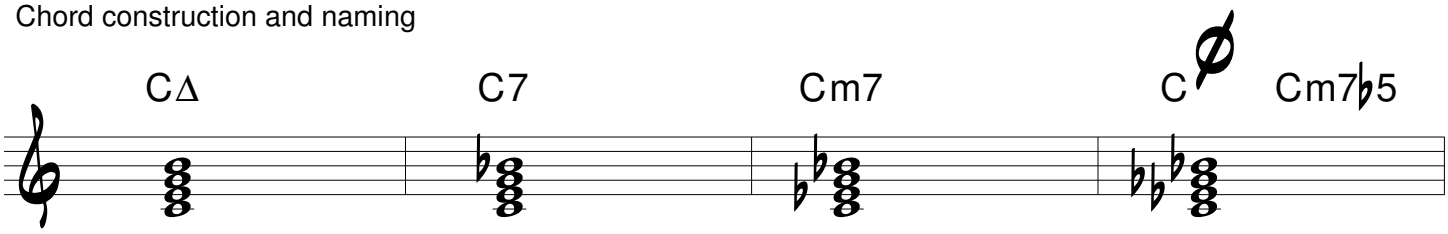
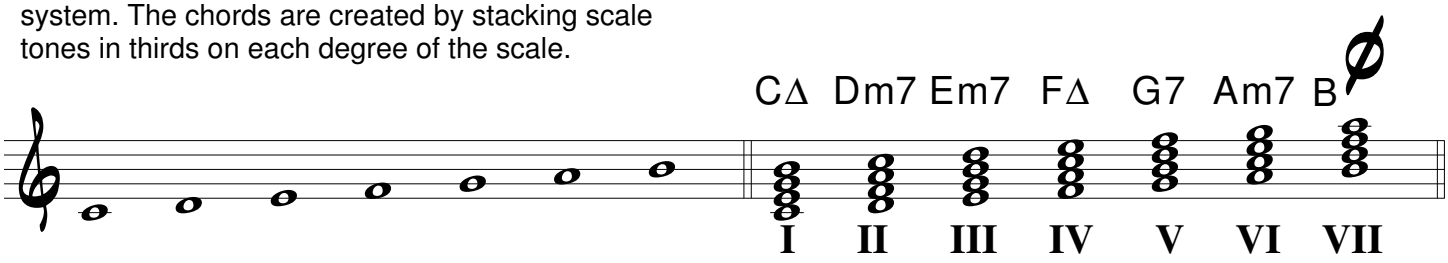
Major Scale Harmony

Chord construction and naming



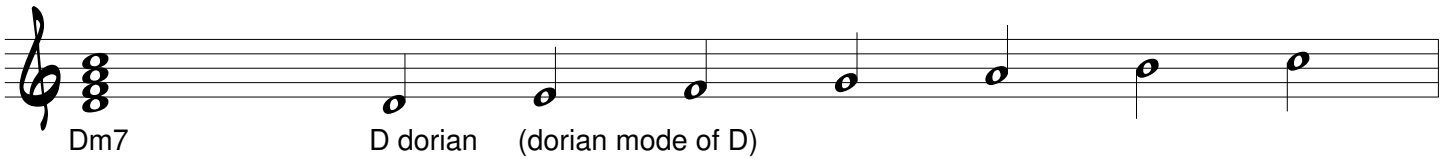
These chord types can be found in the major scale system. The chords are created by stacking scale tones in thirds on each degree of the scale.



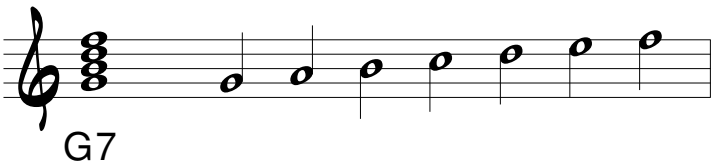
Because these chords are derived from the C major scale it follows that the C major scale can be used to construct a melody over any one of these chords.

Better still, by starting the scale on the root note of our chosen chord we get a 'mode', which is even more strongly related to the chord because it is based on its root.

