

XIII. Chord Scales Via Modal Theory (Part 2)

A. Modal Scales as Scales In-Their-Own-Right

We have seen that each mode of the major scale has its own individual qualities. When using the modes as chord-scales for melodic improvisation, there will always be two distinct yet complimentary ways of viewing them and of constructing them.

Up until now we have considered that, for example, the mixolydian scale is simply a major scale starting on its 5th degree... or put another way; that the mixolydian scale is the 5th mode of the major scale. That's pretty simple to understand, and if you know your major scales really well you can always figure out some way to play it starting on its 5th degree.

Consider this though:

On G7, in the key of C major, the usual scale to use would be the C major scale's 5th rotation, aka G mixolydian.

But the only avoid-note in this scale on a G7 chord is C.

If you are thinking of G mixolydian as being some sort of a C scale, chances are that you will wind up playing "C-ish" types of things. And you will probably be hitting that avoid-note, C, more often and with more emphasis than is musically desirable. I know that this is what happened to me when I first tried this approach.

If, on the other hand, you view G mixolydian as being some sort of a G scale (i.e. like a G major scale with a flattened 7th degree), and you are consciously relating all of the intervals in your scale to how they fit vertically on the G7 chord that you are actually playing on, you stand a better chance of playing "G7-ish" types of things.

G mixolydian IS a C major scale starting on G. No doubt about it.

But, it can also be thought of as a group of intervals, starting on G, with the following intervallic formula:

1 2 3 4 5 6 \flat 7

There are, to be sure, many situations where the first way of thinking makes more sense. But in my experience there are far more situations where the second way of thinking makes for a better conceptual overview.

Here is a summary of the 7 modes of the diatonic scale and their own intervallic formulas:

Mode 1 - Ionian (aka The Major Scale) - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 - used most often on Imaj7.

Mode 2 - Dorian - 1 2 \flat 3 4 5 6 \flat 7 - used most often on IIIm7.

We might say that "the formula for Dorian is \flat 3 and \flat 7".

Mode 3 - Phrygian - 1 \flat 2 \flat 3 4 5 \flat 6 \flat 7 - used most often on IIIIm7.

The formula for Phrygian is \flat 2, \flat 3, \flat 6 and \flat 7.

Mode 4 - Lydian - 1 2 3 \sharp 4 5 6 7 - used most often on IVmaj7.

The formula for Lydian is \sharp 4.

Mode 5 - Mixolydian - 1 2 3 4 5 6 \flat 7 - used most often on V7.

The formula for Mixolydian is \flat 7.

Mode 6 - Aeolian (aka The Natural Minor Scale) - 1 2 \flat 3 4 5 \flat 6 \flat 7 - used most often on VIIm7 (Im7 in minor).

The formula for Aeolian is \flat 3, \flat 6 and \flat 7.

Mode 7 - Locrian - 1 \flat 2 \flat 3 4 \flat 5 \flat 6 \flat 7 - used most often on VIIIm7 \flat 5.

The formula for Locrian is \flat 2, \flat 3, \flat 5, \flat 6 and \flat 7.

This second way of constructing the modal scales can be thought of as involving the comparison of the intervals in the modal scale with the intervals of a major scale built on the same 1st note.

Examples:

G Major = G(1) A (2) B(3) C(4) D(5) E(6) F#(7)

G Mixolydian = G(1) A(2) B(3) C(4) D(5) E(6) F(♭7)

So, G Mixolydian is similar to a G major scale with a flattened 7th degree.

D Dorian can be thought of as being like a D major scale with a ♭3, and a ♭7.

E Phrygian can be thought of as being like an E major scale with ♭2, ♭3, ♭6, and ♭7.

F Lydian can be thought of being like as an F major scale with #4.

A Aeolian can be thought of as being like an A major scale with ♭3, ♭6, and ♭7.

B Locrian can be thought of as being like a B major scale with ♭2, ♭3, ♭5, ♭6, and ♭7.

This concept can be made clearer by first constructing each of the modes with C as the 1st degree.

• Take all of the position-style fingerings that you know for the major scale (especially the 7 comfortable fingerings listed in Chapter IX) and alter them to conform to the intervallic formulas for the other modes.

For Example (Stay strictly in Pos V throughout):

1. Play the fingering for C major.

2. Play the same scale but raise the 4th degree (F to F#). You now have a Pos II fingering for C Lydian.

What major scale is C Lydian a mode of?

Can you see that the finger patterns for G major and for C Lydian are exactly the same? Play a G major scale now in Pos V. It's the exact same fingering as C Lydian, right?

But when you were playing C Lydian, you were not thinking of a G major scale at all! C Lydian really can be thought of as a scale in-its-own-right.

3. Play the C major scale again, but this time lower its 7th degree (B to B♭). You now have a Pos V fingering for C Mixolydian.

