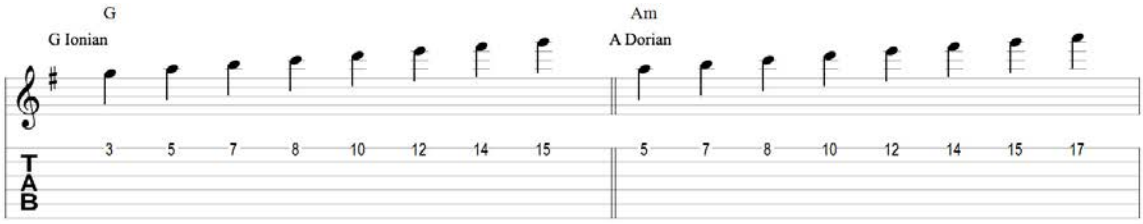
SHREDDED METAL

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 it’s somewhat ‘brighter’ tonality – isn’t used as often. Never-the-less, it is still a good melodic source for composing some sick sounding riffs.

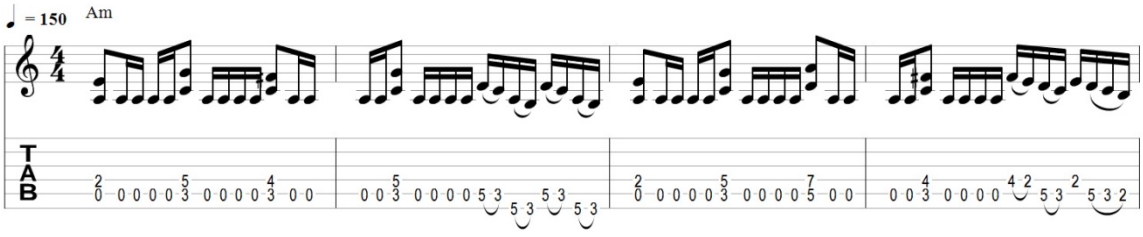
EXERCISE 1

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.



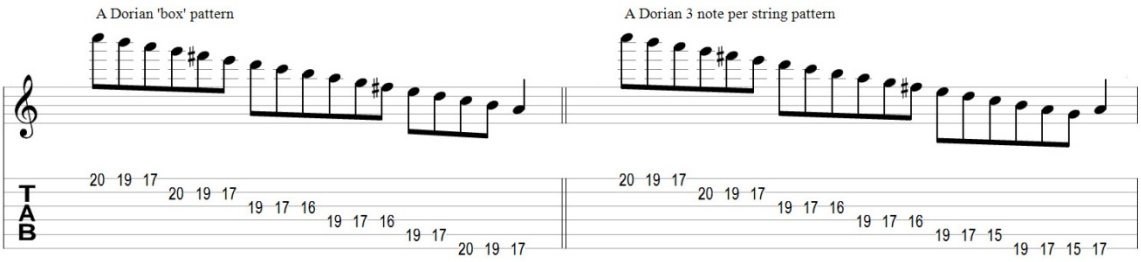
EXERCISE 2

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.



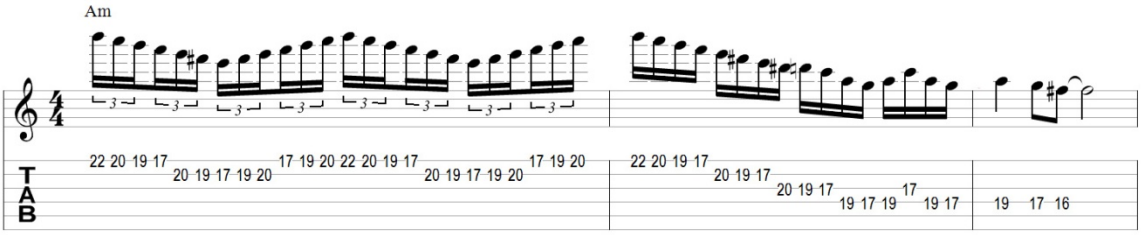
EXERCISE 3

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.



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.



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!