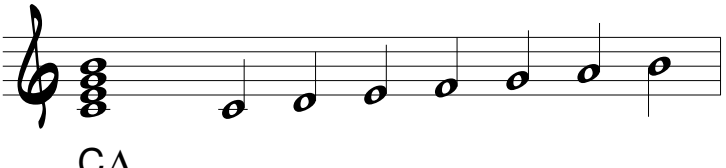
e.g., The chord of Dm7 takes 'D' DORIAN ('parent' scale is C major)



The essence of the **Modal Approach** is that for any given chord we can derive a scale (sometimes more than one) that works well over it. Here are two other common examples:



use a mode that starts on G and uses notes from C major. This is called the **mixolydian mode** (5th mode of major scale)



use the **major scale** itself (also called ionian mode)

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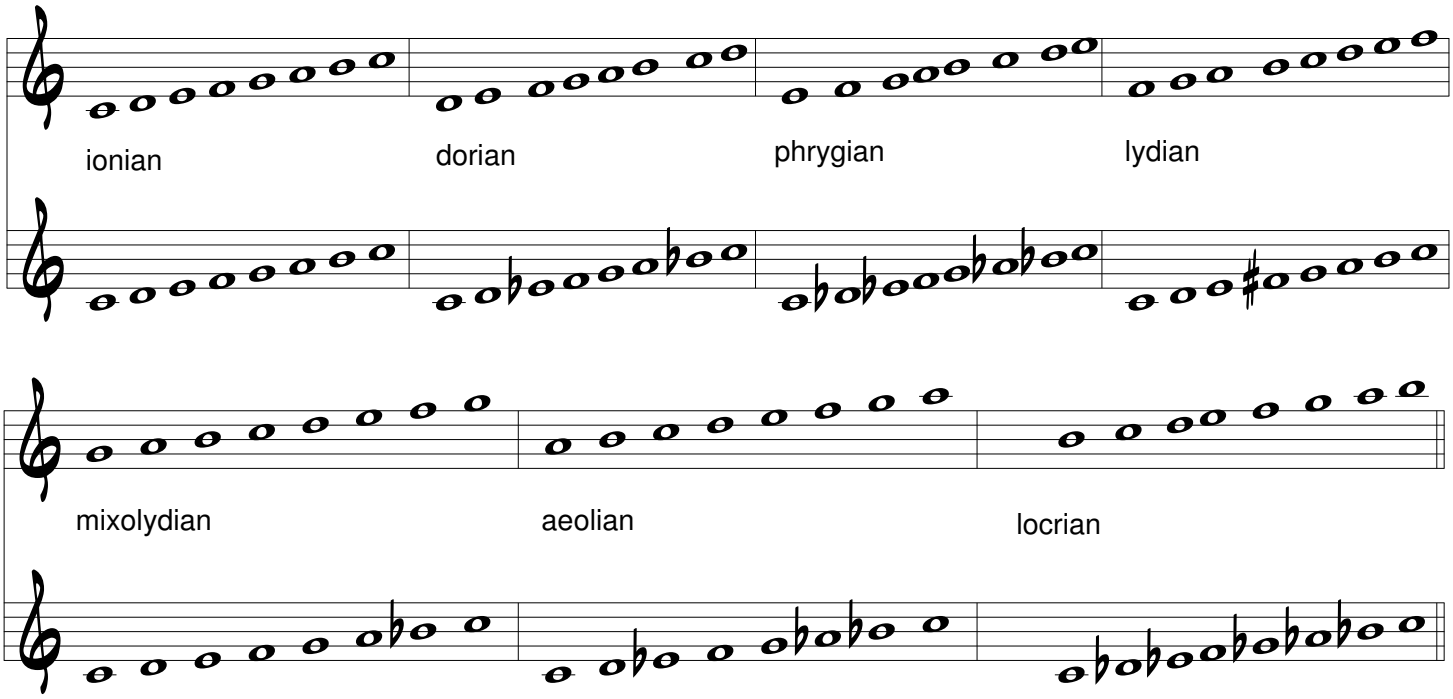
Here are each of the modes from the major scale, firstly as they occur in the key of C major and then transposed so that they **begin on the note C**. (Note that the parent scale of transposed mode will also have been transposed.)



