

Modes & Altered Tones

It is extremely helpful to think about the modes as altered forms of the diatonic scale built on the tone that names the mode. To be specific, ask the question *how does the G-Mixolydian scale differ from the G-Ionian scale?* The key signature of G-Ionian has one sharp: F#. G-Mixolydian is built on the C-Ionian scale in which there are no sharps or flats.

To create the G-Mixolydian scale from G-Ionian requires that the 7th tone of the G-Ionian scale must be dropped a half tone.

G-Ionian	G-Mixolydian	Tones Altered from Ionian Scale that Names the Mode
G	G	
A	A	
B	B	
C	C	
D	D	
E	E	
F#	F-natural	Flatten the 7th

This may seem like pointless information. But it turns out to be vital. So, let's examine all of the modes to answer this same question: *What tones in the scale of the Ionian mode are altered to produce one of the remaining six modes?*

Mode	Tones Altered from Ionian
Ionian	none
Dorian	b7th, b3rd
Phrygian	b7th, b3rd, b6th, b2nd
Lydian	# 4th
Mixolydian	b7th
Aeolian	b7th, b3rd, b6th
Locrian	b7th, b3rd, b6th, b2nd, b5th

A valuable exercise is to work thorough deriving each of the scales for each mode to see how these altered tones appear. Here’s another example to help with that. Let’s identify the tones that have to be altered from D – Ionian to create D – Dorian mode.

Remember the Dorian mode begins on the second degree of the scale. If D is the second tone of the mode we want to create, then the tones of the scale are the same as the tones of the C-Ionian scale begins on C. The key of “C” has no sharps or flats. The key of “D” has two sharps: F# and C#. So, we have to figure out what tones on the D-Ionian scale have to be altered in order to create the D-Dorian scale.

D-Ionian	D-Dorian	Tones Altered from Ionian
D	D	
E	E	
F#	F - natural	Flatten the 3rd
G	G	
A	A	
B	B	
C#	C - natural	Flatten the 7th

The altered tones can be derived in this same way for every mode.

If you have trouble following the logic of this, remember everything flows from the diatonic scale and its pattern of steps: W W H W W W H. For every diatonic scale there are three whole steps and two half steps. The modes merely alter the order of these steps. It works like this:

Mode	Pattern of Steps
Ionian	W W H W W W H
Dorian	W H W W W H W
Phrygian	H W W W H W W
Lydian	W W W H W W H
Mixolydian	W W H W W H W
Aeolian	W H W W H W W
Locrian	H W W H W W W

In the Ionian mode the half step from the 7th tone of the scale to the next octave of the root of the scale is in bold. You can see this tone move from the end of the scale to the beginning of the scale. The 7th tone of a scale is often called the “leading tone”. That’s because it is the tone that leads the ear back to the tonic tone. It is also a tone of high dissonance with the tonic. Leading tones matter within a chord. For example the 3rd of a V chord contains the leading tone. Say the key is “C”. The V chord is G. That chord is spelled: G B D. And “B” is the leading tone on C-Ionian. This leading helps to give the V chord, the dominant chord, its power to pull the music back to the tonic chord.

You will also hear discussions about the “upper leading tone.” This term refers to the 7th tone of a V⁷ chord that resolves down the scale. For example in the key of “C” a V⁷ chord is G7. That chord is spelled G B D F (natural). The 7th tone of the chord is F (natural). The tonic chord is C. That chord is spelled: C E G. So it can be said that the F (natural) of the G7 chord resolves to the E tone in the C chord. Thus this 7th of the dominant chord is sometimes called an upper leading tone.

These theory discussions are interest and good mental gymnastics. They help explain the propulsive power buried inside chords and why some harmonic movement is more powerful than others.

For more information

www.billtroxler.com

BillTroxler@verizon.net