

Chapter 15 More Relative minor (and more modes)

Remember, I covered relative minor a little way back in chapter 3, the pentatonic chapter? I said if you're playing in "C major" you're also playing the same notes as the "A minor scale", its *relative minor*. Well actually the relative minor scale is just the sixth mode: "Aeolian" (Also called "natural minor").

As composers were using those medieval scales "the church modes" around the 16th and 17th centuries two modes became the most popular, the *Ionian* which they called "major" because its major 3rd, and *Aeolian* which they called "minor" because its minor 3rd.

Although I think some Russian composers were still using modes, during the times of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, throughout the rest of the civilized world the "church modes" faded from the composing scene while our current Harmony and theory system evolved around these two scales: Major and minor.

From what I understand not until fairly recently in the 19th century, the church in France in search of a more "Godly" sound to contrast the "common" major and minor sounds, dredged up the old modes and began using them began using for chants during mass in the vein of how *Pope Gregory* used them back in the 6th and 7th century, you've heard of the *Gregorian chants*? Anyway since their return modes have been used by modern composers like as Debussy and Ravel to current rockers like Steve Vai and Metallica.

Like the "natural minor" (aeolian), the "dorian", "phrygian", and "locrian", are all generally considered *minor modes* because they all have a minor 3rd. Likewise the ones that feature the major third, "Ionian" (major), "lydian" and "mixolydian" are often referred to as the *major modes*.

But because of its massive use it's important to know the relative minor (aeolian) for any major key. For example if you look at a piece of music and see one sharp you may think it's in the key of "G major" right? Well it could also be in E minor. They're the same notes so any major scale and it's relative minor share a key signature.

To find the relative minor from a major key you have a little math to do. Its the sixth mode right? So its root starts on the sixth step of the Major scale. In the "G" scale you would count up: G, A, B, C, D, and then the 6th is E. *The E minor scale is the relative minor of the G major scale.*

An easier way to do this math is just count in the opposite direction, the way we did way back in the pentatonic chapter. Count down a "minor third" interval (a whole and a half step) from the

root of the major key. This also gives us the sixth. Down a "minor 3rd" from "G" is "E". So E minor is the relative minor of the "G major scale".

Keeping Note Names in Order

This is not important for playing but it helps when communicating. Like I mentioned in chapter 6, be careful to keep note names in the right order for example:

The relative minor of "B major" is what? Remember, count a minor 3rd down (3 frets). Is it "G#", or "Ab"? They're both the same note, ummm...

If you said G# you're right. For a *minor third* you need *three note names*, in this case:

B - down to A, and then A - down to G.

A third down has to be some kind of "G". That "A" or "Ab" will always be a 2nd down from the note "B". Whenever you measure an interval keep the correct letter name that corresponds to the number of the scale steps you count. Any 2nd above "E" (raised, flatted, whatever) will always be an "F". Maybe an "F#" but not "Gb".

Lets look at the example again this time from the opposite direction; we want the sixth step of the B major scale because that note is the root of Bs relative minor: Lets count up the B major scale to its sixth:

1st: B / 2nd: C# / 3rd: D# / 4th: E / 5th: F# / 6th: G# .

That 6th is "G#", any sixth above B will always be a "G" of some kind, even though its the same note as "Ab", the letter "A" is reserved for the 7th.

If you are confused that's probably because this is a confusing subject. It's really not that big of a deal though anyway. Other musicians are not going to shoot you if you say "G flat" when the note should actually be an "F sharp".

Back to Relative minor

The formula to find the relative minor works in the opposite direction also. If you are playing minor and want to know which major scale is the same scale just count up a minor 3rd. You may be asking why should I care about this? Well... here's one reason: if you've got some real cool minor licks, you can also use them over a major progression, just follow that formula.

Example: Any "E minor" lick can be used over a "G major progression. E minor is the relative minor of G.

Be careful to count in the right direction, it is very easy to get turned around.

If you want to know the relative minor count down a minor third.

If you want to know the major scale from a relative minor count up a minor 3rd

Exercise:

example; The relative minor of D major = B minor

The relative minor of F major = _____

The relative minor of Bb major= _____

The relative major of E minor = _____

The relative major of D minor = _____

The relative minor of F# major= _____

The relative major of G minor = _____