These can then be put in order from BRIGHT to DARK

lydian	BRIGHT	urgent, frantic
ionian		placid, stable, peaceful, resolved
mixolydian		searching, transient, unresolved
dorian		brooding, pensive
aeolian		melancholy, sad, romantic
phrygian		exotic, mysterious
locrian	DARK	angry, tense, ugly

The descriptions are arbitary but an examination of the parent keys shows that there is a logic to the order.

mode	**parent key** (when the mode is started on 'C')
lydian	G major
ionian	C major
mixolydian	F major
dorian	Bb major
aeolian	Eb major
phrygian	Ab major
locrian	Db major

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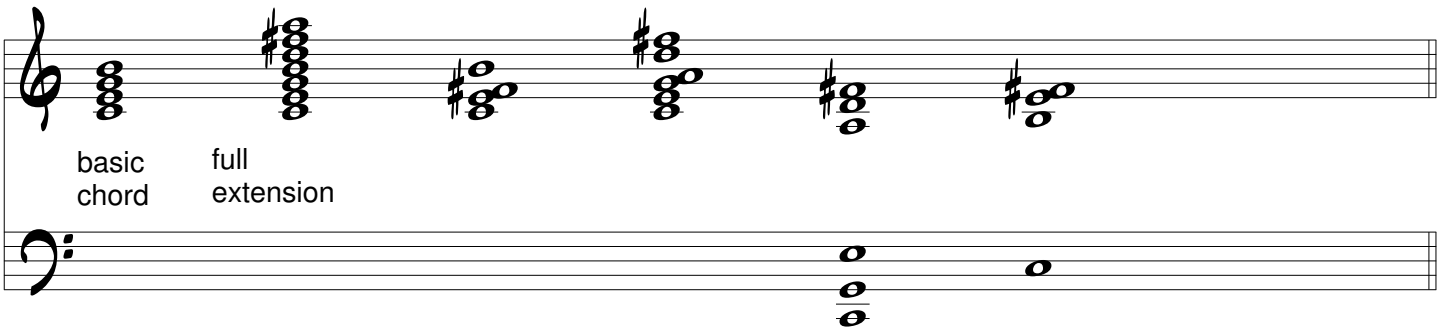
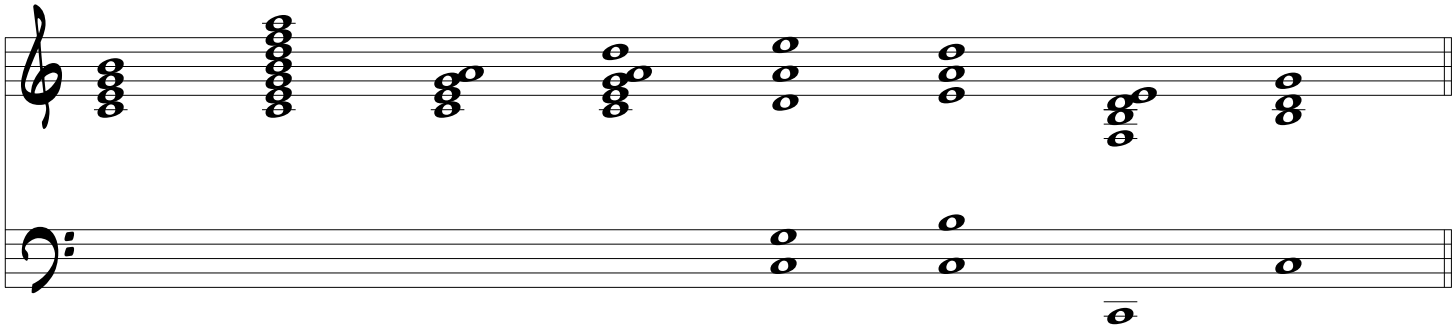
Now consider the **chords** that can be derived from each mode. Bear in mind voicings (i.e., the distribution of the notes) and the extra notes which are implied by the use of the mode. (A basic chord contains four notes while a mode contains seven; the extra three can be added to the basic chord.)

