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The Phrygian Mode

*A Comprehensive Survey of
Its History and Use in Music*

Museca

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THE PHRYGIAN MODE

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THE PHRYGIAN MODE

A Comprehensive Survey of Its History and Use in Music

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Editorial Preface

The Phrygian mode is one of the oldest continuously used musical frameworks in human history, and yet no single comprehensive reference work had brought together its history across the full span of Western art music, global folk and classical traditions, jazz, rock, metal, film scoring, electronic music, and sacred practice. This monograph is an attempt to provide that synthesis — a reference work for musicians, scholars, students, and serious listeners who wish to understand the mode not merely as a scale formula but as a living tradition with deep roots and an astonishing contemporary reach.

The scope of this work is deliberately broad. No single author or research program could claim exhaustive authority across Byzantine sacred chant, Ottoman makam, Hindustani raga, flamenco harmony, modal jazz, thrash metal, and Javanese gamelan simultaneously. The reader will find that some sections — particularly those on Western classical music, film scoring, flamenco, and jazz — reflect denser musicological treatment, while sections on non-Western traditions and popular music are necessarily more introductory in character. Where the analysis of individual pieces involves questions of modal interpretation — particularly in popular and rock music, where modal usage is often intuitive rather than theoretical — the assessments offered here represent one defensible analytical reading, not a settled scholarly consensus. Modal analysis of popular music is an

inherently interpretive enterprise, and readers with specialist knowledge of particular traditions may find grounds for revision or expansion.

The compositions catalog in Section 3 is the most comprehensive single-volume listing of Phrygian-mode works assembled to date, but it is necessarily selective rather than exhaustive. The catalog prioritizes historical significance, stylistic breadth, and analytical clarity. The YouTube search links accompanying each entry are provided as listening starting points rather than canonical performance citations; they link to current search results rather than specific recordings, ensuring they remain functional as the online landscape changes. Readers seeking definitive recordings of classical and world music works are directed to the Curated Listening Guide in Section 9. The diagrams throughout the volume are generated at high resolution for print reproduction; the geographic maps in Section 7 are schematic rather than cartographically precise and should be read as illustrative diagrams rather than reference maps.

Museca Publishing thanks the many musicians, scholars, and educators whose published work and recordings made this synthesis possible. We welcome correspondence regarding additions, corrections, and scholarly responses at the address given on the copyright page.

The Editors
Museca Publishing, April 2026

Executive Summary

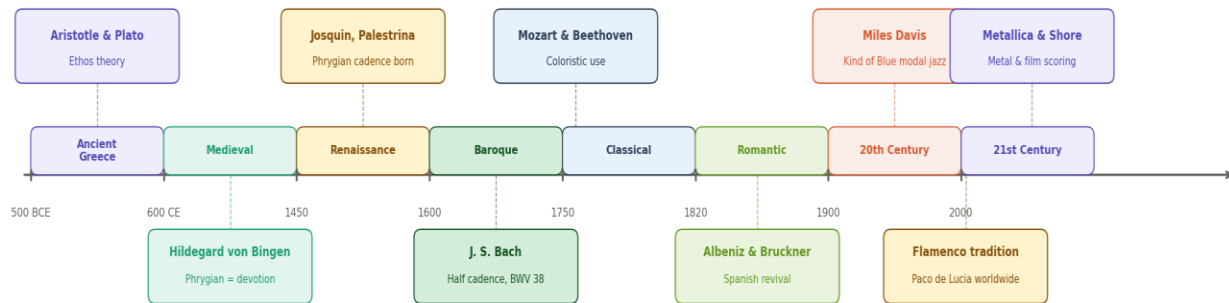
The Phrygian mode is one of the seven diatonic modes and is defined by a single distinctive interval: a half step (semitone) between its first and second scale degrees. Built on the white keys of a piano from E to E, its interval pattern is half-whole-whole-whole-half-whole-whole. This flat second degree — the note one semitone above the tonic — gives the mode its unmistakable sound: dark, tense, archaic, and emotionally charged.

Across nearly three millennia of music history, the Phrygian mode has never disappeared. It was known to ancient Greek theorists, codified as Mode III in the medieval church modal system, exploited for its penitential and devotional power in Renaissance sacred polyphony, preserved in Baroque practice through the Phrygian cadence and half cadence, and revived as a coloristic and structural device throughout the Romantic and modern periods. Today it anchors flamenco, modal jazz, heavy metal, film scoring, and video game music simultaneously.

A close relative, the Phrygian Dominant scale (Phrygian with a raised third degree), generates the characteristic sound of flamenco, Arabic maqam Hijaz, Turkish makam Hicaz, and klezmer Freygish — making Phrygian-related scales among the most globally widespread of all modal systems.

This monograph covers the mode's origins, history, and theoretical structure in Section 1; provides a dedicated chapter on its use in film, television, and video game music in Section 2; catalogs over one hundred compositions spanning all genres and traditions in Section 3; profiles the major composers who have used it in Section 4; examines its role in sacred music in Section 5; surveys its presence in electronic and contemporary production music in Section 6; provides a comprehensive survey of its equivalents in world music traditions in Section 7; offers a practical guide for composers and improvisers in Section 8; and concludes with a curated listening guide, bibliography, and index in Sections 9 through 11.

The Phrygian Mode Through History



The Phrygian mode has never gone extinct — each era found a new purpose for the same half step

Figure 1: The Phrygian mode through nearly three millennia — from ancient Greek theory to 21st-century popular music

SECTION 1 — Origins and History of the Phrygian Mode

The Phrygian mode stands as one of the most distinctive and historically enduring modal frameworks in the history of music. Its story spans nearly three millennia, reaching from the philosophical writings of ancient Greece through the great cathedrals of medieval Europe, across the flamenco stages of Andalusia, into the recording studios of modal jazz, and onward to the distortion-drenched riffs of contemporary heavy metal. No other mode can claim such remarkable longevity, cross-cultural reach, and emotional resonance. Its defining characteristic — a half step between the first and second scale degrees — gives it an immediately recognizable sound that listeners across cultures associate with darkness, tension, mystery, devotion, and passionate intensity.

Ancient Greek Origins

The name 'Phrygian' derives from the ancient kingdom of Phrygia in Anatolia (modern-day Turkey), reflecting the Greek practice of naming modal systems after ethnic regions and the peoples

associated with them. In the Greek theoretical system, the Phrygian tonos or harmonia was associated with passionate, ecstatic, and martial qualities. The philosopher Aristotle, in his *Politics*, described the Phrygian mode as inspiring enthusiasm and ecstatic states, distinguishing it from the orderly and dignified Dorian and the relaxed Lydian. Plato, in the *Republic*, took a more cautious view, considering the Phrygian acceptable alongside the Dorian for its ability to inspire courage and resolution, while banning other modes as enervating.

The Phrygian mode held deep connections to the religious and ritual life of the ancient world. It was closely associated with the cult of Dionysus, the god of wine, fertility, and ritual ecstasy, and with the orgiastic rites of Cybele, the Great Mother goddess whose worship originated in Phrygia itself. The characteristic instruments of these cults — the aulos (a double-reed pipe) and various percussion instruments — were strongly linked to Phrygian music. The theoretical terminology underlying the Phrygian system was formalized by Aristoxenus (flourished c. 335 BCE), a disciple of Aristotle and one of the most influential music theorists of antiquity. Aristoxenus was among the first to argue that the ethos (emotional or ethical character) of music does not reside solely in mathematical ratios but in the perceptual experience of intervals and their arrangement.

It is essential to note that the ancient Greek Phrygian mode was not identical to the medieval or modern Phrygian mode. The Greek tonal system was organized differently — indeed, the octave species underlying the ancient Greek Phrygian tonos corresponds to what the medieval system would later call the Dorian mode, not the Phrygian. The medieval theorists who adopted Greek nomenclature were influenced by the writings of Boethius (c. 480–524 CE), whose *De institutione musica* transmitted a partially garbled version of Greek music theory to the Latin West. The result was that the name 'Phrygian' was reassigned to a different set of intervals — but the association with intensity, passion, and devotional fervor carried over.

Two surviving pieces of ancient music document the Phrygian tonos in practice: **the First Delphic Hymn** (128 BCE), composed by the Athenian Limenius, is written in the Phrygian and Hyperphrygian tonoi; and the **Seikilos epitaph** (1st century AD), one of the oldest surviving

complete musical compositions, employs the Phrygian species (diatonic genus) in the lastian (low Phrygian) transposition. These pieces give tangible musical substance to the theoretical accounts left by Greek philosophers.

Medieval Church Modes

In the medieval system of eight church modes codified by theorists such as Hucbald, Guido d'Arezzo, and later Glarean, the Phrygian mode occupied a distinctive position. It was classified as Mode III (the authentic Phrygian, with a range from E to E above, and a final on E) and Mode IV (the plagal form, Hypophrygian, with a range from B below to B above the final E). The reciting tone (tenor or dominant) of Mode III was C, and for Mode IV it was A. The Phrygian was the only one of the eight modes whose final lay a half step above the note below it — that is, the interval from E to F (the first and second degrees of the mode) was a half step. This unique intervallic signature gave Phrygian chant melodies their characteristic tense and archaic quality.

In medieval sacred practice, the Phrygian mode was strongly associated with penitential and contemplative character. It was used for chants expressing sorrow, supplication, and mystical intensity. The great mystic and composer Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179) made the Phrygian mode her preferred scale — a highly unusual choice for the period that gave her surviving compositions a dark, distinctive quality that sets them apart from virtually all other twelfth-century sacred music. Gregorian chant in Mode III and Mode IV constitutes a substantial portion of the medieval plainchant repertoire, including significant portions of the Requiem Mass and Office of the Dead.

The Defining Intervallic Signature

The Phrygian mode, in its modern and medieval formulation, is built on the following interval pattern: half step, whole step, whole step, whole step, half step, whole step, whole step. Using the white keys of a piano beginning on E, the scale runs E–F–G–A–B–C–D–E. The critical interval is the half step between the first degree (E) and the second degree (F). This semitone at the very bottom of the scale creates an inherent

gravitational pull downward, a sense of resolution by descent rather than ascent — the exact opposite of the major scale's bright, upward-reaching tendency. This descending pull is the source of the mode's characteristic darkness, tension, and sense of inevitability. It is this single interval — the flatted second degree — that gives the Phrygian mode its unmistakable identity across every genre and tradition in which it appears.

Comparison with the Other Diatonic Modes

The following table shows all seven diatonic modes, their interval patterns (W = whole step, H = half step), and their key characteristics. The Phrygian mode is highlighted. Comparing the Phrygian with its closest relative, the Aeolian (natural minor), reveals that the only difference is the second degree: Aeolian has a whole step (major 2nd) above the tonic while Phrygian has a half step (minor 2nd). This single change transforms the emotional character dramatically.

Mode	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Key Character
Ionian (Major)	W	W	H	W	W	W	H	Bright, resolved
Dorian	W	H	W	W	W	H	W	Minor, slightly bright
Phrygian ★	H	W	W	W	H	W	W	Dark, tense (b2)
Lydian	W	W	W	H	W	W	H	Bright, ethereal (#4)
Mixolydian	W	W	H	W	W	H	W	Major with b7
Aeolian (Minor)	W	H	W	W	H	W	W	Natural minor
Locrian	H	W	W	H	W	W	W	Diminished, unstable

Note that the Phrygian Dominant variant — produced by raising the third scale degree (G# in E Phrygian) — creates an augmented second between scale degrees 2 and 3, generating the

characteristic 'exotic' sound associated with flamenco, Arabic, Turkish, and klezmer music. This variant is discussed further below.

The One Note That Defines the Phrygian Mode
These two scales share every note except one — only the 2nd degree differs

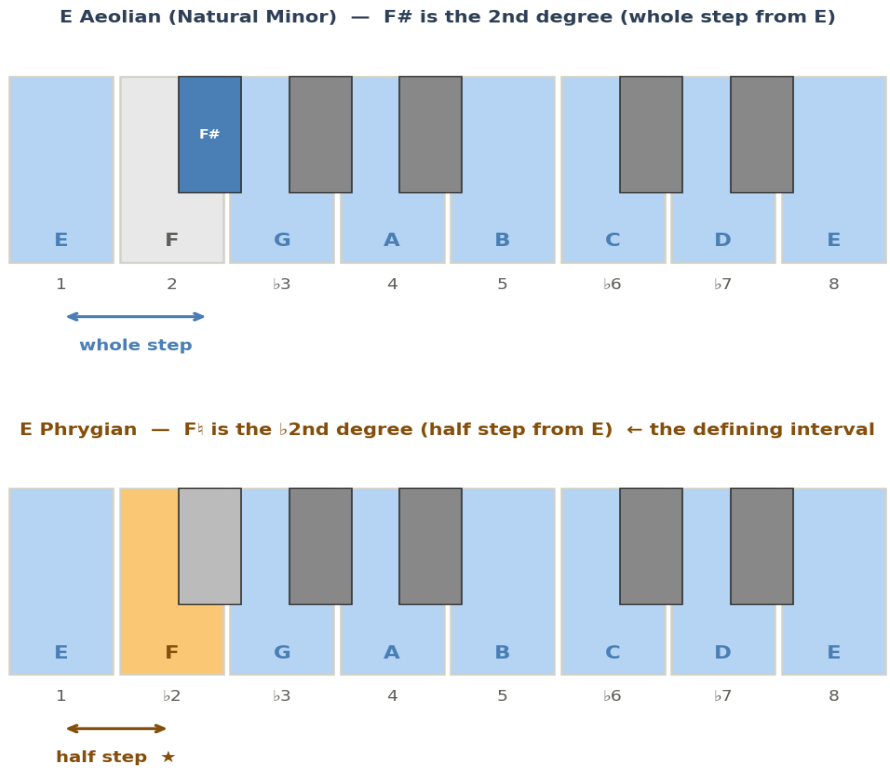


Figure 2: E Aeolian (natural minor) vs. E Phrygian on the piano keyboard. The amber F key is the only difference — a half step instead of a whole step above the tonic.

Phrygian and Closely Related Scales: A Comparative Analysis

The Phrygian mode acquires its full meaning when understood in relation to the scales it most closely resembles. Four categories of comparison are especially revealing: other diatonic modes that share most of its notes; chromatic extensions of Phrygian that raise or lower additional scale degrees; non-Western equivalents discussed elsewhere in this report; and the broader family of 'dark' minor scales from which composers routinely borrow. The table below shows all the most closely related scales using E as the common tonic, with each scale degree expressed relative to the major scale.

Scale	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8ve	Relationship to Phrygian
E Phrygian ★	F (b2)	G (b3)	A (4)	B (5)	C (b6)	D (b7)	E	The reference scale
E Phrygian Dominant	F (b2)	G# (3)	A (4)	B (5)	C (b6)	D (b7)	E	Raise 3rd: creates augmented 2nd (F-G#); enables major tonic chord
E Aeolian (Nat. minor)	F# (2)	G (b3)	A (4)	B (5)	C (b6)	D (b7)	E	Whole-step 2nd only difference; same scale, one note brighter
E Locrian	F (b2)	G (b3)	A (4)	Bb(b5)	C (b6)	D (b7)	E	Shares flat-2nd; diminished 5th makes it harmonically unstable
E Dorian	F# (2)	G (b3)	A (4)	B (5)	C#(6)	D (b7)	E	Major 2nd and natural 6th; same minor feel, brighter character
E Double Harmonic	F (b2)	G# (3)	A (4)	B (5)	C (b6)	D#(7)	E	Two augmented 2nds (F-G# and C-D#); maximum exotic density
E Harmonic Minor	F# (2)	G (b3)	A (4)	B (5)	C (b6)	D#(7)	E	Whole-step 2nd; raised 7th creates leading tone; Western tonal
Hijaz / Phrygian Dom.	F (b2)	G# (3)	A (4)	B (5)	C (b6)	D (b7)	E	Identical to Phrygian Dominant; different cultural frame
Freygish (Klezmer)	F (b2)	G# (3)	A (4)	B (5)	C (b6)	D (b7)	E	Identical to Phrygian Dominant; Ashkenazi Jewish context

Key: Highlighted in blue = E Phrygian reference row. Amber cell = scale degree differs from Phrygian.

The Phrygian–Aeolian boundary: the one-note difference

Of all the comparisons, the most instructive is Phrygian vs Aeolian (natural minor). These two scales share every note except the second degree: Aeolian has a whole step (F# in E), Phrygian has a half step (F natural in E). This single semitone is entirely responsible for the dramatic difference in emotional character between the two scales. Aeolian sounds dark but stable — it is the foundation of virtually all popular minor-key music in the Western tradition. Phrygian sounds dark and tense, with a gravitational urgency that Aeolian lacks. Composers and improvisers who understand this boundary can move fluidly between the two modes, substituting the flat second for the natural second (or vice versa) within a phrase to instantly shift the emotional register.

Phrygian vs Locrian: the shared flat second

Phrygian and Locrian both begin with a half step above the tonic — they share the flat second. But Locrian has a further alteration: its fifth degree is also flattened (Bb rather than B in E Locrian), creating a diminished fifth above the tonic. This makes Locrian the most harmonically unstable of the seven diatonic modes — the tonic chord in Locrian is a diminished triad, which cannot serve as a convincing point of rest. Phrygian, by contrast, has a perfect fifth above the tonic, giving it a minor tonic chord that can function as a stable home. This is why Phrygian is harmonically usable across almost all musical contexts while Locrian remains an exotic special case. The shared flat second between the two modes means that music moving between them (as in some heavy metal and progressive rock compositions) retains the characteristic Phrygian tension while the flattened fifth adds an additional layer of instability.

Phrygian Dominant vs the Double Harmonic scale

Phrygian Dominant (E F G# A B C D) and the Double Harmonic scale (also called Byzantine or Arabic: E F G# A B C D#) share five of their seven notes. The only difference is the seventh degree: Phrygian Dominant has a minor seventh (D natural) while Double Harmonic has a major seventh (D#). The Double Harmonic scale contains two augmented seconds — between the second and third degrees (F to G#) and again between the sixth and seventh degrees (C to D#). This

gives it an even more intensely exotic character than Phrygian Dominant. The Double Harmonic scale is the basis of the Byzantine liturgical tradition, appears in Turkish makam as Hicazkar, and is used in flamenco and in Western art music for extreme coloristic effects. Phrygian Dominant can be heard as a 'lighter' version of Double Harmonic — the one augmented second creates the characteristic sound without the additional harmonic weight of the raised seventh.

The Phrygian mode and its relationship to harmonic minor

Phrygian Dominant is the fifth mode of the harmonic minor scale — that is, if you play a harmonic minor scale (minor scale with a raised seventh degree) starting from its fifth degree, you arrive at the Phrygian Dominant. This relationship is not merely theoretical: it is the reason Phrygian Dominant harmonies can so naturally coexist with harmonic minor harmonies. In A harmonic minor (A B C D E F G#), the V chord is E major (E G# B), and the scale built on that V chord is E Phrygian Dominant. In practice, this means that any music in a minor key that uses a dominant chord (major V chord) is implicitly invoking the Phrygian Dominant scale — which explains why the Phrygian Dominant sound is so pervasive in Western tonal music, even in music that does not consciously think of itself as modal.

Practical summary for composers and improvisers

To move between related scales effectively: start on pure Phrygian; raise the third degree to get Phrygian Dominant (the characteristic flamenco/Middle Eastern sound); lower the fifth degree instead to get Locrian (extreme instability); raise the second degree to get Aeolian (standard natural minor). The flat second is the load-bearing element — as long as it is present, the music retains the Phrygian family's characteristic tension. Remove it (raise the second to a whole step) and you leave the Phrygian world entirely, entering the brighter territory of Aeolian, Dorian, or the other natural minor modes.

Renaissance Polyphony and the Phrygian Cadence

During the Renaissance, the Phrygian mode continued to play a vital role in sacred polyphony. Composers such as Josquin des Prez,

Palestrina, Victoria, William Byrd, Orlando di Lasso, and Thomas Tallis worked within the inherited modal system, and the Phrygian mode (Modes III and IV) provided a vehicle for expressing intense devotion, penitence, and spiritual yearning. Josquin's 'Nymphes des bois / Requiem aeternam,' a lament on the death of Johannes Ockeghem, deliberately transposes the Introit of the Requiem Mass into the Phrygian mode to heighten the work's melancholic power. Josquin's Miserere is another important Phrygian-mode work from this period. Palestrina's cycle of 29 motets from the Canticum Canticorum (Song of Solomon) includes motets specifically composed in E Phrygian, exploiting the mode's expressive intensity for the Bible's most passionate poetry. Orlando di Lasso's motet 'In me transierunt' is a further significant late-Renaissance Phrygian work.

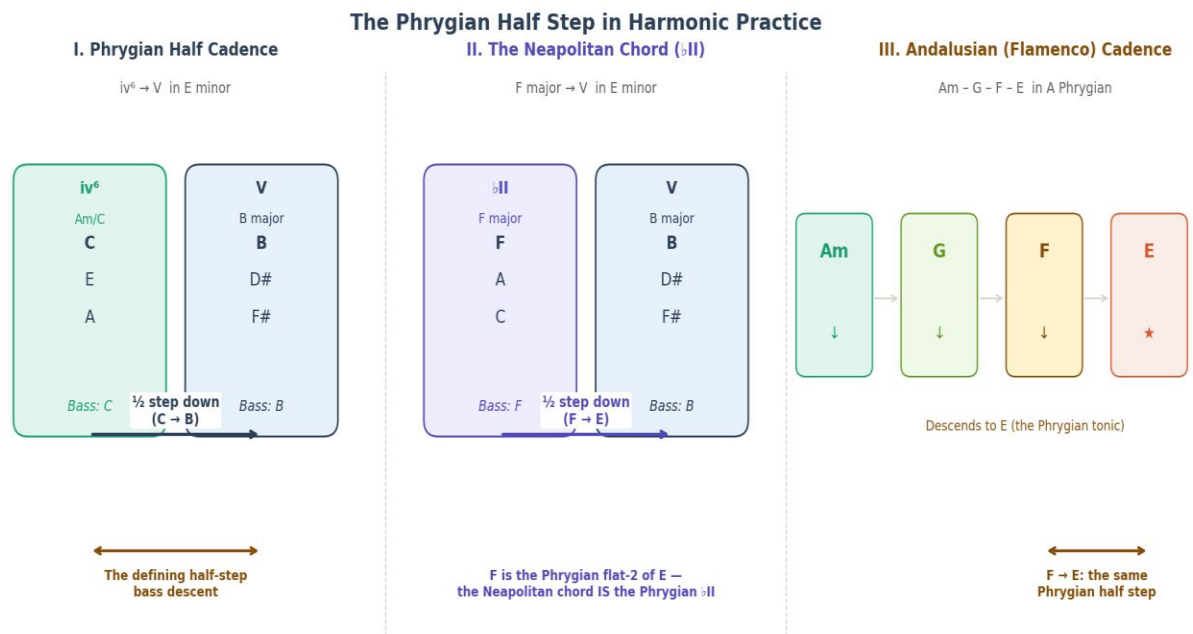
One of the most important harmonic developments to emerge from Renaissance Phrygian practice was the 'Phrygian cadence,' a distinctive cadential formula in which the lowest voice descends by half step while the upper voices resolve upward. This cadence — characterized by the stepwise descent from the second degree to the first (for example, F descending to E in the bass) — became one of the most recognizable gestures in Western music. It gave rise to what later theorists would call the 'Andalusian cadence' or 'Spanish cadence,' linking the Phrygian mode to the music of the Iberian Peninsula in ways that would become profoundly important in subsequent centuries.

The Neapolitan Chord and Phrygian Harmony

One of the most direct legacies of the Phrygian mode in common-practice tonal music is the Neapolitan chord, notated as bII or N⁶ in harmonic analysis. The Neapolitan is a major chord built on the flattened second scale degree — exactly the degree that defines the Phrygian mode. In E minor, for example, the Neapolitan chord is an F major chord (built on the half step above E), which functions as a striking pre-dominant harmony that resolves to the dominant or tonic. This chord appears in countless tonal works — prominently in Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, and Brahms — and represents the most widespread survival of Phrygian harmonic thinking within the major-minor tonal system. Whenever a composer in a minor key uses a major

chord a half step above the tonic as a dramatic harmonic gesture, they are drawing on the same flat-second relationship that defines the Phrygian mode.

The Phrygian cadence (iv⁶–V in a minor key, with the bass descending by half step to the dominant) similarly preserves Phrygian voice-leading within tonal music. The distinctive downward motion of the bass from the flattened second degree to the tonic gives this cadence its archaic, solemn character — a direct echo of the medieval Phrygian modal system encoded into the fabric of Baroque and Classical counterpoint.



All three share the same Phrygian half-step bass descent — from Renaissance church music to flamenco guitar

Figure 3: The Phrygian half step in harmonic practice — the same half-step bass descent appears in the Baroque Phrygian cadence, the Classical Neapolitan chord, and the Andalusian flamenco cadence.

The Baroque Period: Bach and the Phrygian Half Cadence

In the Baroque period, the rise of major-minor tonality gradually displaced the church modes as the primary organizing system of Western music. However, the Phrygian mode did not disappear; instead, it survived as a distinctive harmonic and melodic coloring within the tonal system. The most important Baroque survival of

Phrygian practice was the Phrygian half cadence, a cadential formula in which the bass descends by half step to arrive on the dominant of a minor key (typically iv6–V). This gesture, with its characteristic half-step bass motion, retained the archaic, solemn quality of the old Phrygian cadence and was used extensively by Baroque composers to conclude slow movements and signal transitions.

Johann Sebastian Bach, the supreme master of Baroque counterpoint, made conscious and expressive use of the Phrygian mode. His cantata 'Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir' (BWV 38, 1724), based on Martin Luther's setting of Psalm 130, is cast entirely in the Phrygian mode, employing chromatic inflections and unusual harmonic progressions to create a modern, intensely expressive framework. In 'Die Himmel erzählen die Ehre Gottes' (BWV 76, 1723), Bach preserves the Phrygian mode of the original chorale melody 'Es woll uns Gott genadig sein' (a melody by Matthias Greitter). The slow movement of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 consists of nothing more than a single Phrygian cadence — two chords that serve as a bridge between the outer movements, a gesture of breathtaking economy. Dieterich Buxtehude, Bach's great predecessor and model, wrote his Prelude in A minor (BuxWV 152, labeled 'Phrygisch' in the Buxtehude catalogue) in A Phrygian, establishing a tradition of Phrygian organ writing that profoundly influenced the young Bach.

Another major Baroque figure who employed the Phrygian mode was Heinrich Schutz, whose Johannes-Passion (1666) is cast in the Phrygian mode throughout — an important precedent for Bach's own treatment of Passion settings within the modal tradition.

Classical and Romantic Periods

As the major-minor tonal system consolidated its dominance in the Classical period, the Phrygian mode largely ceased to function as an independent structural key. However, it persisted as a coloristic and expressive device within tonal compositions. Beethoven employed the Phrygian tetrachord (the descending four-note pattern from the tonic through the flatted second degree) in the 'Crucifixus' of his *Missa Solemnis* to depict the entombment of Christ, drawing on centuries of

association between the Phrygian mode and sacred suffering. Mozart used Phrygian inflections in his Masonic Funeral Music and in the overture to *Don Giovanni*, where the descending Phrygian spiral contributes to the opera's dark, fateful atmosphere.

