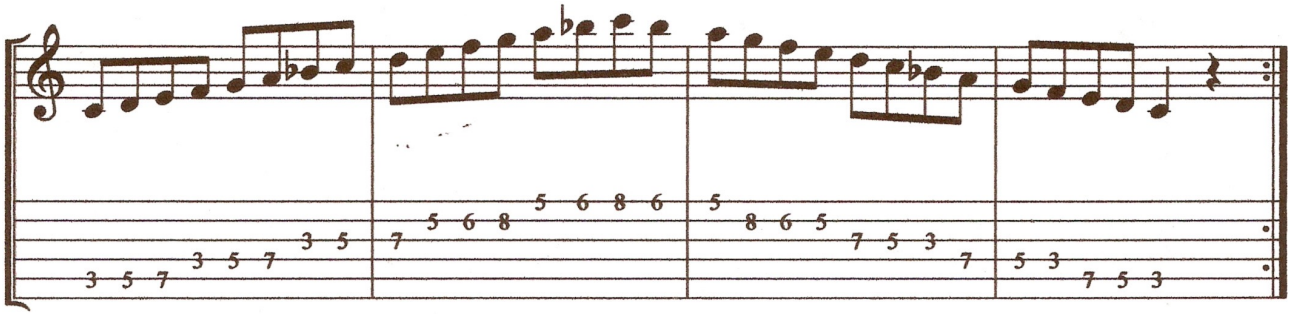


If G Mixolydian is the fifth of C [or a perfect fifth up from C] then what is C the fifth of [or a perfect 5th up from]. Answer is F.

EX.4 C Mixolydian

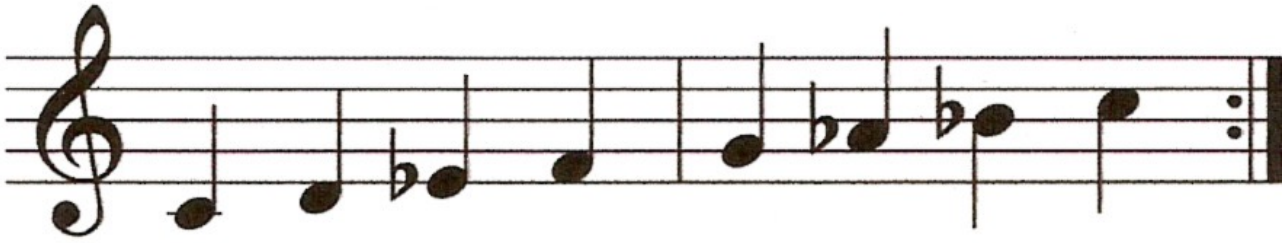


C Mixolydian 2 octaves



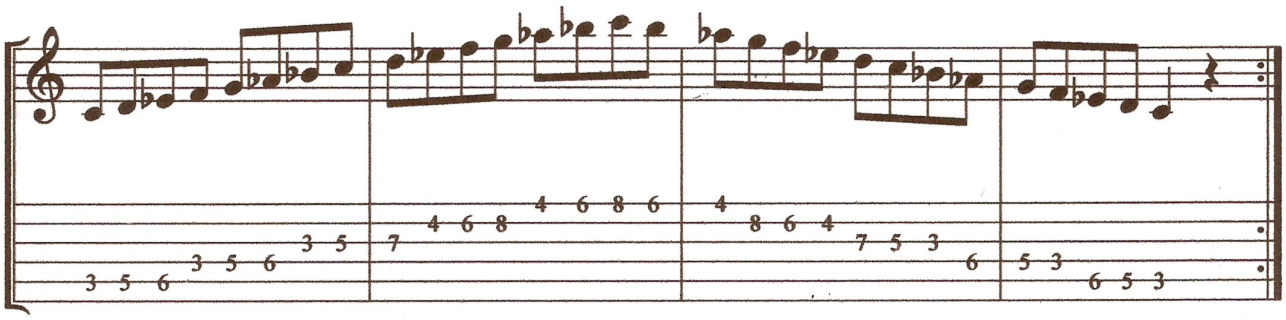
If A Aeolian is the sixth of C[or a major 6th up from C] then what is C the sixth of [or a major 6th up from] Answer is Eb.

