

The Circle of 5ths and Modes

Read the section titled Modes & Altered Tones before you work through this section.

Now that the modes have been defined it is possible to impose order on them. This order provides three important facts: 1) how modes are perceived, 2) how the order of altered tones within the modes can be remembered, and most importantly, 3) what chords characterize a mode. This section will address perception and order.

Each mode derived from the Ionian mode alters one or more of the tones in its native scale. For example D-Ionian has two sharps: F# and C#. To generate D-Dorian (the second tone on a C-Ionian scale) requires that both F# and C# are lowered b one half tone. This relationship is true for all Dorian scales. To create any Dorian scale requires that the 3rd and the 7th of the diatonic scale that would begin on the naming tone be lowered one half tone.

Put the altered tones in order and the modes take on this sequence:

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

Perception

Transcribe a simple melody into each mode. Play the six altered melodies in the order that the tones of the diatonic scales are altered. That is, start with the Lydian mode version, then play the Ionian mode version, next the Mixolydian mode version and so forth all the way to the Locrian mode.

When asked to describe the different sound these modes create, listeners faithfully say that the music moves from bright to dark sounding and the melodies move from Lydian to Locrian. That is to say that a Lydian version of the tune is very bright sounding and a Phrygian version sounds quite dark. This is helpful to know if you are re-harmonizing a familiar tune and want to achieve specific objectives.

Order

Start with C-Ionian and name all the modes in order of altered tones or from bright to dark

Mode	Altered Key Within the Context of C-Ionian
Lydian	F [#4 th produces a B natural]
Ionian	C
Mixolydian	G [b7 th produces an F natural]
Dorian	D [b7 th & 3 rd produces F natural & C natural]
Aeolian	A [etc. on the analysis...]
Phrygian	E
Locrian	B

Look carefully at the right column. The *ORDER* of keys is the same as the order of keys moving clockwise around the Circle of 5ths.

To recall the order of altered tones in the modes, just remember the Circle of 5ths. This trick will work anywhere around the Circle of 5ths. Suppose the key of context is D. you want to know the order of altered tones for the modes. The Circle of 5ths gives the answer:

Mode	Altered Key Within the Context of D-Ionian
Lydian	G [#4 th produces a C#]
Ionian	D
Mixolydian	A [b7 th produces a G natural]
Dorian	E [b7 th & 3 rd produces D natural & G natural]
Aeolian	B [etc. on the analysis...]
Phrygian	F#
Locrian	C#

For more information

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