In the Romantic period, the Phrygian mode found renewed use as a coloristic tool. Brahms made significant use of Phrygian elements: the second movement of his *Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98*, opens with fanfares built on the Phrygian mode, deriving an austere quality from the tension between C major scale tones played over an E pedal. The sixth movement of his *Ein deutsches Requiem* also incorporates Phrygian elements for expressive depth. Liszt employed the Phrygian mode in his *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2*, connecting it to the Hungarian and Romani musical traditions. Mussorgsky and the Russian nationalist school drew on modal elements including the Phrygian, particularly in works seeking to evoke archaic or Eastern atmospheres. Chopin's mazurkas occasionally employ Phrygian inflections, reflecting the modal elements present in Polish folk music.

Anton Bruckner deserves particular attention as perhaps the most systematic employer of the Phrygian mode among Romantic-era composers. Bruckner's deep roots in Catholic sacred tradition and his lifelong engagement with Gregorian chant led him to incorporate Phrygian modal writing throughout his output: the *Ave Regina caelorum* (WAB 8, 1885-88), the second setting of *Pange lingua* (WAB 33, 1868), *Tota pulchra es* (WAB 46, 1878), and *Vexilla regis* (WAB 51, 1892) in the sacred choral repertoire; and Phrygian passages in the scherzo and finale of *Symphony No. 3*, the finale of *Symphony No. 4* (third version, 1880), the first and scherzo movements of *Symphony No. 6*, the first movement of *Symphony No. 7*, and the first and fourth movements of *Symphony No. 8*. Bruckner's Phrygian writing carries the same devotional and contemplative weight as medieval plainchant, transferred into the monumental scale of the Romantic symphony.

The Spanish Revival: Albeniz, Granados, and Falla

The most dramatic revival of the Phrygian mode in Western art music came through the Spanish nationalist composers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Isaac Albeniz, Enrique

Granados, and Manuel de Falla drew extensively on the musical traditions of Andalusia, where the Phrygian mode and its dominant variant had been foundational elements of flamenco and folk music for centuries. Albeniz's 'Leyenda' (Asturias) from the Suite española is a stylized malaguena built on the Spanish Phrygian mode. His Rumores de la Caleta (Op. 71, No. 6) and his magnum opus, the four-book piano suite Iberia, feature the Phrygian mode prominently throughout. Manuel de Falla's 'Ritual Fire Dance' from El amor brujo and his Nights in the Gardens of Spain immerse the listener in the Andalusian idiom, with the Phrygian mode serving as the primary harmonic and melodic framework. These composers brought the sound of the Phrygian mode — which had been alive and well in Spanish folk music for generations — into the concert hall and made it a recognized feature of the international classical repertoire.

The Phrygian Dominant Scale

A close relative of the pure Phrygian mode is the Phrygian Dominant scale, also known as the Spanish Phrygian, Phrygian natural-3 (Phrygian with a raised third degree), or, in Middle Eastern theory, as Hijaz. This scale is the fifth mode of the harmonic minor scale. In the key of E, the Phrygian Dominant runs E–F–G#–A–B–C–D–E. The critical difference from pure Phrygian is the raised third degree (G# instead of G in E Phrygian), which creates an augmented second between the second and third degrees (F to G#). This augmented second gives the scale its characteristic sound and allows for the construction of a major chord on the tonic — unlike pure Phrygian, where the tonic chord is minor.

The Phrygian Dominant scale is near-universally present in flamenco, where it provides the harmonic basis for the 'modo flamenco' or Andalusian cadence (Am–G–F–E in A Phrygian Dominant, for example). It is equally fundamental to Arabic music, where it appears as maqam Hijaz, and to Turkish classical music, where it is known as makam Hicaz. The scale's distinctive augmented second interval is one of the most immediately recognizable sounds in world music, appearing across North Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans, and South Asia. In Western music it is sometimes called the 'Spanish scale'

or the 'Jewish scale' (particularly in klezmer music, where it is called Freygish).

Flamenco and Iberian Folk Music

The Phrygian mode and its Dominant variant occupy a central position in flamenco, the great musical and dance tradition of Andalusia. Flamenco's harmonic system is built on what guitarists call the 'modo flamenco,' which is essentially the Phrygian mode with flexible alterations of the third and seventh degrees depending on context. The characteristic flamenco cadence — a descending progression ending on a major chord with a flatted second above (e.g., Am–G–F–E) — is a direct descendant of the Renaissance Phrygian cadence, carried forward through centuries of oral tradition in southern Spain. The Solea, considered the 'mother' of flamenco, is fundamentally Phrygian in its harmonic language, as are the Buleria, Fandango, and Siguriya, while the use of pure Phrygian versus Phrygian Dominant varies by palo (form) and context. Paco de Lucia, the revolutionary flamenco guitarist, brought Phrygian-based flamenco to a global audience with recordings like 'Entre dos aguas' and his collaborations with singer Camaron de la Isla in the 1970s.

Non-Western Equivalents and Parallels

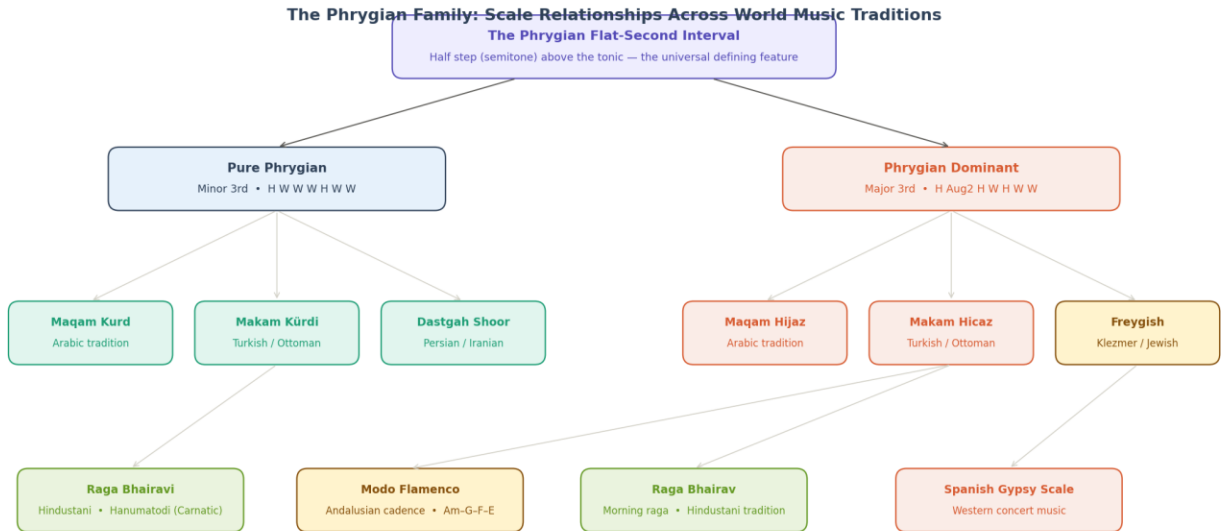
The Phrygian mode, or scales closely equivalent to it, appears in numerous non-Western musical traditions, reflecting the universal appeal of the half-step-above-tonic relationship. In the Arabic maqam system, maqam Kurd corresponds closely to the Western Phrygian mode (with its natural minor third), while maqam Hijaz corresponds to the Phrygian Dominant. The name 'Hijaz' derives from the Hejaz, the geographic region of western Arabia encompassing Mecca and Medina — named for a place, not a concept. Hijaz is one of the most recognizable and widely used maqamat in Arab classical and popular music, and its distinctive augmented second interval has come to symbolize 'Middle Eastern' sound in the Western imagination. Maqam Bayati, with its quarter-tone flat second, occupies an intermediate position between the Western Phrygian and the standard minor, and is one of the most important maqamat in Egyptian music.

The Turkish makam system includes makam Kurdi (corresponding to Phrygian) and makam Hicaz (corresponding to Phrygian Dominant), both of which are foundational to Ottoman classical music and Turkish folk genres including arabesque.

In Iranian classical music, Dastgah Shoor is the primary dastgah (modal framework) that corresponds to the Phrygian mode. Shoor is one of the seven principal dastgahs of the radif (the canonical repertoire of Persian music) and carries associations of longing, melancholy, and mystical yearning that parallel the Phrygian mode's emotional weight in Western traditions.

In Indian classical music, the Phrygian mode finds parallels in several important ragas. Raga Bhairavi, one of the most important ragas in both Hindustani and Carnatic traditions, employs all seven notes with the second, third, sixth, and seventh degrees flattened — a scale that closely corresponds to the Western Phrygian mode. Its equivalent in the Carnatic melakarta system is Hanumatodi, the 8th melakarta raga. Raga Bhairav, the 'king of morning ragas,' uses a flattened second degree and a natural third, corresponding more closely to the Phrygian Dominant. These ragas carry deep associations with devotion, contemplation, and spiritual yearning — emotional qualities strikingly parallel to the associations the Phrygian mode carries in Western sacred music.

In Japanese music, certain modes within the traditional scale systems share the half-step-above-tonic characteristic; the In scale (used in koto music and gagaku court music) contains intervals analogous to Phrygian. African musical traditions, while often organized around pentatonic rather than heptatonic frameworks, occasionally employ modal patterns that include the flat-second relationship characteristic of Phrygian.



All branches share the same defining interval: the semitone immediately above the tonic
 Pure Phrygian has a minor 3rd above the tonic | Phrygian Dominant has a major 3rd (creating the characteristic augmented 2nd)

Figure 4: The Phrygian scale family — Pure Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant, and their equivalents across Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Indian, Jewish, and flamenco traditions.

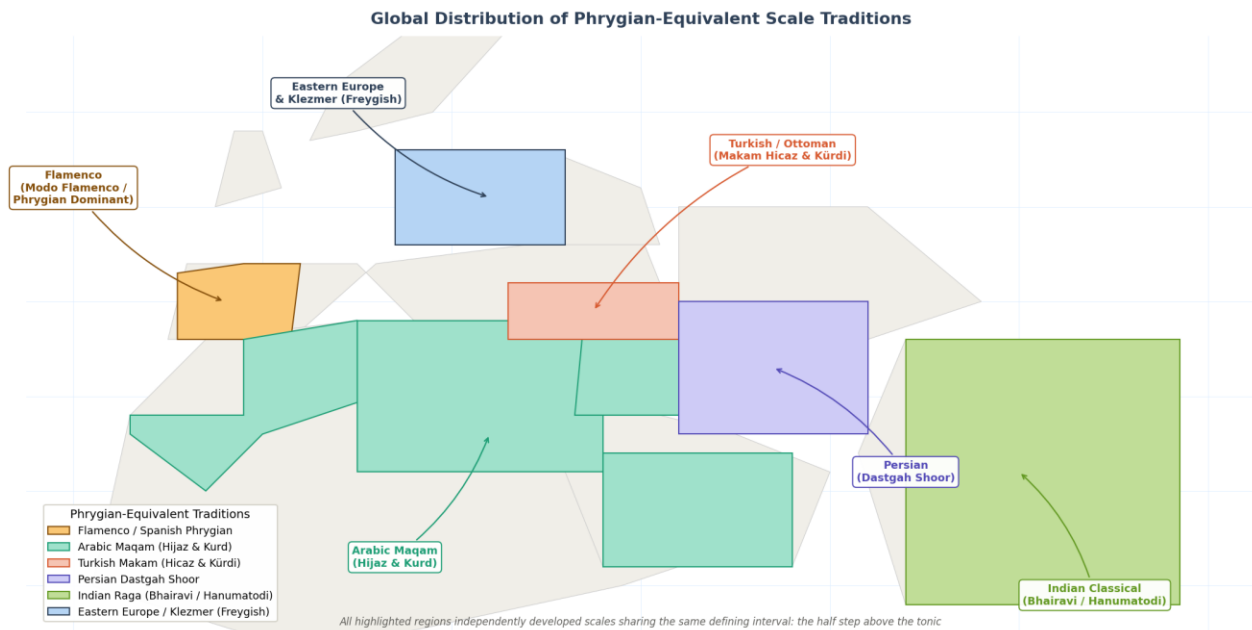


Figure 5: Global distribution of Phrygian-equivalent scale traditions — independent cultures across three continents converged on the same defining half step above the tonic.

Twentieth Century and Beyond: Jazz, Rock, and Metal

The twentieth century saw the Phrygian mode embraced by an astonishing range of musicians. In jazz, the modal revolution led by Miles Davis in the late 1950s brought the Phrygian mode to the forefront. Davis's 'Flamenco Sketches' from the landmark album *Kind of Blue* (1959) includes a section in D Phrygian, and his 'Sketches of Spain' album (1960) with arranger Gil Evans is saturated with Phrygian sonorities drawn from Spanish music — most notably the extended 'Solea' movement. John Coltrane's *Ole* (1961) was directly inspired by this Spanish Phrygian approach, and his classic quartet explored modal improvisation extensively. Wayne Shorter's 'Speak No Evil' uses C Phrygian harmony, and Chick Corea's 'Spain' and 'La Fiesta' feature Phrygian modal cadences that have become jazz standards.

In contemporary jazz, the Phrygian mode is also closely associated with the Phrygian suspended chord — a sus4(b9) chord, sometimes written as Esus4(b9) — which is built from the mode's characteristic tones (E–A–B–D–F) and provides the harmonic vehicle over which soloists improvise in a Phrygian context. This chord type appears in the work of McCoy Tyner, Herbie Hancock, and many other jazz pianists of the post-bop era.

In rock and metal, the Phrygian mode became one of the most widely used scales. Its dark, heavy quality made it a natural fit for the aggressive aesthetics of thrash metal. Metallica's Kirk Hammett popularized the mode in metal guitar, using it in songs like 'Wherever I May Roam,' 'Creeping Death,' and 'Disposable Heroes.' Megadeth, Slayer, Iron Maiden, and countless other metal bands adopted the Phrygian mode as a foundational element of their harmonic vocabulary. In progressive rock, bands from King Crimson to Tool and Dream Theater employed Phrygian harmonies to create tension and complexity. In alternative rock, Radiohead made notable use of the mode in 'Everything in Its Right Place' and 'Pyramid Song,' while Muse employed both Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant in works like 'United States of Eurasia.'

Film and video game composers have also drawn extensively on the Phrygian mode. Howard Shore's score for *The Lord of the Rings* uses F Phrygian for the Prologue theme, its archaic quality perfectly suited to

Tolkien's mythic setting. Hans Zimmer employed Phrygian for the General Zod theme in *Man of Steel*. Video game soundtracks from *Dark Souls* to *Castlevania* to *Chrono Trigger* have used Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant to create atmospheres of mystery, danger, and dark fantasy. In minimalist music, John Adams's 'Phrygian Gates' (1977–1978), a twenty-two-minute piano work, uses the alternation between Lydian and Phrygian modes as its primary structural device, modulating through the circle of fifths.

SECTION 2 — The Phrygian Mode in Film, Television, and Video Game Music

No medium in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has done more to embed the Phrygian mode in the ears of general audiences than film music. Where the mode's earlier lives in sacred chant, Renaissance polyphony, flamenco, and jazz required listeners to seek out specialized repertoires, the cinema brought Phrygian harmony into the experience of billions — woven into the fabric of blockbusters, horror films, animated features, epic fantasies, and the vast libraries of video game soundtracks. In doing so, film composers did not merely use the Phrygian mode; they systematized it, gave it new dramatic functions, and transformed it from a modal scale into a cinematic language.

The Sonic Shorthand for Darkness, Antiquity, and the Supernatural

The association between the Phrygian mode and negative, threatening, or archaic qualities stretches back to Aristotle, but film music gave these associations a new precision and a global audience. By the mid-twentieth century, Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant had become reliable shorthand for a cluster of cinematic meanings: the ancient world (Egypt, Rome, Babylon, the medieval period), the supernatural (ghosts, demons, witches, dark magic), the villainous (antagonists, armies of darkness, malevolent forces), and the exotic or dangerous Other (cultures coded as foreign, mysterious, or threatening by Hollywood convention). These associations were not arbitrary — they derived partly from the music's actual acoustic properties (the flat second creates genuine tension and unease) and partly from the accumulated weight of convention, as composers borrowed from one another and audiences came to recognize the mode's emotional signature.

The establishment of this convention was gradual. Composers of the Golden Age of Hollywood — Max Steiner, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Alfred Newman, Miklos Rozsa — drew on a late-Romantic harmonic vocabulary that occasionally touched Phrygian territory, particularly in scenes set in ancient or exotic locales. Rozsa was especially significant: his scores for *Ben-Hur* (1959), *King of Kings* (1961), and *El Cid*

(1961) drew extensively on ancient modal scales including Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant, and Rozsa researched ancient Greek and Middle Eastern music specifically to give these scores historical authenticity. His work established the equation ancient world = Phrygian-inflected modality that has persisted in Hollywood scoring to this day.

Bernard Herrmann and the Horror Tradition

No figure looms larger over the use of Phrygian harmony in horror and suspense film music than Bernard Herrmann (1911–1975). Herrmann's landmark scores — *Psycho* (1960), *Vertigo* (1958), *Cape Fear* (1962), and *Taxi Driver* (1976) — drew on a highly chromatic harmonic language with strong Phrygian inflections. The famous shower scene in *Psycho* is scored for strings alone, and while its slashing violence is carried by the rhythmic attack, the underlying harmonic language is saturated with Phrygian and chromatic half-step motion — the flat-second interval doing exactly what it has done since ancient Greek music: signaling danger, violation, and psychic disturbance.

Herrmann's influence on subsequent horror scoring is incalculable. His use of sustained low strings, chromatic half-step bass motion, and Phrygian-adjacent harmonics established a template that composers from John Carpenter (*Halloween*, 1978) to Ennio Morricone to the composers of the modern prestige horror era (Mark Korven's *The Witch*, 2015; Colin Stetson's *Hereditary*, 2018; Bobby Krlic's *Midsommar*, 2019) have drawn on. Carpenter's *Halloween* theme, one of the most immediately recognizable horror cues in cinema history, is built on a minor ostinato with a prominent flat-second interval — a direct descendant of Herrmann's Phrygian-inflected language, though Carpenter arrived at it intuitively rather than academically.

The horror genre's adoption of Phrygian harmony reflects something deeper than convention. The flat second — the note that creates the Phrygian mode's defining half step — is genuinely unsettling to Western-trained ears because it contradicts the upward-resolving tendency of the leading tone in major-key music. Where the major scale's seventh degree reaches upward to the tonic with expectation and fulfillment, the Phrygian flat second presses downward toward

the tonic with inescapability and dread. Horror composers have exploited this acoustic truth for decades, and audiences have learned to recognize it.

The Villain Convention: Phrygian as the Sound of Menace

In mainstream Hollywood scoring, the Phrygian mode became so strongly associated with antagonists and threatening forces that it effectively became a villain convention — a reliable signaling device audiences could read almost unconsciously. Hans Zimmer, the most commercially dominant film composer of the past three decades, has returned to this convention repeatedly. His General Zod theme for *Man of Steel* (2013) is built on a pure Phrygian scale, its characteristic flat second establishing the alien general's otherness and menace. The Joker's theme in *The Dark Knight* (2008), co-composed with James Newton Howard, uses Phrygian-inflected harmonics sustained over discordant string textures to communicate chaos and psychopathy.

John Williams — whose harmonic language is typically more Romantic and diatonic — reached for Phrygian inflections in the Imperial March from *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), one of the most recognizable villain themes in film history. The march itself is not purely Phrygian, but it employs the flat second prominently in its inner voice leading, and the score's treatment of the Empire's forces more broadly uses Phrygian-mode coloring to signal implacable, mechanical evil. Williams similarly used Phrygian elements for Voldemort's themes in the *Harry Potter* series and for the shark's approach in *Jaws*, where the famous two-note ostinato (E–F, or minor second) is the Phrygian mode reduced to its absolute minimum — just the tonic and its flat second, cycling inexorably.

Danny Elfman built much of his signature sound — the gothic, carnival-tinged aesthetic of the Tim Burton films — on Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant harmony. The main theme of *Batman* (1989), the *Edward Scissorhands* score (1990), the *Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), and the *Beetlejuice* theme (1988) all draw heavily on Phrygian Dominant, exploiting the augmented second's quality of strangeness and dark whimsy. Elfman's use of the mode is distinctive in that it is not purely

sinister — his Phrygian writing carries a quality of theatrical, macabre playfulness that sets it apart from Zimmer's more aggressive use.

Howard Shore and The Lord of the Rings: Modal Leitmotif as Architecture

Howard Shore's score for Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings trilogy (2001–2003) represents the most architecturally sophisticated use of the Phrygian mode in the history of film music — and arguably one of the most complex deployments of modal leitmotif in any medium. Shore composed over ninety separate themes for the trilogy, organized into a vast network of musical motifs, each assigned to a specific character, place, people, or concept. Crucially, Shore assigned different musical modes and scales to different peoples and cultures of Middle-earth, using modality as a structural and dramatic language.

The Phrygian mode is associated in Shore's score with Mordor and the forces of darkness. The Prologue theme — one of the most immediately recognizable cues in the trilogy, accompanying Galadriel's narration over the forging of the One Ring — is composed in F Phrygian, with the second half of the melody modulating to Phrygian Dominant as the Ring's corrupting power is described. This shift from pure Phrygian to Phrygian Dominant within a single theme is extraordinarily telling: it maps the mode's expressive range (pure Phrygian = archaic, somber, foreboding; Phrygian Dominant = overtly menacing, exotic, corrupted) onto the Ring's dual nature as an ancient artifact and a source of active evil.

The Isengard and Mordor themes throughout the trilogy continue this Phrygian association. Saruman's forces are accompanied by grinding, heavily rhythmic Phrygian ostinatos; the Nazgul themes use extreme Phrygian inflections at the outer limits of the orchestra's expressive range; and the climactic scenes at Mount Doom draw on the full Phrygian vocabulary Shore had established across all three films. This systematic, architecture-level use of the mode — not merely as a coloristic device but as a structural organizing principle — distinguishes Shore's approach from virtually all other film composers of his era and makes the LOTR score a landmark in the modal use of film music.

Shore's approach had significant influence on the subsequent generation of film and television composers. The use of Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant as markers for dark fantasy, mythic evil, and ancient threat became even more widespread in fantasy film and television scoring after LOTR, appearing in scores for Game of Thrones (Ramin Djawadi), The Hobbit films (Shore again), The Witcher (Sonya Belousova and Giona Ostinelli), and countless others.

Fantasy, Mythology, and the Ancient World

Beyond the villain and horror conventions, the Phrygian mode performs a separate but related function in film music: evoking the ancient world. The association of the mode with antiquity derives from its genuine historical pedigree — it is, after all, one of the oldest named modes in Western music — but in film scoring it became a kind of aural time machine, transporting audiences to pre-modern settings. Compositions in this vein include Ennio Morricone's extensive use of modal scales including Phrygian in his scores for spaghetti westerns and historical epics (*The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, 1966; *Once Upon a Time in America*, 1984), John Barry's work in historical and adventure films, and Tan Dun's score for *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), which blends Chinese musical modality with Western Phrygian inflections.

Gladiator (2000, scored by Hans Zimmer and Lisa Gerrard) is particularly significant. The film's score uses Phrygian Dominant extensively in combination with ancient percussion and the distinctive voice of Lisa Gerrard to create a sound world that is simultaneously Roman-feeling and universally archaic. The score became enormously influential, essentially codifying the sound of the 'ancient world epic' for the early twenty-first century and spawning a generation of imitations. Zimmer and Gerrard's Phrygian-inflected writing for *Gladiator* can be heard echoed in scores for *Troy* (2004), *Alexander* (2004), *300* (2006), and numerous subsequent historical action films.

Klaus Badelt and Harry Gregson-Williams's *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003) extended the Phrygian convention into adventure-fantasy territory, using the mode for supernatural and exotic sequences.

Thomas Newman's scores regularly employ Phrygian coloring for moments of mystery, loss, and spiritual searching. Jóhann Jóhannsson (whose scores for *Arrival*, 2016, and *Blade Runner 2049*, 2017, are among the most musically sophisticated of the past decade) used Phrygian-adjacent modal writing for the alien communication sequences in *Arrival* — the mode's archaic, otherworldly quality perfectly suited to music that needed to sound both ancient and impossibly strange.

Television: Game of Thrones and the Modern Fantasy Score

The success of the *Lord of the Rings* films deeply influenced television scoring, particularly after the emergence of prestige television fantasy in the 2010s. Ramin Djawadi's score for *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019) is the most significant example. Djawadi, a Zimmer protégé, used the Phrygian mode and Phrygian Dominant extensively throughout the series, most notably in the main title theme — one of the most widely recognized pieces of television music in history. The main theme's persistent minor modality with Phrygian inflections, combined with its insistent rhythmic drive, established the series' tone of relentless menace and moral ambiguity. Specific character and faction themes drew on different modal areas, with the Night King's themes pushing further into Phrygian territory as the existential threat to Westeros intensified.

Djawadi's scores for *Westworld* (2016–present) and *House of the Dragon* (2022–present) continued and extended this modal vocabulary. The *Westworld* score, which incorporates piano covers of rock songs alongside original orchestral writing, uses Phrygian harmony to signal the hosts' growing awareness and the show's underlying menace. The *Witcher* series (Netflix, 2019–present), scored by Sonya Belousova and Giona Ostinelli, drew extensively on Slavic folk modes and Phrygian-inflected writing to evoke the series' dark medieval fantasy world.

Anime and East Asian Animation

The Phrygian mode occupies a distinctive and somewhat different role in Japanese animation and game music than in Western film

scoring. Japanese composers working in anime and video game music inherited both the Western Phrygian tradition and a native tradition of modal pentatonic writing that includes scale structures analogous to Phrygian. The resulting style — sometimes called 'battle music' or 'epic anime' in popular discourse — blends Western Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant with Japanese melodic idioms to create a sound that has become globally recognized.

Yoko Shimomura, whose extensive game and anime scores include *Street Fighter II* (1991), *Kingdom Hearts* (2002), and the *Final Fantasy XV* score (2016), is one of the most prolific users of Phrygian harmony in East Asian game and animation music. Her battle themes and antagonist themes consistently return to Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant, exploiting the mode's aggressive, intense quality in the context of rhythm-heavy orchestral writing. Joe Hisaishi, whose decades-long collaboration with filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki produced some of the most beloved animated film scores in history (*My Neighbor Totoro*, 1988; *Princess Mononoke*, 1997; *Spirited Away*, 2001; *Howl's Moving Castle*, 2004), uses Phrygian elements more sparingly and expressively than the action-oriented composers — but the mode appears throughout his work in moments of mystery, threat, and transcendence.

Hitoshi Sakimoto's scores for the *Final Fantasy Tactics* series (1997) and *Final Fantasy XII* (2006), Nobuo Uematsu's work across the *Final Fantasy* series (particularly the darker chapters from *Final Fantasy VI* onward), and Yasunori Mitsuda's scores for *Xenogears* (1998) and *Chrono Cross* (1999) all demonstrate sophisticated Phrygian usage. These composers created a distinctive East Asian modal vocabulary for dark fantasy and science fiction that has been enormously influential globally, and which effectively brought Phrygian harmony to entire generations of listeners who encountered it first through video games rather than through Western classical or film music.

