

Ionian Mode

Consider the Ionian mode as the “mother of all modes”. All other modes are derived from this familiar scale.

The scale of the Ionian mode is the familiar *do re me fa so la ti do*. This scale is defined not by specific tones but by the distance between them. Any diatonic scale can be constructed by this formula of steps: *Whole Whole Half Whole Whole Whole Half*.

A half step is the distance between a tone and one of its accidentals; e.g. D and D# or D and Db. Recall the piano key board. The black keys are half steps between the adjacent white keys. A whole step is equal to two half steps. The distance between, say D and E is a whole step. But the distance between E and F is a half step. No black key exists between E and F.

The Scale of the Ionian Mode

C Ionian	C		D		E		F		G		A		B	
G Mixolydian	G		A		B		C		D		E		F#	
D Dorian	D		E		F#		G		A		B		C#	
Step		<i>whole</i>		<i>whole</i>		<i>half</i>		<i>whole</i>		<i>whole</i>		<i>whole</i>		<i>half</i>

Chords Characteristic of the Ionian Mode

The Circle of 5ths is a helpful aid in understanding how chords on the diatonic scale relate to each other.

IV	I	V
ii	vi	iii

In C-Ionian the chords are

F	C	G
Dm	Am	Em

The top row of chords is taken from the Circle of 5ths. The bottom row of chords is the relative minor of each chord in the top row. This chord box can be shifted around the Circle of 5ths to identify the chord options for any key. Put the tonic chord in the center. The IV chord will lie immediately in the counter clockwise direction. The V chord will lie immediately in the clockwise direction.

The chord box permits movement among the chords in any direction. The most familiar chord progress is moves from I to IV to G to I (in C-Ionia that is C – F – G – C). Similarly strong progressions can be created using relationships of 5ths that move up or 4ths that move down the scale. For example, a circle progression of vi – ii – V – I (in C-Ionian that is Am – Dm – G – C) has powerful appeal because each movement following tracks the root of the chord to a 4th above the pervious chord. This kind of root movement gives the feeling of inevitability. The listen is forced back to the tonic of the melody. Nearly all folk, traditional, popular music relies upon this technique.

The characteristic chords for the six useful modes of the diatonic scale are:

C-Ionian chords

F	C	G
Dm	Am	Em

D-Ionian chords

G	D	A
Em	Bm	F#m

G-Ionian chords are

C	G	D
Am	Em	Bm