

DISTILLING MODES

ABSTRACT

This workshop is an attempt to lay out the “why” of Modes in their simplest form using music theory. I suppose, it could be stated another way without music theory; however, understanding the associated theory behind the concepts is more likely to enable one to effectively use modes to create music. Consequently, this effort is intended to distill Modes into their separate parts, using intervals of the C Major scale and its fretboard application. Intervals are used exclusively because this concept of explaining Modes is better than any other illustration other than a piano – which is easier. Or, using a formula without questioning why. In its simplest form “Modes are just scales from different key signatures” used over a specific key (2019 Shepard). Or, as the humours perspective below suggests:

A Rich Man: Money isn't everything you'd be fine without it.

A Prodigy: Talent is overrated, you could get by without it.

A Jazz Musician: Key signatures, ya . . . you can get by without 'em.

The focus will be on the key of C and how the intervals change as we move from Mode to Mode. Or, key signature to key signature. As you are aware, the tonal center changes with the Mode however, the key stays the same. Confusing! Below, you can see the “interval changes” as they relate to the key of C and their modal tonal center; however, the actual “intervals” are in the key signature of the Mode. Even more confusing? Yes!

So, buckle up buttercup, here we go!

ASSUMPTIONS

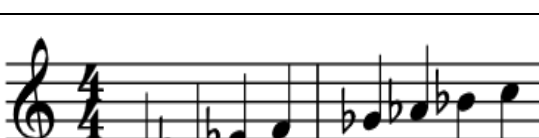
1. Key of C Major
2. Scale is C Major
3. Pitch Set - Dobro Tuning: GBDGBD
4. Know all of the notes in all of the keys
5. Only intervals and notes on the staff will be used to illustrate notes
6. The learner understands basic music theory including intervals and their relationships to notes
7. The concept of whole-step and half-step is understood - W-W-H-W-W-W-H
8. The order of sharps and flats
9. Major Scale Degrees: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
10. The Order of Modes: 1 - 5 - b2 - b6 - b3 - b7 - 4

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LEGEND

	Root	Tonic	1
	Major Second	Supertonic	2
	Major Third	Mediant	3
	Perfect Fourth	Subdominant	4
	Perfect Fifth	Dominant	5
	Major Sixth	Submediant	6
	Major Seventh	Leading Tone	7
Sharps & Flats			
	Flat Second		b2
	Flat Third	Minor Third	b3
	Sharp Fourth		#4
	Flat Five		b5
	Flat Six	Flat Submediant	b6
	Flat Seventh	Subtonic	b7

