6.3 Analyzing Diatonic Modes

When analyzing to determine the scale or mode of a passage:

STEP 1: Find the tonal center. See "tonic by assertion" below.
STEP 2: Create a pitch inventory by listing all the notes low to high starting on the tonal center.
STEP 3: Determine the scale or mode in use, based on the tonal center and pitch inventory.

**Tonic by Assertion**

**Tonic by assertion** = Establishing a tonal center without the formulas of common practice period music.

**Common practice period tonality** (about 1600-1910) uses melodic formulas like Mi-Re-Do and cadential progressions like V-I, ii-V-I, etc. to establish the tonic as the tonal center. Many pitch-centric pieces written after 1900ish establish a tonal center without these melodic and harmonic formulas, making it more difficult to see the tonal center.

**Tonic by assertion** emphasizes the tonal center with one or more techniques such as:

1. Repetition: Doubling the note, repeating it, or using it as a pedal point or in a repeating pattern.
2. Position in the passage: Making the note the first and/or last note of the passage or movement.
3. Dynamic emphasis: Using a louder dynamic or accent marks.
4. Range emphasis: Making the note the highest or lowest note of the passage or movement.
5. Rhythmic emphasis: Metric accent (placing the note on downbeats); Agogic accent (using longer rhythmic values to emphasize the note).
6. Harmonic emphasis: Pairing the note with a harmony or note that is a perfect fifth above.

**Scale/Mode Analysis Example**

STEP 1: The tonal center is E. Although B is emphasized in the first two measures, E is highest, lowest, the most frequent, and the longest rhythmic value (agogic accent). Also, B is a perfect fifth above E.
STEP 2: The pitch inventory lists all the notes in the passage starting from E (without a key signature):

**Step 2: Pitch Inventory**

STEP 3: Because there are seven notes (don't count E twice), and because the accidentals fit a diatonic key signature for three sharps (F#, C#, and G#), this is a diatonic mode (see 6.2 The Diatonic Modes). When analyzing diatonic modes, find the answer using a relative OR parallel approach (NOT both!):

- **Relative approach**: 3 sharps = A major. E is the fifth scale step in A major, so this is mixolydian.
- **OR**
  - **Parallel approach**: This scale is E major with the seventh step lowered (D natural), so it is mixolydian.

**Hybrid Modes**

**Hybrid mode** = Mode formed from the lower tetrachord of one diatonic mode and the upper tetrachord of another. Most common are Lydian-Mixolydian (below) and Phrygian-Dorian (natural minor w/ b2, #6).

**Special Cases**

1. Scales and tonal centers may change from passage to passage within a single movement.
2. Sometimes a note or two may be missing from the mode. If so, comment on which mode(s) it could be if the notes were there.
3. For more than 7 or less than 7 distinct pitches, check 6.4 Additional Contemporary Scales.