The Temp Track Effect and Stylistic Convergence

A significant and often underappreciated factor in the proliferation of Phrygian harmony in film music is the temp track — the temporary music editors place under a film's rough cut during production and

editing. Temp tracks are drawn from existing scores, and because Phrygian-inflected music is so emotionally effective and immediately recognizable, cues by Zimmer, Shore, Elfman, and others have been used as temp tracks for hundreds of films. Directors and editors become accustomed to these cues during the editing process, and they often explicitly ask composers to deliver something with a similar emotional quality. This creates a feedback loop: Phrygian writing gets used as temp music because it works; composers are asked to write music like the temp; they write Phrygian-inflected music; it in turn gets used as temp music for subsequent productions.

The result is a degree of stylistic convergence in Hollywood scoring — particularly in the action, fantasy, and horror genres — that critics have labeled 'the Zimmer effect' or, less charitably, 'trailer music.' The muscular, percussion-heavy Phrygian-Dominant writing that Zimmer pioneered in the mid-2000s with *Batman Begins* (2005) and *Pirates of the Caribbean* has become so ubiquitous in blockbuster scoring that it borders on cliché. The mode has not become less effective — audiences still respond to it — but its currency has been partially inflated by overuse. The most thoughtful film composers of the current generation are navigating this carefully, seeking ways to deploy the mode's genuine expressive power without falling into formula.

Notable Film and Television Scores Employing the Phrygian Mode

The following catalog of significant film, television, and animation scores supplements the entries in the compositions catalog (Section 3, subsection 3.4) of this monograph, focusing on works where the Phrygian mode plays a structural or thematically significant role.

Psycho

Composer / Artist: Bernard Herrmann

Date / Period: 1960

Genre: Film score — horror / thriller

Phrygian Mode Usage: Herrmann's landmark score established the template for horror-film use of chromatic half-step motion and Phrygian-inflected harmony. The shower scene's slashing strings

operate in a harmonic space saturated with flat-second motion. Phrygian chromatic writing as structural device throughout.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Vertigo

Composer / Artist: Bernard Herrmann

Date / Period: 1958

Genre: Film score — psychological thriller

Phrygian Mode Usage: Uses an obsessive harmonic language anchored in chromatic half-step motion with Phrygian inflections throughout. The famous 'falling' leitmotif employs flat-second voice leading. Phrygian coloring as expression of psychological disintegration.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Ben-Hur

Composer / Artist: Miklos Rozsa

Date / Period: 1959

Genre: Film score — historical epic

Phrygian Mode Usage: Rozsa researched ancient Greek and Middle Eastern modal scales specifically for this score. Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant writing is central to the score's evocation of the ancient Roman-Jewish world. Among the earliest systematic uses of Phrygian mode in Hollywood scoring. Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant as historical-authenticity device.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Composer / Artist: Ennio Morricone

Date / Period: 1966

Genre: Film score — spaghetti western

Phrygian Mode Usage: Morricone's legendary score uses a wide range of modal colors including Phrygian inflections to create its distinctive atmosphere of arid menace and moral ambiguity. The whistled main theme contains Phrygian-adjacent modal writing. Modal writing used as atmospheric and psychological device.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Star Wars — Imperial March

Composer / Artist: John Williams

Date / Period: 1980

Genre: Film score — science fiction

Phrygian Mode Usage: The most recognizable villain theme in cinema uses the flat-second interval prominently in its inner voice leading, creating the Phrygian-inflected sense of implacable menace associated with Darth Vader and the Empire. Phrygian flat-second used as villain marker.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Jaws — Main Theme

Composer / Artist: John Williams

Date / Period: 1975

Genre: Film score — thriller / horror

Phrygian Mode Usage: The famous two-note ostinato (E–F, a minor second) is the Phrygian mode reduced to its absolute minimum — the tonic and its flat second cycling in an endless approach. One of the most economical and effective uses of the Phrygian interval in any medium. Pure Phrygian half step as psychological device.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Batman (1989)

Composer / Artist: Danny Elfman

Date / Period: 1989

Genre: Film score — superhero / dark fantasy

Phrygian Mode Usage: Elfman's score established his signature gothic style built on Phrygian Dominant harmony, giving the film its atmosphere of dark theatricality. The main theme's augmented second interval (F to G# in E Phrygian Dominant) is the defining sound of the Burton-Elfman Batman. Phrygian Dominant as gothic-theatrical color.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Edward Scissorhands

Composer / Artist: Danny Elfman

Date / Period: 1990

Genre: Film score — dark fantasy / romance

Phrygian Mode Usage: Elfman's most emotionally nuanced use of Phrygian Dominant, balancing the mode's strangeness with genuine tenderness for the isolated title character. The waltz-like main theme uses Phrygian Dominant to simultaneously evoke Edward's otherness and his longing. Phrygian Dominant as expression of alienation and longing.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

The Nightmare Before Christmas

Composer / Artist: Danny Elfman

Date / Period: 1993

Genre: Film score / songs — animated dark fantasy

Phrygian Mode Usage: Elfman's score and songs draw extensively on Phrygian Dominant throughout. 'This Is Halloween' and the main theme use the mode's augmented second to create a sound of macabre playfulness that became the template for an entire subgenre of dark-fantasy animation scoring. Phrygian Dominant as dark whimsy.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Gladiator

Composer / Artist: Hans Zimmer and Lisa Gerrard

Date / Period: 2000

Genre: Film score — historical epic

Phrygian Mode Usage: Zimmer and Gerrard's enormously influential score uses Phrygian Dominant extensively in combination with ancient percussion and Gerrard's wordless vocals to evoke the ancient Roman world. The score codified the sound of the modern historical epic and influenced a decade of imitators. Phrygian Dominant as ancient-world signifier.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

The Lord of the Rings Trilogy — Complete Score

Composer / Artist: Howard Shore

Date / Period: 2001–2003

Genre: Film score — epic fantasy

Phrygian Mode Usage: The most architecturally sophisticated use of the Phrygian mode in film history. Shore assigned the Phrygian mode to Mordor and the forces of darkness, using it systematically across ninety-plus themes as a structural principle. The Prologue theme (F Phrygian modulating to Phrygian Dominant), Isengard themes, Nazgul motifs, and Mount Doom sequences form a comprehensive Phrygian modal system. Pure Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant as leitmotif and structural architecture.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Batman Begins / The Dark Knight

Composer / Artist: Hans Zimmer and James Newton Howard

Date / Period: 2005 / 2008

Genre: Film score — superhero / thriller

Phrygian Mode Usage: Zimmer and Howard established the template for modern muscular blockbuster scoring in these films. The Joker theme (The Dark Knight) uses Phrygian-inflected string

dissonance to signify chaos and psychopathy; the broader Batman Begins score introduced the Phrygian-heavy sound that Zimmer would deploy throughout his superhero work. Phrygian as antagonist and urban-threat signifier.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon

Composer / Artist: Tan Dun

Date / Period: 2000

Genre: Film score — martial arts / drama

Phrygian Mode Usage: Tan Dun's Academy Award-winning score blends Chinese modal pentatonic writing with Western Phrygian inflections and cello solos (Yo-Yo Ma) to create a sound that is simultaneously Chinese and universally archaic. Phrygian elements used to evoke the mythic dimension of the wuxia tradition.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Game of Thrones — Main Title and Score

Composer / Artist: Ramin Djawadi

Date / Period: 2011–2019

Genre: Television score — dark fantasy

Phrygian Mode Usage: Djawadi's score for the series used Phrygian mode and Phrygian Dominant throughout, from the iconic main title theme to the Night King's increasingly extreme Phrygian writing in the later seasons. One of the most widely heard uses of Phrygian harmony in television history. Phrygian as the sonic world of Westeros.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Arrival

Composer / Artist: Johann Johannsson

Date / Period: 2016

Genre: Film score — science fiction

Phrygian Mode Usage: Johannsson's score for Denis Villeneuve's alien-contact film uses Phrygian-adjacent modal writing for the heptapod communication sequences, deploying the mode's archaic quality to suggest a presence that is simultaneously ancient and entirely alien. Phrygian-modal writing as marker of non-human consciousness.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Princess Mononoke

Composer / Artist: Joe Hisaishi

Date / Period: 1997

Genre: Film score — animated fantasy

Phrygian Mode Usage: Hisaishi's score for Miyazaki's epic uses Phrygian modal inflections in the forest god and demon-god sequences, blending Western modal writing with Japanese pentatonic idioms. The mode appears at moments of spiritual intensity and threat. Phrygian elements in a Japanese-Western modal synthesis.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Spirited Away

Composer / Artist: Joe Hisaishi

Date / Period: 2001

Genre: Film score — animated fantasy

Phrygian Mode Usage: Hisaishi's Academy Award-winning score for Miyazaki's masterwork uses Phrygian coloring in the bathhouse sequences and in scenes involving the more threatening spirit characters. The mode marks the border between the human world and the spirit world. Phrygian as threshold music between realms.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Hereditary

Composer / Artist: Colin Stetson

Date / Period: 2018

Genre: Film score — horror

Phrygian Mode Usage: Stetson's score, created primarily from extended bass saxophone techniques, uses Phrygian-inflected pitch writing to generate a sustained atmosphere of dread. Following directly in Herrmann's footsteps, the score treats the flat-second interval as a source of inescapable menace. Phrygian chromatic writing in extreme timbre.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Midsommar

Composer / Artist: Bobby Krlic

Date / Period: 2019

Genre: Film score — folk horror

Phrygian Mode Usage: Krlic's unsettling score draws on Scandinavian folk modes and Phrygian-inflected writing to create the contradictory atmosphere of the film's sunlit horror. The score's modal language evokes an ancient, pre-Christian ritual world in which the Phrygian mode's archaic quality functions as both authentic folk element and sinister signal. Phrygian as folk-horror modal foundation.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Kingdom Hearts — Battle and Boss Themes

Composer / Artist: Yoko Shimomura

Date / Period: 2002–present

Genre: Video game score

Phrygian Mode Usage: Shimomura's landmark series score uses Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant extensively in its battle music and antagonist themes, creating the template for the 'epic anime' modal style that influenced a generation of East Asian game composers. Phrygian Dominant as battle and antagonist signifier.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Final Fantasy XV

Composer / Artist: Yoko Shimomura

Date / Period: 2016

Genre: Video game score

Phrygian Mode Usage: Shimomura's most ambitious score uses Phrygian Dominant throughout its orchestral battle sequences and antagonist themes, demonstrating the full expressive range of the mode in a modern orchestral game context. Phrygian Dominant as structural scale for the game's darker themes.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Xenogears

Composer / Artist: Yasunori Mitsuda

Date / Period: 1998

Genre: Video game score

Phrygian Mode Usage: Mitsuda's score draws on Celtic and Middle Eastern modal scales including Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant to create the science-fiction/fantasy world of the game. The opening theme and several battle pieces use Phrygian writing. Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant as world-building modal color.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Dark Souls / Elden Ring — Complete Scores

Composer / Artist: Motoi Sakuraba / Yuka Kitamura / others

Date / Period: 2011–2022

Genre: Video game score

Phrygian Mode Usage: The entire Soulsborne series uses Phrygian modal writing as a foundational element of its sound design. Boss themes, environmental music, and character leitmotifs draw on Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant to create the series' defining

atmosphere of dark grandeur and existential menace. One of the most sustained and acclaimed bodies of Phrygian modal writing in video game music. Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant as primary modal language.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

SECTION 3 — Comprehensive List of Compositions Using the Phrygian Mode

This section catalogs compositions from across the full spectrum of musical traditions that employ the Phrygian mode — whether in its pure form, as Phrygian Dominant, or as a significant coloristic element within a broader tonal framework. Each entry identifies the specific variant and manner of use wherever possible. YouTube search links accompanying each entry are provided as listening starting points; they link to current search results rather than specific recordings, ensuring accessibility as the online landscape evolves.

A note on method: Modal analysis of individual compositions is an interpretive enterprise, particularly in popular and rock music where modal usage is often intuitive rather than theoretically explicit. The modal identifications in this catalog represent defensible analytical readings based on the harmonic content most commonly heard in each work. In some cases — particularly entries for popular songs — scholarly opinion may differ. Readers with specialist knowledge of particular traditions are invited to treat these entries as starting points for further analysis rather than settled classifications.

Distribution of Phrygian Mode Compositions by Era and Genre

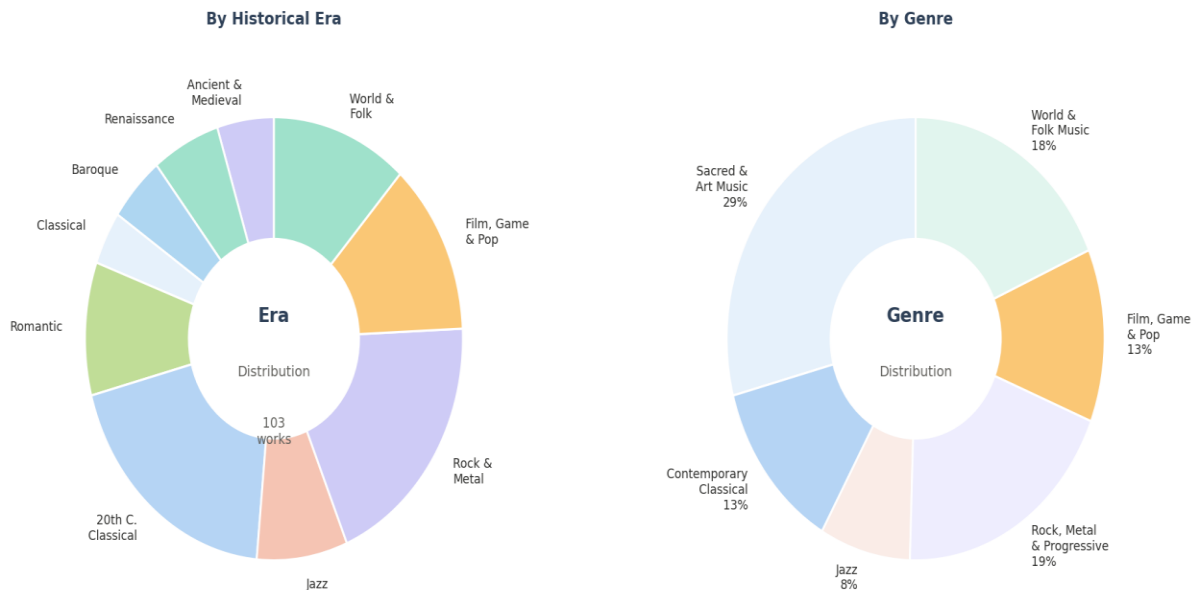


Figure 6: Distribution of the 75+ catalogued compositions by historical era (left) and by genre (right).

3.1 — Western Classical Music

Medieval

Gregorian Chant — Mode III and Mode IV Repertoire

Composer / Artist: Anonymous (various)

Date / Period: c. 6th–13th centuries

Genre: Sacred plainchant

Phrygian Mode Usage: The Phrygian mode (Mode III, authentic; Mode IV, plagal/Hypophrygian) forms the tonal basis of a large portion of the Gregorian chant repertoire. Mode III chants have their final on E, with a reciting tone on C. Significant portions of the Requiem Mass and Office of the Dead are set in Phrygian modes. Pure Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

First Delphic Hymn

Composer / Artist: Limenius (Athenian composer)

Date / Period: 128 BCE

Genre: Ancient Greek sacred music

Phrygian Mode Usage: Written in the Phrygian and Hyperphrygian tonoi with considerable variation. One of the earliest surviving documented musical compositions employing the Phrygian tonos. Ancient Greek Phrygian tonos.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Seikilos Epitaph

Composer / Artist: Unknown (ancient Greek)

Date / Period: 1st century AD

Genre: Ancient Greek song / epitaph

Phrygian Mode Usage: One of the oldest complete surviving musical compositions. Written in the Phrygian species (diatonic genus), in the lastian (or low Phrygian) transposition. An invaluable surviving example of the ancient Phrygian modal system in practice. Ancient Greek Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Sacred Compositions in Phrygian Mode

Composer / Artist: Hildegard von Bingen

Date / Period: c. 1150–1179

Genre: Sacred chant / monophony

Phrygian Mode Usage: Hildegard made the Phrygian scale (starting on E) her preferred mode — a highly unusual choice for the period. Her surviving musical compositions feature the Phrygian mode as their primary tonal framework, giving them a distinctively dark, mystical quality that sets them apart from virtually all other twelfth-century sacred music. Pure E Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Renaissance

Nymphes des bois / Requiem aeternam

Composer / Artist: Josquin des Prez

Date / Period: c. 1497

Genre: Sacred motet / lament

Phrygian Mode Usage: A lament on the death of Johannes Ockeghem, this work deliberately transposes the Introit of the Requiem Mass into the Phrygian mode to heighten its melancholic power. Pure Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Miserere

Composer / Artist: Josquin des Prez

Date / Period: c. 1503

Genre: Sacred motet

Phrygian Mode Usage: A significant large-scale setting of Psalm 51 in the Phrygian mode, demonstrating Josquin's sophisticated handling of Mode III across an extended polyphonic work. Pure Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

In me transierunt

Composer / Artist: Orlando di Lasso

Date / Period: c. 1560s

Genre: Sacred motet

Phrygian Mode Usage: A Phrygian-mode motet from one of the great late Renaissance composers, demonstrating the mode's continued use in sacred polyphony across national traditions. Pure Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Canticum Canticorum (Song of Solomon) — Selected Motets

Composer / Artist: Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

Date / Period: c. 1584

Genre: Sacred polyphony

Phrygian Mode Usage: Several of the 29 motets in this cycle are specifically composed in E Phrygian mode, exploiting the mode's expressive intensity for settings of the Bible's most passionate erotic and devotional poetry. Pure E Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Third Mode Melody (Why fum'th in sight — Psalm 2 Setting)

Composer / Artist: Thomas Tallis

Date / Period: 1567

Genre: Sacred hymn / psalm setting

Phrygian Mode Usage: One of nine psalm tunes Tallis composed for Archbishop Parker's Psalter, each in a different mode. The Third Mode Melody, in Phrygian, later became the basis for Vaughan Williams's Fantasia. Pure Phrygian (G Phrygian in Vaughan Williams's arrangement).

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Baroque

Johannes-Passion

Composer / Artist: Heinrich Schutz

Date / Period: 1666

Genre: Sacred oratorio / Passion setting

Phrygian Mode Usage: Cast in the Phrygian mode throughout, this Passion setting by Bach's great German predecessor demonstrates the Phrygian mode's continued centrality to German sacred music in the generation before Bach. Pure Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir, BWV 38

Composer / Artist: Johann Sebastian Bach

Date / Period: 1724

Genre: Sacred cantata

Phrygian Mode Usage: Cast entirely in the Phrygian mode, based on Martin Luther's hymn setting of Psalm 130. Bach uses chromatic inflections and unusual harmonic progressions within the Phrygian framework to create an intensely expressive, modern-sounding work. Pure Phrygian throughout.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Brandenburg Concerto No. 3, Second Movement (Adagio)

Composer / Artist: Johann Sebastian Bach

Date / Period: c. 1721

Genre: Orchestral concerto

Phrygian Mode Usage: The entire second movement consists of a single Phrygian cadence — two chords that serve as a brief, solemn bridge between the outer movements. One of the most economical and elegant uses of the Phrygian cadence in the entire repertoire. Phrygian half cadence (iv6–V).

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Die Himmel erzahlen die Ehre Gottes, BWV 76

Composer / Artist: Johann Sebastian Bach

Date / Period: 1723

Genre: Sacred cantata

Phrygian Mode Usage: Preserves the Phrygian mode of the original chorale melody 'Es woll uns Gott genadig sein' (by Matthias Greitter) in its chorale movements. Pure Phrygian in the chorale settings.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Prelude in A minor, BuxWV 152 (labeled 'Phrygisch')

Composer / Artist: Dieterich Buxtehude

Date / Period: Late 17th century

Genre: Organ prelude

Phrygian Mode Usage: Written in A Phrygian mode and explicitly labeled 'Phrygisch' in the Buxtehude catalogue (BuxWV). This prelude by Bach's great predecessor established a tradition of Phrygian organ writing that profoundly influenced the young Bach. Pure A Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Classical

Missa Solemnis — Crucifixus

Composer / Artist: Ludwig van Beethoven

Date / Period: 1823

Genre: Sacred choral/orchestral

Phrygian Mode Usage: The 'Crucifixus' section employs the Phrygian tetrachord (the descending four-note pattern from the tonic through the flatted second degree) to depict the entombment of Christ. Phrygian tetrachord used as expressive device.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Masonic Funeral Music, K. 477

Composer / Artist: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Date / Period: 1785

Genre: Orchestral

Phrygian Mode Usage: Features descending Phrygian spiral patterns in the opening measures. The same Phrygian melodic figure appears in Don Giovanni. Phrygian inflections used as coloristic and dramatic device.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Don Giovanni — Overture and Act I

Composer / Artist: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Date / Period: 1787

Genre: Opera

Phrygian Mode Usage: The overture and portions of Act I employ D Phrygian modal inflections, contributing to the opera's dark, fateful atmosphere. Phrygian elements as coloristic device within a tonal framework.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Romantic

Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98 — Second Movement

Composer / Artist: Johannes Brahms

Date / Period: 1885

Genre: Symphonic

Phrygian Mode Usage: The second movement opens with fanfares built on the Phrygian mode, deriving an austere, archaic quality from the tension between C major scale tones played over an E pedal. E Phrygian used as structural framework for the movement's opening.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Ein deutsches Requiem, Op. 45 — Sixth Movement

Composer / Artist: Johannes Brahms

Date / Period: 1868

Genre: Sacred choral/orchestral

Phrygian Mode Usage: Incorporates Phrygian elements for emotional depth and spiritual intensity. Phrygian inflections used as expressive coloring.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Ave Regina caelorum, WAB 8

Composer / Artist: Anton Bruckner

Date / Period: 1885-88

Genre: Sacred choral

Phrygian Mode Usage: One of several Bruckner sacred vocal works employing the Phrygian mode as part of his deep engagement with Gregorian chant tradition. Pure Phrygian modal writing.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Pange lingua, WAB 33 (second setting)

Composer / Artist: Anton Bruckner

Date / Period: 1868

Genre: Sacred choral

Phrygian Mode Usage: A Phrygian-mode setting of the medieval hymn text, reflecting Bruckner's sustained engagement with the Phrygian mode in sacred vocal music. Pure Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Symphony No. 6 — First, Third, and Fourth Movements

Composer / Artist: Anton Bruckner

Date / Period: 1881

Genre: Symphonic

Phrygian Mode Usage: The most extensively Phrygian of Bruckner's symphonies, with Phrygian modal passages structurally prominent in three of the four movements. Phrygian inflections integrated into large-scale symphonic architecture.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Symphony No. 8 — First and Fourth Movements

Composer / Artist: Anton Bruckner

Date / Period: 1892

Genre: Symphonic

Phrygian Mode Usage: The two outer movements of this monumental symphony contain significant Phrygian modal passages, contributing to the work's archaic, devotional grandeur. Phrygian elements in Romantic symphonic context.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2

Composer / Artist: Franz Liszt

Date / Period: 1847

Genre: Solo piano

Phrygian Mode Usage: Employs the Phrygian mode as part of its evocation of Hungarian and Romani musical traditions. Phrygian inflections within a broader tonal framework.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Pictures at an Exhibition — The Great Gate of Kiev

Composer / Artist: Modest Mussorgsky

Date / Period: 1874

Genre: Solo piano (later orchestrated by Ravel)

Phrygian Mode Usage: Uses modal elements including Phrygian inflections to evoke Russian Orthodox church chant and archaic grandeur. Phrygian coloring within a broadly tonal framework.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

20th Century and Contemporary

Adagio for Strings, Op. 11

Composer / Artist: Samuel Barber

Date / Period: 1936

Genre: String orchestra

Phrygian Mode Usage: One of the most emotionally powerful and widely performed orchestral works of the 20th century. The Adagio employs Phrygian modal inflections to generate its characteristic atmosphere of profound, aching sorrow. Phrygian elements integrated into a tonal framework.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis

Composer / Artist: Ralph Vaughan Williams

Date / Period: 1910

Genre: String orchestra

Phrygian Mode Usage: Written in G Phrygian mode throughout, based on Thomas Tallis's 1567 Third Mode Melody. One of the most celebrated and sustained uses of the Phrygian mode in the orchestral repertoire. Pure G Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Fantasia on Greensleeves

Composer / Artist: Ralph Vaughan Williams

Date / Period: 1934

Genre: String orchestra with harp and flutes

Phrygian Mode Usage: Based on the English folk melody 'Greensleeves,' which uses a modal framework with strong Phrygian and Dorian inflections. Mixed modal writing with Phrygian elements.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Hymn to St Cecilia

Composer / Artist: Benjamin Britten

Date / Period: 1942

Genre: Choral / a cappella

Phrygian Mode Usage: A significant 20th-century choral work employing Phrygian modal writing, characteristic of Britten's interest in modal harmonies as an alternative to strict tonality. Phrygian modal inflections.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Satyagraha — Final Aria

Composer / Artist: Philip Glass

Date / Period: 1980

Genre: Opera / minimalism

Phrygian Mode Usage: The concluding aria of Glass's opera about Mahatma Gandhi employs Phrygian modal writing, giving the work's culminating moment a timeless, devotional character. Pure Phrygian in the final aria.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Leyenda (Asturias) from Suite española

Composer / Artist: Isaac Albeniz

Date / Period: 1892

Genre: Solo piano

Phrygian Mode Usage: A stylized malaguena built on the Spanish Phrygian mode, one of the defining works of Spanish nationalist piano music. Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant (Spanish Phrygian).

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Rumores de la Caleta (Malagena), Op. 71, No. 6

Composer / Artist: Isaac Albeniz

Date / Period: 1889

Genre: Solo piano

Phrygian Mode Usage: An evocative Andalusian piece built on the Spanish Phrygian mode, exploiting the characteristic Phrygian Dominant harmonies of the malaguena tradition. Phrygian Dominant throughout.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Iberia (four books)

Composer / Artist: Isaac Albeniz

Date / Period: 1905-1909

Genre: Solo piano

Phrygian Mode Usage: The Phrygian mode appears prominently throughout this magnum opus of Spanish piano music, reflecting the flamenco and Andalusian folk traditions that pervade the entire collection. Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant used extensively.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Ritual Fire Dance (Danza ritual del fuego) from El amor brujo

Composer / Artist: Manuel de Falla

Date / Period: 1915

Genre: Ballet / orchestral

Phrygian Mode Usage: Immersed in the Andalusian idiom, with the Phrygian mode and Phrygian Dominant serving as the primary

harmonic and melodic framework. One of the most famous concert works built on the Phrygian mode. Phrygian Dominant (Spanish Phrygian).

