CHAPTER 7

While the vast majority of pop & rock songs are in either major or minor keys or have a blues structure, there are two other tonalities that should be noted — mixolydian and dorian. This chapter will discuss mixolydian, a close cousin of the major key since it has a natural 3rd degree in the scale (like the major triad and major scale). Chapter Eight will then cover dorian, a variation of the minor sound since it has a flatted 3rd (like the minor triad and scales).

Essential Concepts / Skills covered in chapter 7

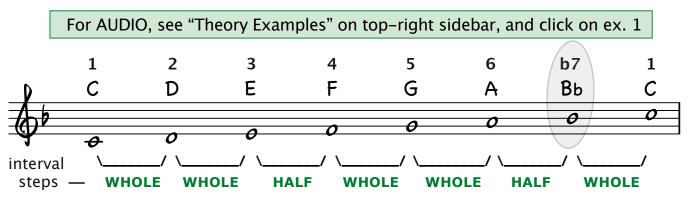
- Mixolydian scale, diatonic triads and seventh chords in mixolydian tonality
- Common chord progressions in mixolydian pop songs using diatonic triads and V major triad
- Signature mixolydian riffs
- Drones and drone riffs in mixolydian
- Songwriting devices for creating focal points
- Ear training I, IV, Vm, bVII, and V major chord in mixolydian tonality



The Mixolydian Scale

Mixolydian tonality is based on the mixolydian scale, shown below

C MIXOLYDIAN SCALE (□)) ex.1



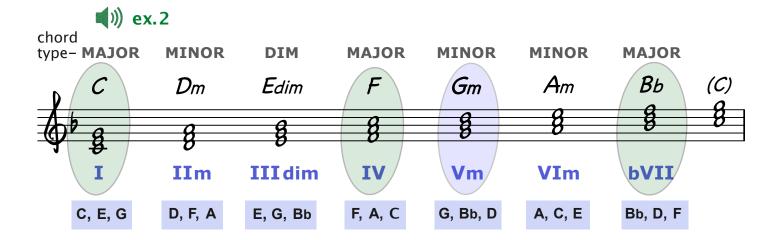
As mentioned, the natural 3rd degree gives this scale an overall major sound, but one note is altered, with the 7th degree flatted. You will recall from Chapter Four that the combination of the natural 3 and flat 7 (a tritone interval) was prominent in blues, being a part of the often-used dominant 7th chords. Mixolydian can sound similar to blues and in fact, the mixolydian scale is yet another option for blues improvisors. But true mixolydian lacks the clashing of the b3 in the melody with the natural 3 in the chords — an important signature of the blues sound. Mixolydian may remind some listeners of Celtic folksong, as on The Beatles' "Norwegian Wood." It can also sound a bit exotic or hypnotic, as on rock classics like Steve Miller's "Wild Mountain Honey," or The Beatles' "Tomorrow Never Knows."

WRITTEN EXERCISE

Use **Exercise 7.1** (see "Textbook Contents"/ "Volume 1"/ "Written Exercises") to practice spelling some common mixolydian scales.

Diatonic Triads

As with the major key and minor key triads discussed in Chapters Two and Three, chords can also be built on each step of the mixolydian scale, as shown below:

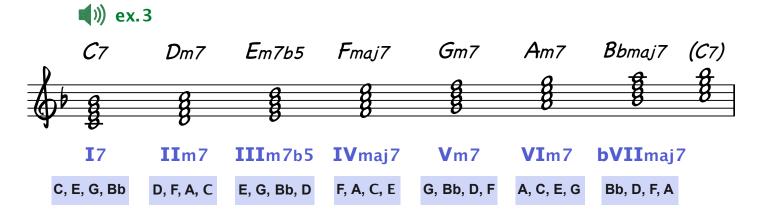


Comparing to the major key, you will note that the I and IV are still major chords, but the V is now minor. This Vm chord is used in a fair amount of songs, but the three most common chords in mixolydian are the I, IV, and bVII. Shown below is the chart of diatonic triads for all the mixolydian keys.

(key)	<u>DIATONIC TRIADS - MIXOLYDIAN TONALITY</u>					
I	IIm	IIIdim	IV	Vm	VIm	bVII
А	Bm	C#dim	D	Em	F#m	G
Bb	Cm	Ddim	Eb	Fm	Gm	Ab
В	C#m	D#dim	Е	F#m	G#m	Α
С	Dm	Edim	F	Gm	Am	Bb
Db	Ebm	Fdim	Gb	Abm	Bbm	Cb
D	Em	F#dim	G	Am	Bm	С
Eb	Fm	Gdim	Ab	Bbm	Cm	Db
E	F#m	G#dim	Α	Bm	C#m	D
F	Gm	Adim	Bb	Cm	Dm	Eb
F#	G#m	A#dim	В	C#m	D#m	E
G	Am	Bdim	С	Dm	Em	F
Ab	Bbm	Cdim	Db	Ebm	Fm	Gb

Diatonic 7th Chords

Just as we did in Chapters Five and Six with the major and minor scales, we can also generate a set of 4-note diatonic 7th chords from the mixolydian scale.