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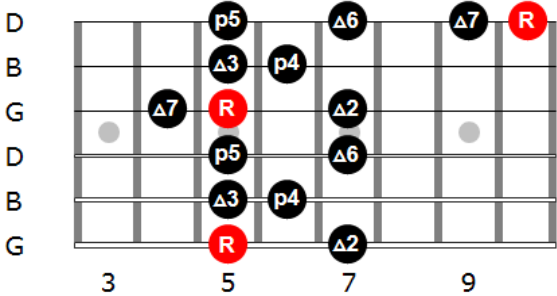
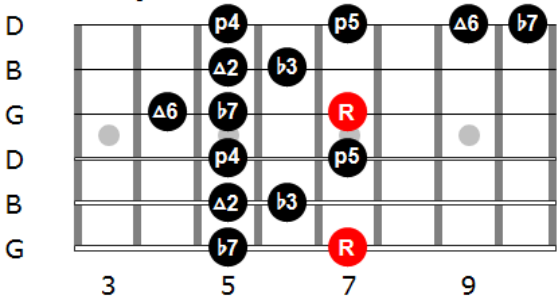
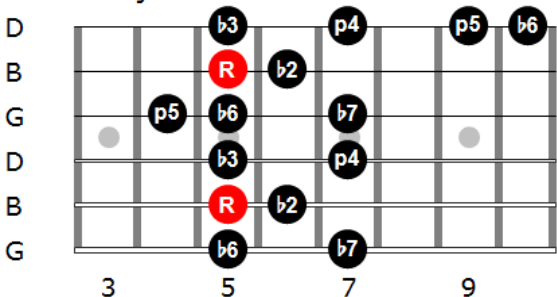
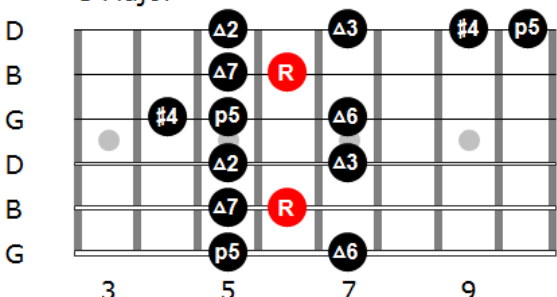
	Modes in the Key of C	Equivalent Key Signature
1		IONIAN No Sharps or Flats = C Major Key Signature Play against chords in C Major W-W-H-W-W-W-H
2		DORIAN II on C 2 Flats = Key of Bb Major Key Signature Play D to D against chords in Dm7 W-H-W-W-W-H-W
3		PHRYGIAN III on C 4 Flats = Ab Major Key Signature Play E to E against chords in Em7 H-W-W-W-H-W-W
4		LYDIAN IV on C * ₂ 1 Sharp = Key of G Major Play F to F against chords in F7 W-W-W-H-W-W-H
5		MIXOLYDIAN V on C 1 Flat = Key of F Major Play G to G against chords in G7 W-W-H-W-W-H-W
6		AEOLIAN VI 3 Flats = Eb Major Key Signature Play A to A against chords in Am7 W-H-W-W-H-W-W
7		LOCRIAN VII 5 Flats = Db Major Key Signature Play B to B against Bm7b5 H-W-W-H-W-W-W

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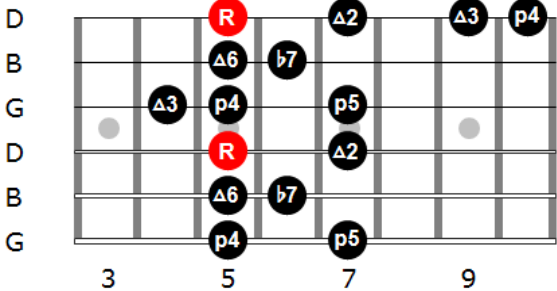
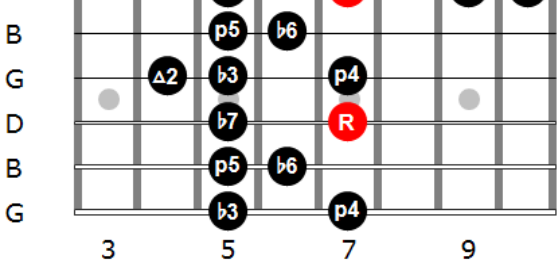
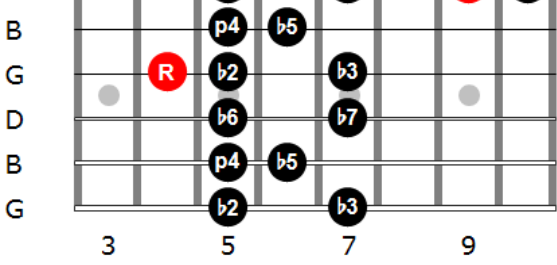
¹ For illustrative purposes and simplicity, only one octave is shown. The assumption is that you move to a new octave with the same note sequence as appropriate.

² * The Lydian conundrum:.. # \$ @ & % * ! The dissonant interval between F and B give the mode it's colour. The [Lydian dominant scale](#) (#F) is out of scope for this work.

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Fig. 1	Modes in the Key of C	Equivalent Key Signature
1	IONIAN  W-W-H-W-W-W-H	C Major 
2	DORIAN  W-H-W-W-W-H-W	C Major 
3	PHRYGIAN  H-W-W-W-H-W-W	C Major 
4	LYDIAN  W-W-W-H-W-W-H	C Major 

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5	MIXOLYDIAN  W-W-H-W-W-H-W	C Major 
6	AEOLIAN  W-H-W-W-H-W-W	C Major 
7	LOCRIAN  H-W-W-H-W-W-W	C Major 

To grasp what is going on in a Mode, you must understand the intervallic motion of each Mode with respect to its whole-step half-step formula and the underlying chords of the key you are in.

