

Modes

Explained for Ukulele Players



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Video Tutorial:

There are seven modes

- Ionian
- Dorian
- Phrygian
- Lydian
- Mixolydian
- Aeolian
- Locrian

Two of these you already know, ever wondered why C major and A minor have the same notes? That is because of modal harmony!

- Ionian is the major scale
- Aeolian is the minor scale

If I take the C major scale and play one octave as normal it looks like this

C D E F G A B C

Modal harmony happens when I take the same notes and treat another as root, so I will take the same notes but I will start and stop on the A note

A B C D E F G A

Now you have the A minor scale, this one we already knew though, lets try to treat a different note as the root, how about D.

D E F G A B C D

This is what is called the D Dorian, and you can create a new scale with all seven notes in the scale simply by treating any one of those notes as the root.

The reason the same notes produce different sounds by treating different notes as the root is because it produces different intervals.

The intervals of C Ionian

- C - Root
- D - 2nd
- E - 3rd
- F - 4th
- G - 5th
- A - 6th
- B - 7th
- C - Octave

The intervals of D Dorian

- D - Root
- E - 2nd
- F - b3rd
- G - 4th
- A - 5th
- B - 6th
- C - b7th
- D - Octave

So we can see by starting on the D note we get a b3rd, that means it is a minor scale, and we also get the b7th typical of a minor scale as well, but we have a major 6th, that is unique to Dorian

The intervals of A Aeolian

- A - Root
- B - 2nd
- C - b3rd
- D - 4th
- E - 5th
- F - b6th
- G - b7th
- A - Octave

Here we can see by starting on the A note we also get a b6th, making it different than the Dorian scale.

Lets look at all the modes with C as the root so we can really hear the differences.

C Ionian

1 Ionian

2

T
A
B

0 2 0 1 3 0 2 3

C Ionian is also known as the C major scale and it has no flat or sharp intervals. It is the captain of all modern music and it is by far the most used scale.

C Dorian (Built from the 2nd interval of the Bb Major Scale)

- Dorian is built from the 2nd interval of the major scale
- Dorian has a flat 3rd, making it a minor scale, as well as flat 7th.
- Most other minor scales have a flat 6th as well, but because Dorian has a major 6th it maintains a level of brightness. It is the happiest of the minor scales.

Famous songs that use Dorian

- Riders on the Storm - The Doors
- Oye Como Va - Carlos Santana
- Mad World - Tears for Fears

C Phrygian (Built from the 3rd degree of the Ab)

- Phrygian is built from the 3rd interval of the major scale
- Phrygian has a flat 2nd, flat 3rd, flat 6th and flat 7th making it very dissonant, the only mode more dissonant is Locrian
- A common place to hear this mode is Flamenco and Rumba music.

Famous songs that use Phrygian (Heavy Metal is the most common contemporary music to make use of this mode)

- Wherever I May Roam - Metallica
- Things We Said Today - The Beatles
- After the Rain - John Coltrane
- Symphony of Destruction - Megadeth

- IF you raise the 3rd degree to a major you get something called Phrygian Dominant, which is a mode of the harmonic minor, and this is even more common for Flamenco. It is also the scale used in Misirlou,

a Mediterranean folk song made famous by Dick Dale's modern interpretation used in the Pulp Fiction sound track.

C Lydian (Built from the 4th degree of G Major)

Musical notation for the C Lydian scale. The top staff shows the scale in treble clef, starting on C4. The notes are C, D, E, F#, G, A, B, C. The sharp 4th interval (F#) is explicitly labeled. The bottom staff shows the fretboard for a guitar, with strings A and B indicated. The fret numbers are: 0, 2, 0, 2, 3, 0, 2, 3.

- Lydian is built from the 4th degree of the major scale
- Lydian contains a sharp 4th interval
- Some people make the argument that Lydian should actually be the major scale as it has even less dissonance than the major scale
- This is a very hopeful sound that is popular in movie themes.
- This is also the only mode we will see with a sharp interval as everything else will be flat.

Famous Songs that Use Lydian

- Yoda's Theme - John Williams
- Oceans - Pearl Jam

If you flatten the 7th you get Lydian Dominant, the scale used for the Simpsons Theme!

C Mixolydian (Built from the 5th degree of F major)

Musical notation for the C Mixolydian scale. The top staff shows the scale in treble clef, starting on C4. The notes are C, D, E, F, G, A, Bb, C. The flat 7th interval (Bb) is explicitly labeled. The bottom staff shows the fretboard for a guitar, with strings A and B indicated. The fret numbers are: 0, 2, 0, 1, 3, 0, 1, 3.

- The Mixolydian mode shares all the same notes as the major scale with the exception of the flat 7th
- This scale is built from the 5th degree, so it treats the V7 as a I7 making it great to use with the blues
- You can use this mode over all 3 chords in the blues as you shift the mode when the harmony changes

Famous Songs that Use Mixolydian

- Clocks - Coldplay
- Bitter Sweet Symphony - The Verve
- Royal - Lorde
- Sweet Child 'o' Mine - Guns' n' Roses

C Aeolian (Built from the 6th degree of Eb major)

- This is a scale you are familiar with; it is the minor scale!
- The intervals that make it unique are the flat 3rd, flat 6th and flat 7th
- Easily the second most used scale
 - o Note there are two other minor scales that aren't modes of the Major scale
 - o Harmonic Minor
 - The same as the minor scale with a raised 7th
 - o Melodic Minor
 - The only scale that use different intervals whether you are ascending or descending

Famous songs that use the minor scale

- Ain't No Sunshine - Bill Withers
- Sultans of Swing - Dire Straits
- Sunday Morning - Maroon 5

C Locrian (Built from the 7th degree of Db major)

- The Locrian is by far the most dissonant mode
- It has flat 2nd flat 3rd flat 5th flat 6th and flat 7th the only interval untouched is the 4th
- This mode is built off the diminished chord, making it essentially impossible to resolve
- Only song I know in Locrian - Army of One - Björk

Let It Be Melody

How to practice and hear modes

Step 1. Take a melody

1 2 3 4 5

When I find my-self in times of trou-ble moth-er Mar- y comes to me. Whisper words of wis- dom let it be

T 3-3 3-3-0-3-3 3-5 7-7-7-5-5-3-3 7-7-8-7-7-5-7-5 3

A

B

For this to really work you need a melody that has all 7 tones of the major scale, this only has six of them as the 6th degree is not present.

The idea is to apply the different intervals to hear the melody in different modes.

Here is the phrase with a sharp 4th, so this is "Let It Be - Lydian"

6 7 8 9 10

When I find my-self in times of trou-ble moth-er Mar- y comes to me. Whisper words of wis- dom let it be

T 3-3 3-3-0-3-3 3-5 7-7-7-5-5-3-3 7-7-9-7-7-5-7-5 3

A

B

Here is the phrase with a flat 3rd, flat 6th and flat 7th, "Let It Be - Aeolian aka Minor)

11 12 13 14 15

When I find my- self in times of trou-ble moth-er Mar- y comes to me. Whisper words of wis- dom let it be

T 3-3 3-3-4-3-3 3-5 6-6-6-5-5-3-3 6-6-8-6-6-5-6-5 3

A

B

Find a melody with all 7 degrees of the major scale and repeat the exercise!