

LCC for Guitar – Construction of the Lydian Scale

The Lydian Chromatic Concept is based in the idea of Pythagoras taking strings and stretching them and finding ratios that create intervals. He found out that the strongest interval was the interval of the fifth. By stacking fifths, he generated a series of 12 fifths, which formed the early basis of a lot of harmony from a time period of the Roman era, before the Roman era in his time, up until about 1100. Stacking fifths became the strongest way to build chords, and a lot of the early Greek modes are based on the idea of fifths being the predominant interval when you stack chords. So Lydian harmony is based on stacking fifths, and you stack 12 fifths and what you get is a series of notes that produces a sharpened 11th out of the scale. That sharpened 11th is also the sharpened 4, which is in the Lydian mode. So the Lydian mode has 1, 2, 3, sharpened 4, 5, 6, 7, and 1. And that's the basis that George Russell has used for creating the Lydian Chromatic Concept.

When you stack notes out of the Lydian scale, you start with the first note (the 1) and then you add a note on top of it from the scale. The most common way to create harmony is to stack the third note of the scale on top of the first note, which is called tertiary harmony. (That's tertiary, T-E-R-T-I-A-R-Y.) So tertiary harmony is built by taking a scale and stacking every other note in the scale. You're skipping one note every time. So you get a scale with stacks of notes, which are called intervals. So taking the scale, you stack the 1 and the 3 and then, if you move to the next note of the scale, you're on the second note of the scale, so you'd be stacking a 2, you'd skip the 3, and then you would add the 4 on top. In this case, the 4 would be a sharp 4. So your interval stack for the first note would be 1 and 3, and your interval stack for the second note would be 2 and sharp 4. The third note, the stack would be 3 and 5, and the fourth note would be a sharp 4 and 6. Stacking the intervals from the fifth note gives you a 5 and a 7, and stacking the notes from the 7 would be giving you a 7 and a 2. That's tertiary harmony in thirds.

The next note above the first harmonic note that you would stack – for example, if you stack 1 and 3, if you were to skip one more note, instead of going to the 4, you'd go to the 5, so you go 1, 3, and 5. So if your scale goes, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, every other note would be 1, 3, 5, and then 7. So in a scale, it ascends and descends one note at a time, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and the chords or intervals are based on stacking every other note out of the scale. So it would be 1, skip 2, 3, skip 4, 5, skip 6, 7. So that would be your chord based on the first note of the scale, the 1 (which is also called the tonic or the DO). So the 1 chord is going to have the notes 1, 3, and 5 in it and if you use a four-note chord, it's going to be 1, 3, 5, and 7. (See example No. 3.4.)

So we have a chord based on 1, 3, and 5 based on the tonic, the 1, the DO; 1, 3, and 5. That's going to be our tonic chord in any scale. Using a Lydian mode, the notes are going to be 1, 3, and 5. The second note of the Lydian scale is note No. 2, so the chord is going to be stacked with 2, sharp 4, and 6. The third chord is going to be starting on 3 and it's going to be 3, 5, and 7. And your 4 chord, which is a sharp 4, is going to be sharp 4, 6, and 1, and then note 5 is going to be – your 5 chord is going to be 5, 7, and 2 (5, 7, and 2). Your 6 chord is going to be starting on the note 6 and is going to give you 6, 1, and 3,

and your 7 chord is going to start on the note 7 and give you 7, 2, and sharp 4. So those are the three notes to make triads using the Lydian scale. So you have a 1 chord, a 2 chord, a 3 chord, and we call it a 4 chord but it's really a sharp 4 chord, a 5 chord, a 6 chord, a 7 chord, and back to your 1 chord. So that forms the basis of the harmonic structure of chords derived out of the Lydian scale.

Now, if you were to take the triads and add one more note to the triad, making it a four-note chord, your first chord would be the tonic chord, the 1, 3, 5, and 7, which would give you a major 7th chord. The second chord would give you a 2, sharp 4, 6, and then 1. So that would give you a dominant 7th chord starting on the second note of the scale. So in the Lydian mode, your 1 chord is a major 7 and your 2 chord is a dominant 7. Okay? So that is a major difference between the major scale and Lydian scales, that your 2 chord in the Lydian mode is a dominant 7, whereas your 2 chord in a major key is a minor 7.

So everything changes when you think of things in the Lydian way. If you're playing against a series of dominant 7th chords, your parent major scale is going to be the 1, right? So if you're playing off of a G7th chord, a whole step – you know that G is going to be an F – so you're going to be playing an F Lydian note over a G7. Or, if you're playing a blues, you play an A7th chord, you're going to be playing – a whole step below that would be a G Lydian mode or G Lydian scale. You go to your next chord in the blues, a D7 or a D9, you're going to drop down a whole step and play a C Lydian mode. And then for your third chord in the blues, going to be an E7. You're going to drop down a whole step and you're going to be playing a D Lydian mode. So in a blues sense, A7, D7, E7 chords, you'd play a G Lydian, a C Lydian, and a D Lydian mode.

Now, the next step above that would be to harmonize the entire scale utilizing four-note chords. As you will see, this way of looking at things changes the perspective on harmony quite a bit, and then we can add other notes to the Lydian scale or modify notes on the Lydian scale to take the harmony further away from a tonal center to an outbound tonal center. This is how all the crazy jazz chords are explained that have been used in the past 50 years. They're moving away from tonality by modifying a tonal scale. The Lydian Chromatic Concept uses the Lydian mode or the Lydian scale as its source, so everything is based on the Lydian scale rather than the major scale. So you're looking at things from a different angle, different perspective. Everything's in the Lydian universe rather than the major universe. The major scale becomes a mode of the Lydian scale. It becomes the Ionian mode, and that's originally how it was thought of back in the days of Pythagoras, was that you had the Lydian mode was your tonic mode, was your main mode was the Lydian mode because you get that sharpened 4th by a series of sequentially stacked fifths that give you fifths stacked.

If you start on the note C, a fifth above that's going to be G, a fifth above G is going to be D, right? So you go C, G, a fifth above G is going to be D, a fifth above D is going to be A, a fifth above A is going to be E, a fifth above E is going to be B, and then a fifth above B is going to be F sharp. There it is. Boom, F sharp. A fifth above F sharp is going to be C sharp, a fifth above C sharp is going to be G sharp, and then so forth and so on. You keep going, a fifth above G sharp is going to be D sharp, a fifth above D sharp is going to

be A sharp (or B flat), a fifth above B flat is going to be what? B flat, D, F. A fifth above F is going to be C, so you're back to C again. So you have all 12 chromatic notes contained within the stack of fifths, and that chord is – it's a 12-note chord.

Many people have different names for it. I like to call it the omni chord. It's a stack of fifths. The stack is going to be C, G, D, A, E, B, F sharp, C sharp, G sharp, D sharp, B flat, F, C. So that's going to be the omni chord. George Russell called it a chord mode and he has modified the omni chord to include harmonies that are reflective of the latter part of the 20th Century. This is where everybody gets tripped up with the Lydian Chromatic Concept because the Pythagorean omni chord concept and the Lydian Chromatic Concept start off being identical, but George Russell takes the fifth harmonically correct note and skips the 7th – he takes the 7th and he skips it, and then he starts over again because he wants to include ideas and harmonies that are based on Western 20th Century music, and you really can't do that with the omni chord because it's such a consonant stack that it doesn't allow for any alterations. So George Russell's concept takes that consonant stack and allows for alterations to occur, and that is the basis of the Lydian Chromatic Concept. This is how it differs from the Pythagorean omni chord concept.