MODAL HISTORY

- Ancient Greeks named scales after their most important tribes: Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian
- These were adopted by Christians in the Middle Ages, who expanded them to seven modes, one for each different white note on a keyboard
- The modal system broke down under the increased usage of polyphony (two or more harmonised melody lines), leading to the system of musical keys we know today

MODAL STRUCTURE

Modes took their structure from the intervals of what we now call a C major scale, IE, each different white note on a keyboard. By starting and finishing each mode with the same note, seven different tonalities, each with its own pattern of tones and semitones, are established.

IONIAN (from C to C): C Tone D Tone E Semitone F Tone G Tone A Tone B Semitone C
DORIAN (from D to D): D Tone E Semitone F Tone G Tone A Tone B Semitone C Tone D
PHRYGIAN: (from E to E): E Semitone F Tone G Tone A Tone B Semitone C Tone D Tone E
LYDIAN (from F to F): F Tone G Tone A Tone B Semitone C Tone D Tone E Semitone F
MIXOLYDIAN (from G to G): G Tone A Tone B Semitone C Tone D Tone E Semitone F Tone G
AEOLIAN (from A to A): A Tone B Semitone C Tone D Tone E Semitone F Tone G Tone A
LOCRIAN (from B to B): B Semitone C Tone D Tone E Semitone F Tone G Tone A Tone B

APPLYING MODAL STRUCTURE

By taking a root note and applying the intervals of your chosen mode, a new scale is produced. For example, if we have a scale of C major (please note that this is also the same as C Ionian):

C Tone D Tone E Semitone F Tone G Tone A Tone B Semitone C

Now if we apply the intervals taken from the Aeolian mode to the root note, we get C Aeolian (also known as C natural minor):

C Tone D Semitone Eb Tone F Tone G Semitone Ab Tone Bb Tone C

TONAL CHARACTERISTICS

These new intervals give each mode a distinctive sound, as well as determining whether they are:

- major (4 SEMITONES between 1st & 3rd notes, 3 SEMITONES between 3rd & 5th notes)
  minor (3 SEMITONES between 1st & 3rd notes, 4 SEMITONES between 3rd & 5th notes)
- diminished (3 SEMITONES between both 1st & 3rd notes, and 3rd & 5th notes)

This gives us the following:

IONIAN (Root 2nd 3rd 4th 5th 6th 7th): identical intervals to the major scale
DORIAN (Root 2nd b3 4th 5th #6 b7): minor, like the Aeolian, only with a sharpened 6th
PHRYGIAN (Root b2 b3 4th 5th b6 b7): minor, like the Aeolian, only with a flattened 2nd
LYDIAN (Root 2nd 3rd #4 5th 6th 7th): major, like the Ionian, only with a sharpened 4th
MIXOLYDIAN (Root 2nd 3rd 4th 5th 6th b7): major, like the Ionian, only with a flattened 7th
AEOLIAN (Root 2nd b3 4th 5th b6 b7): identical intervals to the natural minor scale
LOCRIAN (Root b2 b3 4th b5 b6 b7): all notes except root and 4th are flattened