Modes vs. Parent Scales

Though this course is about chord scales, and not parent scales or modes, these topics come up whenever you look at scales on guitar.

Therefore, it's worth reading a short primer on what parent scales and modes are and how they relate to each other on the guitar.

The most important lesson to learn from this chapter is that if you change the chord scale over a chord, you change the color of that chord.

For example, if you play Dorian over a m7 chord, you bring out that cool, jazzy m6 mode color.

If you then change to Aeolian over that same m7 chord, you switch to more of a rock/pop m7b6 mode color.

This is where chord scales and modes meet, by playing different chord scales you change the modal color of the chord you're soloing over.

Check out this chapter, then use this info as you dig into the chord scales below.

What is a Parent Scale?

To begin, take a minute to learn about parent scales.

A parent scale is a scale system that produces modes.

This means that if you play the parent scale from the 2nd note, 3rd note, 4th note, etc., you produce new modes and mode colors.

Here are the four main parent scales in modern music, with the first two being the most popular and most important to learn.

- Major Scale
- Melodic Minor Scale
- Harmonic Minor Scale
- Harmonic Major Scale

Here's an example of a C major parent scale to play and hear on the guitar.

Notice that the interval numbers below are all natural, 1-2-3-4-5-6-7; this is because the major scale is the neutral parent scale.

That means that all other scales and modes are compared to the major scale, such as Mixolydian.

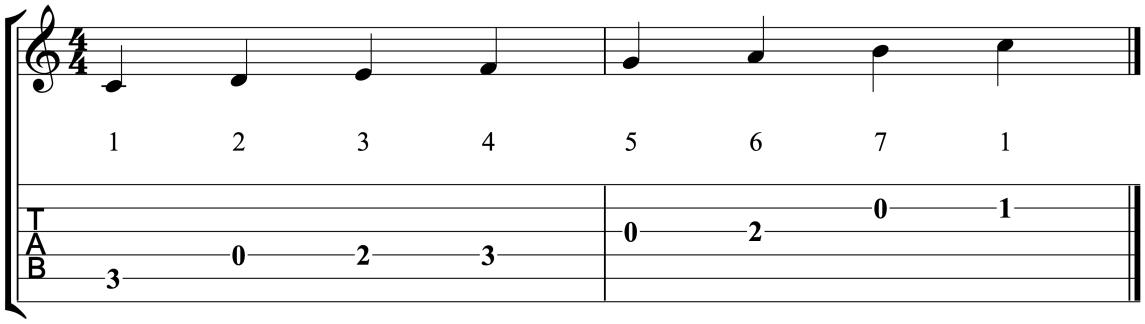
When you write out the intervals for Mixolydian, you compare it to the major scale from that root note.

So, like this:

- C Major = C D E F G A B or 1-2-3-4-5-6-7
- C Mixo = C D E F G A Bb or 1-2-3-4-5-6-b7

As you can see, the B has been changed to Bb in Mixo, therefore the 7th is now b7 compared to the major scale.

If this is a bit fuzzy, not to worry, learn the chord scales below and interval theory will become clearer as you go.



With this knowledge in mind, time to look at the difference between a parent scale and a mode.

What is a Mode?

Now that you know what a parent scale is, it's time to look at modes.

Modes are built by playing the parent scale from a different note in that scale, such as playing C major from D to D.

When doing so, you create a D Dorian sound, which has the same notes as C major but starts on D.

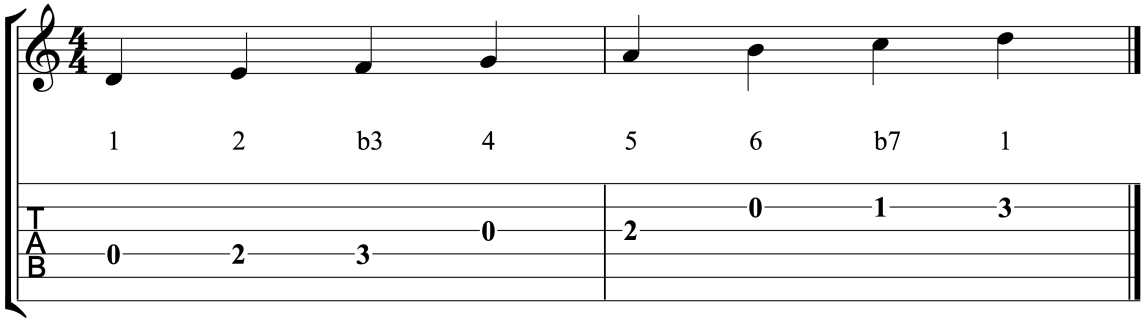
Because it starts on D, and not C from the parent scale, Dorian sounds different than the major scale, but has the same notes.

This is because you always hear the color of any scale or mode as compared to the root of the scale/mode/chord you're on.

In this case, D Dorian sounds minor because you're staring on the note D and playing up from there.

If you compare that to the parent scale, you get the same notes but a major sound.

Play this example to see how the same notes, C major parent scale, played from D-D create a minor sound based on that D root note.

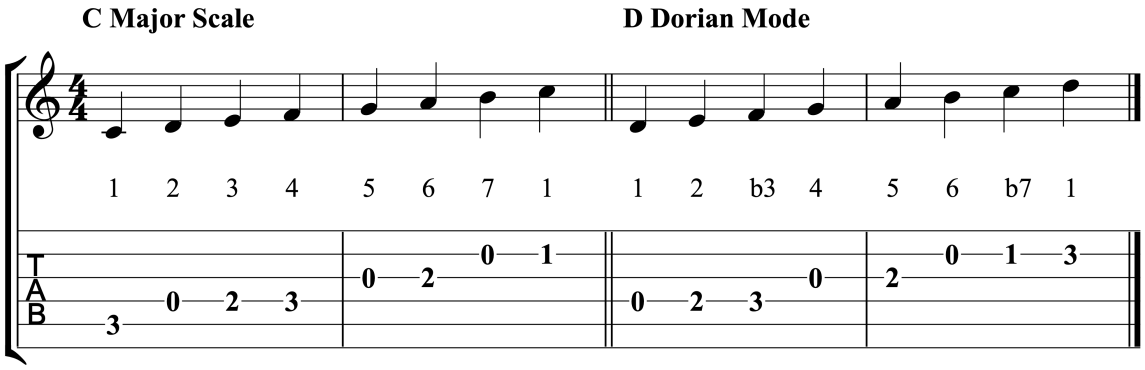


Though the notes of C Major and D Dorian are the same, the parent scale and the mode, the intervals are different.

Because each chord scale is built from the root of that chord/scale, Dorian has a different interval pattern than Ionian.

You can see that here, where the notes are the same, C-D-E-F-G-A-B and D-E-F-G-A-B-C, but they sound different as they start on different roots.

Play both of these modes back-to-back to get an idea of how modes use the same notes as the parent scale but have different intervals.



Now that you know what a parent scale is and what a mode is, time to dive into the practice patterns and chord scales below.

It's not necessary to fully understand mode theory at this point to play the exercises and chord scales below.

But, modes and scales and other terms will come up as you study chord scales, so it's good to know those terms as you learn each shape.

If the theory is fuzzy, not to worry.

Always learn to play first, then the theory will come with time.

So, learn the chord scales, and if you get stuck on a theory concept, learn it after you have the fingerings down on the fretboard.

That way you have an understanding of how that chord scale sounds and sits on the guitar, then you fill in the theory gaps from there.

Have fun with these exercises as you shore up your technique, fretboard and chord scale knowledge, and theory chops in this eBook.