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Nights in the Gardens of Spain

Composer / Artist: Manuel de Falla

Date / Period: 1916

Genre: Piano and orchestra

Phrygian Mode Usage: Saturated with Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant sonorities evoking the nocturnal atmosphere of Andalusia. The Phrygian mode pervades the harmonic language of all three movements.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Alborada del gracioso from Miroirs

Composer / Artist: Maurice Ravel

Date / Period: 1905

Genre: Solo piano (later orchestrated)

Phrygian Mode Usage: Uses Phrygian and Phrygian with raised third (Phrygian Dominant) to evoke Spanish atmosphere. Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Piano Concerto in G major — Second Movement

Composer / Artist: Maurice Ravel

Date / Period: 1931

Genre: Piano concerto

Phrygian Mode Usage: The plaintive Cor Anglais solo that opens this famous slow movement is written in the Phrygian mode, giving it a haunting, archaic quality. Pure Phrygian used melodically.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

String Quartet in G minor

Composer / Artist: Claude Debussy

Date / Period: 1893

Genre: Chamber music

Phrygian Mode Usage: Employs the Phrygian mode for distinctive harmonic coloring, reflecting Debussy's interest in modal alternatives to traditional tonal harmony. Phrygian used as coloristic element.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

La puerta del Vino from Preludes, Book II

Composer / Artist: Claude Debussy

Date / Period: 1913

Genre: Solo piano

Phrygian Mode Usage: Evokes a Spanish flamenco atmosphere with Phrygian Dominant inflections. Phrygian Dominant as coloristic device.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

String Quartet No. 4

Composer / Artist: Bela Bartok

Date / Period: 1928

Genre: Chamber music

Phrygian Mode Usage: Uses the Phrygian mode in combination with dissonant major-minor chord structures, reflecting Bartok's synthesis of folk-derived modal writing and modernist techniques. Phrygian mode integrated into a broader post-tonal harmonic language.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta

Composer / Artist: Bela Bartok

Date / Period: 1936

Genre: Orchestra

Phrygian Mode Usage: Employs modal writing including Phrygian inflections as part of its complex chromatic and folk-derived harmonic language. Phrygian elements within post-tonal framework.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

The Rite of Spring

Composer / Artist: Igor Stravinsky

Date / Period: 1913

Genre: Ballet / orchestral

Phrygian Mode Usage: Employs Phrygian mode elements among its revolutionary harmonic techniques to create tension and primal unease. Phrygian as one element in a broader poly-modal and poly-tonal language.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Bacchanale from Samson et Dalila

Composer / Artist: Camille Saint-Saens

Date / Period: 1877

Genre: Opera

Phrygian Mode Usage: Wild orgiastic dance using exotic Middle Eastern modes, primarily Hijaz/Phrygian Dominant, for orientalist effect. Phrygian Dominant used to evoke Middle Eastern atmosphere.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Phrygian Gates

Composer / Artist: John Adams

Date / Period: 1977-1978

Genre: Solo piano (minimalism)

Phrygian Mode Usage: A 22-minute work considered Adams's foundational piece, using the alternation between Lydian and Phrygian modes as its primary structural device. The work modulates through the circle of fifths, with 'gates' marking abrupt shifts between modes. Pure Phrygian alternating with Lydian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

China Gates

Composer / Artist: John Adams

Date / Period: 1977-1978

Genre: Solo piano (minimalism)

Phrygian Mode Usage: Companion piece to Phrygian Gates, also exploring minimalist procedures with modal alternation. Phrygian mode as structural element.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

3.2 — Jazz

Flamenco Sketches

Composer / Artist: Miles Davis

Date / Period: 1959

Genre: Modal jazz

Phrygian Mode Usage: One of the five compositions on the landmark album *Kind of Blue*. The piece cycles through five modes, with the fourth mode being D Phrygian. Each soloist improvises over D Phrygian in turn, demonstrating careful adherence to the mode's characteristic notes. Pure D Phrygian in the fourth section.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Solea from Sketches of Spain

Composer / Artist: Miles Davis / Gil Evans

Date / Period: 1960

Genre: Modal jazz / orchestral jazz

Phrygian Mode Usage: An extended composition in D Phrygian, drawing directly on the flamenco solea tradition. The work focuses extended duration on Dm7 for Phrygian sonority, with Miles's trumpet playing over lush Gil Evans orchestrations. D Phrygian throughout.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Ole

Composer / Artist: John Coltrane

Date / Period: 1961

Genre: Modal jazz

Phrygian Mode Usage: An 18-minute showpiece from the album *Ole* Coltrane, inspired by Miles Davis's Spanish-influenced work. Features extended modal improvisation over Phrygian-inflected harmonies. Phrygian elements used in modal improvisation.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Speak No Evil

Composer / Artist: Wayne Shorter

Date / Period: 1966

Genre: Modal jazz

Phrygian Mode Usage: The title track features C Phrygian harmony in its opening eight measures, alternating between Cm7 and Dbmaj7 every four beats — a textbook example of Phrygian harmonic usage in jazz. The half-step motion between the roots (C to Db) defines the Phrygian color. Pure C Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Infant Eyes from Speak No Evil

Composer / Artist: Wayne Shorter

Date / Period: 1966

Genre: Modal jazz

Phrygian Mode Usage: Utilizes Phrygian mode as part of its delicate, contemplative harmonic language. Phrygian elements as harmonic coloring.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Spain

Composer / Artist: Chick Corea

Date / Period: 1972

Genre: Jazz fusion

Phrygian Mode Usage: One of the most famous jazz compositions, featuring B Phrygian mode as its characteristic scale. The F#7 chord accommodates Phrygian Dominant for an unmistakable Spanish feel. B Phrygian and B Phrygian Dominant.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

La Fiesta

Composer / Artist: Chick Corea

Date / Period: 1972

Genre: Jazz fusion

Phrygian Mode Usage: Features Phrygian modal cadences with Spanish-influenced rhythmic energy. Phrygian modal writing used throughout.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Inner Urge

Composer / Artist: Joe Henderson

Date / Period: 1965

Genre: Hard bop / modal jazz

Phrygian Mode Usage: The title track, which became a jazz standard, features modal harmonic structures including Phrygian elements. Phrygian inflections in a post-bop context.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

3.3 — Rock, Metal, and Progressive Music

Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun

Composer / Artist: Pink Floyd

Date / Period: 1968

Genre: Psychedelic rock

Phrygian Mode Usage: Melody in E Phrygian, using the flat-two note with the melodic pattern E–F–E–D–E. One of the earliest uses of Phrygian mode in rock music. Pure E Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Wherever I May Roam

Composer / Artist: Metallica

Date / Period: 1991

Genre: Thrash metal

Phrygian Mode Usage: Main riff and verses are in E Phrygian, creating a heavy, epic feel. The sitar-like intro and main riff exploit the E–F half step extensively. Pure E Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Creeping Death

Composer / Artist: Metallica

Date / Period: 1984

Genre: Thrash metal

Phrygian Mode Usage: Uses the Phrygian mode prominently in the chorus, where the 'Die!' chants are set to a Phrygian-mode chord progression, creating a dark, ritualistic tone appropriate to the song's biblical subject matter. Phrygian mode in chorus sections.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Disposable Heroes

Composer / Artist: Metallica

Date / Period: 1986

Genre: Thrash metal

Phrygian Mode Usage: Written in E Phrygian mode to create a dark, menacing atmosphere. The aggressive riffing exploits the flat-second tension throughout. E Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Battery

Composer / Artist: Metallica

Date / Period: 1986

Genre: Thrash metal

Phrygian Mode Usage: Utilizes the E Phrygian Dominant scale for an exotic, intense feel in its acoustic intro and heavy sections. E Phrygian Dominant.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

The God That Failed

Composer / Artist: Metallica

Date / Period: 1991

Genre: Thrash metal

Phrygian Mode Usage: Features Phrygian mode in its dark, brooding main riff and verse sections. Phrygian elements in riff construction.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Symphony of Destruction

Composer / Artist: Megadeth

Date / Period: 1992

Genre: Thrash metal

Phrygian Mode Usage: Main riff and verses in E Phrygian, with heavy, chugging power chords emphasizing the root and F (flat 2), creating a dark, aggressive menace. E Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Seasons in the Abyss

Composer / Artist: Slayer

Date / Period: 1990

Genre: Thrash metal

Phrygian Mode Usage: Uses Eb Phrygian/Eb Locrian modal elements. The melodic content draws heavily on the flat-second interval. Phrygian elements in a thrash context.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

South of Heaven

Composer / Artist: Slayer

Date / Period: 1988

Genre: Thrash metal

Phrygian Mode Usage: The intro uses E Phrygian Dominant scale with a dissonant tritone, creating the song's iconic sinister atmosphere. E Phrygian Dominant.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Raining Blood

Composer / Artist: Slayer

Date / Period: 1986

Genre: Thrash metal

Phrygian Mode Usage: Features Phrygian-inflected riffing in its chromatic descent patterns. Phrygian elements in chromatic context.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Powerslave

Composer / Artist: Iron Maiden

Date / Period: 1984

Genre: Heavy metal

Phrygian Mode Usage: Opening riff based on A Phrygian for the first three measures before shifting to the fifth mode of D harmonic minor. A Phrygian transitioning to Phrygian Dominant.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Remember Tomorrow

Composer / Artist: Iron Maiden

Date / Period: 1980

Genre: Heavy metal

Phrygian Mode Usage: Uses E Phrygian in its melancholic clean guitar intro and verses. E Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Master's Apprentices from Deliverance

Composer / Artist: Opeth

Date / Period: 2002

Genre: Progressive metal

Phrygian Mode Usage: Uses the Phrygian Dominant scale throughout, demonstrating sophisticated modal application in progressive metal. Phrygian Dominant as primary scale.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Chop Suey!

Composer / Artist: System of a Down

Date / Period: 2001

Genre: Alternative metal

Phrygian Mode Usage: Main riff features the Phrygian mode, demonstrating the mode's dark, powerful quality in an alternative metal context. Phrygian mode in riff construction.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Sugar

Composer / Artist: System of a Down

Date / Period: 1998

Genre: Alternative metal

Phrygian Mode Usage: Uses Middle Eastern inflections and flat-second tension over power chords, drawing on Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant scales. Phrygian elements with Middle Eastern influence.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Everything in Its Right Place

Composer / Artist: Radiohead

Date / Period: 2000

Genre: Alternative / electronic rock

Phrygian Mode Usage: Uses the C Phrygian scale combined with major/minor swapping techniques. The progression creates the song's characteristic unsettled, hypnotic atmosphere. C Phrygian.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Pyramid Song

Composer / Artist: Radiohead

Date / Period: 2001

Genre: Alternative rock

Phrygian Mode Usage: Uses Phrygian mode to explore deep, introspective emotions, with the mode's characteristic flat-second lending an ancient, meditative quality. Phrygian mode as harmonic foundation.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

United States of Eurasia

Composer / Artist: Muse

Date / Period: 2009

Genre: Progressive / alternative rock

Phrygian Mode Usage: Features a piano solo in Eb using both Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant modes. Eb Phrygian and Eb Phrygian Dominant.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Break It to Me

Composer / Artist: Muse

Date / Period: 2018

Genre: Alternative rock

Phrygian Mode Usage: Mostly written in B Phrygian Dominant, giving the track an aggressive, Middle Eastern-inflected quality. B Phrygian Dominant.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Seven Nation Army

Composer / Artist: The White Stripes

Date / Period: 2003

Genre: Alternative / garage rock

Phrygian Mode Usage: The iconic bass-line riff is built on a Phrygian-inflected pattern. One of the most recognizable rock riffs of the 21st century. Phrygian elements in the main riff.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

London Calling

Composer / Artist: The Clash

Date / Period: 1979

Genre: Punk rock

Phrygian Mode Usage: Features the flat-two chord characteristic of E Phrygian. Phrygian inflections in a punk context.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Lateralus

Composer / Artist: Tool

Date / Period: 2001

Genre: Progressive metal

Phrygian Mode Usage: Features Phrygian mode as part of Tool's complex harmonic and rhythmic vocabulary. Phrygian elements in progressive metal context.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

3.4 — Film and Television Scores

Prologue: One Ring to Rule Them All — The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring

Composer / Artist: Howard Shore

Date / Period: 2001

Genre: Film score

Phrygian Mode Usage: Composed in F Phrygian mode, the second half modulating to Phrygian Dominant (with A natural). One of the most recognizable contemporary uses of the Phrygian mode. F Phrygian and F Phrygian Dominant.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

The Lord of the Rings Trilogy — Mordor/Isengard Themes

Composer / Artist: Howard Shore

Date / Period: 2001-2003

Genre: Film score

Phrygian Mode Usage: Multiple themes and movements throughout the trilogy employ Phrygian modal techniques to establish archaic, foreboding atmospheres for the forces of evil. Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant used in leitmotif construction.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

General Zod Theme — Man of Steel

Composer / Artist: Hans Zimmer

Date / Period: 2013

Genre: Film score

Phrygian Mode Usage: Uses the Phrygian scale — a minor scale with a lowered second degree — giving the theme a dark, sinister character appropriate to portraying the film's antagonist. Phrygian mode as primary scale for character theme.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

The Dark Knight — Joker Theme

Composer / Artist: Hans Zimmer and James Newton Howard

Date / Period: 2008

Genre: Film score

Phrygian Mode Usage: Uses dissonant, sustained string textures with Phrygian-inflected harmonies to create an atmosphere of chaos and menace for the Joker's character. Phrygian elements in atonal/modal hybrid scoring.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

3.5 — Video Game Music

Magus's Theme — Chrono Trigger

Composer / Artist: Yasunori Mitsuda

Date / Period: 1995

Genre: Video game score

Phrygian Mode Usage: Uses Phrygian mode with the lowered second interval to create an intense, dark character theme for the game's iconic antagonist-turned-ally. Phrygian mode as character leitmotif.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Dark Souls — Main Theme and Boss Themes

Composer / Artist: Motoi Sakuraba / Yuka Kitamura

Date / Period: 2011-2016

Genre: Video game score

Phrygian Mode Usage: The Dark Souls series extensively uses Phrygian modal elements to create its signature dark fantasy atmosphere. Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant elements throughout.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Vampire Killer — Castlevania

Composer / Artist: Kinuyo Yamashita

Date / Period: 1986

Genre: Video game score

Phrygian Mode Usage: The iconic theme from the original Castlevania features modal elements including Phrygian inflections that contribute to the game's gothic horror atmosphere. Phrygian elements in the melodic and harmonic framework.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Final Fantasy Series — Various Battle Themes

Composer / Artist: Nobuo Uematsu

Date / Period: 1987-present

Genre: Video game score

Phrygian Mode Usage: Several battle themes across the Final Fantasy series use Phrygian mode elements. The mode contributes to the dramatic intensity of combat sequences. Phrygian inflections in battle music.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

3.6 — Folk and World Music

Flamenco and Spanish Folk Music

Entre dos aguas

Composer / Artist: Paco de Lucia

Date / Period: 1973

Genre: Flamenco / rumba flamenca

Phrygian Mode Usage: The composition that brought flamenco guitar to a global audience. Built entirely on the Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant scales that define the flamenco harmonic system. The characteristic Andalusian cadence (Am–G–F–E pattern) pervades the work. Phrygian Dominant as primary scale.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Flamenco Tradition — Solea, Bulerias, Fandango, and Related Palos

Composer / Artist: Traditional / Various Artists

Date / Period: Centuries-old tradition

Genre: Flamenco

Phrygian Mode Usage: The entire flamenco tradition is built on the 'modo flamenco,' which is essentially the Phrygian mode with flexible alterations of the third and seventh degrees. The solea is fundamentally Phrygian; the bulerías, fandango, and siguiriyá are also rooted in Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant harmony. This represents the single largest body of music built on the Phrygian mode in any tradition.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Collaborations with Camaron de la Isla

Composer / Artist: Paco de Lucia and Camaron de la Isla

Date / Period: 1970s

Genre: Flamenco

Phrygian Mode Usage: Revolutionary recordings that transformed flamenco. The guitar accompaniment by Paco de Lucia is saturated with Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant harmony. Phrygian Dominant throughout.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Arabic Maqam Tradition

Maqam Hijaz — Classical Arabic Repertoire

Composer / Artist: Traditional / Various

Date / Period: Centuries-old tradition

Genre: Arabic classical music

Phrygian Mode Usage: Maqam Hijaz, equivalent to the Western Phrygian Dominant scale, is one of the most recognizable and widely used maqamat in Arab classical and popular music. The name 'Hijaz' refers to the Hejaz, the geographic region of western Arabia (encompassing Mecca and Medina) — named for a place,

as is common with maqam nomenclature. An enormous body of Arabic classical music — vocal compositions (muwashshah, qasida), instrumental pieces (taqasim, samai), and religious music — is built on this maqam. Phrygian Dominant (Hijaz).

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Maqam Kurd — Classical Arabic Repertoire

Composer / Artist: Traditional / Various

Date / Period: Centuries-old tradition

Genre: Arabic classical music

Phrygian Mode Usage: Maqam Kurd corresponds closely to the Western pure Phrygian mode, with its minor third. Pure Phrygian equivalent.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Maqam Bayati — Classical Arabic Repertoire

Composer / Artist: Traditional / Various

Date / Period: Centuries-old tradition

Genre: Arabic classical music

Phrygian Mode Usage: In traditional tuning, Bayati features a quarter-tone flat second, placing it between Western Phrygian and the standard minor. One of the most important maqamat, especially in Egyptian music. Near-Phrygian with microtonal second degree.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Turkish / Ottoman Classical Music

Makam Hicaz — Ottoman Classical Repertoire

Composer / Artist: Traditional / Various

Date / Period: Centuries-old tradition

Genre: Turkish/Ottoman classical music

Phrygian Mode Usage: Makam Hicaz, the Turkish equivalent of maqam Hijaz and the Western Phrygian Dominant, is foundational to

Ottoman classical music. Instrumental compositions (pesrev, saz semaisi), vocal works (sarki, gazel), and Sufi religious music (ilahi, ayin) built on this makam constitute a vast repertoire. Phrygian Dominant (Hicaz).

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Makam Kurdi — Ottoman and Turkish Classical Repertoire

Composer / Artist: Traditional / Various

Date / Period: Centuries-old tradition

Genre: Turkish classical music

Phrygian Mode Usage: Makam Kurdi corresponds to the Western pure Phrygian mode. Turkish arabesque music is typically in the Phrygian mode, with themes of longing, melancholy, and love. Pure Phrygian equivalent.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Iranian / Persian Classical Music

Dastgah Shoor — Persian Classical Repertoire

Composer / Artist: Traditional / Various

Date / Period: Centuries-old tradition

Genre: Iranian / Persian classical music

Phrygian Mode Usage: Dastgah Shoor is the primary dastgah (modal framework) in the Iranian radif that corresponds to the Phrygian mode. It is one of the seven principal dastgahs of Persian classical music and carries associations of longing, melancholy, and mystical yearning that closely parallel the emotional character of the Phrygian mode in Western and Middle Eastern traditions. An enormous body of Persian classical music — both instrumental and vocal — is built on Shoor. Phrygian equivalent.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Indian Classical Music

Raga Bhairavi — Hindustani and Carnatic Traditions

Composer / Artist: Traditional / Various

Date / Period: Ancient tradition

Genre: Indian classical music

Phrygian Mode Usage: One of the most important ragas in both Hindustani and Carnatic traditions. Raga Bhairavi employs all seven notes with the second (Re), third (Ga), sixth (Dha), and seventh (Ni) degrees flattened — a scale that closely corresponds to the Western Phrygian mode. Its Carnatic melakarta equivalent is Hanumatodi (the 8th melakarta). Carries deep associations with devotion and is used extensively for bhajan. Pure Phrygian equivalent.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Raga Bhairav — Hindustani Tradition

Composer / Artist: Traditional / Various

Date / Period: Ancient tradition

Genre: Indian classical music

Phrygian Mode Usage: Known as the 'king of morning ragas,' Raga Bhairav uses a flattened second degree and a natural third — corresponding more closely to the Western Phrygian Dominant scale. Associated with devotion and the quiet intensity of dawn. Phrygian Dominant equivalent.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

3.7 — Contemporary and Experimental Music

New Person, Same Old Mistakes

Composer / Artist: Tame Impala

Date / Period: 2015

Genre: Psychedelic pop / electronic

Phrygian Mode Usage: The harmonic foundation of this track from the album *Currents* is built on a repeating E minor / F major

alternation — the i to bII movement that is the most direct expression of the Phrygian flat-second relationship. The slow, hypnotic vamp between these two chords (E minor and F major, a semitone apart) is a textbook Phrygian progression, giving the track its characteristic suspended, unsettled atmosphere. Pure Phrygian i–bII vamp.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

3.8 — Popular Music

The Phrygian mode's reach extends into mainstream popular music, most often appearing intuitively rather than through explicit theoretical knowledge. The entries below are selected on the basis of analytically demonstrable Phrygian harmonic content — the mode's characteristic flat-second degree appearing in a structural rather than merely passing role. Readers should note that modal identification in popular music is interpretive; the entries here represent careful analysis rather than consensus.

Doo Wop (That Thing)

Composer / Artist: Lauryn Hill

Date / Period: 1998

Genre: R&B / neo-soul

Phrygian Mode Usage: The song's harmonic foundation employs a descending bass line over a minor chord with a prominent flattened second degree in the inner voices, creating a Phrygian-inflected atmosphere that underscores the lyric's gospel-rooted moral urgency. The flat-second (F in E minor context) appears as a structural harmonic color throughout the verses. Phrygian flat-second as harmonic foundation in an R&B context.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

I Care

Composer / Artist: Beyonce

Date / Period: 2011

Genre: R&B / pop

Phrygian Mode Usage: The track from the album 4 uses a repeating minor chord progression that emphasizes the flat-second degree as a key harmonic color, creating the intense, reaching quality that characterizes the vocal performance. The chord movement from the tonic minor to the chord a semitone above — the defining Phrygian gesture — drives the track's emotional arc. Phrygian flat-second as harmonic driver in contemporary R&B.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Demons

Composer / Artist: Doja Cat

Date / Period: 2023

Genre: Pop / hip-hop

Phrygian Mode Usage: One of the more analytically clear examples of Phrygian mode use in contemporary chart pop. The track's production centers on a repeating E minor / F major alternation — identical in structure to the flamenco modo flamenco's i–bII gesture — creating a dark, ominous atmosphere that the lyrics and visuals explicitly develop as demonic imagery. The flat-second (F above E) is not decorative but structural. Phrygian i–bII progression as primary harmonic framework.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

3.9 — Folk, World, and Miscellaneous

Klezmer Tradition — Freygish Scale

Composer / Artist: Traditional / Various

Date / Period: Centuries-old tradition

Genre: Jewish liturgical and folk music

Phrygian Mode Usage: The klezmer tradition uses a scale called 'Freygish' (from Yiddish, meaning 'Phrygian'), which corresponds to the Phrygian Dominant scale. It is foundational to klezmer music, Jewish liturgical chanting, and Yiddish folk song. The scale's

augmented second gives klezmer its distinctive emotional character. Phrygian Dominant (Freygish).

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Berber (Amazigh) Music Traditions

Composer / Artist: Traditional / Various

Date / Period: Ancient tradition

Genre: North African folk music

Phrygian Mode Usage: Berber music incorporates scalar patterns related to broader Phrygian modal systems found across the Maghreb. The Phrygian Dominant's augmented second is characteristic of Berber music as well as the broader North African Islamic musical tradition. Phrygian-related modal elements.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Dirty Magic

Composer / Artist: The Offspring

Date / Period: 1992

Genre: Punk rock

Phrygian Mode Usage: Demonstrates the Phrygian mode's dark, 'spooky' quality in a punk rock context. Phrygian mode in punk arrangement.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

SECTION 4 — Major Composers Who Have Used the Phrygian Mode

Medieval and Renaissance

Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179)

The most significant medieval composer of sacred music to employ the Phrygian mode as a primary compositional resource. Hildegard made E Phrygian her preferred mode across her surviving compositions, a highly unusual choice that gave her music a distinctively dark, mystical quality unmatched in twelfth-century sacred repertoire.

Josquin des Prez (c. 1450–1521)

The supreme Renaissance master consciously employed the Phrygian mode in significant works, most notably in 'Nymphes des bois / Requiem aeternam' and the Miserere. His masses and motets demonstrate sophisticated handling of Mode III.

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (c. 1525–1594)

The exemplar of Renaissance sacred polyphony employed E Phrygian in his Canticum Canticorum motets, using the mode's intensity for settings of the Song of Solomon's passionate texts.

Orlando di Lasso (c. 1532–1594)

One of the supreme figures of late Renaissance polyphony, Lasso's motet 'In me transierunt' exemplifies his use of the Phrygian mode for expressive intensity in sacred music.

Thomas Tallis (c. 1505–1585)

English composer whose Third Mode Melody (1567), composed in Phrygian for Archbishop Parker's Psalter, became one of the most famous Phrygian melodies in history after Vaughan Williams used it as the basis for his Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis.

Baroque

Heinrich Schutz (1585–1672)

The most important German composer of the generation before Bach, Schutz's Johannes-Passion (1666) is cast in the Phrygian mode

throughout, establishing the tradition of Phrygian Passion settings that would culminate in Bach's own Passions.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Bach employed the Phrygian mode with extraordinary sophistication. His cantata BWV 38 is cast entirely in Phrygian mode, the Brandenburg Concerto No. 3's second movement is a single Phrygian cadence, and numerous chorale settings preserve the Phrygian mode of their source melodies. The Phrygian half cadence appears throughout his works as a structural device.

Dieterich Buxtehude (c. 1637–1707)

Bach's great predecessor wrote the Prelude in A minor (BuxWV 152), explicitly labeled 'Phrygisch' in the catalogue, establishing a tradition of Phrygian organ writing that profoundly influenced the young Bach.

Classical

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Used the Phrygian tetrachord in the 'Crucifixus' of his Missa Solemnis to depict the entombment, drawing on the centuries-old association between the Phrygian mode and sacred suffering. His use was primarily coloristic within a broader tonal framework.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Employed Phrygian inflections in his Masonic Funeral Music and in the Don Giovanni overture, using the mode's dark quality as a dramatic and atmospheric device.

Romantic

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Made significant use of Phrygian elements in the second movement of his Symphony No. 4 (opening fanfares in E Phrygian over an E pedal) and in the sixth movement of Ein deutsches Requiem. His Phrygian writing combines archaic modal character with Romantic harmonic richness.

Anton Bruckner (1824–1896)

Among the most prolific employers of the Phrygian mode among Romantic-era composers. Bruckner's deep roots in Catholic sacred

tradition and Gregorian chant led him to integrate Phrygian modal writing into both his sacred vocal output (*Ave Regina caelorum*, *Pange lingua*, *Tota pulchra es*, *Vexilla regis*) and his symphonic cycle (Symphonies 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8). His Phrygian writing carries the devotional weight of medieval plainchant transposed to the monumental scale of the Romantic symphony.

Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

Employed the Phrygian mode in his *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2* and other works, connecting the mode to Hungarian and Romani musical traditions.

Modest Mussorgsky (1839–1881)

As a leading figure of Russian musical nationalism, Mussorgsky drew on modal traditions including Phrygian inflections in works like *Pictures at an Exhibition*, using the mode to evoke the archaic quality of Russian Orthodox sacred music.

