

Modes: chapter 2

A chapter written at some later stage will deal with the issue of what to do with modes; what their practical application is. Just as with theory generally, there is little value in knowledge unless it can be applied to something practical. But more on that later. Right now, I want to tell you that there are other modes you should know about; especially as a practising (in both senses) Jazz musician. However, unlike the modes derived from the major scales, these new modes do not have exotic Greek names. And in that respect, for the sake of consistency, it might be better to ignore the Greek names altogether; except that I personally have an attachment to them; having been weaned on their names for many years. But certainly, with respect to these new modes, the name tags will be more mundane...

So, what are these modes; and where have they come from?

They are derived from the variants of the Natural Minor scale; namely the Harmonic Minor scale and the Melodic Minor scale. They are as follows:

Harmonic minor scale:

i of Harmonic Minor

ii of Harmonic Minor

III of Harmonic Minor

iv of Harmonic Minor

V of Harmonic Minor

VI of Harmonic Minor

vii of Harmonic Minor

Melodic minor scale:

i of Melodic Minor

ii of Melodic Minor

III of Melodic Minor

IV of Melodic Minor

V of Melodic Minor

vi of Melodic Minor

vii of Melodic Minor

Now as it happens, some, if not all of the modes listed above do in fact have names; though they are not Greek! Here are some examples:

V of Harmonic Minor: Phrygian Dominant (or Phrygian Major)

IV of Melodic Minor: Lydian Dominant

vii of Melodic Minor: Altered Scale (or Super locrian)

I've listed these three because they are particularly useful in addressing what scale to play over **Altered Dominants**; arguably their main practical use. For the record, Altered Dominants refer to dominant 7th type chords that have been altered; typically their 5th or additional tones such as the 9th or 13th have been sharpened or flattened. As said before, a later chapter will deal with the practical use of modes; so back to the foundations first...

As with the modes of the major scale, there is a **derivative** and **parallel** way to look at them. The derivative view is as described above. The parallel view involves more scale spellings. Here they are:

Phrygian Dominant: 1 b2 3 4 5 b6 b7 8

Lydian Dominant: 1 2 3 #4 5 6 b7 8

Altered scale: 1 b2 #2 3 b5 #5 b7 8

Notice how all three modes have two notes in common (apart from the keynote). Namely 3 and b7; the two constituent notes that make up a dominant type chord. Notice also that the altered notes in each mode allude to the notes which can be altered within altered dominants whilst still retaining the dominant function within a key: b2 is really a flattened 9th; b6 is a flattened 13th; #4 is either a sharpened 11th or flattened 5th; a #2 is a sharpened 9th; a #5 is a sharpened 5th (or flattened 13th)

So that is why collectively, they are perfect for providing a set of notes to use over altered dominants generically.

But when it comes to actually learning them and playing them (and learning patterns), I think it helps to refer back to the minor scale variants. But the choice is yours!

A useful exercise – one that can be performed as a mental task rather than one written down – is to work out in your head using both derivative and parallel methods what modes relate to particular major and minor scales. Endless hours of fun to be had getting up to speed with this! But the bottom line is this: LEARN THE CIRCLE OF FIFTHS...because everything rests upon your knowledge of the 12 major keys.

