

Modal Chord Progressions:

The main thing to notice with any modal chord progression is the disparity between the theoretical key that the chords have come from, diatonically speaking...and the home key or key centre that the ear hears. Take for example the following chord progression:

C – G – AM7 – (D7 G) - C

It is usually the case that the first chord is the Tonic chord and also the point of departure. In this case then, it appears that the C Major chord is the Tonic or Key chord. But from a theoretical point of view the C Major scale does not accommodate a D7 chord. Of course, one way to explain the presence of this chord, is that it is a **secondary dominant** - the idea that any chord can be preceded by its own Dominant 7th chord whose root is a perfect 5th higher). In which case, isn't this progression just the C Major scale with a slight deviation?

Well, what I would say without doubt, is that the note 'C' and the C Major chord are at the centre of things. The fact that we start and end on it helps in this regard. If we are looking for a unifying scale to play over the entire progression (accepting as we will that the whole progression belongs to one key – rather than a modulation) then the fact of the matter is that the notes provided by the C Major scale will NOT work: there is a clash between the natural F in the C Major scale and the F# resident in the D7 chord. Therefore, if I were looking for one unifying scale whose notes will work over the entire progression, then I would settle for C Lydian:

C D E F# G A B C

How did I work this out?

First, it helps to have a good knowledge of all diatonic chords in all keys a la the circle of 5ths. It should therefore be apparent that the only theoretical key that has the chords listed above...is the Key of G Major. But neither the note G or the chord G Major are at the centre of things: - it is the note and chord C instead. Therefore, we are looking at a mode of the Key of G Major; the one that starts with the note C...built on the 4th degree of the scale; which we identify as LYDIAN.

Hence we have a LYDIAN CHORD PROGRESSION in the key of C. From an improvised lead standpoint, one would use the key of C Lydian – not C Major!

Exercise: work out what the following home keys are for the following chord progressions:

- Bm – A – Bm – F#m
- G7 – F – C – Am7
- Eb – Ab – Db – Cm7
- G#m – F – Eb – D7
- Bb – Gm – Cm – Eb
- F – Cm – F – Eb – Dm
- Gm7 – C7 – Gm7 – C7 – Dm – C7

Exercise: devise your own modal chord progressions...