EX.5 C Aeolian



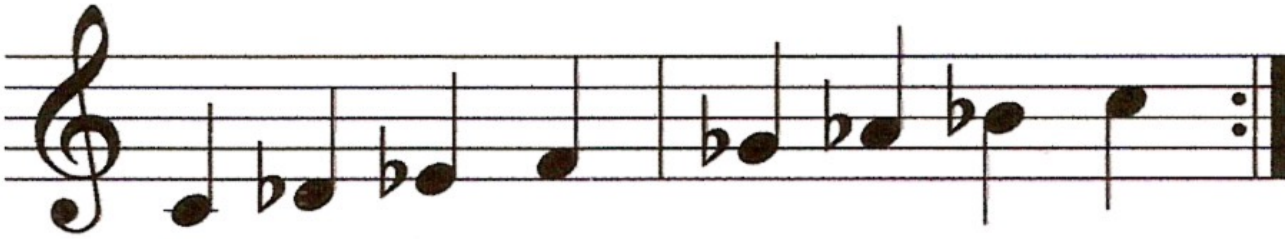
1 2 **b3** 4 5 **b6** **b7**

C Aeolian 2 octaves



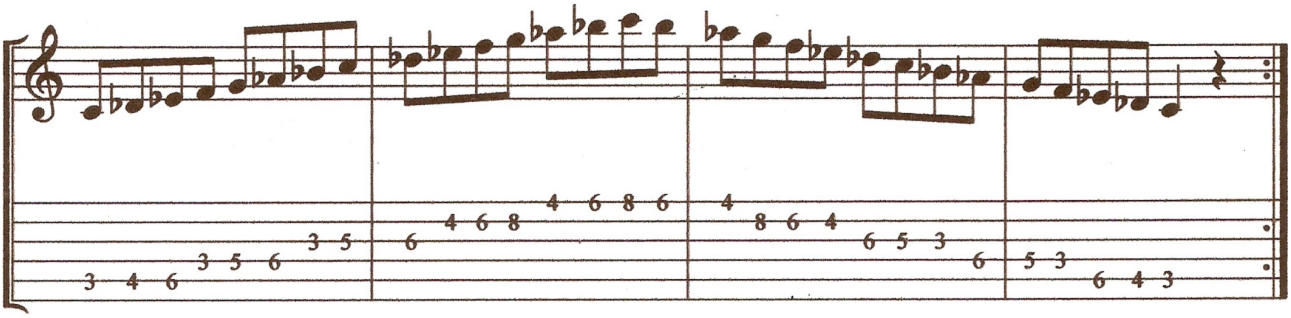
If B Locrian is the seventh of C [or a major seventh up from] then what is C the seventh of [or a major seventh up from]. Answer Db.

EX.6 C Locrian



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

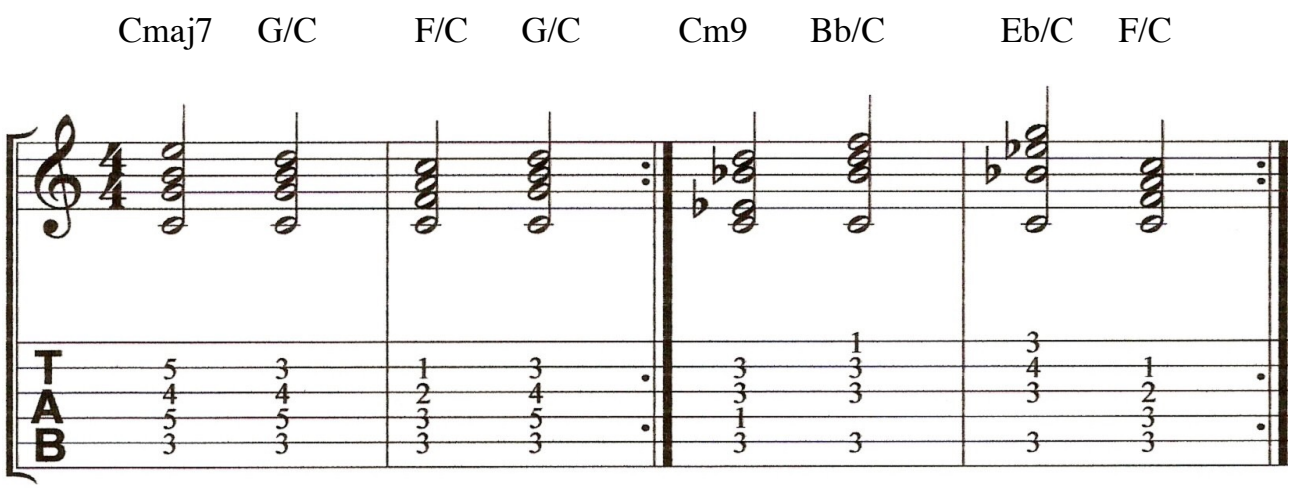
B locrian 2 octaves



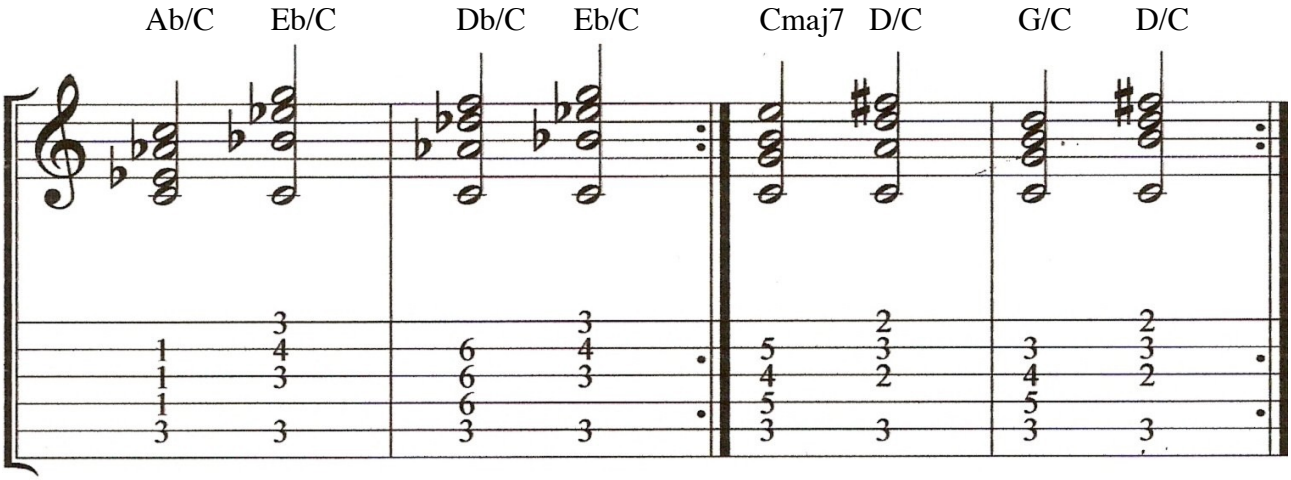
LOOKING AT HARMONY FOR TRANSPOSED MODES OF THE MAJOR SCALE

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.

