

Dorian Tonality

Ted Greene — 1986, August 3

The Dorian tonality is one of the two most widely used minor key colors in American music covering the last 20 or 30 years. Its charm lies in the fact that it is the brightest and most optimistic sounding of all minor types, or to put it another way, the least gloomy without leaving the particular deep kind of warmth that minor key colors are capable of.

Let's look at the diatonic triads of Dorian for starters:

Key of Gm	i	ii	bIII	IV	v	vi°	bVII
	Gm	Am	Bb	C	Dm	E°	F

The note that distinguishes Dorian from the Natural minor (Aeolian) is the $\flat 6$; and this note shows up in a particularly important chord, the one built from the 4th degree of the scale. In Aeolian, as in most minor types, the "four chord" ends up being minor, but in Dorian it turns into a major. Compare the following:

Aeolian		iv	iv	now in Dorian		IV	IV	

As you can see, both colors are beautiful; it's just that Dorian is brighter.

Please try the following now:

i	i	IV	IV	i	i	IV	IV

- Try this phrase substituting iv for IV and compare the effect or mood difference.
- Also transpose this phrase to the keys of Em and C#m (you will have to switch strings on the last chord in C#m).

Here is the same phrase but now on the warmer next lower set(s) of strings, and in the very warm key of Bbm Dorian (in talking about tonality types it is sometimes desirable to refer to them specifically as in “Bb Dorian” or “Bbm Dorian” [both of which mean the same thing] instead of just “key of Bbm”...you’ll get a sense for all this as you get more involved. Anyway, here’s that phrase):

Key of Bbm

	Bbm	Bbm	Eb	Eb	Bbm	Bbm	Eb	Eb
	6	10	8	8	6	3	8	3
	i	i	IV	IV	i	i	IV	IV

If you haven’t already done it, please compare the mood difference resulting from the use of iv in place of IV in your transposed phrases (keys of Em, C#m and Gm).

- Make sure you can play this phrase non-stop through the four assigned keys.

Now for one last phrase in Dorian using the i and the IV:

Key of Dm

	Dm	Dm	G	G(7)	Dm	Dm	G	G
	10	13	15	13	14	10	12	12
			3 2 2					

As usual, compare the darker mood created by using the iv in place of IV throughout this phrase.

Now transpose this phrase to the keys of Bm, G#m and Fm, and then play the phrase non-stop through all four keys. We cannot move forward until you are able to do this, so be patient and do the work. You will not regret it.

JORIAN TONALITY

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Let's look at the DIATONIC triads of Dorian for starters:

Key of Gm	i	ii	III	IV	v	VI	VII
	Gm	Am	B ^b	C	Dm	E ^o	F

The note that distinguishes DORIAN from the NATURAL MINOR (AEOLIAN) is the 4th; and this note shows up in a particularly important chord, the one built from the 4th degree of the scale. In AEOLIAN as in most minor types the "four chord" ends up being minor but in DORIAN it turns into a MAJOR..... compare the following:

NEOLIAN: *Now in DORIAN:*

As you can see, both colors are beautiful, it's just that Dorian is brighter.

Please try the following now:

* Try this phrase substituting IV for IV and compare the effect or mood difference.
* Also transpose this phrase to the keys of Em and C#m (you will have to switch strings on the last chord in C#m).

Here is the same phrase but now on the warmer next lower set(s) of strings and in the very warm key of Bbm DORIAN (in talking about tonality types it is sometimes desirable to refer to them specifically as in "Bbm DORIAN" or "Bbm DORIAN" [both of which mean the same thing] instead of just "Key of Bbm"..... you'll get a sense for all this as you get more involved. Anyway, here's that phrase):

Key of Bbm

If you haven't already done it, please compare the mood difference resulting from the use of IV in place of IV in your transposed phrases (Keys of Em, C#m and Gm).

* Make sure you can play this phrase non-stop through the 4 assigned keys.

Now for one last phrase in Dorian using the i and the IV:

Key of Dm

As usual compare the darker mood created by using the iv in place of IV throughout this phrase.

* Now transpose this phrase to the keys of Bm, G#m and Fm. And then play the phrase non-stop through all 4 keys. We cannot move forward until you are able to do this so be patient and do the work. You will not regret it.