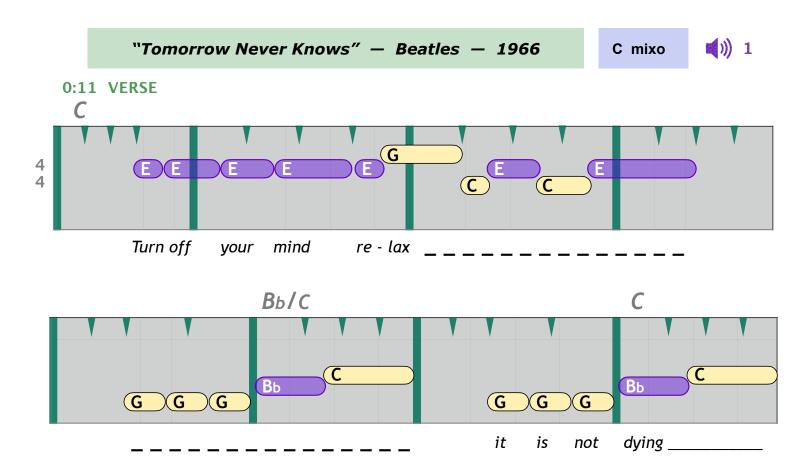
A separate chord chart for the diatonic 7ths is probably not necessary, for at this point you can see how the previous triad chart could be modified to change all the columns into 7ths.

Common Chord Progressions

ONE CHORD or RIFF

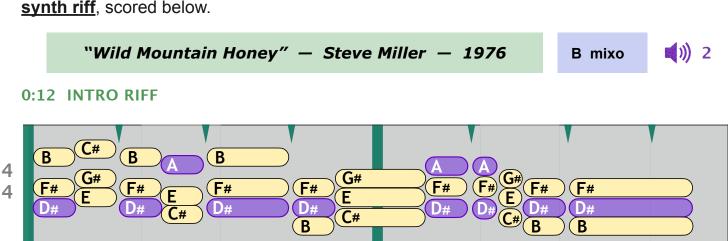
We have seen in previous chapters that one-chord songs (no chord changes, sometimes based on a repeating riff) can be found in major, minor, and blues tonalities. These types of songs are also found in mixolydian, as on the Beatles classic "Tomorrow Never Knows," mentioned earlier. The characteristic notes of the mixolydian scale — natural3 and b7 — are prominently heard in the song's vocal melody, and are highlighted below (E and Bb notes in the key of C mixo).

For AUDIO, see the "Song Examples" playlist in the right sidebar, and click on track 1 song title.



This could be called a two-chord song, since the bVII chord is suggested briefly (Bb). However, the tonic bass drone (C) holds throughout the entire song, and the overall effect is more like one continuous chord, creating the hypnotic mood.

The next song from Steve Miller has the same dreamy, trance-like flavor. This time the natural 3 and b7 (D and A notes in the key of B mixo) are prominent in the **triple-stop synth riff**, scored below.

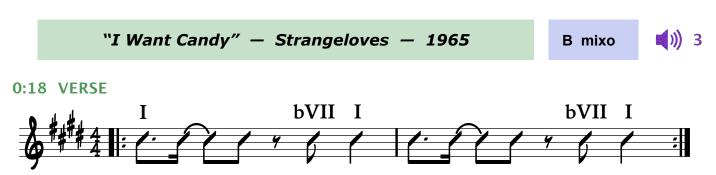


Additional ONE-CHORD SONGS (mixolydian tonality)

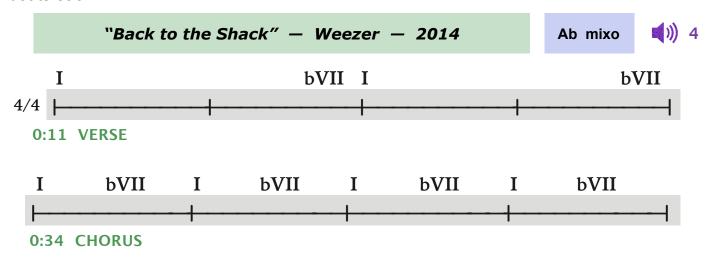
1966	Land of 1,000 Dances	Wilson Pickett	D mixo
1974	Hollywood Swinging	Kool & The Gang	E mixo
1976	Tear the Roof Off the Sucker	Parliament	E mixo
1983	Electric Avenue	Eddy Grant	A mixo
1994	Loser	Beck	D mixo
1998	Feel So Good	Mase	Eb mixo

TWO CHORD VAMP I - bVII

Quite a few mixolydian songs feature a two chord <u>I - bVII vamp</u>, as heard on "I Want Candy" from the Strangeloves. The famous drum beat in this song is based on a traditional Afro-Cuban rhythmic pattern (scored below) that was used extensively by early blues-rocker Bo Diddley in the 50s and 60s, and eventually became known as the "Bo Diddley Beat." This rhythm is heard on other rock classics from the era like "Willie and the Hand Jive," and "Not Fade Away," and in later years on the 1988 hit "Desire" by U2. The Strangeloves' vocal melody starts on the characteristic natural 3rd of mixolydian, and this note is heard prominently throughout the verse.

