

## THE MODES OF THE MAJOR SCALE -written by David Taub

Now that you had a basic modal overview in the previous written lesson we can discuss each mode in detail and how to go about utilizing them. In order to thoroughly understand the modes we will need to look at the interval structure that defines each mode and then match them with corresponding chords and progressions where they can be applied. Remember that the modes are all just variations of the major scale and you will be playing the modes by shifting emphasis to a different note in the parent or mother major scale. Once you know all six major scale patterns up and down the neck you know all the modes of the major scale. You won't have to learn another six shapes or scale patterns for each mode – you can get to all the modes through the major scales. Refer to the past lessons and learn all six major scales and scale links up and down the neck and practice in all keys.

The illustration below shows each mode in order and its interval structure. Many of the modes are very similar, some just one interval difference. For example the only difference between Aeolian and Dorian is the Aeolian mode has a b6 while the Dorian mode has a major 6th. Mixolydian is just like the Ionian mode or major scale but with a b7 and Lydian is also like the Ionian mode but with a #4. Phrygian is just like Aeolian except it has a b2. So many of the modes are very similar but these slight differences will give you a totally different mood and totally different sounds – it's absolutely amazing! Keep in mind that each mode has its own specific sound, texture, and mood.

In the last column of the table it denotes which modes are considered more major modes and which are considered more minor modes. Memorize which are your major modes, (Ionian, Lydian, and Mixolydian), and which are the more minor modes, (Dorian, Phrygian, Aeolian, and Locrian) as this will help guide you to utilizing the correct mode over a given chord or chord progression. Notice the asterisk on the Dorian mode.

1 <sup>st</sup> mode	IONIAN (Major)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Major mode
2 <sup>nd</sup> mode	DORIAN	1	2	b3	4	5	6	b7	Minor mode*
3 <sup>rd</sup> mode	PHRYGIAN	1	b2	b3	4	5	b6	b7	Minor mode
4 <sup>th</sup> mode	LYDIAN	1	2	3	#4	5	6	7	Major mode
5 <sup>th</sup> mode	MIXOLYDIAN	1	2	3	4	5	6	b7	Major mode
6 <sup>th</sup> mode	AEOLIAN (relative minor)	1	2	b3	4	5	b6	b7	Minor mode
7 <sup>th</sup> mode	LOCRIAN	1	b2	b3	4	b5	b6	b7	Minor mode

\*Dorian mode is considered a minor mode but because it has strong elements of minor, (b3, b7), and major, (2,6), it can be played in some major key progressions. For example, use the Dorian mode over all the chords in a major key I-IV-V shuffle, blues, or swing type progression. Major key I-IV-V shuffles and blues are pretty wide open. You can use minor pentatonic for that minor bluesy sound, major pentatonic for that sweet BB King or Allman brothers sound – or to combine elements of both use the Dorian mode as it has elements of both major and minor and sounds great when used in this application. Phrygian can also be used in some major key progressions that have a b2 chord – so there is lots of room for creativity with the modes – but learn the rules first,.....then you can have fun breaking them!

Now that you have an overview of the modes and modal theory lets turn the lesson to how to go about applying them in your playing. Two things are critical when talking about applying the modes:

**1.Understand your choices when soloing and improvising** - When soloing and improvising you have two basic choices. You can solo over the entire chord string playing the same mode or scale over all the chords in the progression. This is called what “relates to all”. No matter what chord comes up in the string you are playing the same scale or mode over all the chords. The second option is to play over each chord independently. This is the type of playing I prefer as it give you a more sophisticated sound. It is definitely more challenging, and will take some practice to get the timing down of changing your scale, mode, or arpeggio over each chord. This is what I call treating each chord as a “separate event”.

