

Figuring out the Mode of a Melody

Forget the pickups notes. Look at the first note of the first beat of the first measure. It is likely the tone that names the key or mode. If not, that tone is probably one of the tones I the tonic triad of the key or mode.

This table contains the NAME of the tone of each of the modes. These entries represent tones NOT chords!

Key Signature				
	Ionian	Mixolydian	Dorian	Aeolian
0 sharps	C	G	D	A
1 sharp: F#	G	D	A	E
2 sharps: F# - C#	D	A	E	B
3 sharps: F# - C# - G#	A	E	B	F#
4 sharps: F# - C# - G# - D#	E	B	F#	C#
1 flat: Bb	F	C	G	D
2 flats: Bb - Eb	Bb	F	C	G

The most common key signatures in traditional music are C,G,D,A occasionally E. Some fiddle tunes are in F or Bb.

The table above should help you to sort out the potential modes that apply to the most common key signatures. The order of the columns is important: Ionian, Mixolydian, Dorian, Aeolian. When ordered this way, a diagonal pattern emerges. The tone A reveals how the modes and key signatures are related.