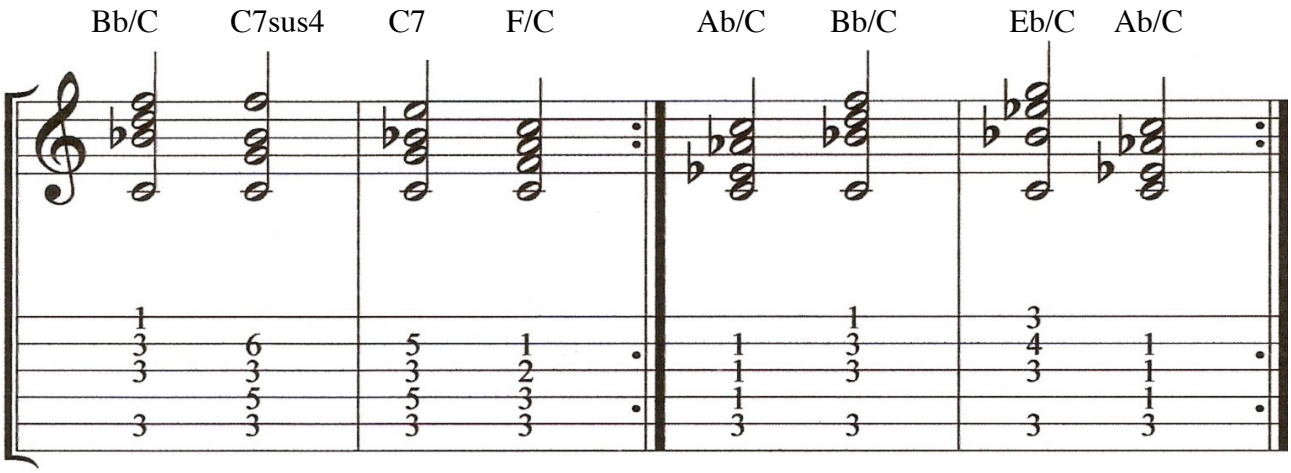
C Ionian **C Dorian**



C Phrygian **C Lydian**

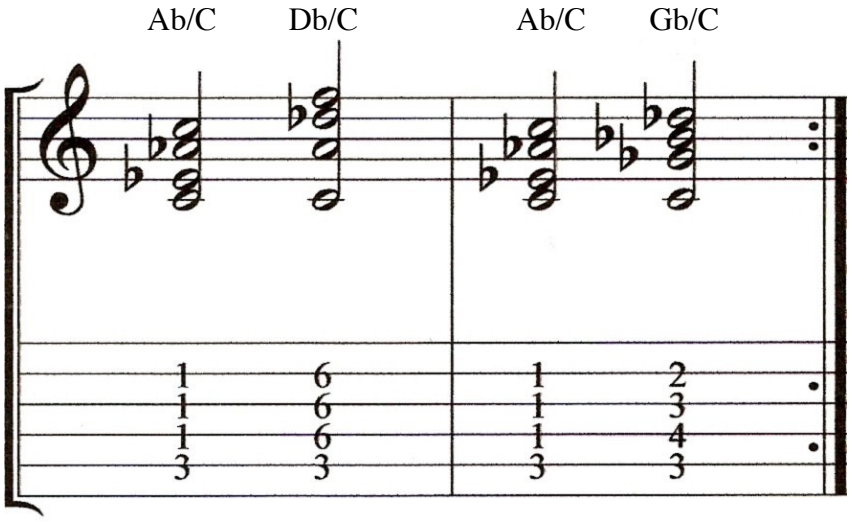


C Mixolydian



C Aeolian

C Locrian

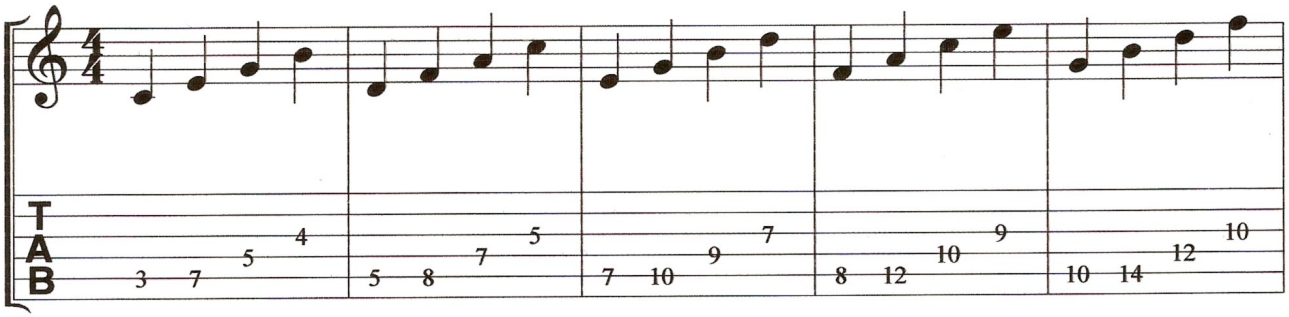


BEING CREATIVE WITH THE MODES

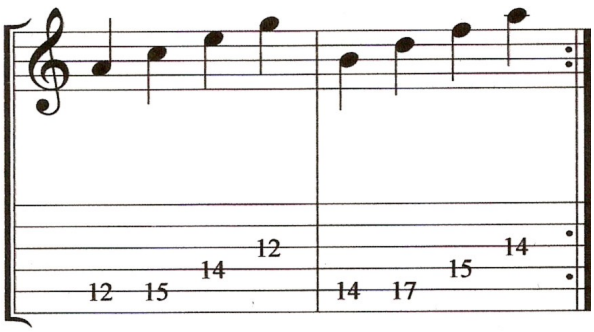
Back to Basics: To explore the “Harmony” of the modes we need to look at the arpeggios/ chords contained within them. We will look at the C major [Ionian] for simplicity’s sake.