“Toto, I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”

– Dorothy

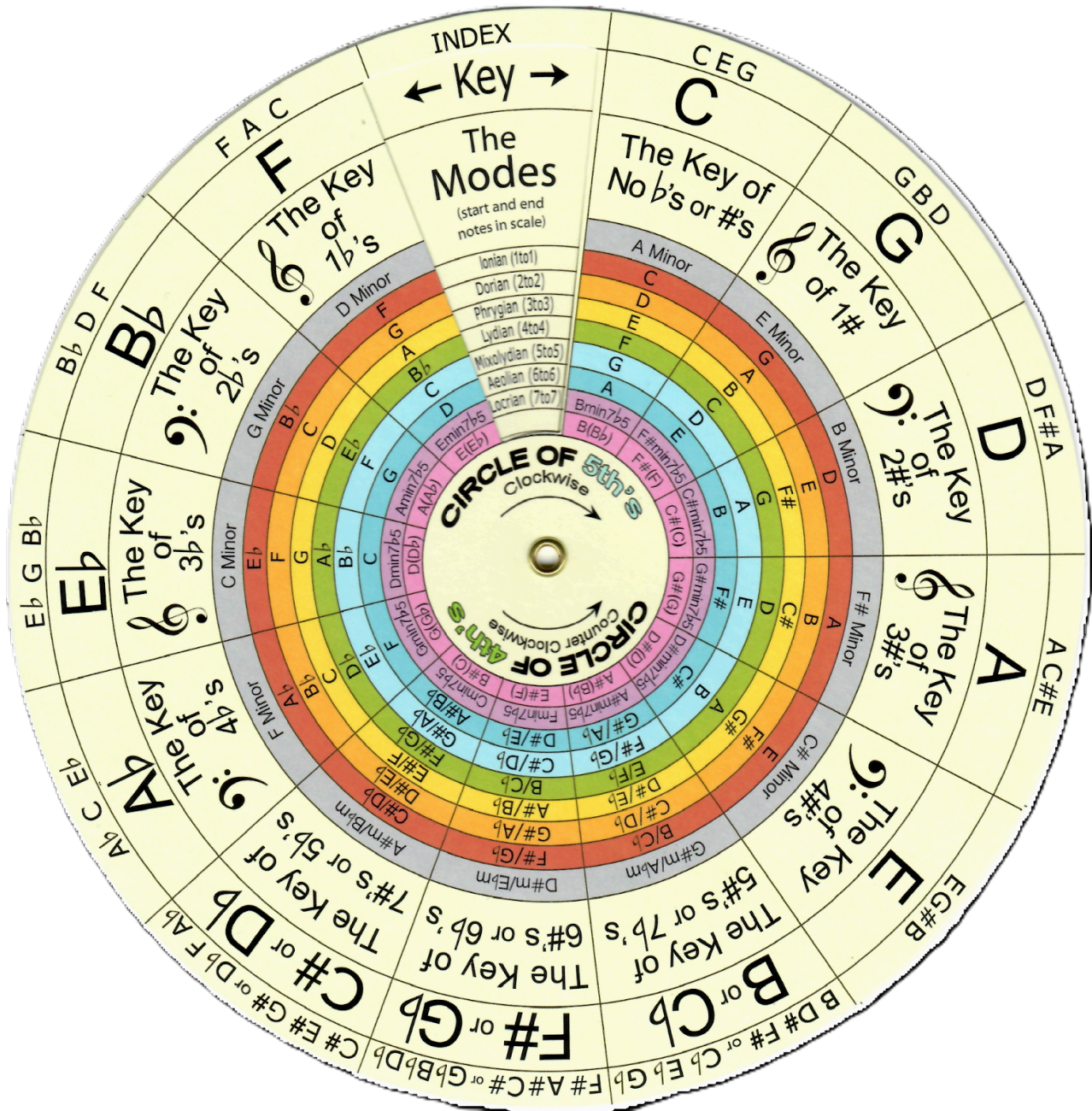
from The Wizard of Oz

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Fig. 2	Modes in the Key of C & Key Signatures	Equivalent Key Signature
1		IONIAN I No sharps or flats = C Major Key Signature C to C or 1 to 1 Reference Chords: C & C7
2		DORIAN II 2 flats = Key of Bb Major Key Signature D to D or, 2 to 2 Reference Chords: Dm7 Intervals for soloing: 4ths & 6ths
3		PHRYGIAN III 4 Flats = Ab Major Key Signature E to E or 3 to 3 Reference Chords: Em7 Intervals for soloing: 3rds & 6ths
4		LYDIAN IV * ₂ 1 Sharp = Key G Major F to F or 4 to 4 Reference Chords: F7 Intervals for soloing: 3rds & 5ths
5		MIXOLYDIAN V 1 flat = Key of F Major G to G or 5 to 5 Reference Chords: G7 Intervals for soloing: 3rds & 6ths
6		AEOLIAN VI 3 Flats = Eb Major Key Signature A to A or 6 to 6 Reference Chords: Am7 Intervals for soloing: 3rds & 4ths
7		LOCRIAN VII 5 Flats = Db Major Key Signature B to B or 7 to 7 Reference Chords: Bm7b5 Intervals for soloing: 3rds & 4ths

Nota Bene: Do not confuse the Key Signature with the Mode ! The Mode is played within the Key Signature starting on its Tonic. The tonal center is on the tonic! Typically, you won't see the Key Signatures of a mode but you will see sharps and flats. I'm with the Jazz guys on Key Signatures.

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Using the Circle of 5ths, verify your findings for each Mode.

Also, note the R, 3, 5 as they will be chord tone options for chord selections later on. Especially, note the 5th of each scale as we will modify the Circle of Fifths to navigate it using Modes referred to as the Circle of Modes. However, that concept is out of scope for this work so, note it but move on.

Nota Bean: Working knowledge of the Circle of Fifths, command and control of the fretboard, and chord tones allow one to play any mode, in any key, anywhere on the fretboard. Melody development and improvisation take on a whole new meaning!

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THE CIRCLE OF MODES (out of scope)

Nevertheless:

C Major: C - G - Db - Ab - Eb - Bb – F

