



The Dorian Mode

The dorian mode is the second mode of the major scale. In the key of C major, the scale would consist of the following notes -

D E F G A B C

If we take the root, 3rd, 5th and 7th notes of the scale (highlighted in bold), we get a minor 7 chord. This means that we can use the dorian mode to improvise over a minor 7 chord. There are several scale options when improvising over a minor 7 chord in jazz music. The dorian mode is used when a minor 7 chord is acting as a II chord in a major key.

The dorian mode is often used by improvisers when a minor 7th chord is static for a period of time. The most notable example of this is Miles Davis's composition 'So What'. The composition only uses 2 minor 7 chords and the dorian mode is used extensively for improvisation.

Another example to study is a minor blues sequence. In a blues in C minor (such as John Coltrane's 'Mr P.C.'), a large portion of the harmony consists of Cm7 and Fm7 chords. In this example, the C dorian mode can be used over Cm7 and the F dorian mode over Fm7.

The dorian mode is such a popular choice for improvisers due to the sound of the major 6th interval. The presence of a major 6th is one of the defining features of the dorian mode and is often highlighted in melodic lines. When voicing a minor 7th chord, harmony instruments will regularly include the 6th/13th as part of the chord.