

SHREDDED METAL

THE DORIAN MODE FOR METAL

There are seven fundamental modes of the major scale: Ionian (modal name for the major scale), Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Aeolian (modal name for the natural minor scale), and Locrian. Of these, three of them (Dorian, Phrygian, and Aeolian) can be considered 'minor modes' since they contain a minor third and a perfect fifth. Due to their 'darker' sound, Aeolian and Phrygian are used quite commonly for constructing metal riffs; however, Dorian – with its somewhat 'brighter' tonality – isn't used as often. Never-the-less, it is still a good melodic source for composing some sick sounding riffs.

EXERCISE 1

Dorian is the second mode of the major scale. It's built by playing the same notes as a major scale, but changing the root note and tonal centre to the second degree. This changes the pattern of tones and semitones in relation to the tonic, thus forming a new scale. Exercise 1 shows the G major scale (Ionian) on the first string over a G chord. If you play the same notes but start and end on the second degree (A) over an A minor chord, you get A Dorian. The formula for Dorian is: 1-2-b3-4-5-6-b7. Being a minor-type mode, the easiest way to think of it is as natural minor but with a major (raised) sixth degree – F to F# in this case.

The image shows two musical staves for guitar. The first staff is labeled 'G Ionian' and 'G' above it. It shows the G major scale on the first string, with notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G. The fret numbers 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15 are written below the notes. The second staff is labeled 'A Dorian' and 'Am' above it. It shows the A Dorian scale on the first string, with notes A, B, C, D, E, F#, G, A. The fret numbers 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17 are written below the notes. A double bar line separates the two scales.

EXERCISE 2

This exercise demonstrates how you can use the Dorian mode to come up with a metal riff that sounds quite cool. Although overall we would consider the key here to be A minor, the riff is built entirely of notes from the A Dorian mode. Featuring a pedalled open A note, power chords, and pull-offs, notice how I exploit the tritone (C and F#) in bars two and four to create a more 'sinister' sound. I feel this riff could work well in a thrash or power metal setting.

The image shows a musical score for a metal riff. It starts with a tempo marking '♩ = 150' and a key signature 'Am'. The music is in 4/4 time. The first staff shows the melodic line with notes and accidentals. The second staff shows the guitar tablature. The riff consists of four bars. The first bar has a pedalled open A note (0) and a power chord (2 0 0 0 0 5). The second bar has a power chord (0 0 5) and a tritone (0 0 0 0 5 3). The third bar has a power chord (2 0 0 0 0 5) and a tritone (0 0 0 0 5 3). The fourth bar has a power chord (0 0 3) and a tritone (0 0 0 0 4 2). The tablature uses numbers 0-5 and includes pull-offs (indicated by a curved line) and a hammer-on (indicated by a curved line with an arrow).

EXERCISE 3

If you're unfamiliar with the Dorian mode, here are two fingerings to get you started – a basic 'box' pattern for A Dorian, as well as the same pattern extended into a three note per string fingering. Ultimately, your aim should be to play any mode up and down the neck in any key.

The image shows two musical examples for the A Dorian mode. The first is labeled "A Dorian 'box' pattern" and the second is "A Dorian 3 note per string pattern". Both are presented in standard musical notation (treble clef) and guitar tablature (TAB). The tablature for the 'box' pattern shows fret numbers 20, 19, 17 on the high strings, and 19, 17, 16, 19, 17, 16 on the lower strings. The 3-note-per-string pattern extends this across all six strings, with fret numbers 20, 19, 17, 19, 17, 16, 19, 17, 16, 19, 17, 15, 19, 17, 15, 17.

EXERCISE 4

This is a fast, Dorian 'shred' lick that could be played over the riff from Exercise 2. Since that riff is based completely off the A Dorian mode, obviously A Dorian will be the best scale choice for soloing. Beginning with a four and three finger 'circular' lick, it then moves down the Dorian scale as well as adding in the b5 'blues' note. The lick ends on the defining note of Dorian – the major sixth – to really emphasise the sound and colour of the mode.

The image shows the notation for Exercise 4, a fast Dorian 'shred' lick. It is written in 4/4 time and starts with an Am chord. The notation includes a treble clef and guitar tablature. The lick begins with a circular lick on the high strings (frets 22, 20, 19, 17) and then moves down the neck, incorporating a b5 note (fret 17) and ending on the major sixth (fret 19). The tablature shows fret numbers: 22 20 19 17, 20 19 17 19 20, 17 19 20 22 20 19 17, 20 19 17 19 20, 22 20 19 17, 20 19 17, 20 19 17, 19 17 19 17, 19 17, 19 17, 19 17, 19 17, 19 17, 19 17.

For those of you new to modal theory, I hope this has been a good introduction. Try writing and recording your own Dorian metal riffs and then practice soloing over them. As always, keep it fast and heavy!