**2.Know and analyze the chords you are playing over** - For lead playing and improvisation the chords that you are playing over will provide the roadmap to what you can play solo and improvisational wise. Just knowing the key signature of the song is not enough to get you playing in the modes. You want to know exactly what chords are in the progression and then analyze them to determine what scales, modes, and landing notes to utilize. For example, in minor key instances when playing over all the chords you need to look at if there is a IV chord, II chord or sometimes a V chord in a progression and are the chords major or minor. You need to know which notes make up the chords that you are playing over so you can use their respective chord tones as strong landing or emphasis notes. You will need to know the chords and their structure to fully understand and apply which mode you want to solo with because some modes sound best when played over certain chords and certain progressions.

**Follow these three critical steps for utilizing the modes over a given chord or an entire chord progression:**

1. Analyze the chords and/or the progression to get the roadmap for which modes and arpeggios you can utilize.
2. Once you derive which mode or modes to use, convert that mode back to its mother major key.
3. Play the mode using the parent major scale patterns but shift to and **EMPHASIZE THE ROOT OF THE MODE**

When playing modally, think in terms of the mode that you want to utilize. To determine what scales and modes we can utilize improvisational wise within a given progression lets analyze the following chord progression, Am7 – D – E. When starting modal theory play a mode or modes over the entire progression – play what relates to all. That is what you will want to get down first, and then later you can start working on treating each chord like a separate event. So with the below examples we will determine what mode relates to all the chords in a given progression.

**STEP 1: Analyze the chords to determine what we can utilize solo and improvisational wise.**

We are in the key of A minor, we have a I minor chord, (Am7), going to a IV major chord, (D), and then to a V major chord, (E). As soon as we see a I minor chord, (minor key), we know we can utilize all our minor pentatonic and blues scales up and down the neck. Analyzing the chords further we have a minor key progression where the IV chord, (D), is major. So we know according to our rules of soloing in minor key, (see previous lesson), that we can use the Dorian mode - so we now have determined A Dorian will work over all the chords. Whenever you have a minor key progression you can almost always use either Aeolian or Dorian over all the chords. So always want to look for that IV chord or II chord when in minor key and determine what mode to use – (follow the guidelines for soloing in minor key as discussed in previous lessons.)

**STEP 2: Once you determine which mode to use, convert back to the mother or parent major key.**

We have determined to utilize A Dorian. Dorian is the 2<sup>nd</sup> mode of the major scale. So you have to ask yourself, what major scale's 2<sup>nd</sup> note is an "A"? The answer is G major. G major scale's 2<sup>nd</sup> note is an "A". So over this progression play all your G major scales up and down the neck but emphasize the "A" notes.

**STEP #3: Shift to and emphasize the root of the mode.**

So we are going to play in A Dorian, so then think A Dorian. Emphasize all the A notes while playing G major scales. Visualize in G major and play those major scale patterns, but emphasize the A notes. This is critical, because if you start on or emphasize the G notes you will be playing in G major, not A Dorian. Remember that each mode has its own "mood", so you want to really exploit that and use the proper mode with the proper emphasis notes. Here we are in minor key so we want that real rock/minor sound so Dorian will work well. We don't want a sweet major sound. So much of modal playing is really all about emphasis.

\*\*side note 1 – Remember that you will also want to know the notes that make up each chord. You will want to get proficient at targeting these notes, or chord tones, as those notes, the roots, 3rds, 5ths, b7ths, etc will be very strong landing notes, and you will want to target them.

\*\*side note 2 – Upon further chord analysis for the above progression we have a minor key progression that goes to a major V chord. That is a great time to utilize the Harmonic Minor Scale. That scale works great over a major V chord in a minor key progression. So try A Harmonic Minor over the E chord.

Overall this is a very systematic and methodical system to analyze chords to determine what to play over them. Over time your ear will take you to the right notes but everyone should start out by systematically analyzing chords and progressions and writing them down. The three steps above are absolutely critical to have success playing in all the modes and you must be very proficient at each step. This will take a good amount of practice – but YOU CAN DO IT! Take things slow at first and it gets easier and easier the more comfortable you get with each step. At first try playing a mode over the whole progression, "what relates to all the chords". Eventually you will want to play over each chord, or treat each chord as a separate event and play a different mode over each chord – but that will come later.