Step 1: C to G

Step 2: G to D. But, we flat this step. Make it a Db on the Circle of Fifths, and then continue with 5ths from there.

Step3: Ab - Eb - Bb – F (Shepard p.20)

SUMMARY

Modes are just Major scales from a different key (₂ Shepard). Your familiarization and grasp of the Circle of Fifths will enable you to work with modes more efficiently. The most effective way of understanding modes is to include them in your music, everyday practice regiment and working with other people's songs. Be aware of their colour, mood and tones created over chords.

There are 3 Major modes:

- Ionian,
- Lydian,
- Mixolydian.

And, 4 minor modes:

- Dorian,
- Phrygian,
- Aeolian (the Natural Minor),
- Locrian Mode (which is minor in structure. Best played, if at all, over 7b5 chords).

Use small chunks of the scales with the reference chords to familiarize your ear with the sound. Then move it around the fretboard, horizontally and vertically, based on your command and control of the fretboard. And, once you can play it as a sequential scale, start playing the scale any other way using different intervals. Most importantly, play songs that use modes! Rock and Roll and Jazz have many examples as do other genres.

Finally, there is playing a mode from any C note on the fretboard, rather than the shapes discussed above. This is probably the best way to integrate modes into your work. I have included a basic example worksheet [here](#) to work from . . . if you are interested in pushing forward. It represents only one shape on the fretboard. Yet, illustrates what you can do with a mode around a root note.

Now then, let's make some moonshine.

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WORKS CITED AND REFERENCE

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Tippet Graham, Modes and How To Use Them

The Ethan Hein Blog. The Major Scale Modes.
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Wikipedia, Mode Music. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mode_\(music\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mode_(music))

GUITARSCALE. <https://www.guitarscale.org>

“Live long and prosper”
– Spock
Vulcan Wisdom