

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:

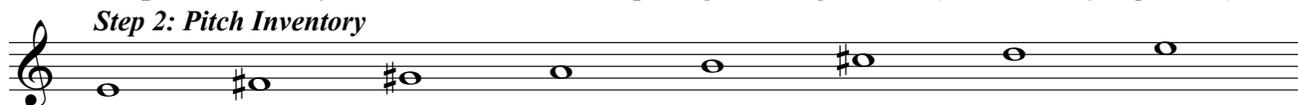
- 1. Repetition:** Doubling the note, repeating it, or using it as a pedal point or in a repeating pattern.
- 2. Position in the passage:** Making the note the first and/or last note of the passage or movement.
- 3. Dynamic emphasis:** Using a louder dynamic or accent marks.
- 4. Range emphasis:** Making 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 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!):

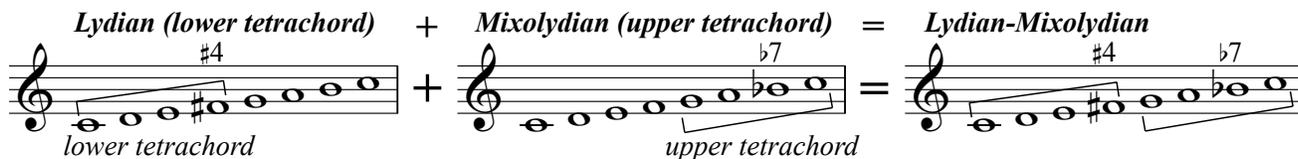
Relative approach: 3 sharps = A major. E is the *fifth* scale step in A major, so this is *mixolydian*.

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*.