Modal Inversions

[To Compliment a Complement]

This document illustrates the complemental relationships which exist between modal mirror-inversions. It is a self-contained and self-completing process: Ionian inverts to Phrygian (and vice versa), Dorian inverts to Dorian (identical pitch palindrome), Lydian inverts to Locrian, and Mixolydian inverts to Aeolian.

For instance, one could be composing in F Lydian (C Major) and immediately modulate to F Locrian (Gb Major), effectively shifting key by a tritone through the pivot of a specific note (in this instance F natural). The work contained in this analytical exercise was an important link for the composer's evolving philosophies of pseudo modulation (modal modulation) and modal sfumato.[1]

This sheet was presented to 2nd year undergraduate composers over a period of at least eight consecutive years, always with the expectation that its internal relationships would spark the interest and enthusiasm of the cohort … Nothing …!

It was always 'just a little disappointing'. So …

Over the past five years, this work has also been given to PG and PhD composers, but again … Nothing …!

It has been a pleasure to teach many talented composers over the past two decades, but no-one has ever really noticed the potential analytical and compositional value of this self-contained cycle, or even 'raised an eyebrow' for the fact that Dorian Mode is a perfect pitch palindrome and therefore unique within western tonality/modality. The internal relationships highlighted on this sheet offer unusual options for pitch modulation, which can present a sense of false modulation (pseudo modulation) within key or offer 'modal' alternatives to traditional functioning harmony when modulating across keys.

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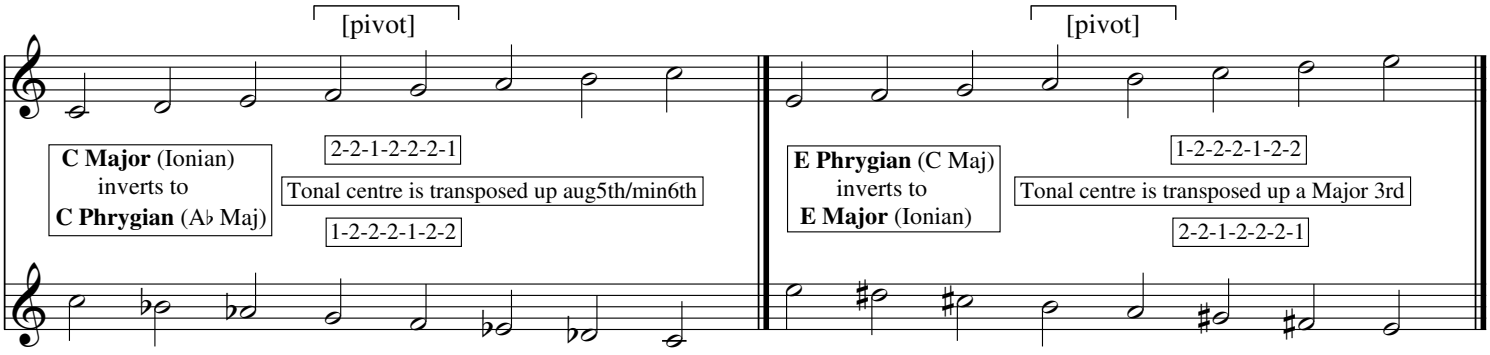
[1] Sfumato: Technique used by Leonardo Da Vinci for softening the transition between colours: Imperceptible transitions between colours and tones …

Modal Inversions

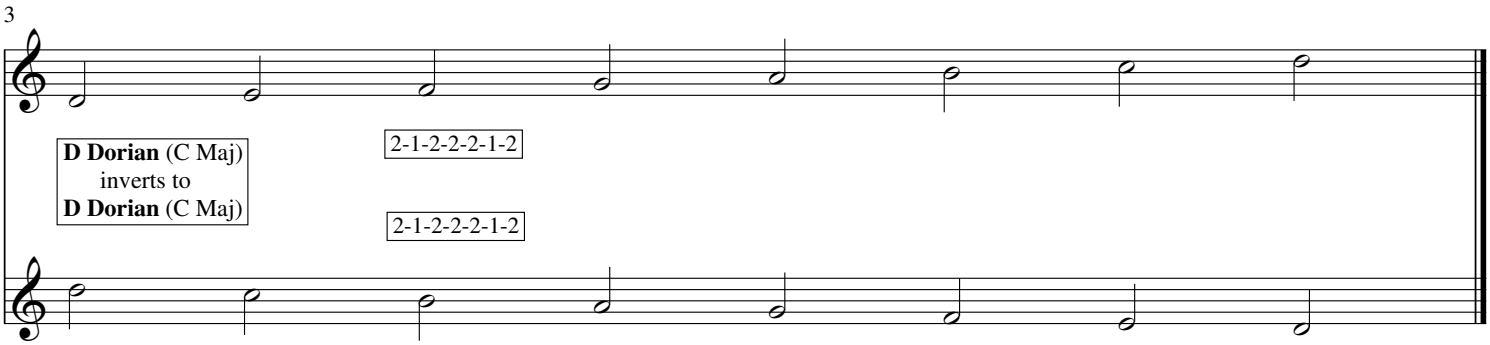
[Mirror Inversion]