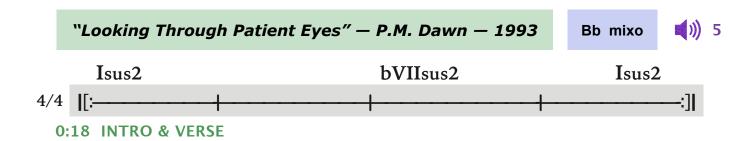


"Back to the Shack" is a more recent example of the I - bVII vamp that also has a prominent natural 3rd in the melody. During the verse, the bVII only occurs on beat four, every other measure. In the chorus, the I and bVII are distributed evenly, alternating two beats each.



The next example has a slightly different flavor, with the I and bVII both occurring as sus2 chords. START LISTENING AT **0:18**

To navigate within an audio track, first click on the song title, then slide the progress bar forward to the desired starting point.

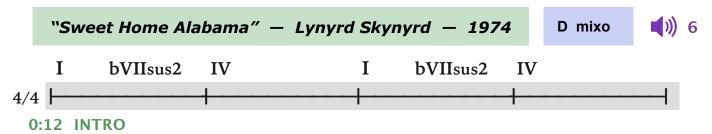


Additional songs with TWO-CHORD VAMP - I, bVII

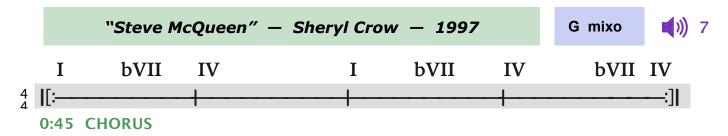
1983	Wanna Be Startin' Something	Michael Jackson	E mixo
2005	Black Tambourine	Beck	Eb mixo
2013	Learnalilgivinanlovin	Gotye	C mixo

I – bVII – IV

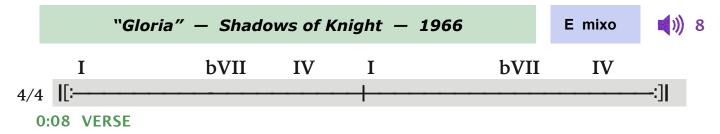
The most common mixolydian progression is the sequence <u>I - bVII - IV</u>, heard below on the 1974 classic "Sweet Home Alabama." In this version of the sequence, the bass notes are highest on the I chord, then descend to bVII and IV. Also note the sus2 sound on the bVII chord. START LISTENING AT **0:12**



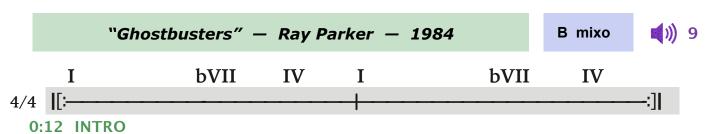
On "Steve McQueen" the bass is highest on the IV chord. START LISTENING AT 0:45



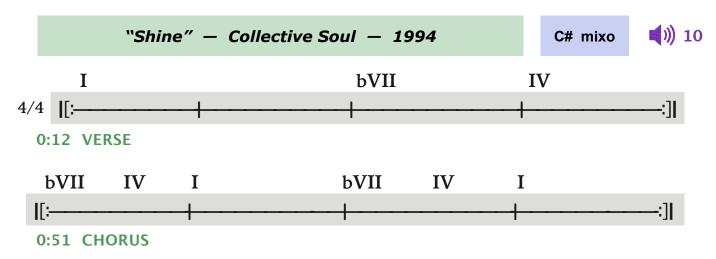
Here's another example of bass highest on the IV chord.



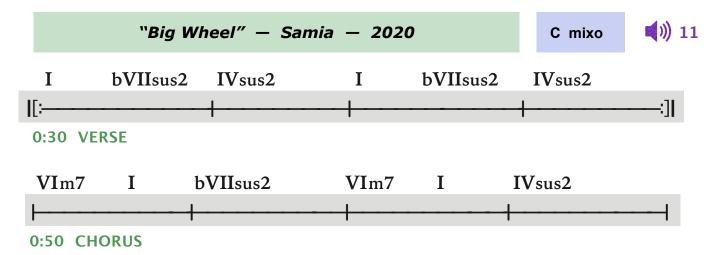
The following 1984 movie theme has the exact same progression as "Gloria," but now the bVII chord has the highest bass:



The verse of this Collective Soul hit features the highest bass note on IV, but the chorus shifts the highest bass to the bVII chord.



Samia's 2020 song "Big Wheel" features a slightly different version of the I - bVII - IV sequence, with sus2 structures on both the bVII and the IV. You will note that the progression changes somewhat during the chorus. START LISTENING AT **0:30**



WRITTEN EXERCISE

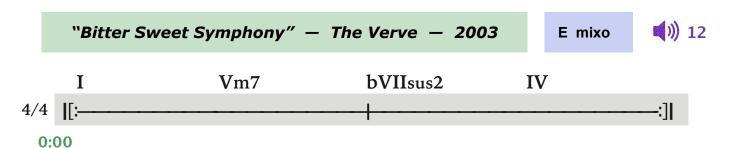
Try **Exercise 7.2** (main menu/"Exercises" tab/"Written Exercises") to get more practice identifying the I – bVII – IV sequence in different keys.

