

The Dorian Mode

The Dorian mode originates from the 2nd degree of the major scale e.g. D to D in C major. Its scale degrees are R (root) 2 b3 4 5 6 b7. Due to its b3 the Dorian mode is a minor scale and in Rock, Pop, Jazz and Blues, Dorian is the most commonly used minor mode. The real character of the Dorian mode comes from its major 6th degree. This note is normally associated with major modes and sounds unusual in a minor scale. It has a distinct sounding quality which can be mystical and magical e.g. Breathe by Pink Floyd, or folk tunes such as Scarborough Fair. It can also sound distinctly funky: Intro of Always on the Run by Lenny Kravitz. When played in a blues context the major 6th has a 'sweet' sounding quality; BB King and Robben Ford are well known for their use of the major 6th within the minor pentatonic scale. Note that Carlos Santana uses this scale a lot in his Latin Blues/Rock sound along with the 'Aeolian' mode which we will come to a little later.... A good chord 'Vamp' in key of A major would be 'Bmin7 to E7' – You could use B Dorian/E Mixo/B Minor Pen – But overall – B Dorian for the Dorian sound.

Using the key of A Dorian (A B C D E F# G), we will now link this mode to how we play the 5 positions of the A minor pentatonic scale (A C D E G).

The notes of the minor pentatonic scale exist inside the Dorian Mode and it can be helpful to see this clearly so firstly learn to play the 5 Minor Pentatonic shapes below. The 'A' root notes are BLACK and other scale degrees are WHITE with the scale degree number inside them. Fret numbers are indicated to the left of each diagram. Next, 'pin' the Dorian scale patterns onto the pentatonic ones and practice them one by one.

The 5 Positions of the Dorian Mode



