

# GET INTO THE MODE

## Beyond Basic Scales

■ If you're having trouble figuring out what key a piece of music is in, the reason could be that it's not in a key at all—it might be in a mode. The modern modes evolved from the music system of the early Greeks, who believed that different modes could affect a person's mood and even personality.

There are seven modes used in Western music today, including the modal equivalents of major and minor keys. Each has its own unique pattern of whole steps (w) and half steps (h).

Luckily, you don't have to memorize seven different patterns—there's an easier way. The pattern of each mode, when started on a certain pitch, will fall on the white keys of the piano. In other words, you can find an example of each mode by starting on the corresponding note shown in the chart below and playing all natural notes (without sharps or flats).

You can then transpose any of these modal scales to start on any pitch. Just be sure to retain the correct pattern of whole steps and half steps. For example, when starting on D, Dorian mode uses all natural notes, but Dorian mode starting on G uses the following pitches: G, A, B $\flat$ , C, D, E, F, G.

**Each mode also has its own distinctive character:**

**Ionian mode** is really just another name for a major key. It's generally cheery sounding, and is found in lots of popular music—everything from nursery rhymes like "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" to Elvis Presley's "Love Me Tender."

**Dorian mode** feels unresolved, making it sound melancholy. It can be heard in The Beatles' song "Eleanor Rigby."

**Phrygian mode**, sometimes called the "Spanish mode," has an ethnic feel to it and is often used in jazz music, such as Chick Corea's "La Fiesta."

**Lydian mode** is like an upside-down version of a major scale, so it sounds dreamy and mysterious. Used in the theme song to the cartoon *The Jetsons*, it helps to evoke a futuristic feel.

**Mixolydian mode** is quite similar to the major scale, so it's stable feeling. It's heard in lots of rock songs, including The Kinks' "You Really Got Me."

**Aeolian mode** uses the same notes as the natural minor scale, and is usually associated with a feeling of sadness. Although it's not as common in popular music as harmonic minor, it can be found in songs like "Losing My Religion" by R.E.M. and the children's song "The Ants Go Marching."

**Locrian mode** is so unusual sounding that it's rarely used. The March from Shostakovich's *Three Fantastic Dances* is one of the only examples of music written entirely in Locrian mode.

| Mode Name               | Starting Pitch<br>Using natural notes | Interval Pattern |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| Ionian (major)          | C                                     | w-w-h-w-w-w-h    |
| Dorian                  | D                                     | w-h-w-w-w-h-w    |
| Phrygian                | E                                     | h-w-w-w-h-w-w    |
| Lydian                  | F                                     | w-w-w-h-w-w-h    |
| Mixolydian              | G                                     | w-w-h-w-w-h-w    |
| Aeolian (natural minor) | A                                     | w-h-w-w-h-w-w    |
| Locrian                 | B                                     | h-w-w-h-w-w-w    |