20th Century (Classical / Art Music)

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)

Composed the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* entirely in G Phrygian, creating one of the most celebrated sustained uses of the mode in orchestral literature. His deep engagement with English folk song and Tudor church music led him to embrace modal writing as a fundamental element of his style.

Samuel Barber (1910–1981)

His *Adagio for Strings* (Op. 11) employs Phrygian modal inflections to generate its atmosphere of profound, aching sorrow, making it one of the most emotionally powerful — and most frequently performed — orchestral works of the 20th century.

Isaac Albeniz (1860–1909)

A founding figure of Spanish musical nationalism, Albeniz made the Phrygian mode and its Dominant variant central to his piano works, including *'Leyenda,'* *Rumores de la Caleta*, and the monumental *Iberia* suite.

Manuel de Falla (1876–1946)

The greatest Spanish composer of the twentieth century, Falla's music is deeply rooted in the Andalusian idiom and the Phrygian mode. 'Ritual Fire Dance' from *El amor brujo* and *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* are saturated with Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant sonorities.

Enrique Granados (1867–1916)

Part of the golden age of Spanish piano music alongside Albeniz and Falla, Granados employed the Phrygian mode in his *Goyescas* and other piano works.

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

Used the Phrygian mode in his String Quartet and in 'La puerta del Vino,' where Phrygian Dominant inflections evoke a Spanish atmosphere. Debussy's modal experiments helped free Western music from exclusive reliance on major-minor tonality.

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

Employed Phrygian mode in the Cor Anglais solo of his Piano Concerto in G (second movement) and Phrygian with raised third in 'Alborada del gracioso,' reflecting his interest in archaic modal color and Spanish music.

Bela Bartok (1881–1945)

Integrated the Phrygian mode into his synthesis of folk-derived modal writing and modernist techniques, notably in his String Quartet No. 4 and *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*. His fieldwork in Hungarian, Romanian, and other folk traditions exposed him to Phrygian scales in living oral traditions.

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

Used Phrygian mode elements in *The Rite of Spring* as part of his revolutionary harmonic language, employing the mode to evoke primal intensity and ritualistic atmosphere.

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)

His *Hymn to St Cecilia* employs Phrygian modal writing characteristic of his broader interest in modal harmony as an alternative to tonal orthodoxy.

Philip Glass (b. 1937)

The final aria from his opera Satyagraha employs Phrygian modal writing, giving the culminating moment of this work about Gandhi a timeless, devotional character.

John Adams (b. 1947)

His 'Phrygian Gates' (1977–1978) is a landmark of American minimalism, using the alternation between Phrygian and Lydian modes as its primary structural principle across 22 minutes. The work modulates through the circle of fifths, making it one of the most systematic explorations of the Phrygian mode in any genre.

Jazz Composers and Improvisers

Miles Davis (1926–1991)

Pioneered modal jazz in the late 1950s, bringing the Phrygian mode to prominence in jazz through 'Flamenco Sketches' (Kind of Blue) and the Sketches of Spain album. His exploration of Phrygian modality, particularly through its Spanish connections, opened new harmonic territories for jazz improvisation.

John Coltrane (1926–1967)

Took the lead in extensively exploring modal improvisation, including Phrygian-inflected harmonies. His album Ole Coltrane was directly inspired by Spanish Phrygian music, and his modal explorations pushed the boundaries of harmonic freedom in jazz.

Wayne Shorter (1933–2023)

Composed 'Speak No Evil' with textbook C Phrygian harmony (Cm7 alternating with Dbmaj7) and 'Infant Eyes' with Phrygian coloring. His compositional sophistication made him one of the most important contributors to the modal jazz language.

Chick Corea (1941–2021)

Created two of the most famous Phrygian-based jazz compositions: 'Spain' (in B Phrygian/B Phrygian Dominant) and 'La Fiesta.' His fusion of jazz improvisation with Spanish Phrygian harmony influenced generations of jazz musicians.

McCoy Tyner (1938–2020)

As pianist in John Coltrane's classic quartet, Tyner was instrumental in developing the harmonic language of modal jazz. His distinctive quartal voicings and bell-like chord clusters provided the harmonic foundation for some of the most important Phrygian-influenced jazz performances of the 1960s.

Rock, Metal, and Progressive Artists

Kirk Hammett / Metallica

Hammett popularized the Phrygian mode in metal guitar, using it as a foundational element in songs like 'Wherever I May Roam,' 'Creeping Death,' 'Disposable Heroes,' and 'Battery.' His use of the E–F half step as a riff-building device became a template for an entire generation of metal guitarists.

Dave Mustaine / Megadeth

Employed E Phrygian in 'Symphony of Destruction' and other songs, demonstrating the mode's effectiveness for creating dark, aggressive thrash metal riffs.

Jeff Hanneman and Kerry King / Slayer

Used Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant scales extensively in Slayer's catalog, including 'Seasons in the Abyss,' 'South of Heaven,' and 'Raining Blood,' making the mode a cornerstone of extreme metal aesthetics.

Thom Yorke / Radiohead

Incorporated Phrygian mode in 'Everything in Its Right Place' (C Phrygian) and 'Pyramid Song,' using the mode's unsettled quality to create the band's signature atmospheric, melancholic sound.

Mikael Akerfeldt / Opeth

Used Phrygian Dominant throughout 'Master's Apprentices' and other works, demonstrating sophisticated modal application in progressive metal.

Serj Tankian / System of a Down

Employed Phrygian mode in 'Chop Suey!' and 'Sugar,' blending Middle Eastern musical heritage with alternative metal to create a distinctive Armenian-influenced sound.

Film and Game Composers

Howard Shore (b. 1946)

Composed the Prologue theme for The Lord of the Rings in F Phrygian, with the second half modulating to Phrygian Dominant. His use of the mode to evoke Middle-earth's ancient, mythic atmosphere is one of the most celebrated applications of Phrygian modality in film music.

Hans Zimmer (b. 1957)

Used the Phrygian mode for the General Zod theme in Man of Steel and Phrygian-inflected harmonies in The Dark Knight's Joker theme, demonstrating the mode's effectiveness for portraying antagonistic and chaotic characters in film.

Yasunori Mitsuda (b. 1972)

Composed Magus's Theme from Chrono Trigger using Phrygian mode, creating one of the most iconic and emotionally resonant character themes in video game history.

Motoi Sakuraba (b. 1965) and Yuka Kitamura

Used Phrygian modal elements extensively in the Dark Souls series to create its signature dark fantasy atmosphere.

Contemporary and Living Artists

Paco de Lucia (1947–2014)

The revolutionary flamenco guitarist who brought Phrygian-based flamenco to a global audience. His technical innovations and recordings with Camaron de la Isla transformed the art form and introduced millions to the sound of the Phrygian mode.

Matt Bellamy / Muse

Employed both Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant in compositions like 'United States of Eurasia' and 'Break It to Me,' bringing modal sophistication to 21st-century stadium rock.

SECTION 5 — The Phrygian Mode in Sacred Music: A Deep Dive

Sacred music is the oldest and most sustained context for the Phrygian mode's use. For over a millennium before the rise of tonality, the Phrygian mode was the principal musical language of devotional expression in both Eastern and Western Christianity, and its traces persist in living liturgical traditions to this day. This section examines the sacred music tradition in greater depth than the historical survey in Section 1, with specific attention to the Byzantine and Orthodox Eastern traditions, the Gregorian plainchant repertoire, and the transmission of modal practice from the ancient world into Christian liturgy.

The Byzantine Chant Tradition

The Byzantine Empire preserved and transmitted the modal practices of ancient Greece into the Christian liturgical tradition through an elaborate system of eight modes called the Octoechos — literally 'eight sounds' or 'eight tones.' This system, codified definitively by John of Damascus (c. 676–749 CE) but rooted in earlier practice, assigned each of the eight modes to a specific day of the liturgical week and a specific emotional-devotional character. The Byzantine modal system is not identical to the Western church modal system, though both derive ultimately from ancient Greek sources and both use the name 'Phrygian' — or its Byzantine equivalent — for a mode beginning on the note E.

In the Byzantine Octoechos, the mode most closely corresponding to the Western Phrygian is Echos Deuterios (Second Mode), while the Plagios Deuterios (Second Plagal Mode) corresponds roughly to the Hypophrygian. These modes carry strong associations with the penitential and the contemplative in Byzantine liturgical practice — exactly the same emotional associations the Western Phrygian mode carries in the Latin chant tradition. Byzantine chant in these modes is characterized by the characteristic half-step above the tonic, ascending and descending melodic formulas that exploit the tension of the flat second, and an overall atmosphere of grave intensity.

The practical repertoire of Byzantine chant in Phrygian-equivalent modes is vast. The apolytikion (dismissal hymn) for many of the most important feasts of the Orthodox liturgical calendar are set in Echos Deuterios or Plagios Deuterios. Theotokion hymns (hymns to the Mother of God), stichera, and troparia in these modes appear throughout the Menaion, Triodion, and Pentecostarion — the great liturgical books of the Orthodox tradition. The Byzantine Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom includes Phrygian-mode settings of the Trisagion ('Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal') that have been sung in Orthodox churches continuously since at least the fifth century.

Unlike Western chant, Byzantine chant maintains a living oral performance tradition: trained chanters (psaltai) in Greek Orthodox, Antiochian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Russian, and other Orthodox communities learn these modes as living musical practice rather than historical reconstruction. The Greek Orthodox chant tradition in particular has preserved the Phrygian modal idiom with extraordinary continuity from the Byzantine period to the present, and recordings of contemporary Greek Orthodox chanters provide one of the most direct available links to the ancient modal practice that underlies all Western uses of the Phrygian mode.

Gregorian Chant: Mode III, Mode IV, and the Latin Repertoire

In the Western Latin church, the Phrygian mode appears as Mode III (authentic Phrygian, final on E, reciting tone on C) and Mode IV (plagal Hypophrygian, final on E, range from B below the final to B above). These two modes together constitute a substantial portion of the Gregorian chant repertoire — perhaps fifteen to twenty percent of all surviving medieval chant — and include some of the most important and frequently sung pieces in the tradition.

The Introit *Requiem aeternam* — the opening chant of the Mass for the Dead — is set in the authentic Phrygian mode (Mode III). This is among the most significant liturgical uses of the mode in the entire Western tradition: the chant heard at the beginning of every Latin Requiem Mass for centuries, establishing the tone of the rite with the mode's characteristic atmosphere of solemn, archaic gravity. The melismatic alleluias of the Gradual for the same Mass, *Lux aeterna*,

are also Phrygian in character. The Kyrie orbis factor, one of the most widely sung Kyrie settings in the medieval repertoire, is in Mode III. The Communion antiphon *Lux aeterna* and many of the antiphons for the Office of the Dead use Phrygian modes.

Beyond the Mass for the Dead, Mode III chants include a wide range of liturgical contexts: Vesper antiphons, Office responsories, sequences, and hymns. The Ambrosian hymn *Nunc sancte nobis Spiritus*, attributed to St Ambrose of Milan (c. 340–397 CE) and one of the oldest Latin hymns in continuous liturgical use, is set in the Phrygian mode. The hymns attributed to Prudentius (348–c.405 CE) are also frequently Phrygian in character. These uses establish the Phrygian mode as a vehicle for sacred devotion at the very foundation of the Latin Christian musical tradition.

A particular feature of Mode III and Mode IV chant worth noting is the treatment of the reciting tone. Unlike the other modes, where the reciting tone (the note on which the chant 'sits' for syllabic recitation) is typically a fifth above the final, Mode III has its reciting tone on C — a minor sixth above the final E. This gives Mode III chant an unusually wide ambitus and a distinctive melodic character, often reaching up to the high C with an air of yearning or supplication before descending back to the E final. This large-interval, reaching quality is one of the most immediately recognizable features of Phrygian chant and helps explain why the mode was so strongly associated with penitence and devotion in medieval practice.

Hildegard von Bingen: Phrygian as Mystical Language

No medieval composer engaged more deeply or more personally with the Phrygian mode than Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179), the Benedictine abbess, mystic, theologian, and composer whose surviving musical output represents one of the most remarkable bodies of medieval sacred music. Hildegard composed over seventy musical works — antiphons, responsories, sequences, and the remarkable liturgical drama *Ordo Virtutum* — almost exclusively in the Phrygian mode. This choice was extraordinary: other medieval composers used the full spectrum of eight modes, distributing their work across the modal system. Hildegard's near-exclusive

commitment to Phrygian suggests that she heard in the mode something that corresponded uniquely to her mystical vision.

Hildegard's Phrygian writing has a distinctive melodic style: wide-ranging melismas that leap dramatically across the modal space, reaching up to the C and even D above the final, with the characteristic flat second (F above E) appearing as both a resting point and a springboard for further ascent. Her antiphon *O viridissima virga* (O greenest branch) exemplifies this approach, with an opening that leaps immediately upward from the final E through the Phrygian scale to a high D before arching back. Her sequence *Columba aspexit* uses the Phrygian mode's tension and resolution to portray the soul's yearning for divine union. For Hildegard, the Phrygian mode was not merely a technical choice but a spiritual language — the sound of the soul reaching toward God.

The Notre Dame School and the Transition to Polyphony

As Western sacred music moved from monophonic plainchant to polyphony in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Phrygian mode faced a distinctive challenge. In polyphony, the modes must be harmonized — additional voices must be added — and the Phrygian mode's flat second created particular harmonic difficulties. The leading tone approach that developed in common-practice tonality (the note a semitone below the tonic resolving upward) works naturally for other modes, but in Phrygian the semitone is above the tonic rather than below it. This means that cadencing in Phrygian polyphony required special solutions that composers of the Notre Dame school (Léonin, Pérotin, and their contemporaries) developed with considerable ingenuity.

Pérotin's great four-voice organum *Viderunt omnes* (c. 1198), one of the earliest surviving polyphonic works of architectural scale, uses Phrygian-influenced modal writing in its approach to the E final. The polyphonic treatment of Phrygian chants required the composers to navigate between the F natural of the mode and the occasional raising of the F to F# for smoother cadential voice leading — a practice that would eventually become codified as the 'Phrygian cadence' discussed elsewhere in this report. The tension between

modal purity and harmonic practicality in treating Phrygian chants was one of the driving forces behind the development of Renaissance polyphonic theory.

Orthodox Christian Music: Russian, Greek, Serbian, and Coptic Traditions

The Orthodox Christian family of churches maintains distinct chant traditions that all preserve Phrygian modal writing to varying degrees. Russian Orthodox chant (*Znamenny raspev*, or 'sign chant,' named after the distinctive neume notation used) was codified in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and includes a substantial Phrygian-mode repertoire, particularly in the *oktoikh* (the Slavic name for the *Octoechos*), where the Second Mode and Second Plagal Mode carry the same Phrygian character as in the Byzantine original. Russian Orthodox chant was substantially reformed in the seventeenth century under Patriarch Nikon, but the modal system remained intact, and traditional *Znamenny* chant is still practiced in some Russian Orthodox communities.

Greek Orthodox chant, which maintains the most direct continuity with Byzantine practice, preserves the Phrygian modes with exceptional fidelity. The Athos tradition — centered on the monasteries of Mount Athos in northern Greece, which have maintained continuous monastic life since the ninth century — is particularly important as a repository of ancient modal practice. The chanters of Mount Athos have transmitted Phrygian modal singing across more than a millennium of unbroken practice, and field recordings made at Athos monasteries in the twentieth century provide invaluable documentation of a living tradition.

The Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt maintains a chant tradition that predates the Byzantine modal codification and preserves distinctly ancient modal characteristics. Coptic hymnody includes scales analogous to the Phrygian mode alongside uniquely Coptic modal patterns derived from ancient Egyptian music. The Coptic *Trisagion* and the liturgical hymns of Holy Week contain some of the most archaic-sounding modal writing in any living Christian tradition, and the connection between Coptic modality and the ancient Egyptian musical tradition makes Coptic sacred music one of the oldest

surviving links to the pre-Greek modal world that the Phrygian system ultimately derives from.

Contemporary Liturgical Music and the Phrygian Legacy

The Phrygian mode continues to animate contemporary liturgical composition. The twentieth-century Gregorian chant revival, catalyzed by the monks of Solesmes Abbey in France from the 1880s onward, brought renewed attention to the beauty and integrity of the medieval modal system, and Phrygian chant in Mode III and IV became familiar to Catholic congregations worldwide through the twentieth century. The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) and the subsequent liturgical reforms partially displaced Latin chant, but the monastic tradition at Solesmes, Fontgombault, and other centers of traditional observance maintains the living practice of Phrygian chant with undiminished care.

Contemporary composers working in sacred genres have continued to use the Phrygian mode for its association with devotional depth and archaic gravity. Arvo Part's tintinnabuli style, developed from the late 1970s onward, draws on medieval modal practice including Phrygian writing in works like *Passio* (1982) and the *Berliner Messe* (1990–92). Part's music does not always deploy the Phrygian mode in its pure form, but the flat-second tensions and half-step resolutions of Phrygian harmony pervade his harmonic language. John Tavener's late sacred works for the Orthodox tradition similarly draw on Byzantine modal practice including Phrygian-inflected writing. The intersection of ancient modal tradition and contemporary minimalist technique in composers like Part and Tavener represents one of the most vital uses of the Phrygian mode in current sacred music.

SECTION 6 — The Phrygian Mode in Electronic, Ambient, and Contemporary Production Music

Electronic music might appear an unlikely context for an ancient modal scale, but the Phrygian mode has proven as at home in synthesizer-driven music as in any earlier tradition. The reasons are not difficult to identify: the mode's dark, tense, atmospheric quality suits the sonic worlds that electronic musicians have consistently sought to create, and the absence of the acoustic constraints that govern acoustic instrument timbre allows electronic composers to exploit the flat-second interval with particularly stark clarity. From the earliest synthesizer explorations of the 1970s through to the bedroom producers of today, the Phrygian mode has been a persistent presence.

Kosmische Musik and the Proto-Ambient Tradition

The German electronic music movement of the early 1970s — often called *kosmische Musik* or, reductively, 'Krautrock' — pioneered the use of synthesizers and sequencers for extended, atmospheric, modal music that abandoned conventional verse-chorus structures in favor of evolving modal soundscapes. Klaus Schulze, whose albums *Irrlicht* (1972), *Cyborg* (1973), and *Rubycon* (1975) are landmarks of the genre, used the synthesizer's capacity for sustained tones to create modal drones in which Phrygian-inflected pitches create slow-evolving tension. Tangerine Dream's *Phaedra* (1974) and *Rubycon* (1975), produced at a time when the band included Schulze, Edgar Froese, and Christoph Franke, use minor modal writing with clear Phrygian tendencies in their hypnotic sequencer patterns. Brian Eno, who was directly influenced by the German scene and collaborated with its members, developed from this tradition his concept of 'ambient music' — music as atmosphere rather than foreground.

Eno's ambient works, beginning with *Discreet Music* (1975) and the *Ambient* series (1978–1982), do not use the Phrygian mode in a systematic way, but his theoretical framework of modal, non-goal-directed harmony directly informed a generation of electronic composers who did. Eno's concept of music as 'furniture' — present without demanding attention — found the Phrygian mode's

stationary, atmospheric quality well-suited to its purposes. His landmark collaboration with Harold Budd, *The Plateaux of Mirror* (1980), uses modal piano writing with Phrygian inflections over slowly evolving synthesizer textures to create an atmosphere of suspended, ominous beauty.

Trip-Hop, Post-Rock, and the 1990s Modal Moment

The 1990s saw a new wave of modal electronic music centered primarily in the United Kingdom. The Bristol trip-hop scene — Massive Attack, Portishead, Tricky — drew on the Phrygian mode and Phrygian Dominant for some of its most characteristic sounds. Portishead's *Dummy* (1994), one of the defining albums of the decade, uses Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant chord progressions extensively, particularly in tracks such as *Sour Times* (which samples Lalo Schifrin's Phrygian-inflected film music), *Roads*, and *Glory Box*. The band's combination of sampled breakbeats, analog synthesizers, and Beth Gibbons's haunted vocals over Phrygian-mode guitar and keyboard parts created a sound that was simultaneously deeply modern and — given the mode's ancient pedigree — somehow archaic.

Massive Attack's *Mezzanine* (1998), perhaps the darkest and most unsettling entry in the Bristol canon, uses sustained Phrygian-mode guitar riffs and bass patterns to create an atmosphere of claustrophobic menace. The album's treatment of the mode — slow, massive, relentless — prefigures the later use of Phrygian in dark ambient and atmospheric metal. Tricky's *Maxinquaye* (1995) similarly employs Phrygian-adjacent modal writing, particularly in the more threatening tracks.

In post-rock, Scottish bands Mogwai and Boards of Canada drew on Phrygian modal writing for the atmospheric, melancholic quality that characterized the genre at its peak. Mogwai's *Come On Die Young* (1999) and *Rock Action* (2001) use Phrygian-inflected guitar figures in extended, slowly evolving pieces that owe more to the ambient tradition than to rock. Boards of Canada's *Music Has the Right to Children* (1998) uses Phrygian-mode keyboard patterns buried in degraded, nostalgic tape textures to create one of the most distinctive modal soundscapes in electronic music.

Burial and the Dark Electronic Tradition

Burial (William Bevan), the anonymous London producer whose albums *Burial* (2006) and *Untrue* (2007) are among the most critically celebrated electronic records of the twenty-first century, uses Phrygian-inflected musical fragments as a central compositional device. Burial's music assembles brief, pitch-shifted vocal samples, broken drum patterns, and sustained synthesizer tones in a way that creates a modal atmosphere of grief, urban alienation, and longing. The harmonic language of tracks like *Archangel*, *Shell of Light*, and *Raver* from *Untrue* uses the flat-second tension of Phrygian mode to devastating emotional effect — the modal fragments seem to reach toward resolution that never fully arrives, creating a sense of perpetual yearning that is quintessentially Phrygian in character.

Burial's influence on a generation of producers has been enormous, and the 'post-Burial' aesthetic — characterized by degraded textures, modal melancholy, and Phrygian-inflected harmonic language — became one of the defining sounds of UK underground electronic music in the 2010s. Artists including *Four Tet* (Kieran Hebden), *Actress* (Darren Cunningham), *Andy Stott*, and *Demdike Stare* all work in this modal-dark-electronic space with varying degrees of Phrygian harmonic language.

Arca (Alejandra Gherzi), the Venezuelan-British producer and artist whose albums *Xen* (2014), *Mutant* (2015), and *Arca* (2017) pushed electronic music toward an extreme of fractured, body-horror aesthetics, uses Phrygian Dominant as one of her primary harmonic colors. The augmented second of the Phrygian Dominant — always the most 'exotic' and disorienting interval in Western ears — suits *Arca*'s music of transgression and physical discomfort. Her collaborations with *Bjork*, *FKA Twigs*, and *Kanye West* brought Phrygian-Dominant-inflected production to mass commercial contexts.

Dark Techno, Industrial, and Metal-Adjacent Electronic Music

The overlap between electronic music and metal has produced a significant body of Phrygian-mode work. *Nine Inch Nails*, whose albums *The Downward Spiral* (1994) and *The Fragile* (1999) sit at the intersection of industrial rock and electronic music, use Phrygian and

Phrygian Dominant extensively. Trent Reznor's characteristic sound — crunching distorted bass lines over Phrygian-mode synthesizer figures — represents one of the most commercially successful deployments of the mode in electronic music.

In strictly electronic contexts, techno producers including Surgeon (Anthony Child), Blawan (Jamie Roberts), and Andy Stott use Phrygian-adjacent harmonic writing in hard, minimal techno contexts where the flat-second creates driving, confrontational tension. Dark ambient artists such as Lustmord (Brian Williams), whose expansive albums *Heresy* (1990) and *Place* (1995) create vast sonic architectures, use Phrygian modal drones in extremely low frequency registers to generate physical as well as psychological unease.

Contemporary Pop Production and the Phrygian Mode

Perhaps the most surprising development in the Phrygian mode's twenty-first century history is its quiet penetration into mainstream popular music production. The global success of music from Latin America, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent — driven by streaming services that have connected listeners across previously separate regional markets — has brought Phrygian-adjacent modal sounds into the mainstream. Reggaeton and Latin trap draw on Phrygian-inflected progressions derived from Spanish flamenco via Puerto Rican popular music. K-pop's production, which routinely draws on the Phrygian Dominant for its characteristic dramatic and 'exotic' textures, has brought the mode to billions of listeners who would never describe themselves as interested in modal music.

In Western pop and hip-hop production, the influence of Phrygian-heavy Middle Eastern and South Asian musical samples has created a distinct 'trap Oriental' subgenre in which Phrygian Dominant is the primary harmonic language. Producers including Metro Boomin, Southside, and Murda Beatz have used Phrygian Dominant samples and synthesizer patterns in productions for Drake, Future, 21 Savage, and others, bringing the augmented second of maqam Hijaz and Turkish Phrygian Dominant into the sonic vocabulary of commercial hip-hop. The mode that animated ancient Greek religious ritual and

medieval sacred chant thus finds itself, in the twenty-first century, equally at home in the Billboard charts.

SECTION 7 — The Phrygian Mode in World Music: A Comprehensive Survey

The Phrygian mode and its close relatives occupy a foundational position in the music of cultures stretching from the Atlantic coast of Iberia through North Africa, across the Middle East and Central Asia to South and Southeast Asia, and into the diaspora communities those traditions produced across the globe. While Section 1 of this report introduced the broadest outlines of the mode's non-Western equivalents, the full scope and depth of the Phrygian tradition in world music demands a dedicated treatment. This chapter examines ten major traditions that were either absent from or underrepresented in the earlier survey, with specific attention to named artists, recordings, and the particular ways each tradition employs the mode's characteristic flat-second interval.

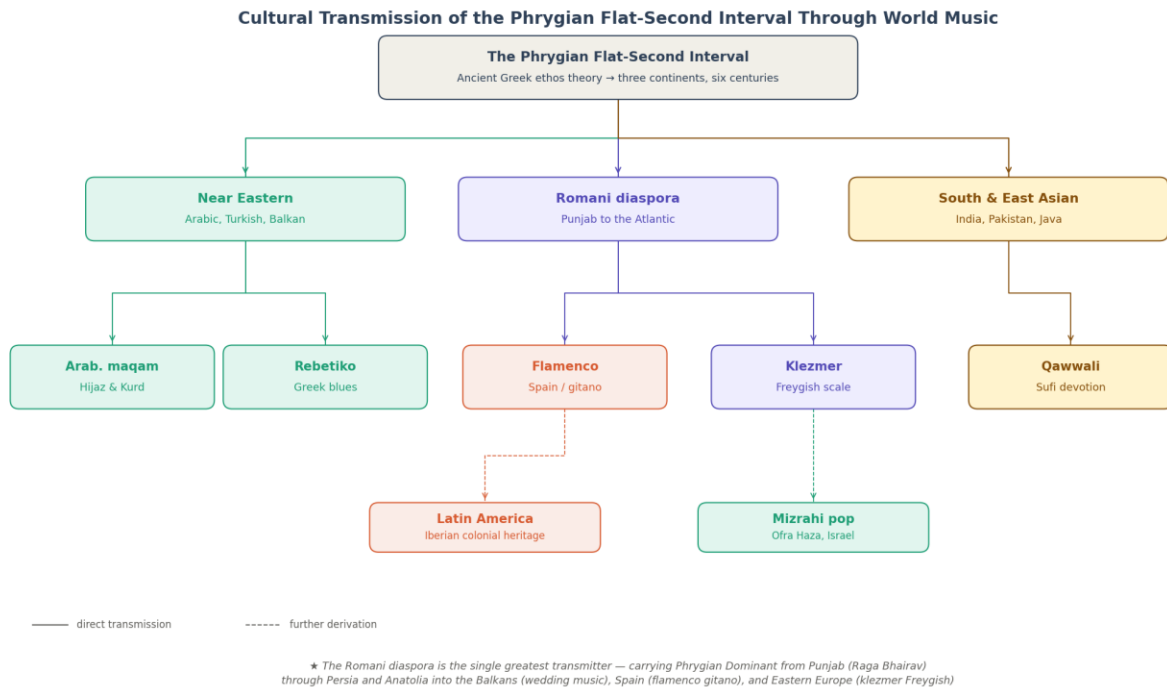


Figure 7: Cultural transmission web — how the Phrygian flat-second traveled through world music traditions. Solid lines show direct cultural transmission; dashed lines show further derivation. The Romani diaspora (center) is the single greatest transmitter, linking South Asian, Balkan, Spanish, and Jewish traditions.