The **fully extended chord** shows all the notes from the mode stacked in thirds. This creates a pleasing sound only in the cases of LYDIAN and DORIAN modes. With the other modes tension is created by intervals within the chord. Careful voicing (or omission of certain notes) is required to incorporate the extra notes derived from the mode.

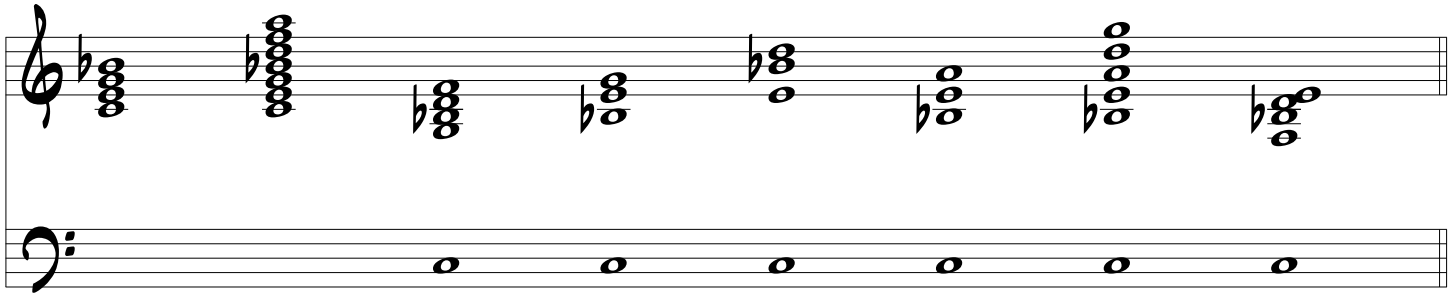
LYDIAN MODE
#4 is the feature here



IONIAN MODE
the 4th is usually avoided



MIXOLYDIAN MODE
care in accommodating the 3rd and 4th



