

Defining Modes

by Scott Wilson

MODE: The term MODE essentially means the word SCALE, however, **99%** of the time when musicians use the word MODE they are referring to a scale found within a major or minor scale. For Example: The "D Dorian Mode" is created by playing a C major scale starting on the note D and ending on the note D.

NOTE: The Dorian Mode creates a minor sound even though it is a "mode" of the Major Scale. This concept is explain in detail in the chapter *Scales/Modes and the Chords They Facilitate*.



D is the 2nd note of the C Major Scale. Therefore, when we play a C major scale from D to D we call this scale the 2nd mode of the C Major Scale. The 2nd mode of the major scale always creates a minor sound and is specifically called the **Dorian Mode**.

D Dorian Mode = the D Dorian Scale

If you play any Major Scale, starting and ending on the 2nd scale degree of that Major Scale, you will always be playing the Dorian Mode / Dorian Scale.

Jazz Gem * Although the Dorian Mode is derived from a Major Scale, it essentially creates a minor sound and is used over minor chords.

MODES OF THE MAJOR SCALE

(Using The C Major Scale as my example)

- 1st mode = **Ionian** = Play C Major Scale from C to C - can use on a **C^Δ7**
- 2nd mode = **Dorian** = Play C Major Scale from D to D - can use on a **D-7**
- 3rd mode = **Phrygian** = Play C Major Scale from E to E - can use on a **E-7** (like pure minor however with a b2)
- 4th mode = **Lydian** = Play C Major Scale from F to F - can use on a **F^Δ7(#11)**
- 5th mode = **Mixolydian** = Play C Major Scale from G to G - can use on a **G7**
- 6th mode = **Aeolian** = Play C Major Scale from A to A - can use on a **A-7** (Also know as the Pure Minor Scale)
- 7th mode = **Locrian** = Play C Major Scale from B to B - can use on a **B^Δ7**

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All of the modes of the Major Scale create **their own unique chord quality** and therefore are useful when improvising over various Major, minor or half-diminished chords. For example: The B Locrian Scale (the 7th mode of a C major scale) is used to play over a Bmin7(b5) Chord. If you understand simple theory (like the names of the modes) then you can stack complex theory (**like how modes relate to chord symbols**) to finally understand the simplicity of the "big picture" {Which is that the scary looking Bmin7(b5) contains the same notes of the C Major Scale}. NOTE: How you use that mode to accentuate the sound of a Bmin7(b5) chord is a separate skill that needs much attention.

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Knowing the MODE that correlates to a specific chord (like Dominant 7th chords use Mixolydian Mode) can help you locate the Major or minor scale that the Dominant 7th scale is derived from. For example, if you encounter a G#7 chord and understand that it requires Mixolydian mode, you can then piece together that the Mixolydian mode is the 5th mode of a Major Scale and G# is the 5th scale degree of the C# major scale. This means that you can use the notes from a C# Major Scale to play over a G#7 chord. Now that you know the correct notes to play you can safely begin to improvise using a number of techniques (like outlining the chord tones, playing a lick, rotating to the third of the chord, choosing a different mode to create more dissonance, etc).

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The mode name for the Major Scale is **IONIAN**. However, this term is rarely used. Most musicians say, "I'm going to play my C Major Scale." They rarely say, "I'm going to play my C Ionian Mode."

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