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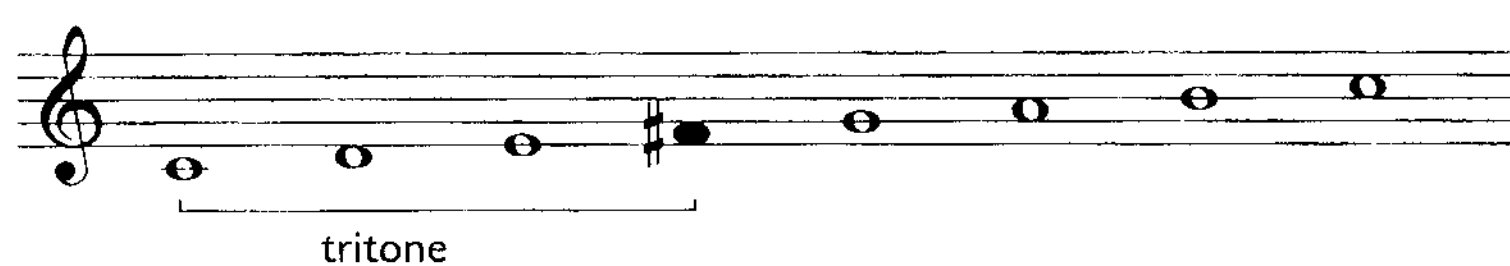
Modal Systems

CHARACTER NOTES

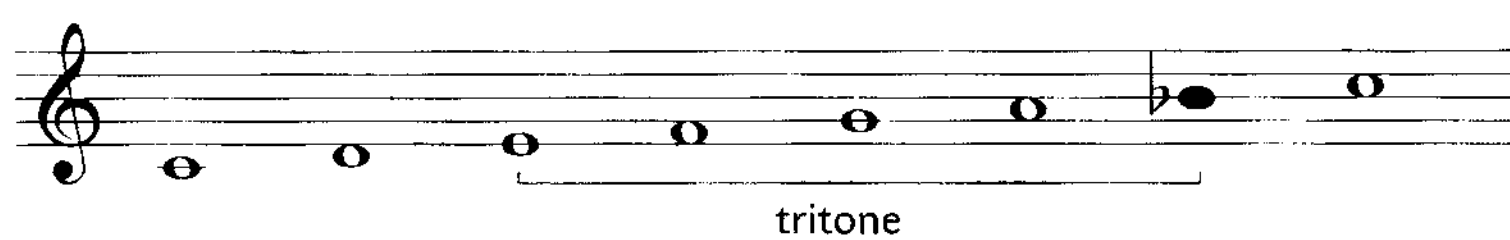
All the diatonic modes have one thing in common, they contain the same seven pitches arranged in different order. Dorian, Phrygian, Aeolian, Lydian, and Mixolydian are *displacements* of the major mode – the Ionian scale. Each mode's characteristic is distinct from the others by the specific location within the mode of one particular pitch – the *character note*. In the *Ionian* mode/scale, the $\flat 4$ th scale degree is the character note:



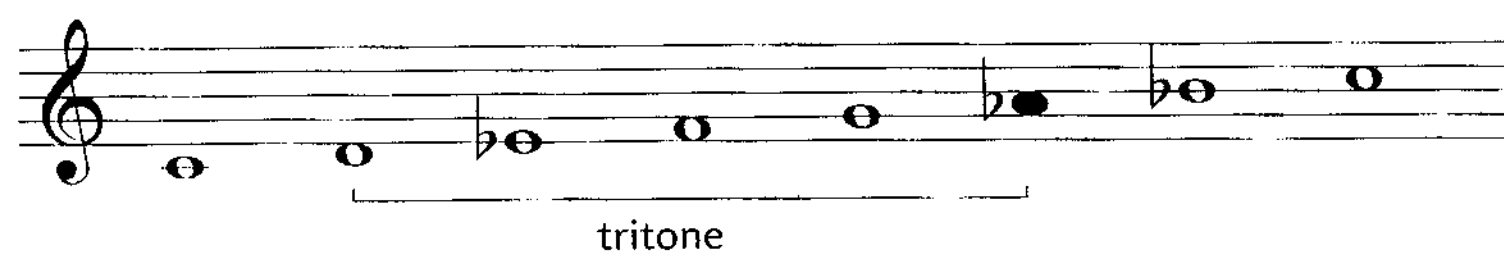
The *Lydian* mode character note is the $\sharp 4$ scale degree which distinguishes it from Ionian:



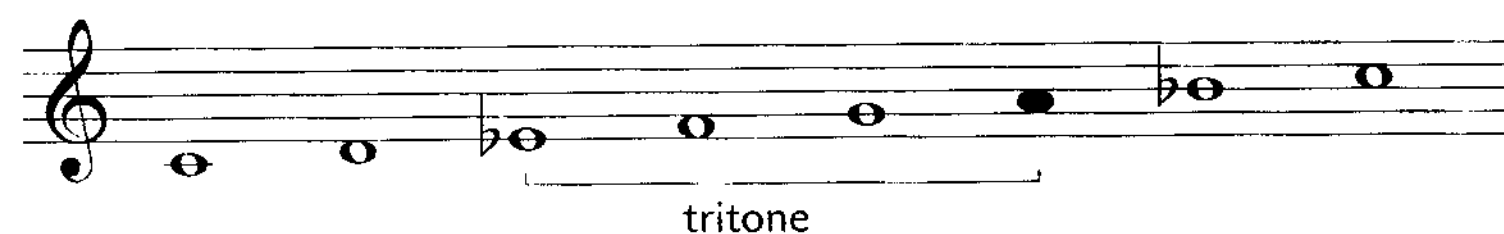
The *Mixolydian* mode differs from the other major modes in that the character note is the $\flat 7$ scale degree:



The character note of *Aeolian* is the $\flat 6$ th scale degree:



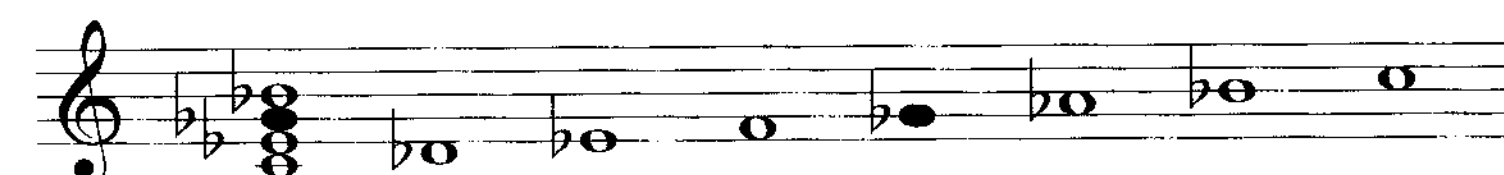
Dorian differs from Aeolian because the character note is a $\flat 6$ scale degree:



Phrygian differs from the above minor modes with a $\flat 2$ scale degree character note:



Any diatonic chords which contain the character note as a chord tone are *very unstable*, and therefore will progress to the more stable chords which do not contain the character note as a chord tone. Because of the position of the character note, *Locrian* has always been ignored as a modal system. The *Locrian* mode has the paradox of finding the *unstable* characteristic pitch, scale degree $\flat 5$, as a chord tone of the *stable* tonic chord:



An observation of the modes reveals that the character notes are one of the two pitches making up the diatonic tritone. In a major or minor key, the tritone has the important function of creating the primary cadential sound. In a modal context, the tritone must be carefully controlled in order to retain the modal character while not lapsing into the relative major or minor key. The character note of the mode locates half of the diatonic tritone, and must be present. For this reason, there are certain avoided diatonic chord structures which inherently contain both pitches of the tritone. *The diatonic -7($\flat 5$) is avoided*. The diatonic *dominant 7th chord* is most often treated as a *triad*, avoiding the use of both tritone notes. Each of the five common modes contain seven different pitches and six diatonic chords.

CHORD PROGRESSIONS

Lead sheets of modal tunes do not always contain a modal progression – simply the name of the mode. An understanding of modal harmonies may prove helpful for writers and rhythm section players.

The diatonic chords of the mode can be divided into three functional areas:

- The *tonic* chord of the mode stands alone.
- The *cadential* chords are those diatonic 7th chords and the diatonic triad which contain, as a chord tone, the characteristic pitch.
- The *noncadential* chords do not contain the character note as a chord tone.

(For the following examples, T=tonic, C=cadence chord, the noncadential chords are not labelled.)

The functions for the diatonic chords of Lydian are:

I^{ma}7 II III-7 V^{ma}7 VI-7 VII-7

T C avoid C C

The functions for the diatonic chords of Mixolydian are:

I II-7 IV^{ma}7 V-7 VI-7 bVII^{ma}7

T avoid C C

The functions for the diatonic chords of Dorian are:

I-7 II-7 bIII^{ma}7 IV V-7 bVII^{ma}7

T C C avoid C

The functions for the diatonic chords of Phrygian are:

I-7 bII^{ma}7 bIII IV-7 bVI^{ma}7 bVII-7

T C avoid C

The functions for the diatonic chords of Aeolian are:

I-7 bIII^{ma}7 IV-7 V-7 bVI^{ma}7 bVII

T avoid C C

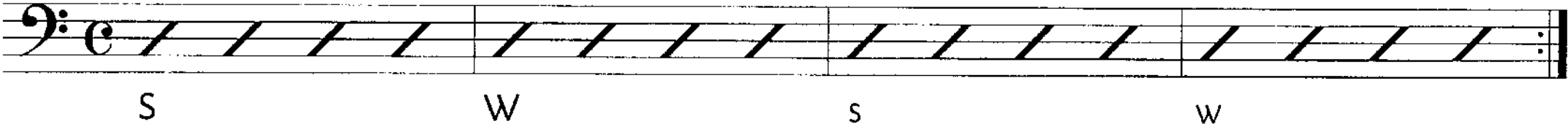
The organization of a modal progression takes into account the following considerations:

- The strongest cadential motion of major key, minor key, and blues is root motion of perfect fifths or its inversion, perfect fourths, typical of dominant or subdominant root motion. The typical root motion found in modal harmony is synonymous with mode/scale-steps.
- A cadence by step is *not* possible in Aeolian.
- The position of the character pitch within the cadence chords will determine the comparative strength for each chord. The characteristic pitch as the root has the *greatest* demand for resolution; as the 5th is *next strongest*; as the 3rd is *weak*; and as the 7th is *weakest*.
- The tonic chord receives the most *stress*.
- Cadences are from *weak* beats.
- Simplicity is important when dealing with modal systems.*

C Lydian:

Cmaj7 (tonic)


B-7 (character note = 5th)



C Mixolydian:

C (tonic)


Bbmaj7 (character note = root)



C Dorian:

C-7 (tonic)


D-7 (character note = 5th)



C Phrygian:

C-7 (tonic)

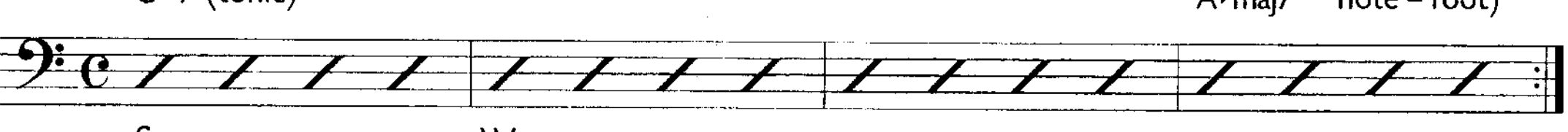
Dbmaj7 (character note = root)



C Aeolian:

C-7 (tonic)

Abmaj7 (character note = root)



If a more complex progression is desired (but usually not necessary), or if the melody demands a different chord, the cadence chord can be preceded by a *noncadential* chord; that chord can then be preceded by a cadence chord and so on. The cadence chords will continue falling on weak stress points ultimately cadencing to tonic:

C Dorian:

C-7

D-7

E^bmaj7

D-7

S

W

s

w

The available tensions for the diatonic modal chords are a whole step above a chord tone. For the diatonic Dorian chord scale, 13 is an available tension. The diatonic tritone need not be avoided if one pitch is a tension; this is not perceived as a dominant sound. Because all the notes of Dorian and Lydian are available on the I chord, the total sound of the mode is self-contained and a cadence to tonic is unnecessary:

C Dorian:

I-7 (9, 11, 13)

C Lydian:

I⁺maj7 (9, #11, 13)

In addition to the diatonic chords built in thirds, *hybrids* are available. Each individual hybrid will function as either a cadence or noncadence chord based on the inclusion or omission of the character note. Maj6 is an alternative for the diatonic maj7 chords.

MELODIES

Modal melodies contain the following attributes:

- They are almost always *diatonic*.
- Chromatics may appear as *simple* passing tone ornamentations.
- Like typical modal root motion, *steps* are common.
- *Arpeggios* of the diatonic chords and consecutive leaps of *4ths* are typical.
- Cadences are most often by step and resolve to either scale degrees 1 or 5 (or 3).
- The character note is often found *emphasized*.
- *Many* or *all* the pitches of the mode will be heard.
- The diatonic *tritone* is neither outlined (top and bottom notes of a melodic motif) nor leaped (except in a series of consecutive 4ths). In either case, the tritone is *never* resolved by traditional means.
- The key signature may be *open* (no key signature), or the key for the *relative* major/minor, or (least desirable) the key for the *parallel* major/minor. The actual modality is *indicated*.

MODAL TUNES TO ANALYZE WHICH DEMONSTRATE THE ABOVE

"It's a Lazy Afternoon"

"Black Narcissus"

"Crystal Silence"

"Follow Your Heart"

"Little Sunflower"

"Maiden Voyage"

"Moondance"

"Norwegian Wood"

"Recordame"

"Simone"

"So What"

"Milestones"

"Little B's Poem"

"First Light"

"Darkness"

"Tell Me a Bedtime Story"

"Saga of Harrison Crabfeathers"

"Footprints"

Chord structures used for modal harmonies and in support of modal melodies are:

- often triadic, or triads with added color tone (tension);

VOICINGS

C Dorian: C- Eb D- C- D-



- or quartal (voiced in fourths);

C Dorian: C-7 Ebmaj7 D-7 C-7 D-7



- may be diatonically parallel (as some of the above);
- may be pandiatonic/tonic modal voicings.

Pandiatonicism is the use of diatonic structures to achieve the harmonic sound of the key/mode without emphasizing a single pitch as the tonic. Tonic modal voicings, most often in fourths, are a convenient way for a writer, or chordal instrument player, to create an illusion of a modal progression where only the tonic modal chord is indicated. Tonic modal voicings will each sound tonic and carry equal weight when moving in parallel motion:

C Dorian:



Pedal point and ostinato (see above) are very typically found in modal music because of the strength of scale degrees 1 and 5 (tonic and dominant pedals).