Balkan Music: Asymmetric Rhythms and Phrygian Harmony

The folk and popular music traditions of the Balkan peninsula — encompassing Bulgaria, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, Greece (in its northern folk traditions), and Romania — constitute one of the densest concentrations of Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant use in any regional musical tradition on earth. Balkan folk music is distinguished by two features that set it apart from most other Phrygian-mode traditions: its use of deeply asymmetric rhythmic cycles (7/8, 9/8, 11/16, and more complex groupings), and its treatment of the Phrygian Dominant augmented second as a melodic ornament to be bent, slid, and inflected rather than merely played as a fixed interval.

Bulgarian folk music in particular has developed the Phrygian Dominant scale into a virtuosic instrumental tradition. The Bulgarian wedding music (*svatbarska muzika*) that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s — pioneered by clarinetist Ivo Papasov (Ibryam Hapazov), accordionist Yuri Yunakov, and their collaborators — fused traditional Phrygian-mode folk melodies with jazz improvisation, high-speed ornamentation, and the asymmetric rhythms of Bulgarian dance music. Papasov's albums *Orpheus Ascending* (1989) and *Balkanology* (1991), recorded for the Hannibal label and produced with the involvement of ethnomusicologist Joe Boyd, brought Bulgarian Phrygian Dominant playing to international audiences. The augmented second interval that defines Phrygian Dominant is treated in Bulgarian wedding music as a site of extreme expressive intensity — bent, vibrated, and ornamented in ways that would be unrecognizable to a Western classical musician but that are fully intelligible within the Balkan tradition as markers of heightened emotion.

Serbian and Macedonian folk music uses the Phrygian mode in its traditional *cocek* and *oro* dance forms, where the flat-second interval appears in both the melody and the underlying harmonic drone. Romanian Romani music (*lautareasca*) draws on Phrygian Dominant for its most characteristic melodic passages, and the great Romanian violinists of the *lutar* tradition — Grigorascu Dinicu (1889–1949), whose *Hora Staccato* is a Phrygian Dominant showpiece, and Fanica Luca

on the panpipe — transmitted this tradition in recordings that remain touchstones of Balkan modal playing.

The influence of Balkan Phrygian music on jazz has been significant. American jazz musicians including Don Ellis (whose album *Live at Monterey*, 1966, featured Bulgarian-influenced asymmetric rhythms over modal Phrygian-Dominant harmony), Dave Holland, and later Vijay Iyer drew on Balkan rhythmic and modal concepts to expand jazz's harmonic and rhythmic vocabulary. The 'Balkan jazz' subgenre that developed in the 1990s and 2000s — represented by the Boban Markovic Orkestar, the Mahala Rai Banda, and the work of Bosnian accordion virtuoso Merima Kljuco — combined the Phrygian-mode heritage of the Balkans with jazz and electronic production.

Orpheus Ascending

Composer / Artist: Ivo Papasov and His Orchestra

Date / Period: 1989

Genre: Bulgarian wedding music / Balkan jazz

Phrygian Mode Usage: The landmark recording of Bulgarian wedding music (*svatbarska muzika*) by master clarinetist Ivo Papasov. Papasov's playing demonstrates Phrygian Dominant ornamentation at its most virtuosic — the augmented second interval between the flat second and major third degrees is bent, slid, and vibrated with extreme expressive intensity over asymmetric Bulgarian rhythms. Essential listening for understanding how the Phrygian mode functions in Balkan folk music. Phrygian Dominant as primary melodic language.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Hora Staccato

Composer / Artist: Grigoras Dinicu

Date / Period: 1906 / various recordings

Genre: Romanian folk violin

Phrygian Mode Usage: Dinicu's showpiece for violin demonstrates Phrygian Dominant in the Romanian *lautar* tradition at its most technically demanding. The rapid staccato runs exploit the

augmented second interval of the Phrygian Dominant scale for maximum dramatic effect. Heifetz's later arrangement brought the piece to concert hall audiences. Phrygian Dominant as virtuosic showcase.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Greek Rebetiko: The Urban Blues of the Phrygian Mode

Rebetiko is the urban popular music of Greece, emerging in the port cities of Piraeus, Thessaloniki, and Smyrna (Izmir) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Often described as 'the Greek blues,' rebetiko originated among the urban poor, the Greek refugees from Asia Minor who arrived in Greece following the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922), and the marginalized communities of the port districts. It is the most important popular music tradition built on Phrygian mode to emerge in Europe in the twentieth century — and one of the most direct living descendants of the Ottoman makam system that the Phrygian mode inhabits.

Rebetiko draws primarily on makam Hicaz (Phrygian Dominant) and makam Kurdi (pure Phrygian), transmitted directly from the Ottoman classical and folk traditions through the Asia Minor Greek communities who carried these musical practices with them to Greece. The characteristic rebetiko instruments — the bouzouki (a long-necked plucked lute), baglama, and guitar — are tuned to facilitate Phrygian-mode playing, and the standard rebetiko chord progressions are essentially the same as Ottoman Hicaz harmony: the alternation between the Phrygian Dominant tonic chord and the flat-second chord, the descending cadential patterns, and the characteristic melodic ornamentation of the augmented second.

Markos Vamvakaris (1905–1972) is the founding figure of the rebetiko tradition and its most important composer. His recordings from the 1930s and 1940s — including *Fragosyriani*, *Sta Tria Palia Ta Chronia*, and *Kanarinis* — establish the Phrygian Dominant harmonic framework that defines the genre. Vamvakaris's bouzouki playing is saturated with flat-second ornaments and augmented-second melodic figures; his singing style, derived from Asia Minor lamentation

traditions, uses the Phrygian mode's descending pull to devastating emotional effect.

Vasilis Tsitsanis (1915–1984) was the most prolific and musically sophisticated rebetiko composer, responsible for over five hundred songs and the gradual modernization of the genre in the postwar period. His compositions *Synefiasmeni Kyriaki* (Cloudy Sunday), *Hartino to Fengaraki* (The Paper Moon), and many others deploy Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant harmony in more harmonically complex settings than the early Vamvakaris recordings, incorporating elements of Western tonal harmony while retaining the modal flattened second as a structural element. Tsitsanis's work represents the most sophisticated integration of Phrygian modality with European popular harmony in any twentieth-century popular music tradition.

The rebetiko tradition's influence extends well beyond Greece. It was a primary influence on the *laika* (popular song) tradition that dominated Greek popular music through the 1960s and 1970s, transmitted through artists including Grigoris Bithikotsis and Manolis Aggelopoulos. Through the Greek diaspora communities in the United States, Australia, and Germany, rebetiko Phrygian harmony entered those countries' ethnic popular music scenes. And through the work of ethnomusicologists including Alan Lomax (who recorded rebetiko musicians in the 1950s) and the commercial releases of the Minos and CBS Greece labels, rebetiko reached international audiences and influenced European folk-rock musicians.

Rebetika: Songs from the Old Greek Underworld

Composer / Artist: Markos Vamvakaris, Stratos Pagioumtzis, Sotiria Bellou and others

Date / Period: 1975 (compilation)

Genre: Rebetiko

Phrygian Mode Usage: The essential introductory compilation for rebetiko, released on the EMI Odeon label. Includes Vamvakaris's *Fragosyriani* and numerous other Phrygian-mode classics. The liner notes provide historical context for the tradition. Phrygian Dominant throughout as the primary harmonic language of the genre.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Synefiasmeni Kyriaki (Cloudy Sunday)

Composer / Artist: Vasilis Tsitsanis

Date / Period: 1948

Genre: Rebetiko / laika

Phrygian Mode Usage: The most famous rebetiko composition and one of the most important Phrygian-mode popular songs ever recorded. Tsitsanis's melody is built on a Phrygian Dominant scale, and the song's emotional weight — originally written during the Nazi occupation of Greece — derives directly from the mode's characteristic combination of sorrow and inevitability. Covered by dozens of artists across six decades. Phrygian Dominant as the vehicle for collective grief.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Umm Kulthum and North African Popular Music

Umm Kulthum (c. 1898–1975) was the most celebrated and beloved singer in the history of Arab music, and her recordings represent the most important body of Phrygian Dominant music in the popular tradition of North Africa and the Arab world. Born in a village in the Nile Delta to a family of religious musicians, Kulthum developed her vocal technique in the tradition of Quranic recitation before moving to Cairo and becoming the dominant figure in Egyptian popular music from the 1930s until her death. Her concerts, broadcast live on Radio Cairo on the first Thursday of every month for decades, were moments of near-universal cultural participation across the Arab world — shops closed, streets emptied, and listeners gathered around radios from Morocco to Iraq.

Kulthum's musical language was rooted in the maqam system, and maqam Hijaz (the Arabic Phrygian Dominant equivalent) was one of her most frequently used scales. Her landmark recordings *Al-Atlal* (The Ruins, 1966), *Enta Omri* (You Are My Life, 1964), and *Fakarouni* (Remember Me, 1966) — each running to over an hour in their complete live versions — use Phrygian Dominant maqam for

extended passages of intense emotional expression. Kulthum's approach to the mode is characterized by extreme melodic elaboration: she would circle around the augmented second interval, approaching it from above and below, ornamenting it with microtonal inflections, delaying resolution, and using the flat second as a site of maximum expressive intensity. Audiences responded to these moments with shouts of encouragement (tarab), and Kulthum would often repeat particularly affecting phrases multiple times in response to the crowd's emotional engagement.

The Egyptian popular music tradition that Kulthum dominated also includes Mohammed Abdel Wahab (1902–1991), the great composer and singer who collaborated with Kulthum on some of her most celebrated recordings and whose own compositions make extensive use of Phrygian Dominant harmony. Abdel Wahab was also significant as a modernizer who brought Western orchestral instruments and harmonies into Egyptian popular music while retaining the maqam modal foundation — a synthesis that made Egyptian popular music of the mid-twentieth century one of the most sophisticated cross-cultural musical achievements of the era.

North African Andalusian music — the classical tradition preserved in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia that descends from the music brought to North Africa by the Moorish refugees expelled from Spain after 1492 — maintains a direct connection to the Phrygian mode through both its Spanish flamenco heritage and its Arabic maqam foundation. The Andalusian nuba (suite) tradition performed in Fez, Tlemcen, and Tunis uses maqam Hijaz and related Phrygian Dominant scales in many of its most formal and solemn movements, preserving a direct musical link to the flamenco tradition on the other side of the Strait of Gibraltar.

Enta Omri (You Are My Life)

Composer / Artist: Umm Kulthum

Date / Period: 1964 (live recording)

Genre: Egyptian popular music / tarab

Phrygian Mode Usage: One of Kulthum's most celebrated performances, recorded live at the Cairo Opera House. The complete recording runs over an hour, with Kulthum circling through

maqam Hijaz (Phrygian Dominant) with extraordinary emotional intensity and elaboration. The augmented second interval between the flat second and major third degrees is the site of the performance's most intense moments. Essential listening for understanding Phrygian Dominant in the Arabic popular tradition. Phrygian Dominant (maqam Hijaz) as primary expressive vehicle.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Al-Atlal (The Ruins)

Composer / Artist: Umm Kulthum

Date / Period: 1966 (live recording)

Genre: Egyptian popular music / tarab

Phrygian Mode Usage: Perhaps the most famous single recording in Arab music history. Composed by Riad Al-Sunbati on poems by Ibrahim Nagi, this extended live performance uses maqam Hijaz and related Phrygian-Dominant maqamat throughout its hour-plus duration. Kulthum's treatment of the augmented second in the climactic passages is considered the pinnacle of her art. Phrygian Dominant as the language of longing and loss.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Mizrahi Music: Phrygian Dominant in Israeli-Middle Eastern Pop

Mizrahi music (from Hebrew mizrahi, meaning 'eastern') is the popular music of the Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewish communities in Israel — Jews whose families originated in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia rather than in Europe. Mizrahi music blends Arabic maqam harmonics (especially maqam Hijaz and maqam Bayati), Turkish makam influences, and Greek laika with Hebrew lyrics and Western pop production. It is one of the most commercially significant bodies of Phrygian-Dominant-based popular music in the world, with a domestic audience of several million Israeli listeners and a global diaspora following.

Zohar Argov (1955–1987), often called 'the King of Mizrahi music,' was the defining voice of the tradition. His recordings Elinor, Perach Gani,

and Haperach Begani use maqam Hijaz (Phrygian Dominant) as their primary harmonic language, delivered in a vocal style that combines Arabic tarab ornamentation with the directness of Israeli popular song. Argov's tragic life — he died in prison at thirty-two — gave his music a mythic quality, and his recordings remain the standard against which all subsequent Mizrahi singers are measured.

Ofra Haza (1957–2000) brought Mizrahi Phrygian Dominant music to international audiences with her 1988 recording *Im Nin'alu* (If the Gates Are Locked), which sampled traditional Yemenite Jewish devotional poetry over a synthesized dance beat. The recording — which used maqam Hijaz (Phrygian Dominant) as its harmonic foundation — became an international dance hit, reaching the top ten in the United Kingdom and across Europe. Its success was a landmark moment in the globalization of Phrygian Dominant music: the same augmented second interval that had animated Ottoman classical music and Arabic maqam was now driving dancefloors from London to Berlin. Haza's subsequent album *Shaday* (1988), which expanded on the *Im Nin'alu* template, remains one of the most successful fusions of Phrygian Dominant Middle Eastern modal music with Western electronic production.

The Mizrahi tradition continues in contemporary Israeli music through artists including Sarit Hadad, Omer Adam, and the 'Mediterranean music' movement, which extends the Phrygian Dominant aesthetic to include Greek, Turkish, and Balkan influences alongside the core Arabic maqam heritage. The tradition's persistence demonstrates the mode's capacity to remain fresh and commercially viable across generations — the same flat-second tension that moved Umm Kulthum audiences to tears of tarab in the 1960s moves Israeli club audiences sixty years later.

Im Nin'alu

Composer / Artist: Ofra Haza

Date / Period: 1988

Genre: Mizrahi / electronic pop

Phrygian Mode Usage: The recording that brought Mizrahi Phrygian Dominant music to international dancefloors. Based on traditional

Yemenite Jewish devotional poetry set to a synthesized beat, the track uses maqam Hijaz (Phrygian Dominant) as its harmonic foundation. Reached the top ten across Europe and became one of the most important crossover recordings in world music history. Phrygian Dominant (maqam Hijaz) as dance music foundation.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Elinor

Composer / Artist: Zohar Argov

Date / Period: 1980

Genre: Mizrahi popular song

Phrygian Mode Usage: One of the defining recordings of the Mizrahi tradition, by the genre's most beloved singer. Argov's vocal style applies Arabic tarab ornamentation to maqam Hijaz harmony over a straightforward popular song arrangement, demonstrating how the Phrygian Dominant mode can carry intense emotional weight within a commercial popular song format. Phrygian Dominant as the primary harmonic language of Israeli Mizrahi pop.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Qawwali and Sufi Devotional Music

Qawwali is the devotional music of the Sufi Islamic tradition, performed at shrines (dargahs) and in concert contexts throughout Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and the global South Asian diaspora. It is one of the oldest continuously practiced performance traditions in the world — qawwali gatherings (mehfils) at the great Sufi shrines of South Asia follow protocols that have been observed for seven hundred years or more — and it is one of the most important contexts for the use of Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant harmony in any sacred music tradition.

Qawwali was codified by the great Sufi saint and musician Amir Khusrau (1253–1325), a disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi, who is credited with synthesizing Persian, Arabic, and Indian musical traditions into the devotional musical form we know today. The scales

used in qawwali draw on the North Indian raga system, and ragas analogous to the Phrygian mode — particularly Raga Bhairavi (the Phrygian equivalent) and Raga Bhairav (the Phrygian Dominant equivalent) — appear throughout the qawwali repertoire. The intense emotional state that qawwali is intended to induce in listeners (hal, a state of spiritual rapture analogous to the Greek concept of ethos that Aristotle attributed to the Phrygian mode) is closely associated with these Phrygian-equivalent ragas.

Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (1948–1997) was the most celebrated qawwali singer of the twentieth century and one of the most important world music figures of any genre. Born into a hereditary qawwali family in Faisalabad, Pakistan, he possessed a voice of extraordinary range, power, and precision, and his performances — which could last six or more hours — are legendary for their ability to carry audiences into states of spiritual rapture. His recordings for the WOMAD and Real World labels in the late 1980s and early 1990s brought qawwali to global audiences, and his collaborations with Peter Gabriel, Eddie Vedder (for the Dead Man Walking soundtrack), and Michael Brook demonstrated the Phrygian-mode qawwali tradition's capacity to speak across cultural boundaries.

Nusrat's most celebrated recordings include *En Mast Qalandar* (a devotional song in honor of the Sufi saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar), *Allah Hoo*, and the extended meditations on *Sufiana kalam* (Sufi poetry) that fill his concert recordings. The harmonic language of these performances is rooted in Phrygian-equivalent ragas, with the characteristic flat-second interval of Bhairavi appearing at moments of maximum devotional intensity. The parallel between this use of the Phrygian mode in Islamic devotional music and its use in Christian sacred music — both traditions reaching for the divine through the same flat-second tension — is one of the most remarkable cross-cultural convergences in the history of sacred music.

The Sufi Whirling Dervish ceremony (Sema) of the Mevlevi Order, founded by the disciples of the poet Rumi in thirteenth-century Konya (in present-day Turkey), provides another important context for Phrygian Dominant in sacred practice. The musical accompaniment for the Sema — played on the ney (end-blown reed flute), kemence

(Byzantine fiddle), ud, and kanun — draws on Ottoman classical music in makam Hicaz (Phrygian Dominant) and related makamlar. The ceremony's combination of spinning dance, Phrygian-inflected music, and collective spiritual intention directly parallels the ancient Greek Phrygian cult of Cybele described in Section 1 of this report — both traditions using the mode's ecstatic qualities to facilitate transcendence of ordinary consciousness. Neyzen Turgut Ozkan's recordings of Mevlevi Sema music on the Kalan label provide the most accessible documentation of this tradition.

The Supreme Collection Vol. 1

Composer / Artist: Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan

Date / Period: 1988

Genre: Qawwali / Pakistani devotional music

Phrygian Mode Usage: The essential introduction to Nusrat's art, recorded for the WOMAD label. The extended performances of En Mast Qalandar and other devotional qawwalis demonstrate how the Phrygian-equivalent ragas of the North Indian system (particularly Bhairavi and Bhairav) function in sustained devotional improvisation. Nusrat's vocal treatment of the flat-second interval in the climactic passages of these recordings is among the most intense deployments of Phrygian-mode harmony in any musical tradition. Phrygian equivalent (Raga Bhairavi) as vehicle for Sufi devotional rapture.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Mevlevi Sema: Music of the Whirling Dervishes

Composer / Artist: Neyzen Turgut Ozkan and Mevlevi Ensemble

Date / Period: Various recordings

Genre: Turkish Sufi ceremonial music

Phrygian Mode Usage: Recordings of the complete Mevlevi Sema ceremony, including the taksim (improvisation) and peshrev (suite) sections in makam Hicaz (Phrygian Dominant). The most direct available documentation of Phrygian Dominant harmony in Islamic Sufi ceremonial context. The ney's treatment of the augmented

second in the Hicaz passages has a piercing, otherworldly quality that makes the mode's spiritual associations viscerally clear. Phrygian Dominant (makam Hicaz) as ceremonial sacred music.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Klezmer: The Freygish Tradition in Depth

The klezmer tradition of Ashkenazi Jewish music deserves treatment in greater depth than the catalog entry provided in the compositions catalog (Section 3.9, Folk and Miscellaneous). Klezmer — from the Hebrew *kley zemer*, literally 'vessels of song' — is the instrumental folk music of Eastern European Jewish communities, developed over centuries in the Pale of Settlement (the region of Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, and Moldova where Jews were permitted to reside under Tsarist Russia). It is the most important Jewish musical tradition built on Phrygian Dominant harmony, and its transmission to the United States through the great wave of Jewish immigration (1880–1924) made Freygish scale harmony one of the formative influences on American popular music.

The Freygish scale (E F G# A B C D in E Freygish) is identical to the Western Phrygian Dominant scale and to maqam Hijaz. Its name — from Yiddish *Frayg*, meaning 'Phrygian' — reflects the direct naming of the scale after the ancient mode. In klezmer practice, Freygish is used primarily for the most emotionally intense pieces: the *doinas* (improvisatory laments) and the *freylekhs* (celebratory dances) that represent the emotional poles of the klezmer repertoire. The same augmented second interval that signals ecstasy in the *freylekhs* signals grief in the *doinas* — the mode is capacious enough to carry both extremes.

The great klezmer clarinetists of the early twentieth century — Dave Tarras (1897–1989), Naftule Brandwein (1884–1963), and Shloimke Beckerman (1888–1974) — recorded for labels including Columbia, Victor, and the Yiddish theatre companies in New York, and their 78 rpm recordings from the 1920s and 1930s are the foundation of the klezmer canon. Tarras in particular is celebrated for his treatment of the Freygish scale: his recorded performances of *doinas* show a

mastery of the augmented second ornament that parallels the best Ottoman and Greek treatments of the same interval. Tarras's playing bridges the Eastern European Ashkenazi tradition and the American context, demonstrating how the Freygish scale maintained its identity as it crossed the Atlantic.

The klezmer revival of the late 1970s and 1980s, centered in New York and led by musicians including Andy Statman (mandolin and clarinet), Zev Feldman, and the Klezmer Conservatory Band, brought authentic klezmer practice back into public awareness after decades of assimilation had eroded the tradition. This revival produced recordings that document Freygish playing with modern production quality while maintaining stylistic fidelity to the early masters. The Klezmatics, a New York ensemble formed in 1986, pushed the revival further by fusing klezmer Freygish harmony with rock, jazz, and experimental music — much as Ivo Papasov had done with Bulgarian Phrygian Dominant in the same decade.

The influence of the Freygish scale on American popular music is broader than is commonly recognized. The Yiddish theatre tradition of New York in the early twentieth century — which produced composers including Abraham Goldfaden and Joseph Rumshinsky — drew on Freygish harmony for its most dramatic and emotionally intense theatrical songs, and these songs reached mainstream American audiences through the vaudeville circuit. The blues and jazz musicians who absorbed Yiddish vaudeville in the 1910s and 1920s found in its Freygish Phrygian Dominant harmonics a parallel to the blue notes and modal inflections of African American music, and the cross-pollination between Jewish Freygish and African American blues in the New York entertainment industry of the early twentieth century is one of the underexplored chapters in American popular music history.

Dave Tarras: Master of Klezmer Music

Composer / Artist: Dave Tarras

Date / Period: Various (1920s-1950s recordings, reissued)

Genre: Klezmer / Ashkenazi Jewish folk music

Phrygian Mode Usage: The essential collection of Tarras's recordings, reissued on the Global Village label. His doina performances demonstrate Freygish (Phrygian Dominant) improvisation at its most expressive and technically refined. The augmented second ornament in these recordings is the defining sound of the Ashkenazi Freygish tradition. Essential listening for understanding Phrygian Dominant in Jewish musical practice.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Jews with Horns

Composer / Artist: The Klezmatics

Date / Period: 1995

Genre: Klezmer revival / fusion

Phrygian Mode Usage: The Klezmatics' most acclaimed recording, which pushes Freygish Phrygian Dominant into fusion territory with rock, jazz, and experimental influences. The title track and the traditional-derived pieces demonstrate both the modal heritage and the contemporary vitality of the Freygish tradition. Grammy-winning ensemble; the recording is a landmark of the klezmer revival.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

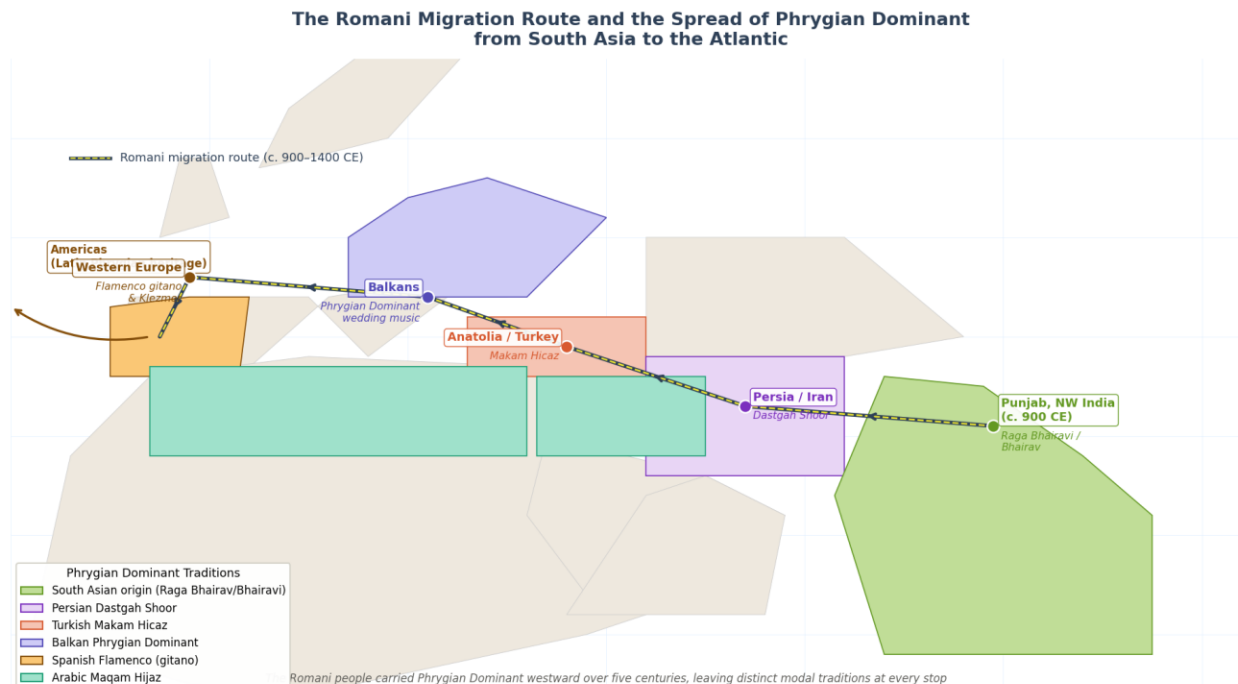


Figure 8: Schematic map of the Romani migration route (c. 900–1400 CE), illustrating how Phrygian Dominant traveled from Punjab westward through Persia, Anatolia, the Balkans, and into Western Europe. Country boundaries are approximate and illustrative; this map is a conceptual diagram, not a cartographic reference. Each waypoint generated a distinct regional tradition sharing the same defining augmented second.