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

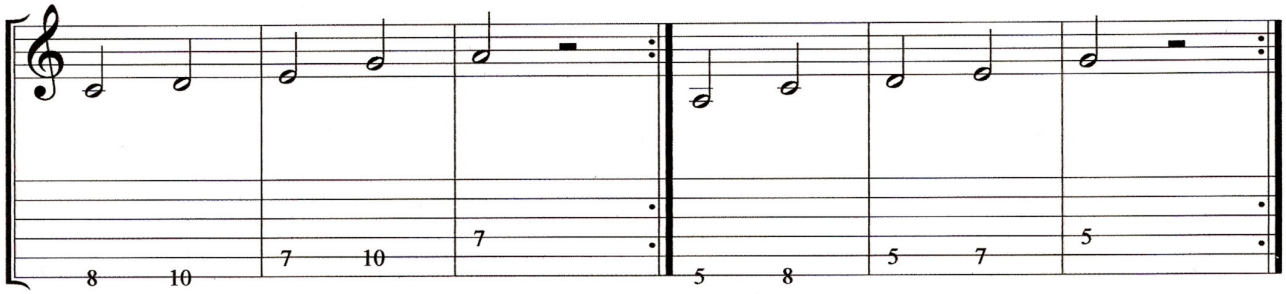
Cmaj7 Dm7 Em7 Fmaj7 G7 [Dominant]



