

MODES



What are 'modes'?

'Mode' is another word for 'Scale'. The Mountain Dulcimer is a modal instrument.

The word 'scale' comes from the Italian word 'scala' - translated as 'ladder' (as in the La Scala Opera House in Milan, Italy). In music, you climb the 'ladder' of eight notes which is called a 'scale' (i.e. – the eight notes of: do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do)

The ancient Greeks had funky names for the scales (goes back to that smart guy, Pythagoras), good today only to impress people at parties. Good news is, you do not need to know any of this to play the dulcimer!

WE PLAY THE MODES (SCALES) OUT OF THE TUNINGS

On the one side - DULCIMER TUNINGS

Such as:

DAA DAD AEA DGD DF#A
GGG CGC DAC
and others

It is important to know what scales you can get within different tunings on the dulcimer. We don't think about it, but most of the time we play the common 'Ionian' scale out of a DAD tuning. If we play a '6 fret' instead of a '6 1/2 fret' throughout a tune, then we have jumped to a '**Mixolydian**' scale. Old-time traditional dulcimers tuned to DAA can play only an '**Ionian**' scale, but when tuned to DDD, can play both an '**Ionian**' and '**Mixolydian**' scale. With the addition of the newer 6 1/2 fret, we can play both scales out of a DAD tuning. A 'scale' and a 'tuning' are two different things, and it is good to know the difference and how to get what you are after!

On the other side - MUSIC MODES

Such as the four commonly used in dulcimer playing:

Ionian scale:

do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do — (most common)

Mixolydian scale:

do-re-mi-fa-so la-ti (flatted)-do
Note the flatted seventh note as in
Old Joe Clark

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Aeolian scale:

do-re-mi (flatted)-fa-so-la-ti-do
Note the flatted third note as in
Shady Grove

Dorian scale:

do-re-mi (flatted)-fa-so-la-ti (flatted)-do
Note the flatted third and seventh note as
in *Clinch Mountain Backstep* or the
Beatles' *Eleanor Rigby*.

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