Romani and Gypsy Music: A Phrygian Dominant Thread Across Continents

The Romani people — a diaspora community whose ancestors migrated from the Punjab region of northwestern India to Persia, the Middle East, and ultimately to Europe between the ninth and fourteenth centuries — carry with them one of the world's most remarkable musical heritages. Romani music, in its diverse regional forms (Hungarian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Spanish, Turkish, and others), is almost universally characterized by the use of Phrygian Dominant harmony. This near-universal presence of the augmented second across Romani musical traditions that have been separated for centuries supports the theory that the Phrygian Dominant scale was part of the original musical heritage the Roma carried from South Asia — possibly derived from ragas of the Bhairavi and Bhairav family that were practiced in the Punjab before the migration.

In Hungary, the cigányzene (Gypsy music) tradition — associated with legendary violinists including János Bihari (1764–1827), Janos Lavotta, and later Sándor Lakatos — uses Phrygian Dominant harmony as the basis for the verbunkos (recruitment dance) and csárdás (national dance) forms. This tradition was the primary influence on Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies, and through Liszt it entered the European classical repertoire. The confusion between 'Hungarian' and 'Gypsy' elements in nineteenth-century European music is a well-documented historical problem; what is clear is that the Phrygian Dominant scale heard in Liszt, Brahms, and Bartók's Hungarian-influenced works derives primarily from the Romani musical tradition rather than from a specifically Hungarian folk scale.

In Spain, the gitano (Spanish Romani) community was the primary transmitter and developer of the flamenco tradition. The Phrygian Dominant harmony of flamenco — discussed extensively elsewhere in this report — is in part a Romani contribution to Spanish music, blending the augmented second that the Roma brought from the East with the Phrygian modal foundation of Andalusian Spanish music. The gitano dynasties of flamenco — the Camarón family, the Moraos, the Habichuelas — are simultaneously the guardians of the Spanish Phrygian tradition and the living carriers of the Romani Phrygian Dominant heritage.

Django Reinhardt (1910–1953), the Belgian Romani guitarist who co-founded Gypsy jazz (jazz manouche) with violinist Stéphane Grappelli, is one of the most important figures in the history of the Phrygian mode's use in jazz. Reinhardt's jazz style drew directly on the Romani Phrygian Dominant tradition — his characteristic minor-key improvisations frequently emphasize the augmented second and flat second intervals of the Freygish/Phrygian Dominant scale. Django's composition Minor Swing and his recordings of standards in minor keys demonstrate how Romani Phrygian Dominant harmony could be fused with American jazz idioms to create a wholly new and distinctive style. The gypsy jazz tradition he established continues today in the work of guitarists including Bireli Lagrene, Angelo Debarre, and Dorado Schmitt.

Minor Swing

Composer / Artist: Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli / Quintette du Hot Club de France

Date / Period: 1937

Genre: Gypsy jazz / jazz manouche

Phrygian Mode Usage: The defining recording of Gypsy jazz, built on an A minor Phrygian Dominant harmonic framework that reflects Django's Romani musical heritage. The recording demonstrates how Romani Phrygian Dominant harmony can be fused with American swing jazz idioms. One of the most influential jazz recordings of the 1930s and the foundation of the ongoing gypsy jazz tradition. Phrygian Dominant as Romani-jazz fusion.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

The Rough Guide to the Music of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe

Composer / Artist: Various Artists

Date / Period: Various (compilation)

Genre: Romani folk and popular music

Phrygian Mode Usage: A compilation surveying the Romani Phrygian Dominant tradition across Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Hungary, and other Balkan countries. Demonstrates the remarkable consistency of the augmented second interval across Romani traditions separated by centuries and thousands of miles. Essential for understanding the Romani role in transmitting Phrygian Dominant across Eurasia.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Latin American Music: Colonial Phrygian Heritage

The Spanish Phrygian tradition traveled to Latin America through the colonial encounter, and its traces are audible across a range of Latin American popular and folk music traditions. The connection is most direct in those traditions that maintained close stylistic ties to Spanish musical culture — particularly in the Caribbean and in the Andean highlands — and it becomes more attenuated in traditions that

developed a stronger African or indigenous American musical influence.

Cuban son and its descendants — mambo, cha-cha-cha, and ultimately salsa — draw on a harmonic vocabulary that includes Phrygian-inflected chord progressions, particularly in the more formal, Spanish-derived elements of the genre. The Cuban tres guitar plays characteristic Phrygian-adjacent figures in many son montuno patterns, and the Buena Vista Social Club recordings (1997) — which brought classic son to international audiences — demonstrate this Phrygian heritage throughout. Ibrahim Ferrer's vocal performances, Ruben Gonzalez's piano improvisations, and Compay Segundo's guitar playing all contain characteristic Phrygian-inflected moments that derive from the Spanish colonial musical heritage.

Argentine tango, developed in the port districts of Buenos Aires and Montevideo in the late nineteenth century, draws on a complex mixture of African, Spanish, and Italian musical influences. The Spanish component includes Phrygian modal elements derived from the flamenco and Andalusian traditions brought by Iberian immigrants. The early tango recordings of Carlos Gardel (1890–1935) — the most celebrated tango singer of all time — show clear Phrygian-inflected melodic passages in his most dramatic pieces, and the tango bandoneon's characteristic voicing of the Phrygian minor chord has become one of the definitive sounds of Argentine music.

Reggaeton — the Puerto Rican urban music genre that became the most commercially successful Latin music form of the twenty-first century — draws on Phrygian-inflected progressions through its Spanish flamenco heritage. The characteristic dembow rhythm pattern of reggaeton, combined with the modal minor harmonics derived from Spanish colonial musical tradition, creates a distinctly Phrygian-adjacent harmonic environment. The producers of early reggaeton — DJ Playero, DJ Draco, Luny Tunes — drew on samples and progressions rooted in the Spanish Phrygian tradition, and as reggaeton became a global phenomenon in the 2010s through artists including Daddy Yankee, Bad Bunny, and J Balvin, the Phrygian harmonic heritage traveled with it.

Buena Vista Social Club

Composer / Artist: Various Artists (Ibrahim Ferrer, Ruben Gonzalez, Compay Segundo, and others)

Date / Period: 1997

Genre: Cuban son / Latin American roots music

Phrygian Mode Usage: Ry Cooder's landmark recording of Havana's veteran son musicians demonstrates the Phrygian heritage of Cuban popular music throughout. The Spanish colonial modal tradition is audible in the guitar accompaniment figures, the vocal melodic patterns, and the harmonic progressions of the most formal son pieces. Essential listening for understanding how the Spanish Phrygian tradition traveled to the New World.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Mi Buenos Aires Querido

Composer / Artist: Carlos Gardel

Date / Period: 1934

Genre: Argentine tango

Phrygian Mode Usage: Gardel's most celebrated tango recording demonstrates the Phrygian-inflected melodic style that characterizes his most dramatic pieces. The bandoneon accompaniment uses characteristic Phrygian minor chord voicings, and Gardel's vocal ornamentation at the flat-second degree shows the direct influence of Spanish colonial modal traditions. Essential for understanding Phrygian heritage in Argentine popular music.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

World Music Phrygian-Equivalent Scales: Comparative Interval Analysis

Scale / Tradition	Cultural home	2nd degree	3rd degree	Key feature
Pure Phrygian *	Western classical, jazz	♭2 = F natural	♭3 = G natural	Minor tonic chord; reference
Phrygian Dominant	Flamenco, film scores	♭2 = F natural	3 = G#	Aug. 2nd F→G#: major tonic
Maqam Hijaz	Arabic classical / pop	♭2 = F natural	3 = G#	= Phrygian Dominant (12-TET)
Makam Hicaz	Turkish / Ottoman	♭2 = F natural	3 = G#	= Phrygian Dominant (12-TET)
Freygish (Klezmer)	Ashkenazi Jewish	♭2 = F natural	3 = G#	= Phrygian Dominant (12-TET)
Raga Bhairavi	Hindustani / Carnatic	♭2 (microtonal)	♭3 = G natural	Pure Phrygian equiv.; microtonal 2nd
Pelog (Javanese)	Gamelan, Java / Bali	~♭2 (non-12TET)	varies by pathet	Approximate; non-equal tuning


 = augmented 2nd (F→G#); Phrygian Dominant and all equivalents share this interval
 * Maqam Hijaz, Makam Hicaz, and Freygish are acoustically identical in 12-TET — their differences are cultural, not intervallic.
 Raga Bhairavi uses microtonal inflections not captured in 12-TET; Pelog intervals are non-equal-tempered approximations.

Figure 9: Comparative interval analysis of Phrygian-equivalent scales across world music traditions. Amber cells mark the augmented second (F→G#) that characterizes Phrygian Dominant and its global equivalents. Maqam Hijaz, Makam Hicaz, and Freygish are acoustically identical in 12-TET — their differences are cultural, not intervallic.

Indonesian Gamelan and the Pelog Scale

The gamelan orchestras of Java and Bali use two principal tuning systems: slendro, a roughly pentatonic system, and pelog, a seven-tone scale with unequal intervals. Pelog exists in numerous regional tunings that vary from village to village and instrument to instrument — gamelan tuning is not standardized the way Western equal temperament is — but the most common pelog configurations include intervals that approximate the Phrygian mode in certain of their modes (pathet). The comparison is approximate rather than exact, because pelog intervals are slightly different from the equal-tempered Phrygian mode, but the structural parallel is significant enough to merit attention.

In the Javanese gamelan tradition, pathet nem (one of the three principal modes used in the wayang kulit shadow puppet theatre) uses a scale drawn from pelog that includes a prominent interval

analogous to the Phrygian flat second — a narrow second above the tonic that creates the same quality of dark, inward-pulling tension that characterizes the Western Phrygian mode. The wayang kulit uses different pathet for different emotional states and times of night, and pathet nem, used in the early evening portion of the all-night performance, is associated with the most grave and powerful dramatic content — exactly the same association that the Phrygian mode carries in Western sacred and theatrical tradition.

The connection between the Balinese gamelan tradition and the Phrygian mode is less direct but still audible. Certain Balinese gong kebyar pieces use pelog tunings that produce a prominent narrow second above the tonic, creating a harmonic atmosphere that Western ears consistently describe using Phrygian-adjacent vocabulary: ancient, mysterious, dark, otherworldly. The American composer Colin McPhee (1900–1964), who lived in Bali in the 1930s and became the first Western musicologist to seriously document Balinese music, noted the emotional similarity between Balinese pelog music and the ancient Greek Phrygian mode in his landmark study *Music in Bali* (1966). McPhee's own compositions, which synthesize Balinese pelog writing with Western modal harmony, represent one of the earliest conscious cross-cultural explorations of the Phrygian modal tradition in twentieth-century art music.

The Jasmine Isle: Javanese Gamelan Music

Composer / Artist: Court Gamelan of Yogyakarta

Date / Period: Various recordings (Nonesuch Explorer series)

Genre: Javanese gamelan / Indonesian classical music

Phrygian Mode Usage: The Nonesuch Explorer series recordings of Javanese court gamelan demonstrate pathet nem and other pelog modes that approximate the Phrygian interval structure. The slow, meditative quality of these recordings makes the Phrygian-parallel harmonic atmosphere fully audible, and the emotional associations (grave, archaic, otherworldly) directly parallel those of the Western Phrygian mode. Essential listening for cross-cultural modal comparison.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

SECTION 8 — Using the Phrygian Mode: A Guide for Composers and Improvisers

This section addresses the practical use of the Phrygian mode — how to compose with it, how to improvise over it, what chord progressions it generates, how to voice-lead within it, and how to move between it and related scales. It is intended as both an introduction for musicians encountering the mode for the first time and a systematic reference for those already familiar with it.

The Phrygian Diatonic Chord System

Every major and minor scale generates seven diatonic chords — one built on each scale degree. The Phrygian mode's seven diatonic chords (using E Phrygian as the reference) are as follows, expressed as Roman numeral analysis:

Degree	Chord (E Phrygian)	Quality	Notes in chord	Musical function
i	Em	Minor	E G B	Tonic — home chord; minor quality typical of dark modes
bII	F	Major	F A C	The Phrygian characteristic chord — built on the flat second; functions as bII or Neapolitan
bIII	G	Major	G B D	Subtonic major — often used for strong harmonic motion away from tonic
iv	Am	Minor	A C E	Minor subdominant — creates modal minor cadential motion
v	Bm(b5)	Diminished	B D F	Rarely used as a chord; the diminished fifth weakens dominant function
bVI	C	Major	C E G	Major flat-sixth — provides harmonic color and modal variety
bVII	Dm	Minor	D F A	Minor subtonic — often used in descending progressions toward tonic

The most important observation about this chord system is what it lacks: a dominant seventh chord. In major-key music, the V7 chord (B7 in E major: B D# F# A) provides the strong harmonic resolution that drives tonal music forward. In E Phrygian, the chord built on the fifth

degree is a diminished triad (Bm(b5): B D F), which lacks the driving energy of a dominant seventh. This absence of a conventional dominant is what gives Phrygian music its modal, non-tonal quality — the music does not 'want' to resolve in the same urgent way that tonal music does. Instead, Phrygian music tends to oscillate between the tonic (Em) and the characteristic flat-second chord (F major), creating a static, hypnotic, or ominous atmosphere rather than a goal-directed harmonic narrative.

Core Progressions in the Phrygian Mode

The following progressions are the most commonly used in Phrygian-mode music across genres. All examples use E Phrygian.

The i–bII vamp: Em – F – Em – F (or extended: Em – F – G – F – Em) — The most fundamental Phrygian progression. The alternation between the minor tonic and the major flat-second chord creates the mode's characteristic rocking tension. This progression is the harmonic foundation of flamenco, the basis of countless metal riffs, and the vamp structure of most Phrygian jazz compositions. The E–F half step in the bass is the Phrygian mode in its most concentrated form.

The Andalusian cadence: Am – G – F – E (in A Phrygian) — The defining progression of flamenco, also called the Spanish cadence. A descending sequence through the Phrygian modal degrees, ending on the tonic E (often as a major chord with bII characteristics when played in context). The descending bass line Am–G–F–E is the Phrygian mode walking down its own scale.

The i–bVII–bVI–bVII progression: Em – Dm – C – Dm — A four-chord cycle widely used in metal and rock. The bVII–bVI–bVII motion creates a modal see-saw that surrounds the tonic without resolving to it in a tonal sense. The flatted seventh (Dm) gives the progression its dark, non-tonal character.

The i–bII–bVII–i turnaround: Em – F – Dm – Em — A complete Phrygian cycle that touches all three most characteristic Phrygian harmonies: the tonic minor, the flat-second major, and the flat-seventh minor. Common in progressive rock and metal.

The Phrygian Dominant vamp: E – F – E – F (with E as a major chord) — When the tonic is made major (E major instead of E minor), the scale becomes Phrygian Dominant. The vamp between E major and F major — a half step apart — is the most concentrated expression of this variant's characteristic sound. Used throughout flamenco, Middle Eastern music, and metal.

Voice Leading in Phrygian Contexts

The Phrygian mode's flat second creates specific voice-leading patterns that recur across genres. The most important is the semitone descent from the flat second (F in E Phrygian) to the tonic (E): this motion — F moving down to E — is the Phrygian cadence in its simplest form, and it appears in bass lines, melody lines, and inner voices throughout the mode's history. When writing in Phrygian, prioritize this semitone resolution in at least one voice at cadential points.

The opposite motion — ascending from the tonic E up to F — creates the characteristic Phrygian 'reach': the sense of the music straining upward against gravity before falling back. This ascending half step is particularly effective in melodic lines that want to suggest tension without fully departing from the tonal center. It is used obsessively in flamenco melody, in Phrygian jazz improvisation, and in the opening gestures of many Phrygian-mode themes in film music.

When harmonizing the Phrygian scale in multiple voices, be aware that parallel octaves and fifths between the Em tonic chord and the F major bII chord are very easy to fall into, given that all the voices are moving by semitone or close to it. The Renaissance polyphonists spent considerable effort developing contrary-motion voice-leading patterns that avoided these parallels while preserving the Phrygian

modal character — their solutions, found in the scores of Palestrina and Victoria, remain the most elegant available.

Phrygian for Guitarists

Of all the instruments in the Western tradition, the guitar is the one for which the Phrygian mode might be said to be most naturally suited. This is not an accident of acoustics but of history and geography: the guitar as we know it is a Spanish instrument, developed in Andalusia alongside the flamenco tradition that is built almost entirely on Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant harmony. The instrument's standard tuning (E–A–D–G–B–E) places the low open E string as a natural Phrygian tonic, and the adjacent F at the first fret is a single finger movement away. The core Phrygian gesture — the half step from tonic to flat second — is the easiest possible movement on the instrument, which is one reason the Phrygian mode dominates so much guitar music across so many genres.

The Guitar and the Phrygian Mode: Historical Overview

The guitar's relationship with the Phrygian mode stretches back to the earliest documented guitar music. The Spanish Baroque guitar repertoire of the seventeenth century — represented above all by Gaspar Sanz (1640–1710), Francisco Guerau (1649–1722), and Santiago de Murcia (c.1673–c.1739) — is saturated with Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant writing drawn directly from the Spanish folk and dance traditions of the period. Sanz's *Instrucción de Música sobre la Guitarra Española* (1674), the most important guitar treatise of the Baroque period, includes numerous pieces in Phrygian mode: his *Canarios* (a fast dance form in Phrygian), *Españoleta*, and many of the pieces in the *Passacalles* section are built on the descending Phrygian cadence Am–G–F–E that would later become the foundation of the flamenco tradition. Rodrigo de Zayas's modern editions of Sanz's music have brought this repertoire to contemporary guitarists, and it remains one of the most direct available connections between the Phrygian mode and the guitar's earliest repertoire.

The transition from the Baroque guitar to the modern classical guitar in the nineteenth century brought a new generation of Spanish guitar composers who continued the Phrygian tradition. Dionisio Aguado

(1784–1849) and Fernando Sor (1778–1839), the two towering figures of the early classical guitar tradition, both composed in Phrygian-influenced styles derived from Spanish folk music. Francisco Tárrega (1852–1909), the father of the modern classical guitar technique, composed and arranged numerous pieces with strong Phrygian inflections, and his arrangements of Albéniz and Granados brought the Phrygian Spanish nationalist idiom directly onto the classical guitar in its modern form.

Classical Guitar: The Central Phrygian Repertoire

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries produced the pieces that today constitute the most widely studied Phrygian repertoire for classical guitar. Isaac Albéniz's *Asturias* (from the *Suite Española*, originally composed for piano but now far more famous in its guitar transcription by Miguel Llobet and later Francisco Tárrega) is arguably the single most important Phrygian composition in the solo guitar repertoire. The piece is a stylized Asturian jota — not, despite its name, from Asturias but in the Andalusian style — built on the E Phrygian Dominant scale throughout. Its characteristic tremolo melody sits on the Phrygian Dominant tonic (E major) while the bass moves through the descending flamenco cadence, and the central section exploits the augmented second interval between the flat second and major third degrees for its characteristic dark, passionate intensity. Every classical guitarist learns this piece, and it is one of the most direct transmissions of the Phrygian Dominant harmonic idiom from the flamenco tradition into the concert hall.

Joaquín Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* (1939) — the most performed guitar concerto in the repertoire and one of the most recognizable pieces of twentieth-century orchestral music — features a slow movement (*Adagio*) that is one of the most emotionally overwhelming deployments of the Phrygian mode in any medium. The *cor anglais* theme that opens the movement is in D Phrygian, and the guitar's response sustains and develops this modal language over an orchestral bed of extraordinary beauty. The movement's middle section, where the guitar plays an extended Phrygian Dominant passage with the orchestra responding in shimmering harmonics, is among the most extended and technically demanding exploitations

of the mode's expressive range for the instrument. Miles Davis was so moved by this movement that he used it as the conceptual model for his *Sketches of Spain* album, confirming the *Adagio*'s status as a cultural touchstone that crosses genre boundaries.

Rodrigo's *Fantasia para un Gentilhombre* (1954), based on dance pieces by Gaspar Sanz, returns to the Baroque Spanish Phrygian tradition. The *Danza de las Hachas* movement and the *Españoleta* both draw on Phrygian modal writing derived directly from Sanz's original pieces, while Rodrigo's orchestral harmonizations give the Phrygian idiom a twentieth-century modernist sheen. The *Fantasia* is less frequently heard than the *Concierto* but is equally important as a demonstration of the Phrygian mode's deep roots in the classical guitar tradition.

Manuel Ponce (1882–1948), the great Mexican guitar composer whose three decades of collaboration with Andrés Segovia produced much of the core classical guitar repertoire, used Phrygian inflections extensively in his Mexican-influenced works. His *Sonatina Meridional* (1932) and the *Sonata Mexicana* employ Phrygian modal writing derived from Mexican folk music that is itself descended from the Spanish colonial Phrygian tradition. Leo Brouwer (b.1939), the Cuban composer-guitarist who has been the most prolific and influential creator of new classical guitar music since the 1960s, draws frequently on Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant harmony in works such as *Danza Característica* and *El Decamerón Negro*, connecting the Cuban guitar tradition to its Iberian Phrygian roots.

Flamenco Guitar: The Phrygian Instrument

In flamenco, the guitar is not merely one of several instruments using the Phrygian mode — it is the primary vehicle through which the entire Phrygian harmonic language of the tradition is organized, transmitted, and elaborated. The flamenco guitarist's left hand is essentially a Phrygian harmonic machine: the fundamental chord positions of flamenco guitar (the *rasgueado* E chord, the Am-shape capo chord, the F barre chord) are the tonic, subdominant, and flat-second chords of the Phrygian mode laid out in the most physically efficient way possible on the instrument's neck. Every major flamenco guitarist

has therefore been, whether they would use the term or not, a major Phrygian composer.

Beyond Paco de Lucía — whose centrality to this document's flamenco discussion is already established — the classical-flamenco guitarist Sabicas (Agustín Castellón Campos, 1912–1990) was the dominant figure of the pre-Paco era and one of the most important composers of flamenco guitar music in the Phrygian idiom. His recordings for Everest Records in the 1950s and 1960s — including the albums *Flamenco Puro* and *King of the Flamenco Guitar* — established the technical and harmonic template for flamenco guitar solo performance that Paco de Lucía later revolutionized. Sabicas's Phrygian Dominant writing is more traditional and harmonically conservative than Paco's, but it is exemplary in its clarity and serves as an ideal introduction to the flamenco Phrygian grammar.

Ramón Montoya (1880–1949), the earliest flamenco guitarist to make significant recordings, documented the Phrygian harmonic language of traditional flamenco guitar at its most archaic and unadorned. His 1920s and 1930s recordings — recently reissued on the Sonifolk label — show the Phrygian Dominant cadences of soleá and siguiriya in their pre-modernization form. Manolo Sanlúcar (b.1943), often cited as the most harmonically sophisticated flamenco guitarist of his generation, extended the Phrygian Dominant harmonic language of flamenco into near-classical harmonic complexity in works such as *Tauromagia* (1988) — a suite for guitar and orchestra that subjects the Phrygian flamenco idiom to a quasi-symphonic development. Vicente Amigo (b.1967) and Tomatito (José Fernández Torres, b.1958) represent the current generation of flamenco guitarists carrying the Phrygian tradition forward with contemporary production sensibilities.

Carlos Santana and the Phrygian Dominant in Rock

No guitarist has brought the Phrygian Dominant scale to a larger popular audience than Carlos Santana (b.1947). Santana's guitar style — rooted in the Latin rock of 1960s and 1970s San Francisco — draws primarily on the Phrygian Dominant scale for its characteristic melodic and harmonic language. His tone, phrasing, and note choices are almost entirely Phrygian Dominant in orientation: the augmented second, the major third over a minor-tonic harmonic context, and the

characteristic descending Phrygian Dominant scale passages that define his most recognizable phrases. Unlike most rock guitarists who use the Phrygian mode for riffing, Santana uses it primarily for melodic improvisation, sustaining long single-note lines over Phrygian Dominant vamps with a singing quality derived from his immersion in both Latin and blues guitar traditions.

Black Magic Woman (1970, originally written by Peter Green of Fleetwood Mac but transformed by Santana into its definitive version) is in D minor with a prominent Phrygian Dominant character throughout — the Eb (flat second degree in D) appears constantly in Santana's improvisation over the Am–Dm chord movement. Oye Como Va (1970) is built on a D minor groove that Santana plays with strong Phrygian Dominant inflections in the improvised sections. Europa (Earth's Cry Heaven's Smile) (1976) uses Phrygian Dominant as its primary melodic scale, with Santana's long, weeping lines exploiting the augmented second for maximum emotional impact. Santana's playing on these and dozens of other recordings created the template for Phrygian Dominant lead guitar in rock and Latin music that has influenced three generations of guitarists.

Rock, Metal, and Fusion Guitar: Phrygian Voices

Beyond Metallica and the thrash metal tradition already documented elsewhere in this monograph, several other guitarists have made particularly important contributions to the Phrygian vocabulary on the instrument. Tony Iommi (b.1948) of Black Sabbath developed some of the earliest and most influential Phrygian riffing in heavy rock — the opening riff of Iron Man (1970) is a Phrygian Dominant figure, and the harmonic world of Sabbath Bloody Sabbath uses Phrygian inflections throughout. Iommi's detuned guitar sound combined with Phrygian modal writing created the foundational template for heavy metal that all subsequent practitioners, including Metallica's Kirk Hammett, built on.

Steve Vai (b.1960) is among the most technically sophisticated and analytically conscious users of the Phrygian mode in rock guitar. His piece For the Love of God (from the album Passion and Warfare, 1990) uses Phrygian mode throughout its eight minutes of extended guitar meditation — it is one of the few pieces in rock guitar literature where

the Phrygian mode functions not as a riff device but as a sustained compositional framework comparable in scope to its use in flamenco or jazz. Vai has discussed his use of the Phrygian mode explicitly in interviews and instructional materials, making him a particularly valuable guide for guitarists seeking to understand the mode's application in rock.

Al Di Meola (b.1954), the jazz-fusion guitarist whose early career with Return to Forever and his subsequent solo work established the template for Latin jazz guitar fusion, uses Phrygian Dominant almost exclusively in his Spanish-influenced compositions. Mediterranean Sundance (from the album *Elegant Gypsy*, 1977), recorded in a landmark duet with Paco de Lucía, is Phrygian Dominant throughout — a direct meeting of the flamenco and jazz-fusion Phrygian traditions. John McLaughlin (b.1942) of the Mahavishnu Orchestra, whose engagement with Indian music led him to the Phrygian-adjacent ragas of the Bhairav family, uses Phrygian inflections in compositions like *Meeting of the Spirits* and *Birds of Fire* in ways that consciously bridge the Western modal tradition and the Indian raga system.

