

Theory and Application



Scales 3: Modes

Every major scale has a series of *modes*; that is, scales which are based upon the same notes as the major scale, but which do not start at the root note (the “doh”). We have learned that the major scale has a particular arrangement of intervals (see the **Scales 1** sheet); each mode has a different “formula”

Most people know the major scale, and many people know the minor scale, but it might be useful to think of these two scales as two modes. The seven modes associated with the major scale have Greek names; to

start with, the major scale is also known as the *Ionian mode*, and the minor scale (or strictly speaking the natural minor scale) is also known as the *Aeolian mode*.

We’re going to continue to use the D major scale as our reference. Use the chart below to start understanding where the different modes start within the D scale. To make things complicated, each scale is named after the starting note, so the Dorian mode based on the D major scale is called “E Dorian”, the Mixolydian mode is “A Mixolydian” and so on.

Modes Based on the D Major Scale

intervals (in semitones):

Ionian	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#
Dorian	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#
Phrygian	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#
Lydian	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#
Mixolydian	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#
Aeolian	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#
Locrian	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#

The chart gives you the seven modes that are usually mentioned, but when it comes to Scottish traditional music, only four are really found.

Ionian (major) mode

Most Scottish tunes are in this mode, as you might expect. Its semitone interval formula is **2-2-1-2-2-2-1**

Dorian mode

Dorian mode is closely related to the minor scale, and when accompanying a tune in dorian, minor chords will be prominent. Interval formula: **2-1-2-2-2-1-2**

Mixolydian mode

A vast number of Scottish tunes are in Mixolydian because it is the scale which approximates the bagpipe scale. Interval formula: **2-2-1-2-2-1-2**

Aeolian (minor) mode

Quite common in Scottish music, the most popular are E minor, A minor and B minor, but G minor, C minor and D minor are not unknown. Interval formula: **2-1-2-2-1-2-2**