Ian Percy

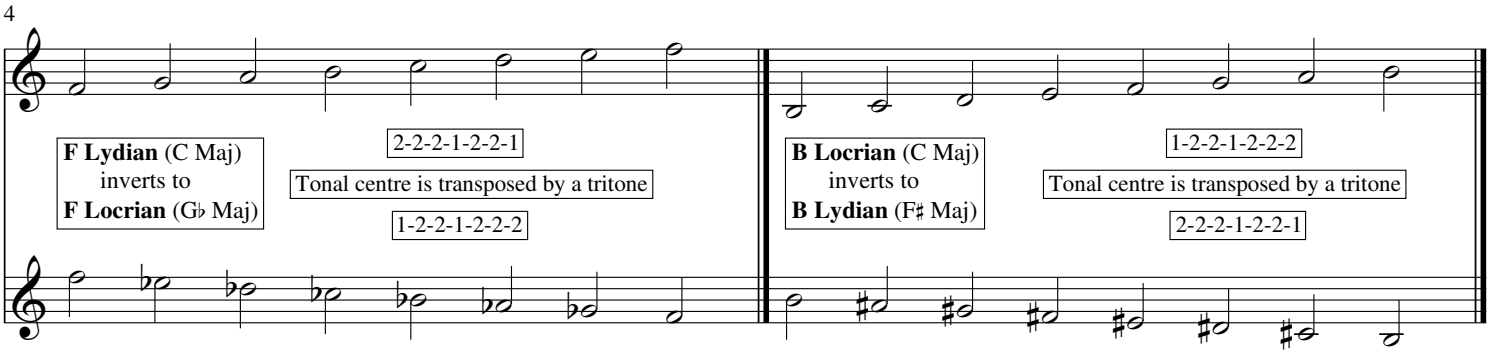
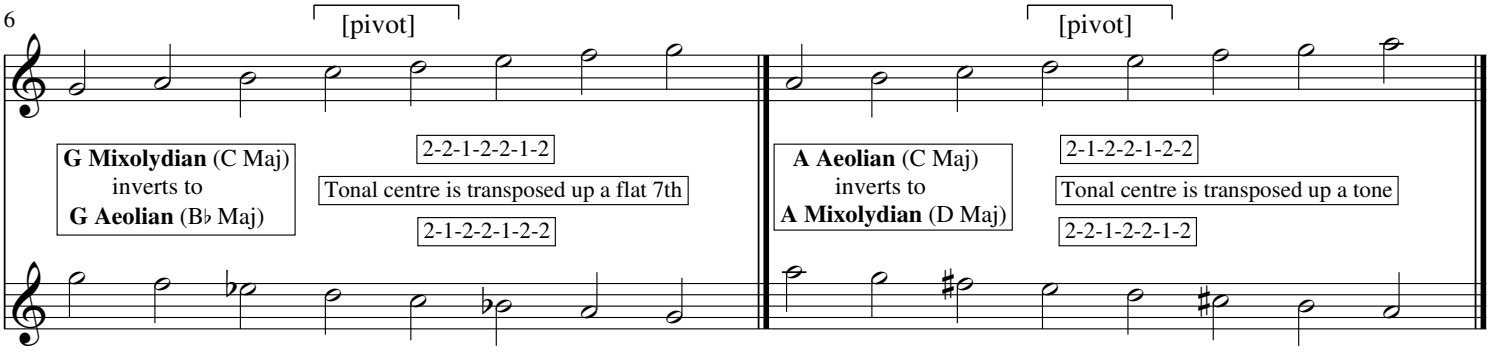
1. Major (Ionian mode) inverts to Phrygian mode (and vice-versa) with minor 6th/Major 3rd tonal transposition



2. Dorian mode inverts to itself (D Dorian - D Dorian)



3. Lydian mode inverts to Locrian mode (and vice-versa) with tritone tonal transposition



4. Mixolydian mode inverts to Aeolian mode [natural minor] (and vice-versa) with tone/flat 7th tonal transposition