Additional songs with I-bVII-IV PROGRESSION

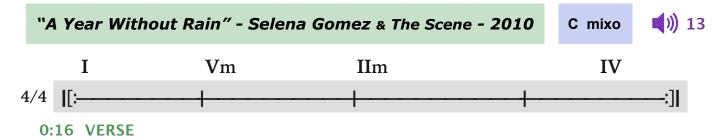
1965	The Last Time	Rolling Stones	E mixo
1968	Time Has Come Today	Chambers Brothers	D mixo
1974	Takin' Care of Business	Bachman Turner Overdrive	C mixo
1978	Werewolves of London	Warren Zevon	D mixo
1981	Centerfold	J. Geils Band	G mixo
1988	Nothin' But a Good Time	Poison	Ab mixo
1998	Wishing I Was There	Natalie Imbruglia	F mixo
2008	All Summer Long	Kid Rock	D mixo
2011	Born This Way	Lady Gaga	F# mixo
2017	Gold	Beaches	E mixo

Vm(7)

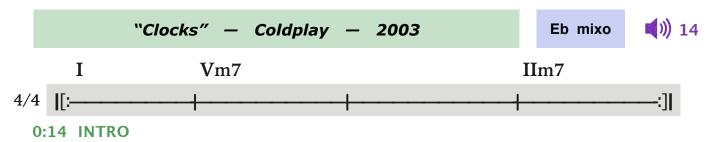
You will recall that in mixolydian the V chord should either be a minor triad or a minor 7th. The following 2003 song from The Verve features the Vm7 as part of a four-chord sequence that repeats throughout the entire song. Once again, there is a sus2 sound on the bVII chord. Six years later, Tim McGraw used this exact same progression on his hit "Good Girls."



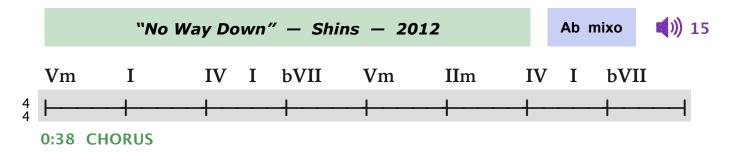
The next song features a variation of the previous progression, with the <u>IIm</u> chord substituting for the bVII:



This 2003 hit from Coldplay also contains the Vm7 and IIm7.

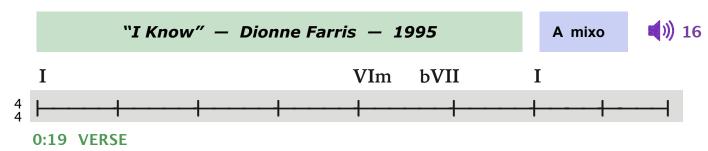


Here's the Vm in a slightly different sequence. START LISTENING AT 0:38

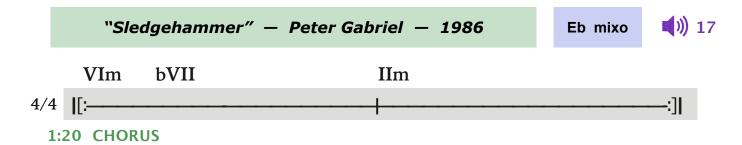


OTHER MIXOLYDIAN

This mixolydian song features a VIm chord preceding the bVII.



The chorus of Peter Gabriel's "Sledgehammer" also has the VIm - bVII combo. START LISTENING AT **1:20**



Additional songs in MIXOLYDIAN TONALITY

1983	All Night Long	Lionel Richie	Ab mixo
1992	I'm Too Sexy	Right Said Fred	E mixo
2001	Beautiful Day	U2	A mixo
2003	Let Forever Be	Chemical Brothers	Eb mixo

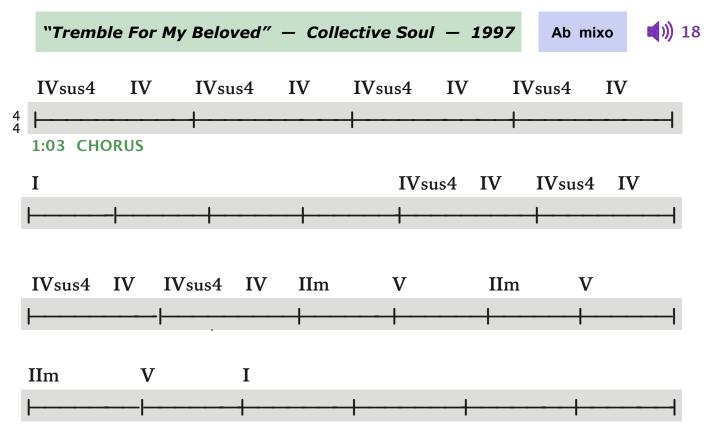
EAR TRAINING EXERCISES

To practice hearing and identifying chord progressions in mixolydian tonality, try **Exercises 7.1e - 7.5e** (see "Textbook Contents"/ "Volume 1"/ "Ear Training Exercises").

