

Breaking the Code of Modes

■ In addition to the major and minor scales that are at the heart of many practice sessions, there are other ways of grouping eight notes in each octave. For a new approach to both playing and listening, try out these Gregorian modes which can be performed on any instrument. Modes are scale forms that developed in the liturgical music sung in churches during the Medieval period, around the 9th century. Frequently referred to as “church modes,”

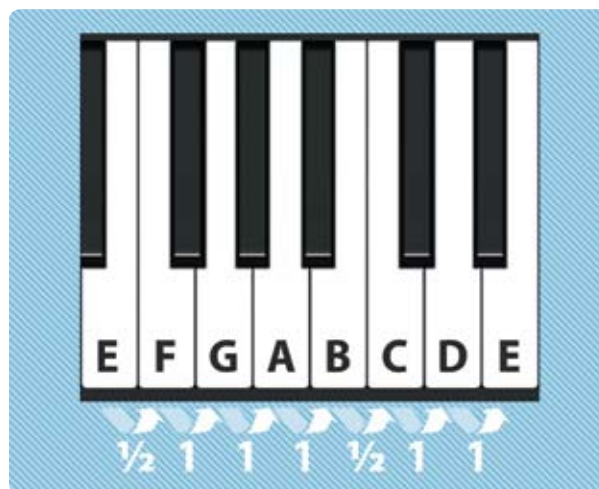
these patterns present different ways of grouping the traditional eight notes to an octave. Centuries after they were first used, classical composers continued to use them to invoke ancient times and to go beyond the forms of the major and minor scales.

Trying out these modes will help train your fingers to play intervals differently and also help train your ears to hear them differently. Each one of these

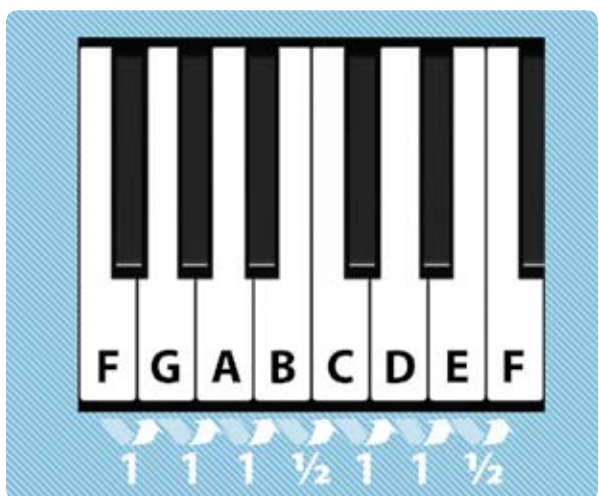
patterns uses a major or minor scale as a reference point and is identical in its intervals to an octave played on the piano using only the white keys (no sharps or flats). Of course, all of these modal scales can also be performed in any key. The Aeolian mode is the natural minor scale, following the white keys from A to A, and Ionian mode is the familiar major scale from C to C. Here are four others to try:



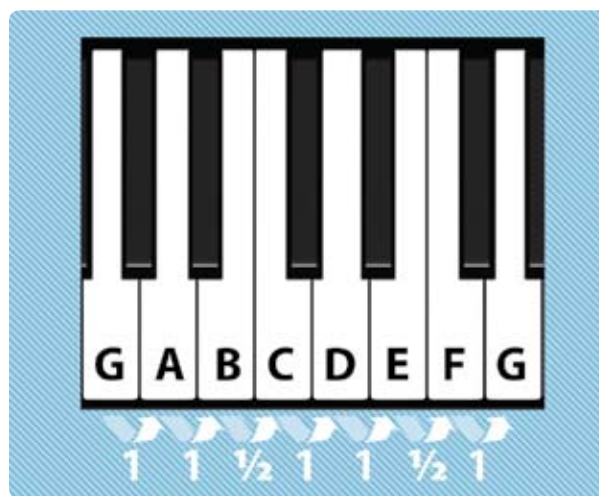
Dorian—Resembles the natural minor scale, but with a raised sixth degree from D to D.



Phrygian—A natural minor scale but with a lowered second degree from E to E.



Lydian—Sounds like a major scale but with a raised fourth degree creating the interval of a tritone (or diminished fifth) between the first and fourth degrees from F to F.



Mixolydian—A major scale but with a lowered seventh degree from G to G. The lowered seventh allows for a major chord (VII) based on the seventh scale degree.

