

Major Scale Modes

Most music we listen to is based on the **Major Scale**. Even songs that have a sad, lilting, minor quality can still be based wholly on the major scale. Depending on the style of music you listen to the major scale could be the basis of 80% of the music you have ever heard. There are a variety of scale forms:- melodic minor, harmonic minor, tone and diminished scales are just a few of the possibilities. However in Western music by far the most often used scale is the major scale.

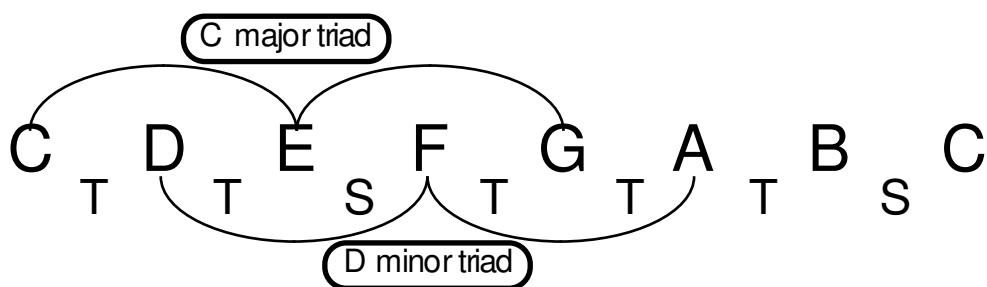
What are the Modes?

Many musicians find it difficult to understand modes. Technically the Major Scale modes are scales which use the different degrees of the major scale as their beginning note but still comprise of notes from that same major scale. The diagram below illustrates this using the key of C major. Each of the modes has a different name. These names come from the regions in ancient Greece where a particular mode characterised the music from that region.

Mode	Scale degrees	Triad
	I II III IV V VI VII I	
I Ionian	C D E F G A B C	C major
II Dorian	D E F G A B C D	D minor
III Phrygian	E F G A B C D E	E minor
IV Lydian	F G A B C D E F	F major
V Mixolydian	G A B C D E F G	G major
VI Aeolian	A B C D E F G A	A minor
VII Locrian	B C D E F G A B	B minor b5

Scales can be used to create melodies which can be played on virtually any musical instrument. All the chords that can be used to rhythmically accompany the melody are constructed from the notes belonging to the same scale as the melody. In order to make our understanding of modes easier we will use a chordal approach.

The Key of C major



There are many types of chords that can be constructed from the notes of a major scale, but for the moment we will deal only with the **Foundation Triads**. In the main diagram above the foundation triads for C major are listed. A song is said to be in the key of C major if the chords in that song are constructed from the notes found in the C major scale. It is possible for a song, at some point, to move into another scale. This is called **Modulation** or a **Key Change**.

Just because a song is in the key of C major don't assume that the C major triad will always be the resolving triad. You can use any of the triads in that key as the focus for resolution. When you use a chord other than the tonic triad as the main focal point in a song you are said to be in a **Modal Key**. Each mode has its own character and emotional quality which can be used to enhance the intended meaning of a piece of music. For example, in general the major modes sound brighter and happier while the minor modes are darker and more melancholy. However, rhythm and tempo also has an influence on the extent of this effect and can override the general quality of the mode used.