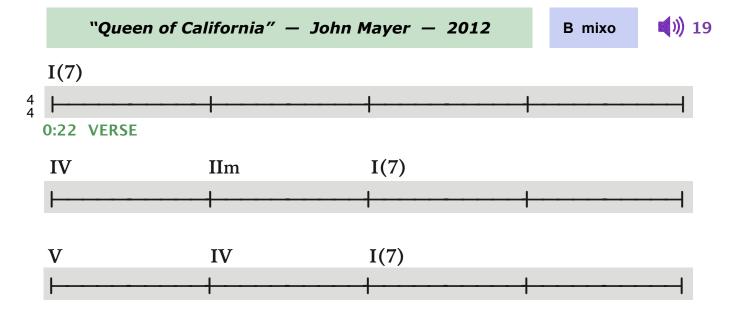
MIXOLYDIAN with V (major) CHORD

You will recall our discussion in the previous chapter about minor keys and the difference in tension between the Vm chord (less tension) and the V major chord (more tension). Likewise with mixolydian, the Vm chord is often altered to a <u>V major</u>, restoring the lost tension.

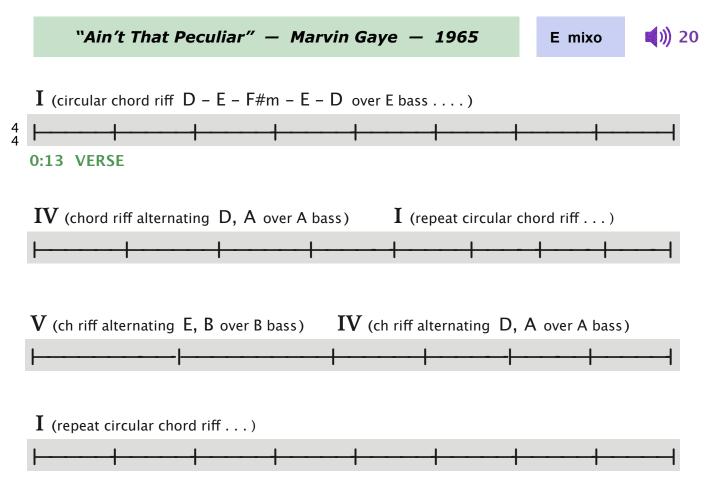
On the following song by Collective Soul, the mixolydian flavor is firmly established in the spacey guitar intro, and continued in the verse with a prominent b7 in the bass line during the I chord. You will note the use of the dominant V major chord on the third and fourth lines. START LISTENING AT **1:03**



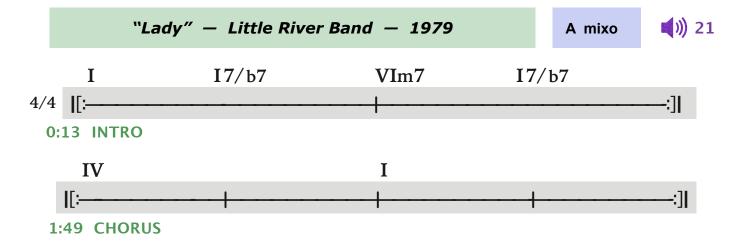
Here's a mixolydian example using a slight variation of the **12-bar blues form**.

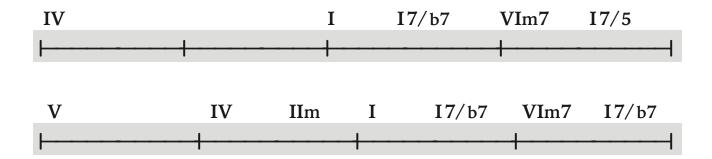


The following Marvin Gaye classic also uses the 12-bar blues form with some variation. The I, IV, and V chords all feature rhythmic chord riffs and the form is **doubled to 24 bars** with a six-bar extension.



This 1979 hit by the Little River Band features a circular mixolydian progression on the intro that extends into the verse. The last line of the chorus contains the V major chord.



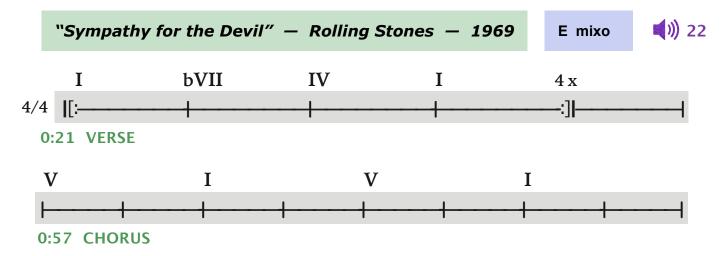


Additional songs in MIXOLYDIAN with V (major) CHORD

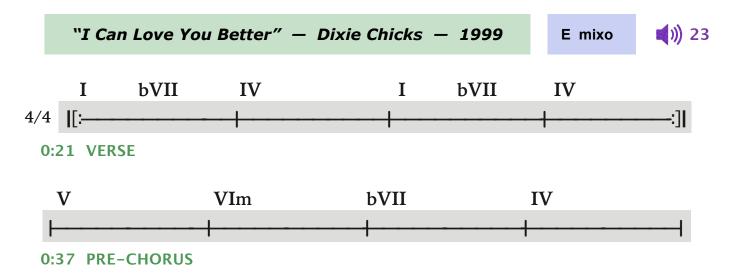
1974	Sundown	Gordon Lightfoot	F# mixo
1991	Joyride	Roxette	A mixo
1993	Wicked Garden	Stone Temple Pilots	A mixo
2014	Rock Bottom	Kenny Chesney	G mixo

