

Improvisation: Dorian Alternative Rock Groove

In this lesson, we will demystify what modes are. The alternative rock groove featured in this lesson consists of a chord progression over which you'll improvise using the C Dorian scale. You'll find that as long as you're playing in C Dorian, you don't need to worry about the chord changes. Instead, you can focus on melodic ideas, articulation, technique, emotion/feel, dynamics, rhythm, tone, phrasing, space/rest, and listening.

Outcomes:

- Gain an aural and theoretical understanding of the Dorian mode through improvisation and analysis
- Develop motivic ideas while improvising

Materials:

- Computer with a browser such as Chrome, Safari or Firefox, to access the Berklee PULSE website
- Projector, PA system
- Preferred instrument
- PULSE motivic development video (above)
- C Dorian Alternative Rock Groove Notation Mixer

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY IDEAS

Exposition of Material

The available time in your curriculum will determine how much you incorporate from the following suggested activities. This is meant as a cumulative experience based on musicianship concepts and training presented inside the Berklee PULSE Music Method site.

1. What is a "mode"?
 - Modes have seven notes, and are built using a pattern of half steps and whole steps, just like the major and minor scales. Each mode has a "characteristic note," a note that sets it apart from the other modes.

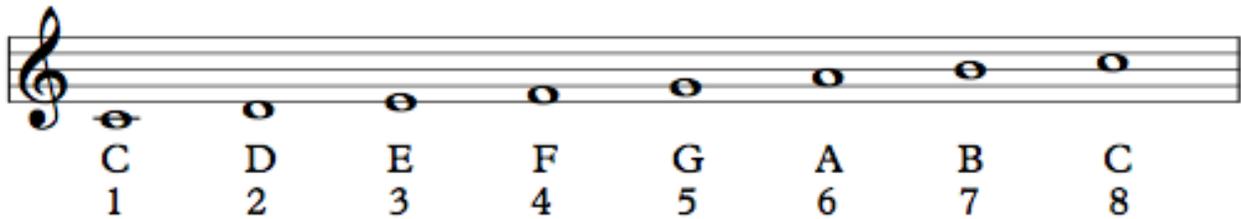
Identifying Key Concepts and Terms

2. The Ionian mode vs. the Dorian mode

- The Ionian mode, also known as the major scale, is built using the following pattern of steps:

W, W, H, W, W, W, H
 (W= Whole Step, H= Half Step)

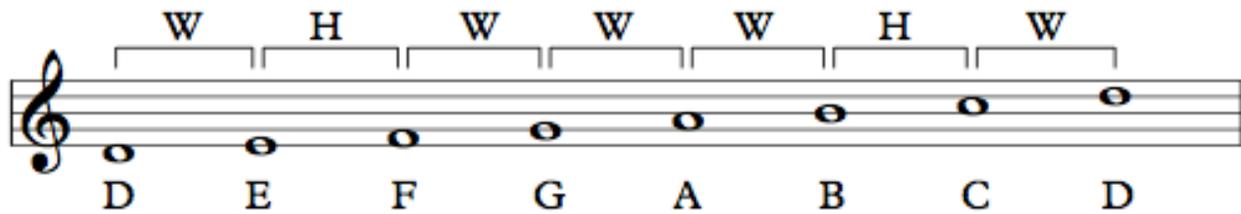
C Major Scale



- The Dorian mode starts on the second degree of the major scale. The D Dorian mode is the Dorian mode for the C major scale (key of C). The Dorian mode is built using the following pattern of steps:

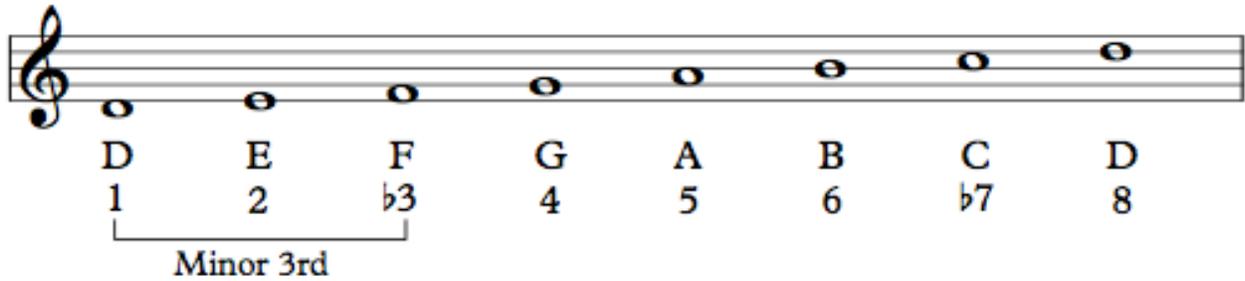
W, H, W, W, W, H, W
 (W= Whole Step, H= Half Step)

D Dorian Scale



- The Dorian mode is a minor mode because it has a minor third between the first and third degrees of the mode.

D Dorian Scale



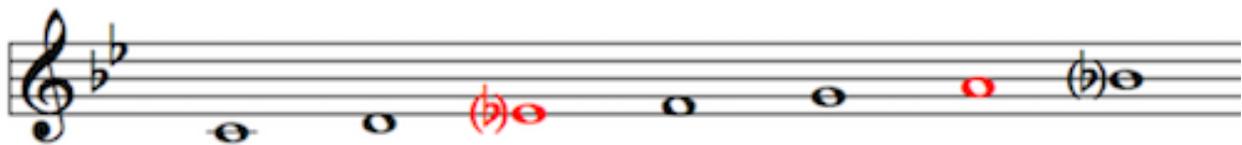
Activity/Assessment

3. Improvise using the C Dorian mode.

View the full recording of the [C Dorian Alternative Rock Groove](#) in our Notation Mixer to complete the following exercise.

In this exercise, you will be improvising over a Dorian groove using the C Dorian mode! You will find that as long as you're playing in the right notes in the C Dorian mode, you don't need to worry about the chord changes. Instead you can focus on melodic ideas, articulation, technique, emotion/feel, dynamics, rhythm, tone, phrasing, space/rest, and listening.

C Dorian Scale



Use the chart and Steps 1-4 below to tell you your key, tonic, and sharps/flats you need to play based on the instrument you are using.

1. Instrument	2. Key	3. Tonic	4. Sharps/Flats
C instruments	C Dorian	C	Bb, Eb
Bb instruments	D Dorian	D	none
Eb instruments	A Dorian	A	F#

Step 1. Instrument– Choose which key to play in based on what instrument you play.

- C instruments: bass, piano, guitar, violin, trombone, flute, voice
- Bb instruments: trumpet, soprano sax, tenor sax
- Eb instruments: alto sax, bari sax

Step 2. Key – This tells you what key you are in.

Step 3. Tonic – This tells you the note that sounds like “home base” when you are improvising. It is the first note of the mode, so the key you are in is named after the tonic.

Step 4. Sharps/Flats – This tells you which sharps or flats to play. Please note, in the context of modal improvisation, making something "flat" just means to bring it down a half step (ex. B becomes Bb).

Lesson Closing

- For further study of improvisation on PULSE, check out these materials on the PULSE website:
 - Improvisation [Level 1](#), [Level 2](#), and [Level 3](#)