Am7 Bm7b5

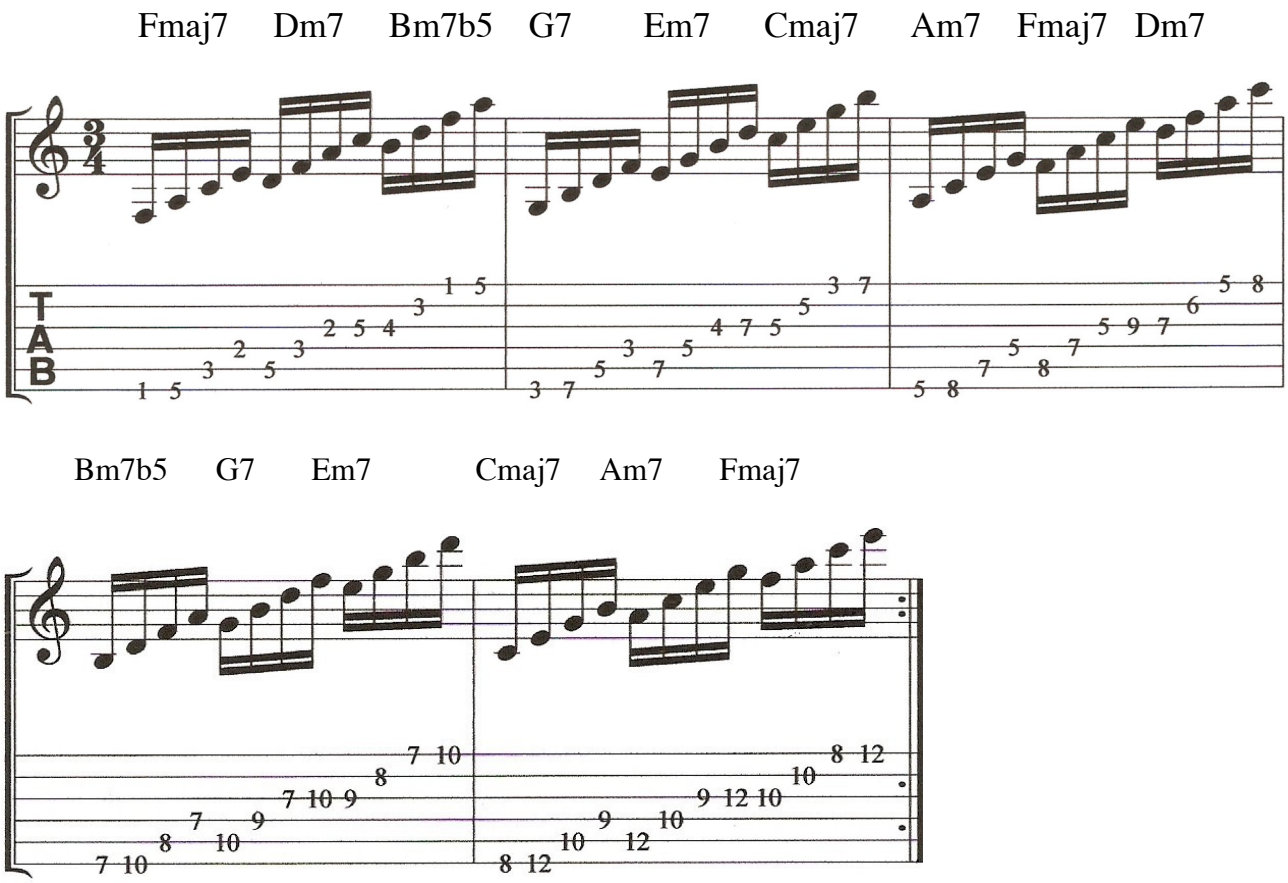


C major Pentatonic A minor Pentatonic



EXTENDING THE CHORDAL ARPEGGIOS: C IONIAN

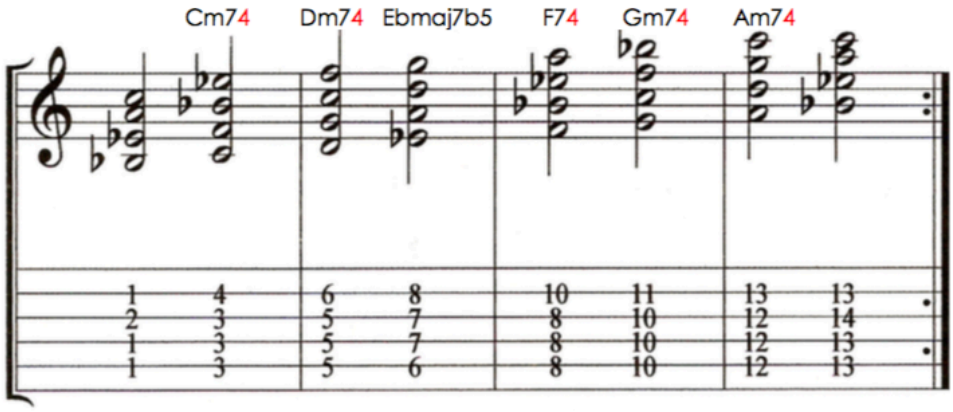
With this in mind we can now extend the C Major [Ionian] arpeggios contained in the harmony. [Starting on the 4th degree F as it opens out the whole fingerboard for us].



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.

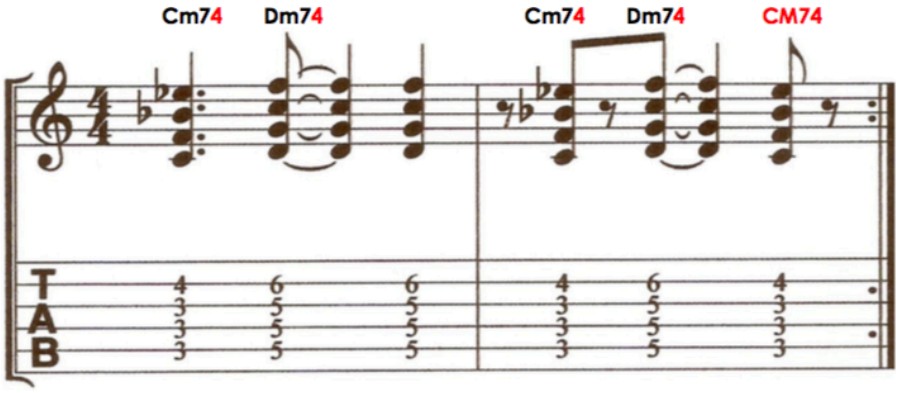
MODES AS QUARTAL HARMONY

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



CONSTRUCTING SIMPLE REPETITIVE VAMPS FOR PRACTICE:

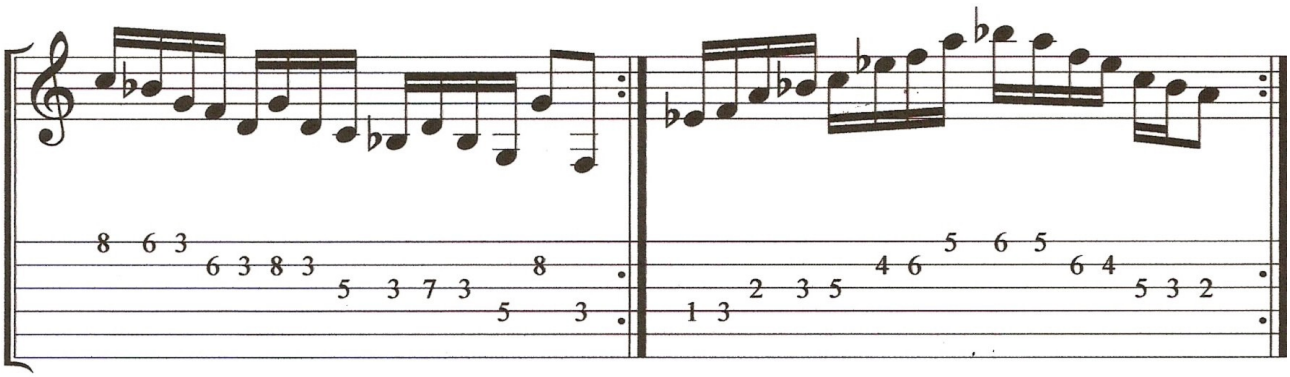
From the chords of the harmony above here is a simple "'Dorian Mode" vamp.



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 motific development.

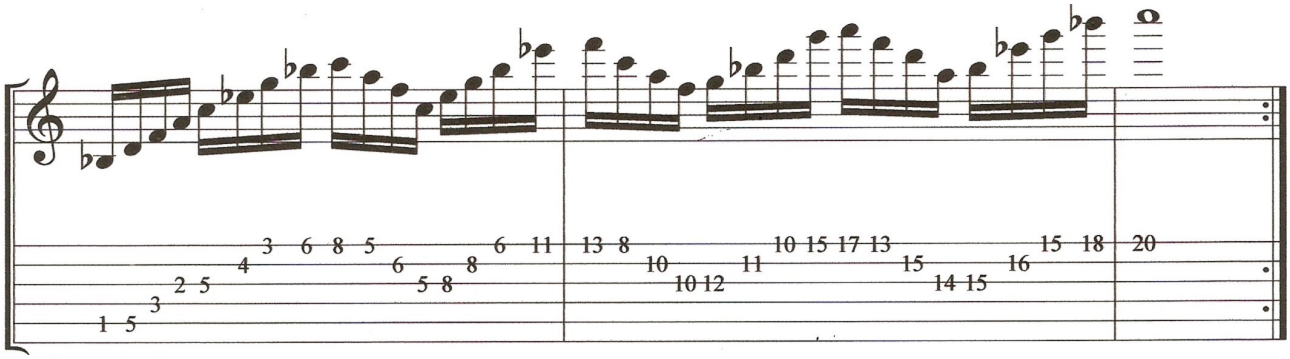
Cm9 [C dorian] Typical Pentatonic flourish