BOTH V (major) and I - bVII - IV

Some songs use both the I - bVII - IV progression heard earlier and the V major chord. In this example from the Rolling Stones, the I - bVII - IV progression is heard during the verse, and the V major chord is introduced in the chorus.



This 1999 hit from the Dixie Chicks introduces the V major chord in the pre-chorus. START LISTENING AT **0:21**



Additional songs in MIXOLYDIAN with both V (major) and I - bVII - IV

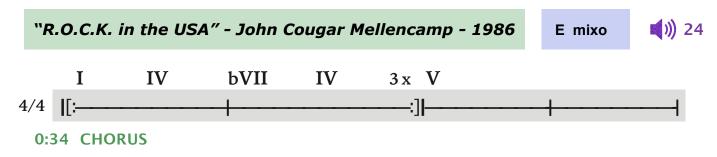
1965	I Can't Explain	The Who	E mixo
1970	No Sugar Tonight	Guess Who	F# mixo
1977	Don't Stop	Fleetwood Mac	E mixo
1980	Giving It Up for Your Love	Delbert McClinton	C mixo

EAR TRAINING EXERCISES

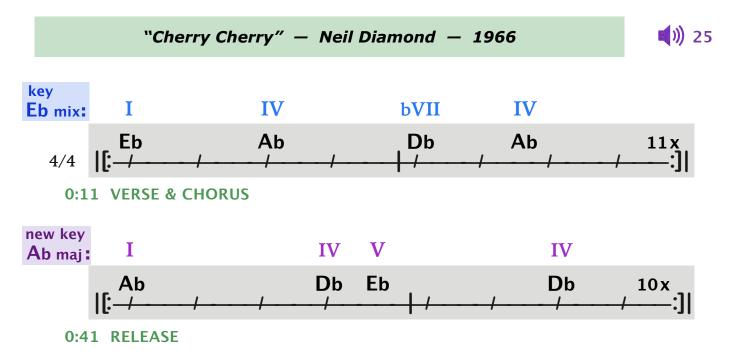
To practice identifying the V major chord in mixolydian tonality, try **Exercises 7.6e - 7.9e** (see "Textbook Contents"/ "Volume 1"/ "Ear Training Exercises").

CIRCULAR MIXOLYDIAN I-IV-bVII-IV

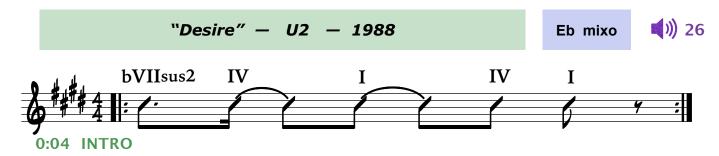
Portions of two previous songs — "Lady" and "Ain't That Peculiar" — featured different circular chord progressions, but the most common circular sequence in mixolydian is the <u>I - IV - bVII - IV</u> progression, as seen on the following example. This John Mellencamp song has become an annual classic, featured routinely at 4th of July fireworks around the country.



The following example from Neil Diamond has two circular progressions and a key change. The I - IV - bVII - IV progression is heard in the verse in the key of Eb mixo (Eb - Ab - Db - Ab). However, the release features the **circular major** progression I - IV - V - IV in the key of Ab major (Ab - Db - Eb - Db). Much more will be said about key changes in Spinning Gold, Vol. 2, Chapter Ten.



U2's "Desire" features a variation of the circular mixo progression, starting on the bVII with a sus2 sound. Anchoring the progression is a tonic bass drone. You will note the "**Bo Diddley" beat** (mentioned earlier), scored below:



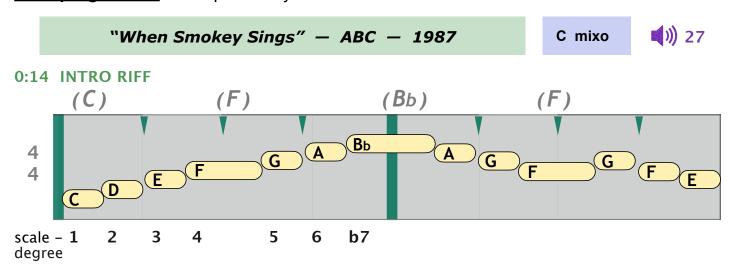
Additional songs with CIRCULAR I-IV-bVII-IV PROGRESSION

1967	Thank the Lord for the Night Time	Neil Diamond	E mixo
1984	On The Dark Side	John Cafferty & Beaver Brown Band	E mixo
2016	Smoking Jacket (chorus)	Miranda Lambert	G mixo