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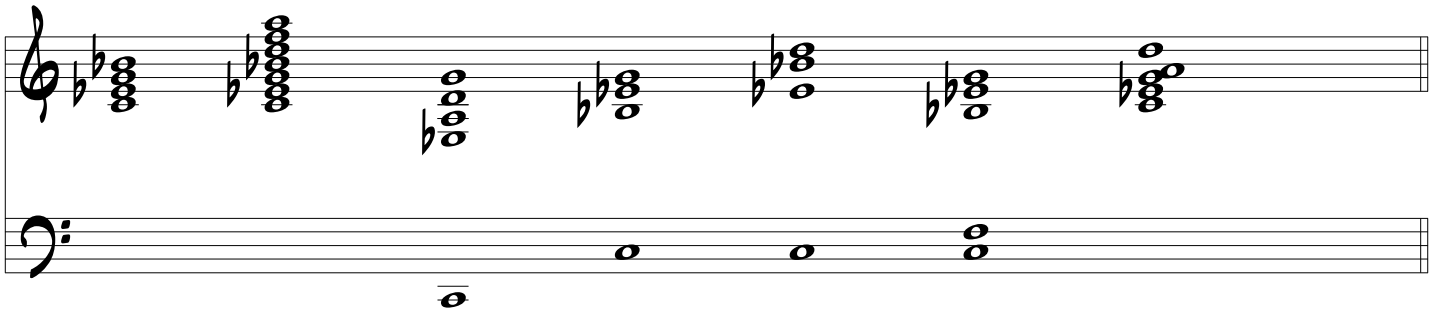
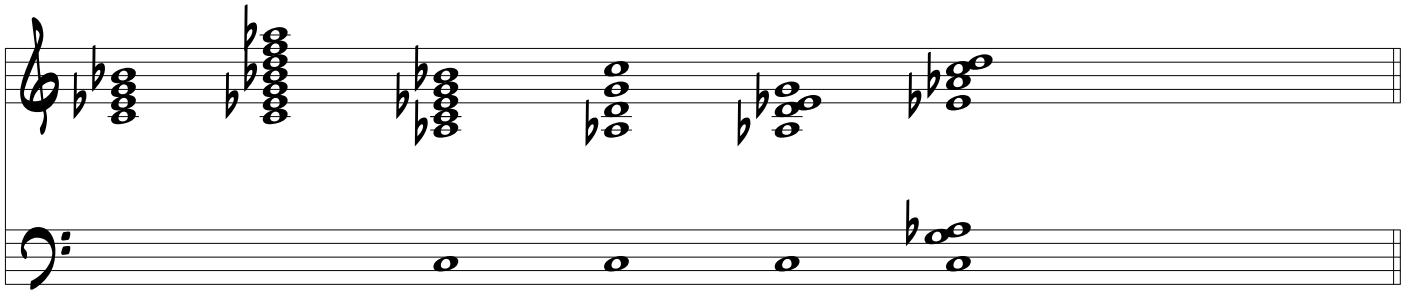
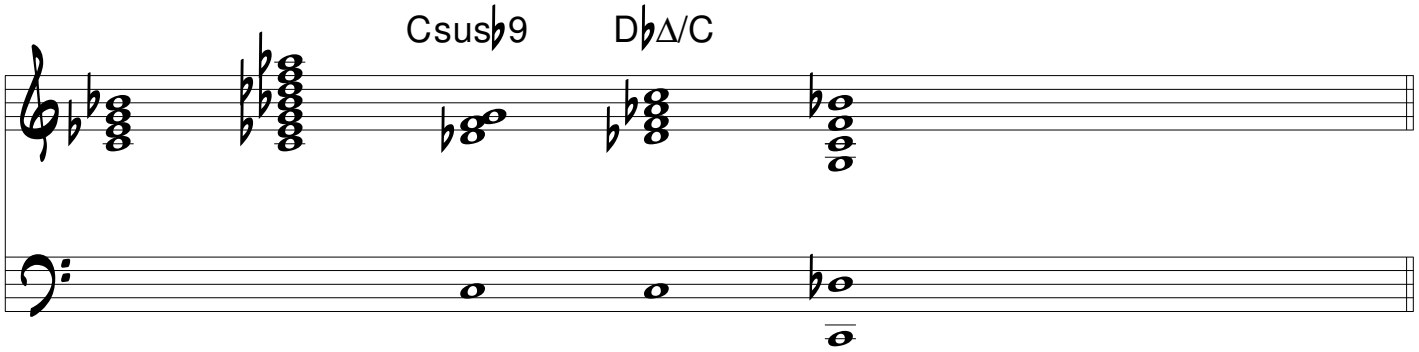
DORIAN MODE
natural 6 distinguishes this from other minor modes
chords can be voiced quite freely



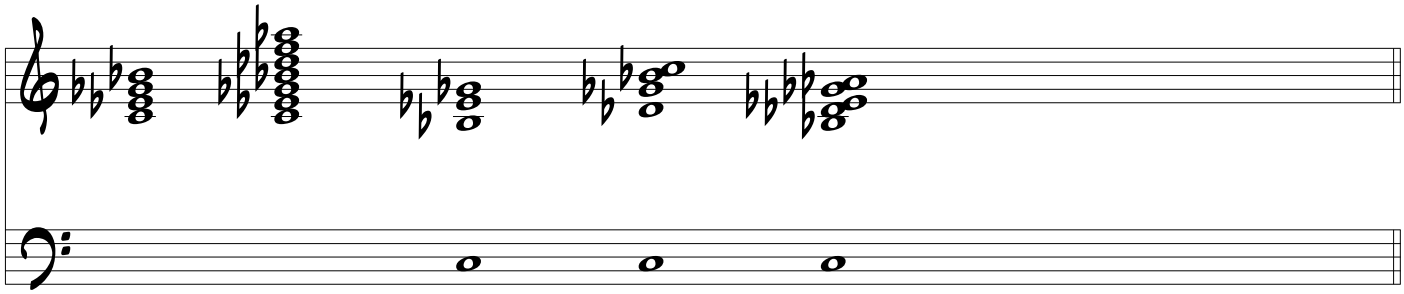
AEOLIAN MODE
b6 is the feature
can sound like a first inversion of major triad



PHRYGIAN MODE
b9 creates tension with the root



LOCRIAN MODE
usually used over IIØ (i.e., the II chord in a minor IIm7 V7 I
otherwise use with caution due to darkness/heaviness of the sound