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

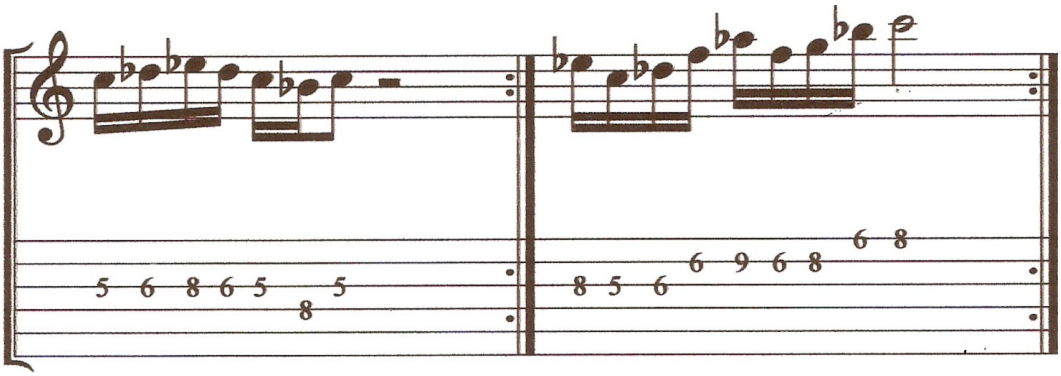


Note: *You can also make “Triad Pairs” From the above exercise*

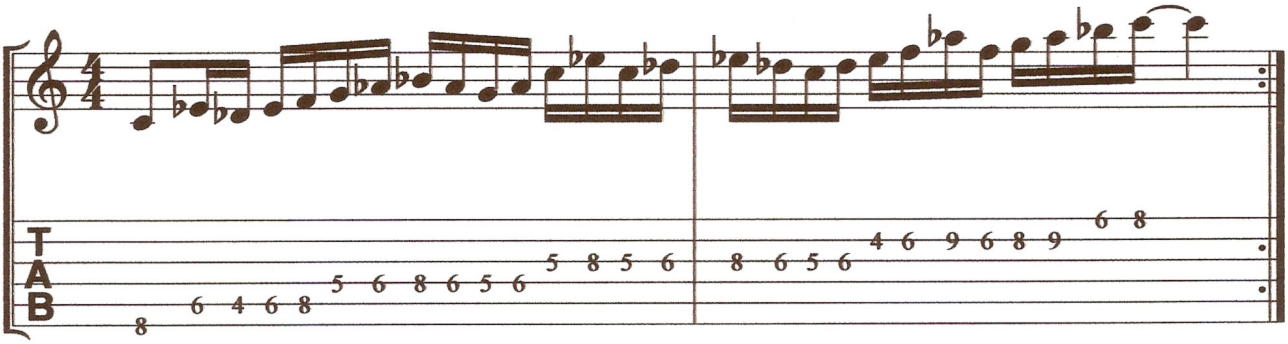
C PHRYGIAN MODE

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



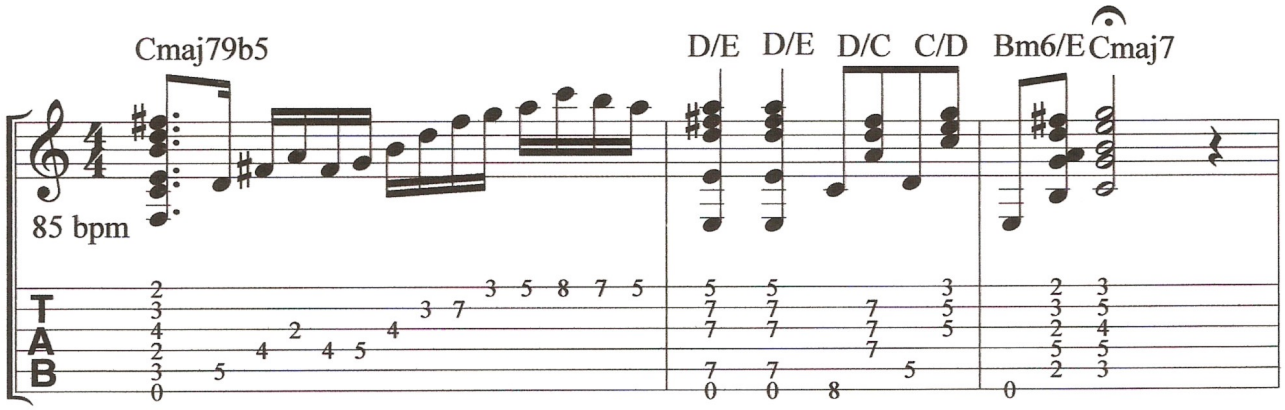
Longer Phrygian Mode line.