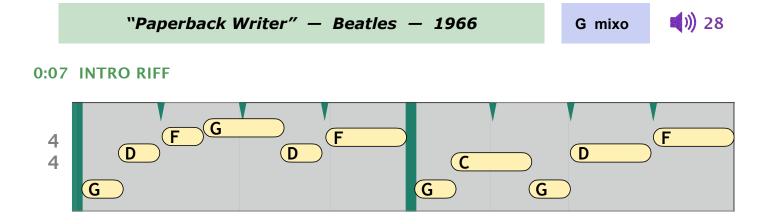
Signature Riffs

MELODIC FUNCTION RIFFS

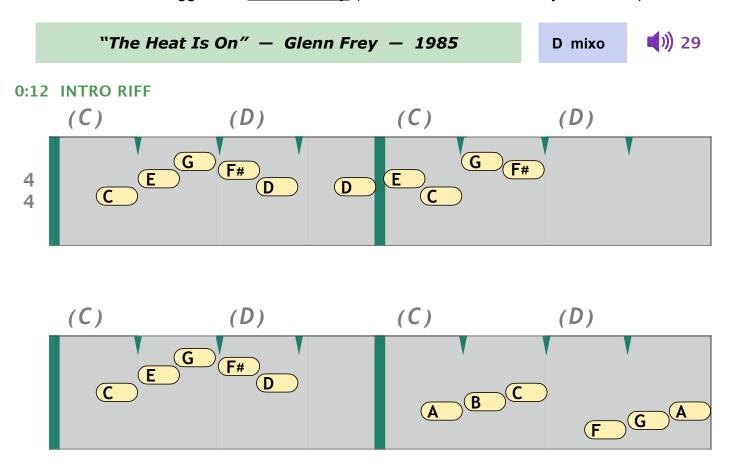
The signature riff on this 1987 song starts by ascending through the **entire mixo- lydian scale** (shown below). You will also notice that the two-bar riff implies the **circular mixo progression** heard previously.



This Beatles' riff on "Paperback Writer" prominently features the **characteristic b7 note** of mixolydian (in this case, an F note in the key of G mixo).

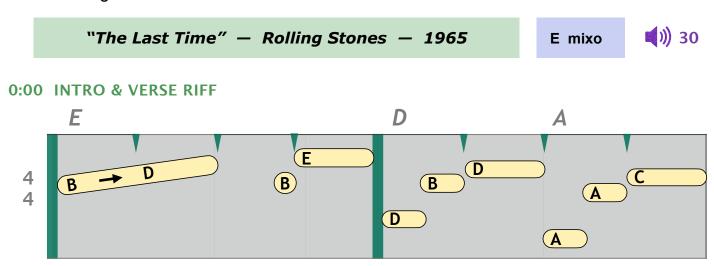


The next riff suggests a **bVII - I vamp** (C and D chords in the key of D mixo).

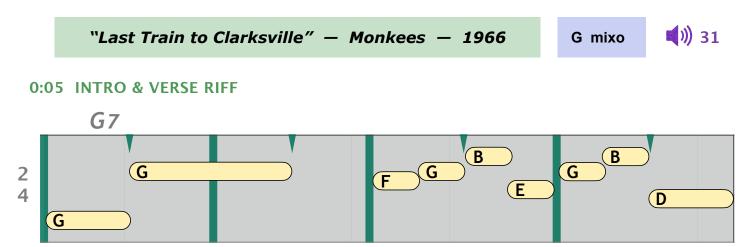


HARMONIC FUNCTION RIFFS

Here's a signature harmonic riff that outlines the <u>I - bVII - IV progression</u>, courtesy of the Rolling Stones.



Perhaps the Monkees were listening to the Stones when they recorded a similar mixolydian guitar riff a year later.



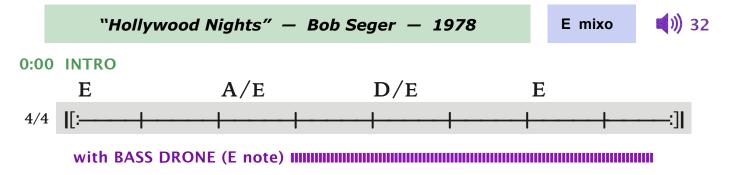
Additional SIGNATURE RIFFS (mixolydian tonality)

1974	Sweet Home Alabama	Lynryd Skynryd	D mixo
1984	Ghostbusters	Ray Parker	B mixo
1984	I Want a New Drug	Huey Lewis & The News	A mixo
1986	Best of Both Worlds	Van Halen	A mixo
1994	All Apologies	Nirvana	Db mixo
2002	Steve McQueen	Sheryl Crow	G mixo

