

COMMONLY USED MODES AND SCALES

The use of modes in jazz can be traced back to the landmark recording *Kind of Blue* by the Miles Davis' band in 1959. There may have been other people experimenting with modes before that, but it is this record which was the big influence on musicians.

Modes have been around for centuries and were the predominant form of Western church music until the Middle Ages. It is not necessary to delve too deeply into medieval modal music to appreciate how modal playing can bring a new dimension to your music.

The modes that are used nowadays in jazz are as follows:

Ionian mode (same as a major scale)



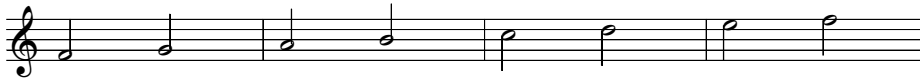
Dorian mode



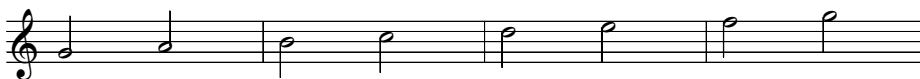
Phrygian mode



Lydian mode



Mixo-lydian mode



Aeolian mode



Locrian mode



Imagine the white notes of a piano. The first mode (Ionian) is from C to C. The Dorian starts on the second note of the Ionian mode (which I will now refer to as the major scale), the Phrygian starts on the third note, the Lydian on the fourth note, the Mixolydian on the fifth, the Aeolian on the sixth and the Locrian on the seventh. Some teachers advocate learning the precise intervals between each note of every one, This is time-consuming. Instead, it is easier to relate each one to the major scale.

Thus, to find the notes of the Dorian mode, think of the major scale a tone (**major second**) below;

...for a Phrygian think of the major scale a **major third** below,

...for a Lydian think of the major scale a **perfect fourth** below,

...for a Mixo-lydian think of the major scale a **perfect fifth** below/same as a **perfect fourth** above

...for an Aeolian think of the major scale a **major sixth** below/**minor third** above

...for a Locrian think of the major scale a **major seventh** below/**tone** above

So if you want to think of the Eb Dorian, for instance, it is Db major scale and to get Ab Lydian, it is Eb major scale.

Sometime in the middle ages, the concept of major and minor began to be taken seriously, just like the equal-tempered scale and a standard method of notation. Rules of harmony, eg, no consecutive 5ths, or octaves or even hidden octaves (you little devil!) were also written which produce nice hymn tunes, but which are hopelessly outdated now. But generations of musicians have been plagued by these strict rules. The only good rule is one that can be broken.

The mode which lent itself to becoming a minor scale was the Aeolian mode (the natural minor scale, as it is sometimes called.) The harmonic structure of music which was then being developed saw the dominant seventh being of pivotal importance. Now in the Aeolian mode the chord built on the fifth step (the dominant) produces not a dominant seventh, but a minor seventh, E G B E (although when I went to musical college in the 1960s my harmony tutor refused to call it that - to him they were all dominant eleventh with the root note missing.)

To produce the dominant seventh, the G (the leading-note of the mode) has to be raised a semitone to a G# as the dominant seventh has to have a major third.

In this way the harmonic minor was born.

A harmonic minor scale



C harmonic minor scale



Now this is where the early musical theorists bodged it up and all of us have them to blame for this: they gave the new minor scale the same key signature as the major scale a major sixth below (or a minor third above), so

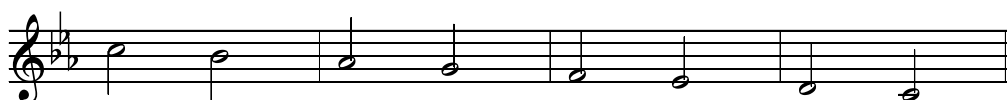
Am has the same key signature as C major. They called Am the relative minor key of C. But it's the sort of relatives you would not want to invite to a party. The reason being that in a minor key the leading-note always has to have an accidental within the bar. That means a lot of unnecessary detail to remember.

But matters didn't end there. The harmonic scale is good for harmonic purposes but singers found it hard to pitch the major third interval between the sixth and seventh note. Arabic singers would not have had this problem but they did in Europe. So to facilitate a smoother ascending line they also raised the sixth note (the F becomes the F# in the scale based on A). But in descending passages, the top note (tonic) going to the leading note was also difficult to pitch, so it reverted to the former note as does the sixth note. Therefore a scale with a different ascending form from the descending form came into being: the melodic minor scale:

A melodic minor scale



C melodic minor scale



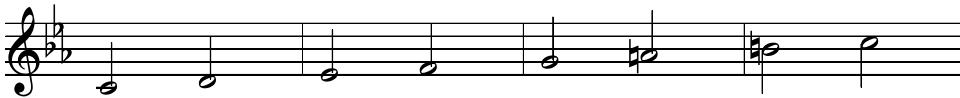
This scale is not usually suited to jazz, however. For instance, if you had an A minor sixth or A minor major 7th, it would suit the ascending form a A melodic minor scale, but coming down there would be a clash between the F natural and the F# in the Am6 chord, or between the G and the G# in the Am maj7 chord.

Consequently it is usually best to use another minor scale. This one has the same format at the ascending melodic minor, but also uses the same notes in descending. Looked at in another way, you need only to change the major third of a major scale into a minor third and you have it. I call this scale a minor scale, eg. C minor scale.

C minor scale



or if you use a key signature...



(Sometimes it is better to use the open key, ie. like C major, if there are a lot of accidentals about.)

There are other minor scales, but you will discover those in other tutorials.