

XIII. Chord Scales Via Modal Theory (Part 2)

A. Modes as Scales In Their Own Right

We have seen that each of the modes 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 Mixo-Lydian mode is simply a major scale starting on its 5th degree or put another way that the Mixo-Lydian scale is the 5th mode of some other 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 one starting on its 5th degree.

Consider this though:

On G7, in the key of C major, the usual chord-scale would be G Mixo-Lydian.

The only avoid note in this scale on a G7 chord is C.

If you are thinking of G Mixo-Lydian as being some sort of a C scale chances are you will wind up playing "C-ish" types of things and you will probably be hitting that avoid note more often and with more emphasis than is musically desirable.

If, on the other hand, you view G Mixo-Lydian as being some sort of a G scale, a G scale with a flatted 7th degree, and you are consciously relating all of the intervals in the scale to how they vertically fit the G chord you are actually playing on you stand a better chance of playing "G7-ish" types of things.

G Mixo-Lydian IS a C major scale starting on G.

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 b7

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 and their own intervallic formulas:

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

Mode 2 - Dorian - 1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7 - used most often on IIIm7

We often say that "the formula for Dorian is b3 and b7".

Mode 3 - Phrygian - 1 b2 b3 4 5 b6 b7 (b2 b3 b6 b7) - used most often on IIIIm7

We often say that "the formula for Phrygian is b2, b3, b6 and b7".

Mode 4 - Lydian - 1 2 3 #4 5 6 7 (#4) - used most often on IVmaj7

We often say that "the formula for Lydian is #4".

Mode 5 - Mixo-Lydian - 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 - used most often on V7

We often say that "the formula for Mixo-Lydian is b7".

Mode 6 - Aeolian (Natural Minor Scale) - 1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7 - used most often on VIIm7 (Im7 in minor)

We often say that "the formula for Aeolian is b3, b6 and b7".

Mode 7 - Locrian - 1 b2 b3 4 b5 b6 b7 - used most often on VIIIm7b5

We often say that "the formula for Locrian is b2, b3, b5, b6 and b7".

This second way of constructing the modes can be thought of as the process of comparing the intervals in the mode with the intervals of a major scale built on the mode's 1st degree.

Examples:

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

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

G Mixo-Lydian is identical to a G major scale with a flatted 7th degree.

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

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

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

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

B Locrian can be thought of as a B major scale with a ♭2, a ♭3, a ♭5, a ♭6 and a ♭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) and alter them to conform to the formulas for the modes.

For Example:

Stay strictly in Pos II throughout.

1. Play the fingering for C major.

2. Play the same scale but raise the 4th degree (F to F#) and you will 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 II. 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 is a scale in it's own right.

3. Play the C major scale again but this time lower it's 7th degree (B to B♭) and you will have a Pos II fingering for C Mixo-Lydian.

What major scale is C Mixo-Lydian a mode of?

Can you see that the finger patterns for F major and for C Mixo-Lydian are exactly the same? Play an F major scale in Pos II. Exact same fingering as C Mix, right?

But when you were playing C Mixo-Lydian you were not thinking of an F major scale at all! C Mixo-Lydian really is a scale in it's own right.

4. Play the C major scale again but this time lower it's 3rd degree (E to E♭) as well as it's 7th degree (B to B♭) and you will have a position style fingering for C Dorian.

What major scale is C Dorian a mode of?

Can you see that 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 is a scale in it's own right.

5. Play the C major scale again but this time lower it's 3rd degree (E to E♭), it's 6th degree (A to A♭) as well as it's 7th degree (B to B♭) and you will have a Pos II fingering for C Aeolian.

What major scale is C Aeolian a mode of?

Can you see that 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 is a scale in it's own right.

6. Play the C major scale again but this time lower it's 2nd degree (D to D \flat), it's 3rd degree (E to E \flat), it's 6th degree (A to A \flat) as well as it's 7th degree (B to B \flat) and you will have a Pos II fingering for C Phrygian.

What major scale is C Phrygian a mode of?

Can you see that the finger patterns for A \flat major and for C Phrygian are exactly the same?

But when you were playing C Phrygian you were not thinking of an A \flat major scale at all! C Phrygian really is a scale in it's own right.

7. Play the C major scale again but this time lower it's 2nd degree (D to D \flat), it's 3rd degree (E to E \flat), it's 5th degree (G to G \flat), it's 6th degree (A to A \flat) as well as it's 7th degree (B to B \flat) and you will have a Pos II fingering for C Locrian.

What major scale is C Locrian a mode of?

Can you see that 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 an D \flat major scale at all! C Locrian really is a scale in it's own right.

Repeat in Positions IV, V, VII, IX, X and XII. These are the other 6 comfortable fingering positions for the C major scale.

Repeat in every possible position.

Transpose the vamps into all 12 possible keys.

Improvise with these sounds over the entire fretboard as suggested in the exercises in Chapter XI.

1. C Lydian

C (as IV in G major) 9 #11 13 7
 R 3 5 R 2 3 #4 5 6 7 R

C_{maj7} 9 #11 13
 R 3 5 7 R 2 3 #4 5 6 7 (R)

C₆ 9 #11 13 7
 R 3 5 6 R 2 3 #4 5 6 7 R

C D C D

2. C Ionian

C (as I in C major) 9 13 7
 R 3 5 R 2 3 (4) 5 6 7 R

C_{maj7} 9 13
 R 3 5 7 R 2 3 (4) 5 6 7 (R)

C6 9 7

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

Cmaj7 G7sus4

3. C Mixo-Lydian

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