

The Modern Modes

MODERN?
WAIT, ISN'T THIS STUFF, LIKE,
100 YEARS OLD?

YES, BUT WE ONLY CALL THEM "MODERN" BECAUSE WE NEED TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN A BUNCH OF UNRELATED THINGS ACROSS MUSIC HISTORY THAT, EVER SO INCONVENIENTLY, USE THE SAME NAMES!



AND, TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, EACH OF THESE THINGS USE THE NAMES TO REPRESENT DIFFERENT CONCEPTS! FORTUNATELY, RIGHT NOW, WE'RE ONLY WORRIED ABOUT THE MODERN MODES.

THESE MODES ARE USED A LOT... ESPECIALLY IN FOLK MUSIC. AS FOR STANDARD WESTERN REPERTOIRE, THEY ARE FIRST PROMINENTLY FEATURED IN THE POST-ROMANTIC MUSIC OF THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY BRITISH ISLES.



ONE OF THE PRIMARY CHARACTERISTICS OF THESE ENGLISH MODALISTS IS THAT THEY TENDED TO AVOID THE STRONG TENSIONS OF THE COMMON PRACTICE PERIOD... FOR EXAMPLE, THEY AVOIDED CHORDS THAT USED A TRITONE... AND AVOIDED RAISING THE LEADING TONE IN MINOR KEYS!

SO WHAT ARE THEY?

WELL, REMEMBER WHEN WE CREATED THE NATURAL MINOR SCALE BY STARTING WITH A MAJOR SCALE, BUT USING THE SIXTH NOTE OF THE SCALE AS THE TONIC? IT GAVE US A NEW PATTERN OF WHOLE STEPS AND HALF STEPS... A NEW SCALE.

KEEPING THE SAME KEY SIGNATURE, WE USE THIS NOTE AS OUR NEW TONIC!



IN FACT, THESE ARE TWO OF THE SEVEN MODERN MODES: MAJOR IS THE IONIAN MODE, AND NATURAL MINOR IS THE AEOLIAN MODE.

BY STARTING ON THE OTHER NOTES OF THE MAJOR SCALE, WE GET THE OTHER FIVE MODES.

BECAUSE IT HAS A DIMINISHED TONIC, LOCRIAN IS A THEORETICAL MODE... IT'S NOT USED IN ACTUAL PRACTICE.

B TO B: THE LOCRIAN MODE

G TO G: THE MIXOLYDIAN MODE

F TO F: THE LYDIAN MODE

E TO E: THE PHRYGIAN MODE

D TO D: THE DORIAN MODE

THE MODES HERE ALL SHARE THE SAME KEY SIGNATURE... THEY ARE RELATED, LIKE C MAJOR AND A MINOR!

C IONIAN

C MIXOLYDIAN
MAJOR + LOWERED 7TH

C LYDIAN
MAJOR + RAISED 4TH

A MORE EFFECTIVE METHOD OF KEEPING THE MODES STRAIGHT INVOLVES MEMORIZING EACH MODE'S COLOR TONE: THE SCALE DEGREE THAT MAKES IT UNIQUE FROM THE MAJOR OR MINOR SCALE WITH THE SAME TONIC.

A AEOLIAN
MINOR + RAISED 6TH

A DORIAN

A PHRYGIAN
MINOR + LOWERED 2ND