

An Introduction To Modes With Relative Minor & Relative Major

Burton Jamison – Island Guitar Studios

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The simple explanation is that there is a relationship between the Major and the Natural Minor Scales. Two different scales but both scales share the same notes. Relative Major C Ionian Mode (Ionian Mode is the “Major Scale”) shares the same notes as it's Relative Minor, the A Aeolian Mode (the “Natural Minor Scale”).

But how is this so? Remember from our Intervals Lesson that note 6 of the Major Scale is always the Relative Minor of that Major Scale. Look at the Major Scale below and you will see that the 6th note is A. For those that have not had the Interval Lesson there is an easy way to determine the Relative Minor, which is always 3 frets away.

TAB C Ionian Mode/ Major Scale:

C D E F G A B C D E F G A B C

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1E-----5-7-8-----
2B-----5-6-8-----
3G-----4-5-7-----
4D-----5-7-----
5A-----5-7-8-----
6E-----8-----
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To determine the Relative Minor of the C Major Scale Mode Ionian you will descend 3 frets toward the nut. String 6E fret 8 note C descends 1 and 1/2 steps to fret 5 note A. We now have the starting note of the A Aeolian Mode which is note 6 of the C Major Scale. Take a look at the A Aeolian Mode/ Natural Minor Scale Below. You are starting the Ionian Mode two notes below fret 8 note C. A Aeolian is the Relative Minor of C Ionian, the Relative Major. Strum an Am before you play it.

TAB A Aeolian Mode/ Natural Minor Scale:

A B C D E F G A B C D E F G A B C

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1E-----5-7-8-----
2B-----5-6-8-----
3G-----4-5-7-----
4D-----5-7-----
5A-----5-7-8-----
6E--5-7-8-----
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To determine the Relative Major or the A Aeolian Mode start on String 6E Fret 5 (and ascend towards the bridge 1 and 1/2 steps from fret 5 note A to fret 8 note C. This is the starting note of the Relative Major Ionian. You can continue the A Aeolian TAB on string 5A, which you may notice is the same as Ionian. Strum a C chord a few times before you play Ionian to allow your ear to adjust to C. The Interval is always 3 frets. 1 and 1/2 steps either direction up or down the fret board to find the Relative Minor or Relative Major.