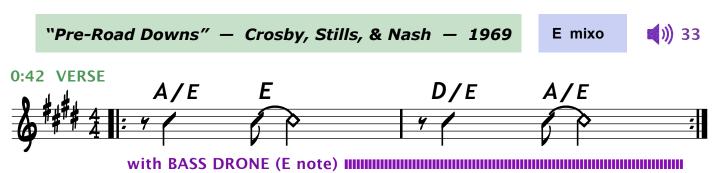
Drones

BASS DRONE

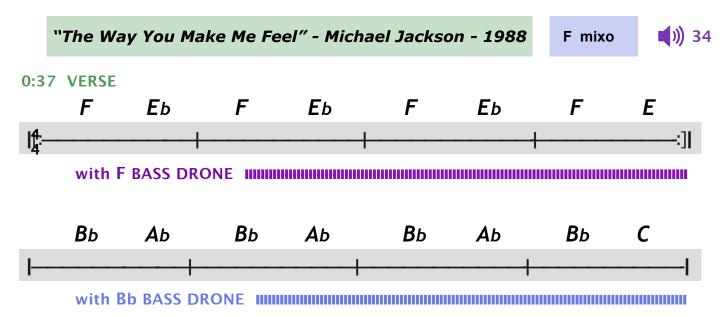
Just as with major and minor keys, there are sometimes bass drones in mixolydian songs. Here's an example from Bob Seger with a **tonic bass drone**.



This Crosby, Stills, & Nash song offers another example of a tonic bass drone. START LISTENING AT **0:42**



On the following 1988 hit from Michael Jackson, a tonic bass drone (F note) anchors a two-chord vamp (F - Eb) to start the verse at **0:37**. However, the bass drone changes to Bb at **0:53** (second line) to match a new vamp on the IV chord (Bb - Ab). Also notice the brief use of the <u>V major</u> chord (C) at the end of the second line.



TREBLE DRONE

This mixolydian song from 1998 features a tonic drone over a <u>I - IV chord vamp</u>. The drone is not exactly treble (more mid-range), but definitely above the alternating bass line. Listen for the spacey, pulsing synth, starting at **0:22**

The next example from Kool & The Gang has both bass and treble drones, as described below:

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"Celebration" — Kool & The Gang — 1981

Ab mixo

(i)) 36
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- 0:01 (intro) HIGH DRONE (chunky guitar strums carrying 16th-note pulse)
- O:17 (chorus) HIGH DRONE on guitar continues over keyboard, bass, & vocals. Chord progression uses IV, bVII, and I chord.

- --- 0:49 (verse) high drone disappears, <u>LOW</u> **DRONE** enters (bass holds same pitch throughout verse)
- —— 1:20 (pre-chorus) NO drone (bass begins to move to new pitches)
- —— 1:33 (chorus) **HIGH DRONE** re-enters (chunky guitar strums return, highlighting the chorus).

Additional songs with TREBLE DRONE in MIXOLYDIAN

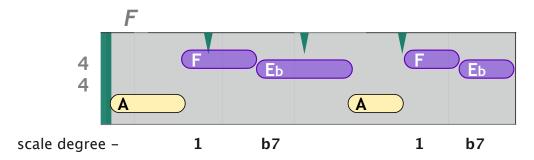
1993	Slide Away	The Verve	A mixo
1995	Hand in My Pocket	Alanis Morissette	G mixo
2010	Georgia Woods	Keith Urban	Bb mixo

DRONE RIFF

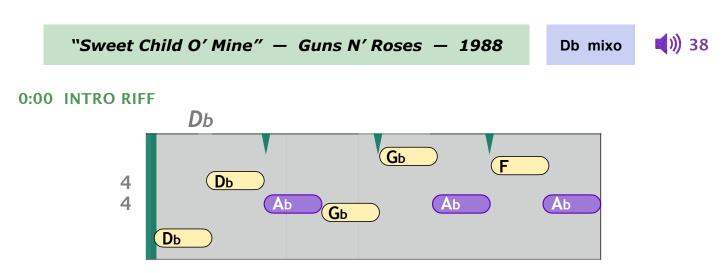
The 1998 song "Wishin' I Was There" features a repeating one-bar drone riff that pivots around the <u>1 and b7</u> notes (F and Eb, shown below). The riff is played over a <u>I - bVII - IV chord sequence</u> during the intro and verse. You will hear that the riff changes slightly to accommodate the chord changes.

"Wishin' I Was There" — Natalie Imbruglia — 1998 F mixo

0:01 INTRO & CHORUS RIFF



Sometimes the droning note within the riff is not an obvious high note, but a note hidden in the middle of the pitch range. The classic riff drone on Guns N Roses' "Sweet Child O' Mine" is constructed this way, with the riff pivoting around a **droning Ab note** that is buried deep in the pattern. Also notice that the first note of the pattern changes as the accompanying chords change underneath. Once again the progression is **I - bVII - IV.**



Songwriting Focal Points

V to I Tension - Resolution, Mixolydian Tonality

You will recall that like natural minor, mixolydian tonality does not have a V to I resolution, due to its diatonic Vm chord. We have seen, however, that a V major chord is sometimes added to mixolydian songs, restoring the tension - resolution dynamic. On Delbert McClinton's 1980 song "Giving It Up for Your Love" (written by Jerry Lynn Williams), the tension V chord occurs during the release section.

Note that the V chord lasts much longer than the other chords. This <u>extension of the</u> \underline{V} (discussed earlier in Chapter Two) adds to the tension before the chorus. Also notice that this is another example of the I - bVII - IV progression.

