

Lydian Mode

The Scale & Vibe

The Lydian scale begins on the 4th degree of the scale, Fa. This mode sounds intensely happy and bright. It's the go-to mode when film composers want end a movie on with a message of happiness and success. In a word, Lydian mode sounds "triumphant". Lydian mode can be difficult to distinguish from Ionian mode.

Re Me Fa So La Ti Do

F-Lydian scale: F A B C D E

C-Lydian scale: C D E F# G A B

The Key Signature

The root tone of a Lydian scale is always the 3rd degree of the Ionian scale that sets the key signature.

C: The tone F is the 4th degree of the C-Ionian scale. So, the key signature of this mode has no accidentals

C-Lydian: The tone C is the 4th degree of the G-Ionian scale. So, the key signature of this mode has one sharps (F#)

B-Dorian: The tone B is the 2nd degree of the A-Ionian scale. So, the key signature of this mode has three sharps (F# C# G#)

Altered Tones

To create an Lydian scale from the Ionian scale using the same root tone raise the 4th tone by a half-step.

Lydian	1	2	3	4#	5	6	7
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F-Ionian scale: F G A Bb C D E

F-Lydian: scale: F G A B C D E

C-Ionian scale: C D E F G A B C D

C-Lydian scale: C D E F# G A B

Chords

The Lydian mode is certain bright and happy. But, it's also a bit outlandish, quirky or eccentric. Pick your own polite adjective!

Gary Ewer writes this about Lydian chord progressions:

"As with all modes, you can create chord progressions that are based on the notes of the lydian scale, and just like the melodies, the progressions can sound pleasantly strange. Chords built on the second note of the scale will be major, and that's the telltale sound of a lydian progression."

Gary Ewer also describes the problem with Lydian chord progressions:

"Let's say you're trying to write a song in C Lydian. As soon as you play the I-chord and follow it with a major II-chord (C moving to D), you feel tempted to follow the D with a G chord, and now your music just sounds like G major, not C Lydian. In order for a progression in C Lydian to truly sound Lydian, the C needs to remain as a kind of "tonic," the focal point of all the progressions. (I say "kind of tonic" because the term "tonic" really does belong in a discussion about major/minor music, not modes.)"

The key trouble is retaining the focus on the “tonic” sound of Lydian. That makes this mode difficult to apply for singer-songwriters and traditional musicians. The listener’s ears naturally gravitate to Ionian. That said, this trouble makes Lydian a wonderful choice for film composers and jazz musicians and advanced rock-and-roll composers.

Gary Ewer concludes his article about Lydian chord progressions with these thoughts:

It’s not very easy to make Lydian work for an entire song, because it takes a lot of effort to make C sound like the tonal focus. As you can hear, it often sounds as though a Lydian progression is simply ending on the IV-chord (G, in this case).

Sometimes, the best use of Lydian is to allow the major II-chord to operate as a kind of sound effect. So try that: create diatonic progressions (ones that sit strongly in a key) in C major, and then try turning any Dm chords to D, and see if you like the effect.

Read Gary Ewer’s full article at this link. The article includes five Lydian chord progressions for listening.

<https://www.secretsofsongwriting.com/2014/10/29/5-lydian-mode-chord-progressions-and-how-they-work/>

The “Lydian Chord”

Jazz composers and film composers often use what they call a “Lydian Chord”. The sound is gorgeous and contemporary. It’s full of bright air. Lots of tension without any darkness. The Lydian Chord is a major 7#11 multi-tone chord built on the first scale tone of the Lydian mode. The C-Lydian Chord is spelled “ C E G B F#.” A G-Lydian chord is spelled G B D F# C#.

Jam track

C Am D Em Am D C
C D/C G/B C Am Bm/F# C/G G C

Examples of Lydian Mode

Perhaps the most pervasive use of Lydian mode in American music is the theme music to the TV cartoon series *The Simpsons*.

A hodge-podge of SHORT clips of songs and themes composed in Lydian mode. Lots of different styles.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkLyLRAyjNw>

More Resources

Youtube is filled with short videos demonstrating the modes. Here are some links to Dorian mode:

Lydian Chord Progressions

<https://www.secretsofsongwriting.com/2014/10/29/5-lydian-mode-chord-progressions-and-how-they-work/>

Lydian Mode for Guitar

<http://www.fundamental-changes.com/lydian-mode-guitar/>