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Scales Lesson 2

Modes

A **Mode** is a scale that begins and ends on a specific step or degree of a scale. Each note in a scale becomes its own mode. So, a seven note scale will have seven modes, one mode for each note, and all seven modes will use the same seven notes. Since each mode is played starting on a different note, each mode will be built with a different whole step and half step interval combination. This is what gives each mode its unique sound! Some of the scales already constructed are actually modes of the major scale. For example, the C major scale has seven notes (C, D, E, F, G, A, B) and therefore, seven modes. The table below shows these seven modes, their scale formula, and notes in the key of C.

Mode Name	Mode Formula	Notes in the Key of C
Ionian mode (major)	1-2-3-4-5-6-7 W-W-H-W-W-W-H	C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C
Dorian mode	1-2-b3-4-5-6-b7 W-H-W-W-W-H-W	D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D
Phrygian mode	1-b2-b3-4-5-b6-b7 H-W-W-W-H-W-W	E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E
Lydian mode	1-2-3-#4-5-6-7 W-W-W-H-W-W-H	F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F
Mixolydian mode	1-2-3-4-5-6-b7 W-W-H-W-W-H-W	G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G
Aeolian mode (minor)	1-2-b3-4-5-b6-b7 W-H-W-W-H-W-W	A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A
Locrian mode	1-b2-b3-4-b5-b6-b7 H-W-W-H-W-W-W	B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B

Table 1 - C Major Modes

The next set of modes comes from the Harmonic Minor scale. For this next example, the A harmonic minor scale will be used. Remember, a mode can be created from each note in the harmonic minor scale.

Mode Name	Mode Formula	Notes in the Key of C
Harmonic Minor	1-2-b3-4-5-b6-7 W-H-W-W-H-W+H-H	A, B, C, D, E, F, G#, A
Locrian #6	1-b2-b3-4-b5-6-b7 H-W-W-H-W+H-H-W	B, C, D, E, F, G#, A, B
Major(Ionian) #5	1-2-3-4-#5-6-7 W-W-H-W+H-H-W-H	C, D, E, F, G#, A, B, C
Dorian #4	1-2-b3-#4-5-6-b7 W-H-W+H-H-W-H-W	D, E, F, G#, A, B, C, D
Phrygian #3	1-b2-3-4-5-b6-b7 H-W+H-H-W-H-W-W	E, F, G#, A, B, C, D, E
Lydian #2	1-#2-3-#4-5-6-7 W+H-H-W-H-W-W-H	F, G#, A, B, C, D, E, F
Super Locrian bb7	1-b2-b3-b4-b5-b6-bb7 H-W-H-W-W-H-W+H	G#, A, B, C, D, E, F, G#

Table 2 - A Harmonic Minor Modes

Since modes are scales within a scale and share the same notes, notice how the whole step-half step combinations relate to each mode. For example, the dorian mode has the same whole step-half step combination as the ionian mode, but starting on the second whole step because the dorian mode is the second mode. So, if the whole step-half step combination is memorized for the ionian mode, the other six modes use the same combination, but starting on their respective step number. This approach makes learning all the modes of a scale much simpler.

Modes are very important to study and practice because although the seven modes all share the same notes, the note order will make each mode sound unique. This allows more versatility and diversity creating solos, riffs, and melodies. To become better at using modes, practice creating the modes of any scale, just like the three examples shown above. Remember, any scale can create modes from it. When applying modes to songs and solos, try practicing modes that correspond to the chord progression, such as playing C ionian, F lydian, and G mixolydian modes over a C-F-G chord progression. Start with simple examples and then progressive to more complex chord progressions. Chord progressions will be discussed in detail in the Chord's chapter.

Relative Minor and Parallel Scales

Each major scale has a minor scale with the exact same notes called **Relative Minor**. That major scale is known as the relative major scale to that minor scale. The C major mode's table above (table 1) showed seven modes that shared the same seven notes. Recall that the first mode is the major scale and the sixth mode is the minor scale. To find the relative minor scale from a major scale, use the major scale's sixth step note as the minor scale's root or tonic note. To find the relative major scale from a minor scale, use the minor scale's third step note as the major scale's root note.

For example, what is the relative minor of the C major scale? The relative minor is the sixth step note in the C major scale. C major has the notes C, D, E, F, G, A, and B. So, the relative minor scale is the A minor scale. Now, from the opposite perspective, what is the relative major of the A minor scale? The answer is the C major scale because C is the A minor scale's third step note (A, B, C, D, E, F, G). By using the right scales steps, relative minor and major scales can be substituted for each other in songs and solos.

This same relationship works with pentatonic and blues scales too. For example, the C major pentatonic scale (C, D, E, G, A) has the same notes as the A minor pentatonic scale (A, C, D, E, G). The A minor pentatonic scale is the relative minor of the C major pentatonic, and the C major pentatonic is the relative major of A minor pentatonic. The C major blues scale (C, D, Eb, E, G, A) has the same notes as the A minor blues scale (A, C, D, Eb, E, G). So, the A minor blues scale is the relative minor blues of the C major blues. The C major blues scale is the relative major blues of the A minor blues scale.

Continue to practice this concept by finding and memorizing every major scale's relative minor scale. Likewise, practice every minor scale's relative major scale until they are fully memorized.

Playing **Parallel** scales simply means changing the scale type, not the root note of the scale. For example, a solo might play the C major scale then shift to a C minor scale. Notice, the root note (C) did not change, but the scale type changed from major to minor. Unlike relative minors, changing scale types will result in a different set of notes. C major (C, D, E, F, G, A, B) and C minor (C, D, Eb, F, G, Ab, Bb) do not share the exact same set of notes. This topic will be explored further in the Pitch Axis chapter. Figure 1 shows the C major and C minor scales. In this example, notice the root notes are the same but the subsequent notes are different because the scale type changed from major to minor.

The image displays two musical staves. The top staff is a treble clef staff containing the C Major and C Minor parallel scales. The C Major scale is shown in the first measure, ascending from C4 to C5. The C Minor scale is shown in the second measure, ascending from C4 to C5, with a flat sign (b) placed below the notes F and C. The bottom staff is a guitar TAB staff with three strings labeled T (Treble), A (Middle), and B (Bass). The first measure contains the fret numbers for the C Major scale: T (0), A (3), B (0). The second measure contains the fret numbers for the C Minor scale: T (0), A (1), B (3).

Figure 1 - C Major and Minor Parallel Scales