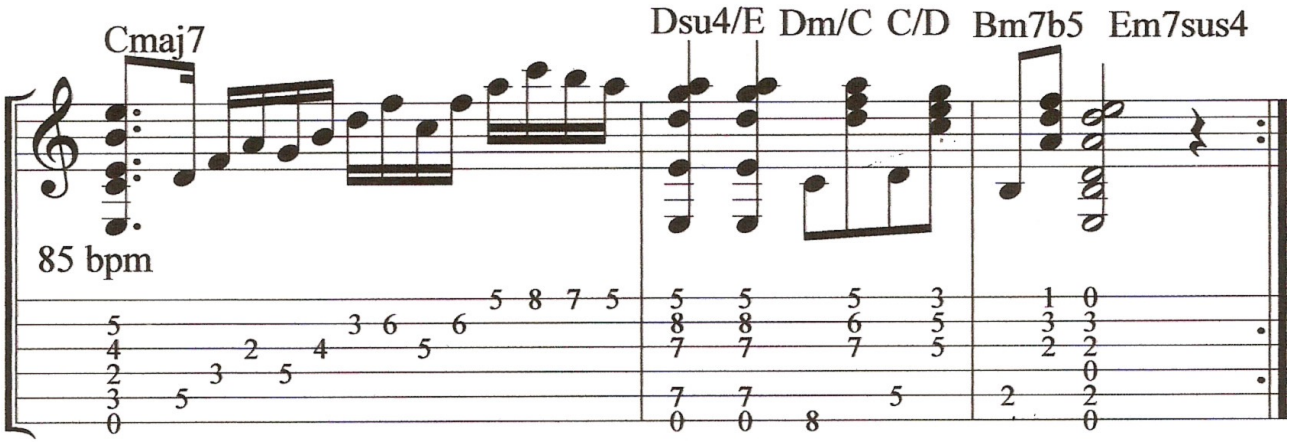
C LYDIAN MODE

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



C IONIAN MODE



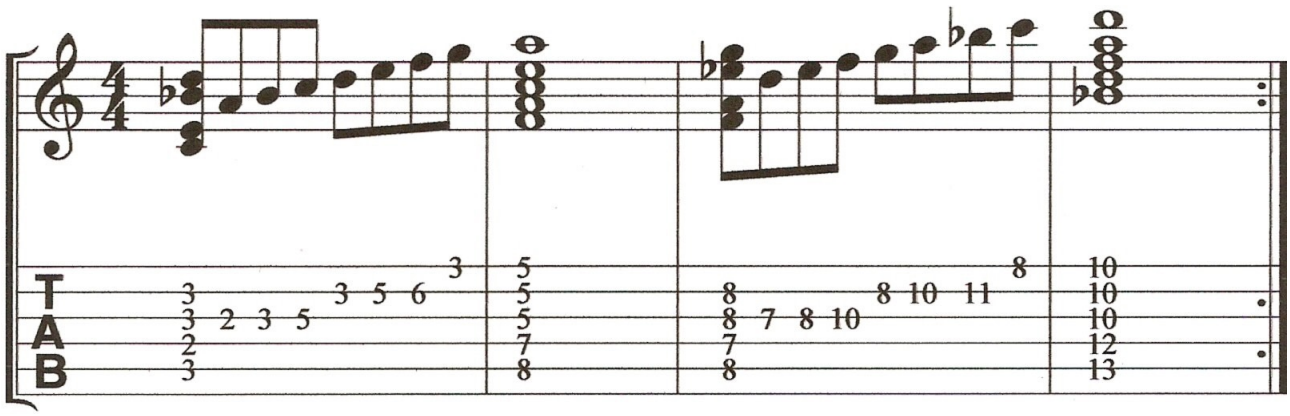
MIXOLYDIAN FOR DOMINANT 7THS

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

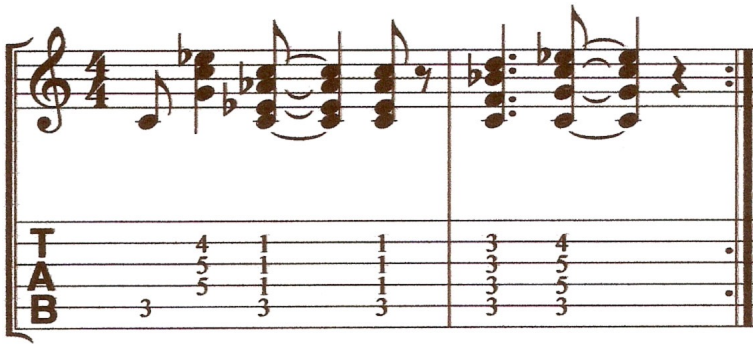
C9 Fmaj7 F9 Bbmaj7



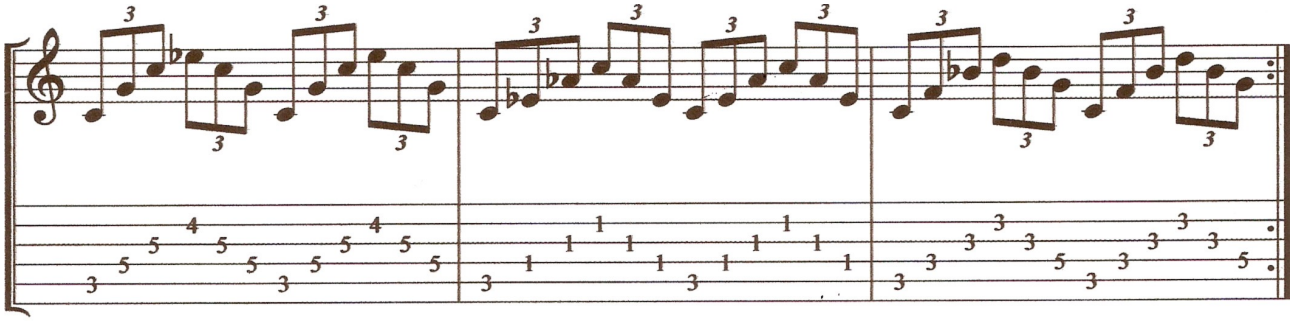
C AEOLEAN MODE

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.