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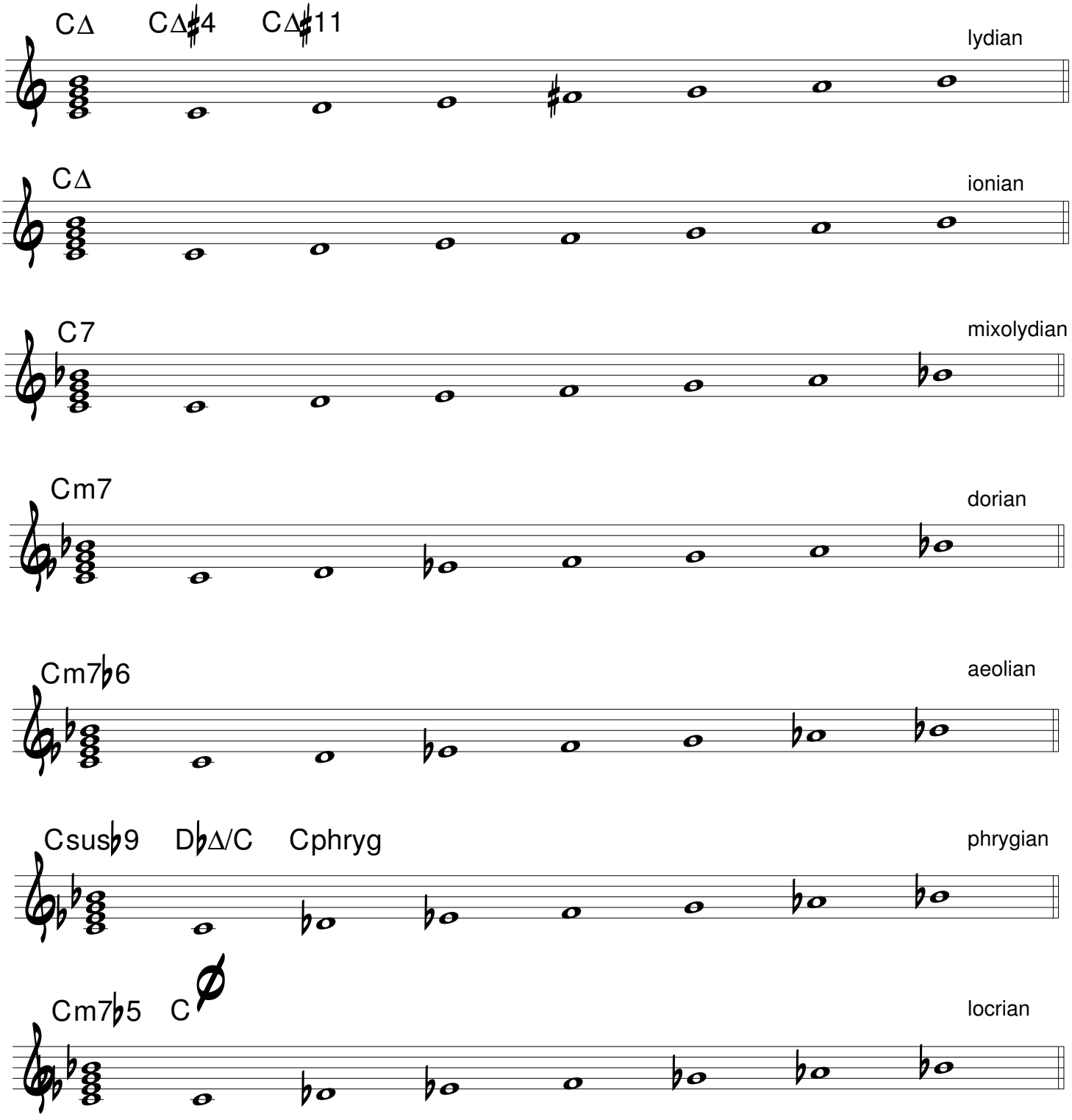
SUMMARY of basic chords and their modes from major scale



Note that the chord symbols are those which infer use of the mode shown.
They are not always intended to describe the basic four note chord notated below.

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