What major scale is C Mixolydian a mode of?

Can you see that the finger patterns for F major and for C Mixolydian are exactly the same? Play an F major scale in Pos V. It's the exact same fingering as C Mix, right?

But when you were playing C Mixolydian, you were not thinking of an F major scale at all! C Mixolydian really can be thought of as a scale in-its-own-right.

4. Play the C major scale again, but this time lower its 3rd degree (E to E♭), as well as its 7th degree (B to B♭). You now have a Pos V fingering for C Dorian.

What major scale is C Dorian a mode of?

Can you see that, in Pos V, the finger patterns for B♭ major and for C Dorian are exactly the same?

But when you were playing C Dorian, you were not thinking of a B♭ major scale at all! C Dorian really can be thought of as a scale in-its-own-right.

5. Play the C major scale again, but this time lower its 3rd degree (E to E♭), its 6th degree (A to A♭), as well as its 7th degree (B to B♭). You now have a Pos V fingering for C Aeolian.

What major scale is C Aeolian a mode of?

Can you see that, in Pos V, the finger patterns for E♭ major and for C Aeolian are exactly the same?

But when you were playing C Aeolian, you were not thinking of an E♭ major scale at all! C Aeolian really can be thought of as a scale in-its-own-right.

6. Play the C major scale again, but this time lower its 2nd degree (D to D♭), its 3rd degree (E to E♭), its 6th degree (A to A♭), as well as its 7th degree (B to B♭). You now have a Pos V fingering for C Phrygian.

What major scale is C Phrygian a mode of?

Can you see that, in Pos V, the finger patterns for A♭ major and for C Phrygian are exactly the same?

But when you were playing C Phrygian, you were not thinking of an A♭ major scale at all! C Phrygian really can be thought of as a scale in-its-own-right.

7. Play the C major scale again, but this time lower its 2nd degree (D to D \flat), its 3rd degree (E to E \flat), its 5th degree (G to G \flat), its 6th degree (A to A \flat), as well as its 7th degree (B to B \flat). You now have a Pos V fingering for C Locrian.

What major scale is C Locrian a mode of?

Can you see that, in Pos V, the finger patterns for D \flat major and for C Locrian are exactly the same?

But when you were playing C Locrian, you were not thinking of a D \flat major scale at all! C Locrian really can be thought of as a scale in its own right.

- Repeat in Positions II, IV, VII, IX, X and XII. These are the other 6 "comfortable" fingering positions for the C major scale. Note though that the fingerings for the other modes may not be among the 7 comfortable fingerings in these positions. This is one reason why ultimately you need to know all 12 position-style major scale fingerings.

- Repeat in every possible position.

- Transpose the following vamps into all 12 possible keys and record yourself playing them. Then solo over them with the indicated chord-scale relationships.

- Pay attention to any indicated avoid-notes and learn to resolve these downwards, by 1/2 step.

- Pay attention to which notes are chord-tones, and which notes are tensions.

- Improvise with these scales over the entire fretboard just as suggested in the exercises in Chapter XI.

1. C Lydian

The diagram shows the C Lydian scale in two positions. The first position is labeled 'C (as IV in G major)' and has notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B. The second position is labeled with fret numbers 9, #11, 13, 7 and has notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: R, 3, 5 for the first position and R, 2, 3, #4, 5, 6, 7, R for the second. Below the scale are two staves for chords: C and D. The first staff shows C and D chords in the first position, and the second staff shows C and D chords in the second position.

2. C Ionian

The diagram shows the C Ionian scale in two positions. The first position is labeled 'C (as I in C major)' and has notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B. The second position is labeled with fret numbers 9, 13, 7 and has notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: R, 3, 5 for the first position and R, 2, 3, (4), 5, 6, 7, R for the second. Below the scale are two staves for chords: C and D. The first staff shows C and D chords in the first position, and the second staff shows C and D chords in the second position.

C6 9 7

R 3 5 6 R 2 3 (4) 5 6 7 R

Cmaj7 G7sus4

3. C Mixolydian

C (as V in F major) 9 13 b7

R 3 5 R 2 3 (4) 5 6 b7 R

C7 9 13

R 3 5 b7 R 2 3 (4) 5 6 b7 R

C6 9

R 3 5 6 R 2 3 (4) 5 6 (b7) R

C B^b maj7 C B^b maj7

4. C Dorian

Cm (as IIIm in B^b major) 9 11 13 b7

R b3 5 R 2 b3 4 5 6 b7 R

Cm7 9 11 13

R b3 5 b7 R 2 b3 4 5 6 b7 R

Cm 9 11

R b3 5 6 R 2 b3 4 5 6 (b7) R

Cm7 Dm7

(or F7)

5. C Aeolian

Cm (as VIIm in E^b major) 9 11 b7

R b3 5 R 2 b3 4 5 (b6) b7 R