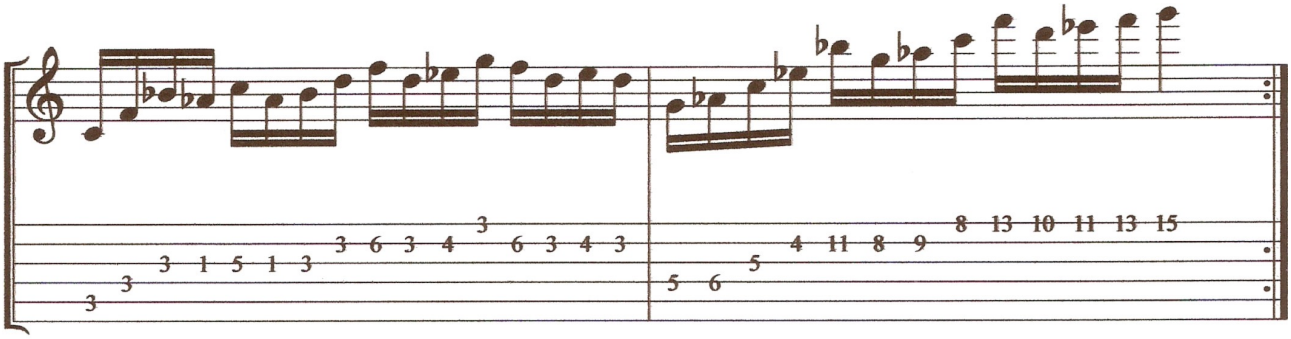
Cm Ab/C Gm [Bb/C] Cm



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

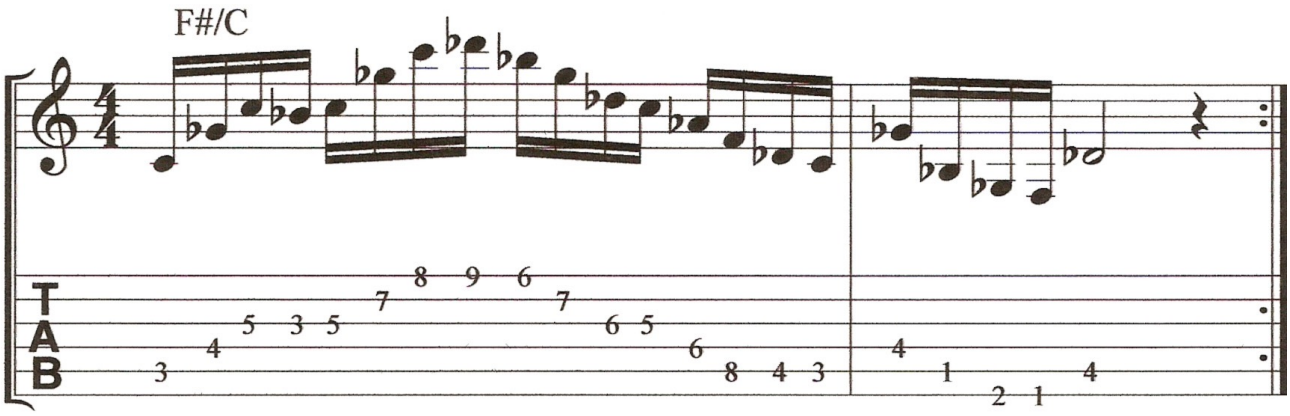


This last Aeolean example is a modern fusion-esque approach



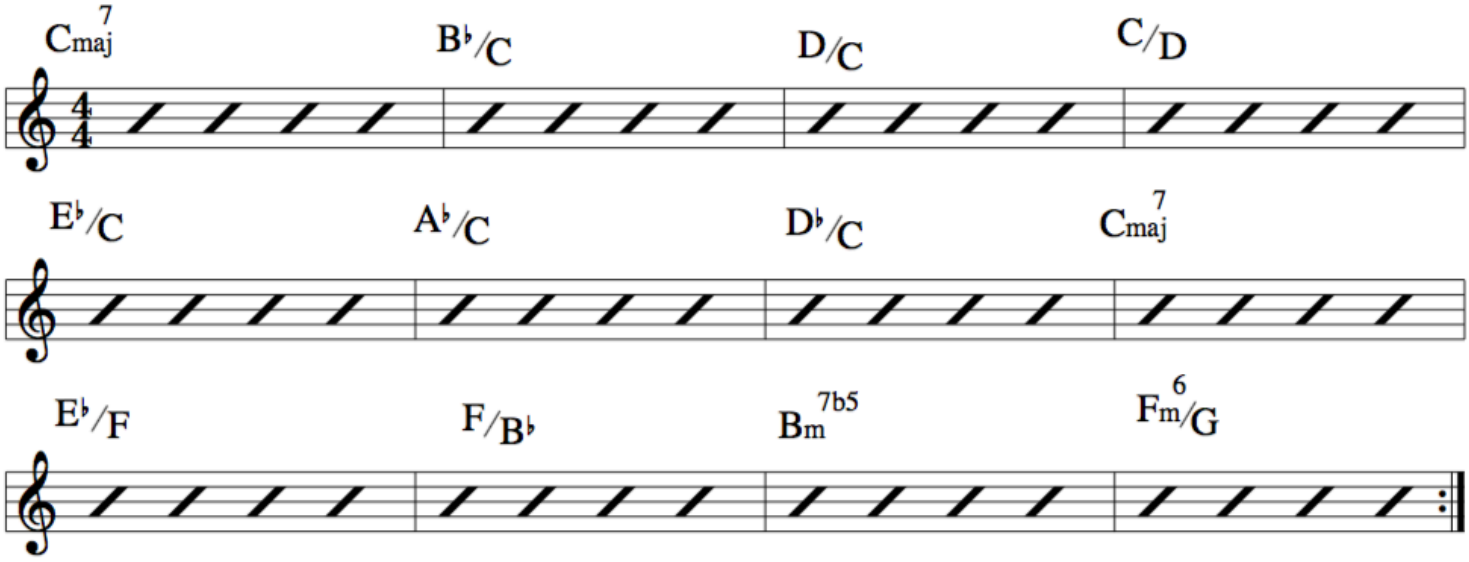
C LOCRIAN MODE

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



LASTLY,

Blues through the modes of C major for improvisation practice



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 Bb/C use C dorian or C Aeolean 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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