Jazz Guitar in the Phrygian Mode

In jazz guitar, the Phrygian mode appears most frequently in the post-bop and fusion contexts established by players like McLaughlin and Di Meola. Django Reinhardt's use of Romani Phrygian Dominant is documented in the world music chapter of this volume; in the specifically jazz-guitar context, the most significant deployments of Phrygian harmony come from guitarists working in the modal tradition established by Miles Davis.

Pat Metheny (b.1954), whose vast catalog encompasses virtually every style of jazz guitar, uses Phrygian inflections in his more atmospheric and modal compositions — particularly in the solo guitar and duet contexts where the mode's static, meditative quality suits his reflective style. Mike Stern (b.1953), guitarist on Miles Davis's 1980s fusion recordings, uses Phrygian modal writing in his Davis-influenced work. Bill Frisell (b.1951), whose eclectic style draws on Americana and folk music, uses Phrygian inflections in pieces with a Spanish or Middle Eastern character. For jazz guitarists, the primary challenge of Phrygian

improvisation is navigating the absence of a conventional dominant chord (as discussed in Section 8's chord system analysis) — the mode requires a horizontal, scale-based approach to improvisation rather than the vertical, chord-tone-based approach of bebop.

Guitar Compositions in the Phrygian Mode: A Supplementary Catalog

The following entries catalog compositions and recordings that are essential listening for guitarists wishing to understand the full breadth of Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant writing for the instrument. Entries span the classical, flamenco, rock, fusion, and jazz guitar traditions.

Classical Guitar

Asturias (Leyenda) from Suite Española

Composer / Artist: Isaac Albéniz (arr. Francisco Tárrega / Miguel Llobet)

Date / Period: c.1892 (arr. for guitar c.1900)

Genre: Classical guitar

Phrygian Mode Usage: The definitive Phrygian Dominant composition for solo classical guitar. The guitar transcription — far more famous than the original piano version — exploits the instrument's open-E resonance for the Phrygian tonic drone, while the tremolo melody and the central section's augmented second passages demonstrate every essential technique of Phrygian Dominant writing for the instrument. Studied by every classical guitarist; John Williams's recording (Sony Classical) is the benchmark. E Phrygian Dominant throughout.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Concierto de Aranjuez — Second Movement (Adagio)

Composer / Artist: Joaquin Rodrigo

Date / Period: 1939

Genre: Guitar concerto

Phrygian Mode Usage: The most performed guitar concerto in the repertoire and one of the supreme expressions of the Phrygian mode in any medium. The Adagio's opening cor anglais theme in D Phrygian, the guitar's extended Phrygian Dominant response, and the movement's sustained modal meditation constitute the single most emotionally powerful deployment of the Phrygian mode for guitar in the entire concert repertoire. Pepe Romero with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields (Philips) is the recommended recording. D Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) (links to search results — select a performance of your choice)

Fantasia para un Gentilhombre — Danza de las Hachas / Española

Composer / Artist: Joaquin Rodrigo (based on Gaspar Sanz)

Date / Period: 1954

Genre: Guitar concerto / Baroque transcription

Phrygian Mode Usage: Based on Gaspar Sanz's 17th-century guitar pieces, this concerto movement brings the earliest documented Phrygian guitar tradition into the modern concert repertoire. The Española and Danza de las Hachas movements are among the clearest connections between the Baroque Spanish Phrygian guitar idiom and contemporary performance practice. Phrygian Dominant derived from Baroque Spanish dance tradition.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) (links to search results — select a performance of your choice)

Instrucción de Música sobre la Guitarra Española — Canarios / Passacalles

Composer / Artist: Gaspar Sanz

Date / Period: 1674

Genre: Baroque guitar

Phrygian Mode Usage: The foundational document of the Spanish Phrygian guitar tradition. Sanz's Canarios — a fast dance built on the Phrygian Dominant cadence — and the Passacalles in E Phrygian are among the earliest notated guitar music in the Western tradition and demonstrate the Phrygian mode at the root of the instrument's

repertoire. Rolf Lislevand's recording on the Naïve label provides excellent documentation of the Baroque guitar Phrygian tradition. Pure Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

El Decamerón Negro

Composer / Artist: Leo Brouwer

Date / Period: 1981

Genre: Classical guitar

Phrygian Mode Usage: Brouwer's most performed solo guitar work, in three movements inspired by Leo Frobenius's compilation of African legends. The first movement (La Balada de la Doncella Enamorada) and third movement (La Huida de los Amantes por el Valle de los Ecos) use Phrygian modal writing as part of Brouwer's synthesis of Cuban, African, and European guitar idioms. A key work in the twentieth-century classical guitar repertoire demonstrating Phrygian mode in a non-Spanish context. Mixed modal with Phrygian elements.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Danza Característica

Composer / Artist: Leo Brouwer

Date / Period: 1957

Genre: Classical guitar

Phrygian Mode Usage: One of Brouwer's earliest and most characteristic solo pieces, drawing on Cuban Afro-Hispanic musical traditions with strong Phrygian Dominant inflections derived from the Spanish colonial heritage. A rhythmically vital study in Phrygian Dominant writing for classical guitar. Phrygian Dominant as Cuban-Spanish synthesis.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Flamenco Guitar

Almoraima

Composer / Artist: Paco de Lucia

Date / Period: 1976

Genre: Flamenco guitar — Rumba

Phrygian Mode Usage: One of Paco's most beloved compositions and a perfect introduction to Phrygian Dominant writing in flamenco guitar. Built on the characteristic Am–G–F–E Andalusian cadence in A Phrygian Dominant, the piece demonstrates the modo flamenco in its most accessible and rhythmically compelling form. The guitar work is technically demanding but harmonically transparent — an ideal study piece for guitarists learning Phrygian Dominant. A Phrygian Dominant throughout.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Rio Ancho

Composer / Artist: Paco de Lucia

Date / Period: 1977

Genre: Flamenco guitar — Bulería

Phrygian Mode Usage: A showcase for Paco's technical mastery of the bulería form in A Phrygian Dominant. The piece's rapid Phrygian Dominant chord sequences, lightning rasgueados over the flat-second chord, and extended guitar falsetas demonstrate how flamenco guitarists develop the Phrygian Dominant language at virtuosic speed. Essential for understanding the mode's rhythmic possibilities on guitar. A Phrygian Dominant.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Fuente y Caudal (full album)

Composer / Artist: Paco de Lucia

Date / Period: 1973

Genre: Flamenco guitar

Phrygian Mode Usage: The album that contains Entre dos Aguas (documented separately throughout this monograph) and represents the pinnacle of Paco's early compositional output. The album as a whole demonstrates the complete range of Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant writing in flamenco — from pure Phrygian solea and siguiriya to the more accessible Phrygian Dominant rumba style. The essential single-album introduction to Phrygian guitar in flamenco. Multiple Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant forms.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) (links to search results — select a performance of your choice)

Flamenco Puro (album)

Composer / Artist: Sabicas

Date / Period: 1961

Genre: Flamenco guitar

Phrygian Mode Usage: The landmark Sabicas album documenting pre-Paco flamenco guitar in its purest traditional form. The solea, siguiriya, and farruca pieces demonstrate Phrygian Dominant harmony in the unadorned, architecturally transparent style of the flamenco guitar tradition before fusion influences. Essential for understanding the historical Phrygian grammar of the instrument. Phrygian Dominant throughout in the traditional flamenco manner.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) (links to search results — select a performance of your choice)

Tauromagia

Composer / Artist: Manolo Sanlúcar

Date / Period: 1988

Genre: Flamenco guitar with orchestra

Phrygian Mode Usage: Sanlúcar's ambitious suite for guitar and orchestra subjects the Phrygian flamenco idiom to symphonic development. The work's harmonic sophistication extends the Phrygian Dominant language of flamenco into near-classical harmonic complexity while maintaining the modal identity of the flamenco tradition. Considered by many specialists to be the most harmonically ambitious extended work in the flamenco guitar

repertoire. Phrygian Dominant as the basis for extended harmonic development.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Rock, Metal, and Latin Rock Guitar

Black Magic Woman / Gypsy Queen

Composer / Artist: Carlos Santana

Date / Period: 1970

Genre: Latin rock guitar

Phrygian Mode Usage: Santana's transformation of Peter Green's original into a Phrygian Dominant showcase defined the sound of Latin rock guitar. The improvised sections are built almost entirely on Phrygian Dominant scale phrases — the augmented second (Eb in D context) is the melodic centerpiece of Santana's most characteristic lead lines throughout the track. One of the most widely heard deployments of the Phrygian Dominant scale in popular music history. D minor / D Phrygian Dominant in the improvised sections.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Europa (Earth's Cry Heaven's Smile)

Composer / Artist: Carlos Santana

Date / Period: 1976

Genre: Latin rock guitar

Phrygian Mode Usage: Perhaps Santana's most sustained single-composition exploration of the Phrygian Dominant as a vehicle for melodic improvisation. The piece's slow tempo and extended guitar lines allow the Phrygian Dominant scale's expressive range — particularly the weeping quality of the augmented second — to be heard in uninterrupted lyrical context. A masterclass in Phrygian Dominant melodic phrasing on electric guitar. E Phrygian Dominant throughout.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

For the Love of God

Composer / Artist: Steve Vai

Date / Period: 1990

Genre: Progressive rock guitar

Phrygian Mode Usage: One of the few pieces in rock guitar literature where the Phrygian mode functions as a sustained compositional framework comparable in scope to its use in flamenco. Vai's eight-minute meditation uses E Phrygian throughout, exploring the mode's darkest and most introspective registers. Vai has discussed the deliberate modal structure of this piece in interviews, making it one of the most analytically documented uses of Phrygian mode in rock guitar. Pure E Phrygian as compositional framework.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Iron Man

Composer / Artist: Black Sabbath (Tony Iommi)

Date / Period: 1970

Genre: Heavy metal guitar

Phrygian Mode Usage: The iconic opening riff — built on a Phrygian Dominant figure in B — established one of the templates for Phrygian Dominant use in heavy metal guitar. Iommi's detuned guitar sound combined with the Phrygian Dominant interval creates the sense of massive, lumbering menace that defined heavy metal's first decade. One of the most important single riffs in the development of Phrygian-based metal guitar. B Phrygian Dominant.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Mediterranean Sundance

Composer / Artist: Al Di Meola and Paco de Lucia

Date / Period: 1977

Genre: Jazz-fusion / flamenco guitar

Phrygian Mode Usage: The landmark duet recording — a live improvisation on the album *Elegant Gypsy* (studio version) and later *Friday Night in San Francisco* — is a direct meeting of the jazz-fusion and flamenco Phrygian traditions on equal terms. Di Meola's and Paco's simultaneous Phrygian Dominant improvisation at extreme speed is one of the most technically demanding and harmonically concentrated pieces of Phrygian guitar writing in any tradition. E Phrygian Dominant as the shared harmonic language of two traditions.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Friday Night in San Francisco (full album)

Composer / Artist: John McLaughlin, Al Di Meola, Paco de Lucia

Date / Period: 1981

Genre: Acoustic guitar trio / flamenco-jazz fusion

Phrygian Mode Usage: The most celebrated acoustic guitar recording of the twentieth century. The entire album is built on Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant harmony, with all three guitarists — drawing on Indian, flamenco, and jazz-fusion Phrygian idioms respectively — improvising within the same modal framework at extraordinary speed and technical precision. Essential listening for any guitarist interested in Phrygian mode. Phrygian Dominant as the shared modal language of three distinct guitar traditions.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Jazz Guitar

Minor Swing

Composer / Artist: Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli

Date / Period: 1937

Genre: Gypsy jazz / jazz manouche

Phrygian Mode Usage: Already documented in the world music chapter as the foundational work of gypsy jazz, *Minor Swing* is

equally important as a guitar composition: Django's chord voicings for the A minor Phrygian Dominant framework define the gypsy jazz guitar vocabulary, and his improvised lines over the changes are a masterclass in Romani Phrygian Dominant phrasing. Essential for any jazz guitarist studying the Phrygian mode. A minor / Phrygian Dominant inflections throughout.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Meeting of the Spirits

Composer / Artist: Mahavishnu Orchestra (John McLaughlin)

Date / Period: 1971

Genre: Jazz-rock fusion guitar

Phrygian Mode Usage: The opening track of *The Inner Mounting Flame* introduces McLaughlin's synthesis of Indian modal writing (Phrygian-adjacent ragas) with jazz-rock guitar. The piece's Phrygian Dominant harmonic language reflects McLaughlin's immersion in the Indian classical tradition and his determination to bring raga-derived modality into an electric rock context. E Phrygian Dominant as modal foundation.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Tour de Force

Composer / Artist: Al Di Meola

Date / Period: 1982

Genre: Jazz-fusion guitar

Phrygian Mode Usage: Di Meola's album-length exploration of Spanish Phrygian Dominant in the jazz-fusion context. The guitar work throughout the record demonstrates how a jazz-trained improviser applies Phrygian Dominant modal thinking — not through flamenco technique but through jazz phrasing and rhythm — making it a valuable bridge between the flamenco and jazz applications of the mode. Phrygian Dominant as jazz-fusion compositional language.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Phrygian in Jazz Improvisation

In jazz, the Phrygian mode is most commonly encountered over two chord types: the minor chord with a flat ninth (Em7(b9), sometimes written Esus(b9)) and the half-diminished chord (Em7b5). Both chord types contain the flat-second degree that defines the Phrygian mode, and both invite Phrygian scale improvisation.

The sus4(b9) chord — sometimes called the 'Phrygian suspended chord' — is the quintessential jazz Phrygian voicing. In E, this chord is E–A–B–D–F (the tonic, fourth, fifth, minor seventh, and flat ninth). A soloist over this chord would typically use the E Phrygian scale, emphasizing the F (the flat ninth / flat second) as a characteristic color tone. McCoy Tyner's distinctive quartal voicings and Herbie Hancock's modal jazz playing frequently feature this chord type, and it appears throughout the post-Coltrane modal jazz tradition.

Miles Davis's approach on *Kind of Blue* and *Sketches of Spain* showed jazz musicians how to use the Phrygian mode as a basis for extended improvisation rather than merely as a chord-scale option within a bebop framework. On *Flamenco Sketches*, the D Phrygian section invites each soloist to stay within the modal area for as long as they choose, without the harmonic rhythm of bebop changes pressing forward. This static, atmospheric approach to Phrygian improvisation — dwelling in the mode's tension without urgently seeking resolution — became the defining jazz approach to the scale.

Phrygian in Rock and Metal Riffing

In rock and metal, the Phrygian mode is typically used for riff construction rather than extended improvisation. The characteristic approaches are: the E–F power chord alternation (the simplest and most direct Phrygian statement), the descending scale run from E to the low B or A while emphasizing the F natural, and the use of the bII chord (F major or F power chord) as a dramatic arrival point rather than a passing chord.

The Phrygian mode also pairs effectively with the tritone in metal contexts: the interval from E to Bb (the tritone or 'devil's interval') can

be combined with the Phrygian flat second to create harmonically extreme, dissonant riffs. Slayer's use of the Phrygian mode consistently incorporates tritone relationships alongside the flat second, and the combination gives their music its particularly destabilizing harmonic character.

For guitarists developing a Phrygian vocabulary, useful exercises include: practicing the E–F–E–F alternation at different rhythmic values and with different articulations; playing the full Phrygian scale in different positions on the neck (not just the open-position pattern); and analyzing the transcriptions of established Phrygian riffs (Wherever I May Roam, Chop Suey, Symphony of Destruction) to understand how specific intervallic choices create the mode's characteristic effect.

Moving Between Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant

One of the most powerful compositional techniques available within the Phrygian family is the flexible alternation between pure Phrygian (with a minor third, G natural in E Phrygian) and Phrygian Dominant (with a major third, G# in E Phrygian). This alternation — sometimes called 'modal mixture' — is fundamental to flamenco, Arabic maqam music, and klezmer, all of which treat the third degree as a variable pitch that shifts between natural and raised depending on context.

In practical terms, this means that a passage in E Phrygian can include both G natural (pure Phrygian) and G# (Phrygian Dominant) without sounding 'wrong' — provided the surrounding harmonic context supports each choice. When the music emphasizes the Em tonic chord (E–G–B), the G natural fits naturally; when it emphasizes the E major chord (E–G#–B) or moves through a F–G#–A melodic pattern, the G# fits. The back-and-forth between these two versions of the third degree is one of the most characteristic sounds of flamenco improvisation, and its conscious use in Western composition opens up a rich harmonic resource.

SECTION 9 — Curated Listening Guide

The following guide selects essential recordings for a listener wishing to understand the Phrygian mode across its major traditions. Each entry recommends a specific recording where possible. Entries are organized by tradition and roughly ordered from most accessible to most specialized within each category.

Sacred and Early Music

Chant: Requiem Mass (Complete)

Composer / Artist: Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo de Silos

Date / Period: 1994 (recording)

Genre: Gregorian chant

Phrygian Mode Usage: The Grammy-winning recording by the monks of Silos remains the most accessible and widely available introduction to Gregorian chant. Mode III and Mode IV chants appear throughout the Requiem, and the monks' warm, unhurried delivery makes the Phrygian modal atmosphere fully audible. Essential starting point for sacred Phrygian listening.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Hildegard von Bingen: O Euchari / A Feather on the Breath of God

Composer / Artist: Gothic Voices / Christopher Page

Date / Period: 1982 (recording)

Genre: Medieval sacred chant

Phrygian Mode Usage: The landmark recording that introduced Hildegard's music to modern audiences. Gothic Voices' pure, unaccompanied performances of O euchari, O viridissima virga, and related antiphons make the Phrygian modal language of Hildegard's compositions fully transparent. The Hyperion label recording is the definitive version.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Byzantine Chant: Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom

Composer / Artist: Choir of the Patriarchal Cathedral, Constantinople

Date / Period: Various recordings

Genre: Byzantine sacred chant

Phrygian Mode Usage: Recordings of the Byzantine Liturgy in the Greek Orthodox tradition by the choir of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul (available on the Lyra label) provide the most authentic available documentation of living Byzantine chant practice, including Phrygian-mode settings of the Trisagion, the Alleluia, and the Great Doxology.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis

Composer / Artist: Academy of St Martin in the Fields / Neville Marriner

Date / Period: 1972 (recording)

Genre: String orchestra

Phrygian Mode Usage: The Argo/Decca recording with ASMF under Marriner remains the most transparent and perfectly scaled recording of Vaughan Williams's G Phrygian masterwork. The clear texture allows every detail of the modal voice-leading to be heard, making it ideal for study as well as listening.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Flamenco Essentials

Entre dos aguas

Composer / Artist: Paco de Lucia

Date / Period: 1973

Genre: Flamenco guitar

Phrygian Mode Usage: The recording that made Paco de Lucia and flamenco guitar internationally famous. Side A of this LP is a single extended rumba flamenca in A Phrygian Dominant that

demonstrates every characteristic of the modo flamenco in its most accessible, rhythmically driven form. The essential entry point for Phrygian Dominant in flamenco.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Potro de Rabia y Miel

Composer / Artist: Camaron de la Isla with Paco de Lucia

Date / Period: 1992

Genre: Flamenco song and guitar

Phrygian Mode Usage: One of Camaron's late masterpieces, recorded with Paco de Lucia's guitar accompaniment. The siguiriya and solea tracks demonstrate pure Phrygian flamenco at its most intensely expressive, while the guitar interludes show Phrygian Dominant harmony at the highest level of sophistication.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

La Leyenda del Tiempo

Composer / Artist: Camaron de la Isla

Date / Period: 1979

Genre: Flamenco / fusion

Phrygian Mode Usage: The revolutionary album that fused traditional flamenco with rock, jazz, and electronic elements, produced by Ricardo Pachon. The modal harmonic language is pure Phrygian throughout, but the rhythmic and timbral contexts are radically new. Essential for understanding how Phrygian flamenco can absorb external influences while retaining its modal identity.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Jazz Essentials

Kind of Blue

Composer / Artist: Miles Davis

Date / Period: 1959

Genre: Modal jazz

Phrygian Mode Usage: The non-negotiable starting point for Phrygian mode in jazz. *Flamenco Sketches* (track 5) provides eight measures of pure D Phrygian improvisation by each soloist in turn, with Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, and Bill Evans each demonstrating a distinct approach to the mode. The entire album is essential; *Flamenco Sketches* is the Phrygian centerpiece.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Sketches of Spain

Composer / Artist: Miles Davis with Gil Evans

Date / Period: 1960

Genre: Orchestral jazz

Phrygian Mode Usage: The full album-length exploration of Spanish Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant in a jazz orchestral context. *Solea* (the longest track, nearly thirteen minutes) is in D Phrygian throughout, with Miles's flugelhorn improvising over Gil Evans's extraordinary orchestrations drawn from flamenco and Spanish folk music.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Speak No Evil

Composer / Artist: Wayne Shorter

Date / Period: 1966

Genre: Hard bop / modal jazz

Phrygian Mode Usage: Shorter's textbook demonstration of Phrygian harmony in jazz. The title track alternates between Cm7 and Dbmaj7 (the C Phrygian tonic and its flat-second chord) in its opening eight bars — the most succinct possible demonstration of modal Phrygian jazz harmony.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

My Spanish Heart

Composer / Artist: Chick Corea

Date / Period: 1976

Genre: Jazz fusion

Phrygian Mode Usage: Corea's extended exploration of Spanish Phrygian in a jazz context. The two-LP set includes extended versions of Spain and La Fiesta alongside original material, demonstrating the full expressive range of Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant in jazz fusion.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Rock and Metal Essentials

Master of Puppets

Composer / Artist: Metallica

Date / Period: 1986

Genre: Thrash metal

Phrygian Mode Usage: The album that established Metallica's full modal vocabulary. Battery (Phrygian Dominant), Disposable Heroes (pure Phrygian), and the title track all use Phrygian mode writing, and the album's overall character of dark, rampaging menace owes everything to Kirk Hammett's Phrygian-mode riff construction.

Find recordings: [YouTube search](#) → *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Dummy

Composer / Artist: Portishead

Date / Period: 1994

Genre: Trip-hop

Phrygian Mode Usage: The essential Phrygian-mode trip-hop album. Sour Times, Roads, and Glory Box all use Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant harmonic language over sampled breakbeats, and the album's combination of modal melancholy with contemporary production techniques is uniquely influential.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) (links to search results — select a performance of your choice)

Untrue

Composer / Artist: Burial

Date / Period: 2007

Genre: Electronic / dark ambient

Phrygian Mode Usage: Burial's masterpiece. Archangel, Shell of Light, and Raver use Phrygian modal fragments in a context of extreme textural fragmentation and emotional desolation. One of the most emotionally powerful deployments of the mode in any electronic music context.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) (links to search results — select a performance of your choice)

Film and Game Music Essentials

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring (Complete Recordings)

Composer / Artist: Howard Shore

Date / Period: 2005 (expanded release)

Genre: Film score

Phrygian Mode Usage: The expanded release of Shore's score allows the full modal architecture of his Phrygian system to be heard in context. The Prologue, the Isengard Unleashed sequence, and the Bridge of Khazad-dum are the essential Phrygian showpieces.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) (links to search results — select a performance of your choice)

Gladiator (Complete Score)

Composer / Artist: Hans Zimmer and Lisa Gerrard

Date / Period: 2000

Genre: Film score

Phrygian Mode Usage: The complete score (available as a two-disc set) provides the fullest picture of Zimmer and Gerrard's Phrygian Dominant-dominated sound world. The Elysium theme, The Wheat,

and Honor Him are the most emotionally concentrated Phrygian pieces in the score.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Chrono Trigger Original Soundtrack

Composer / Artist: Yasunori Mitsuda

Date / Period: 1995

Genre: Video game score

Phrygian Mode Usage: The foundational work of Phrygian modal writing in East Asian video game music. Magus's Theme, The Brink of Time, and Corridors of Time all use Phrygian mode writing, and the full soundtrack demonstrates the extraordinary range of emotional expression available within a modal framework.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

World Music Essentials

Leyenda: Spanish Guitar Music

Composer / Artist: John Williams (guitarist)

Date / Period: Various

Genre: Spanish classical guitar

Phrygian Mode Usage: The Australian guitarist John Williams's recordings of Albeniz, Granados, and Falla provide the most technically polished available recordings of the Spanish Phrygian classical guitar repertoire. His recording of Leyenda (Asturias) is particularly recommended as a demonstration of Phrygian and Phrygian Dominant alternation in a concert context.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Raga Bhairavi: Morning Raga

Composer / Artist: Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia

Date / Period: Various recordings

Genre: Hindustani classical music

Phrygian Mode Usage: Chaurasia's bansuri (bamboo flute) recordings of Raga Bhairavi — available on the Music Today and Navras labels — are among the most beautiful available demonstrations of the Indian Phrygian equivalent. The morning raga context gives the recordings a devotional, meditative quality that parallels the sacred Phrygian tradition in the West.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

Maqam Hijaz: Classical Arabic Music

Composer / Artist: Simon Shaheen

Date / Period: Various recordings

Genre: Arabic classical music

Phrygian Mode Usage: Palestinian-American oudist and violinist Simon Shaheen's recordings on the Lyricord and Rounder labels provide an accessible and technically superb introduction to maqam Hijaz (the Arabic Phrygian Dominant equivalent). His album Turath (Heritage) is particularly recommended.

Find recordings: [YouTube search →](#) *(links to search results — select a performance of your choice)*

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SECTION 11 — Conclusion

The Phrygian mode's remarkable longevity and cross-cultural reach testify to something fundamental about the musical interval at its heart: the half step between the first and second scale degrees. This single semitone — the smallest interval in Western music — creates a gravitational tension, a sense of darkness, urgency, and inevitability that has spoken to human listeners across three millennia, from the ecstatic rites of ancient Phrygia to the concert halls of Vienna, the flamenco tablaos of Andalusia, the jazz clubs of New York, the metal stages of the world, and the immersive sound worlds of contemporary film and video games. No major period of Western music history has entirely abandoned the Phrygian mode; it has merely transformed, adapting its character to each new aesthetic context while retaining its essential emotional identity.

What makes the Phrygian mode truly extraordinary is not just its survival in Western music but its independent emergence in musical traditions around the globe. The Arabic maqam Hijaz (named for the Hejaz region of Arabia), the Turkish makam Hicaz, the Iranian Dastgah Shoor, the Indian ragas Bhairavi (Carnatic: Hanumatodi) and Bhairav, the klezmer Freygish, and the flamenco modo flamenco all testify to the universal power of the flat-second relationship — a power that transcends cultural boundaries and speaks to something deep in the human experience of musical sound.

The mode's theoretical legacy in tonal harmony is also profound and often underappreciated: the Neapolitan chord (bII), one of the most dramatic and widely used harmonic devices in Western common-practice music, is simply the Phrygian flat second imported into tonal syntax. Every time a composer reaches for that chord, they are drawing on a tradition that stretches back to the ecstatic instruments of Dionysian ritual.

Whether used to express sacred penitence, romantic passion, primal aggression, cinematic menace, or meditative contemplation, the Phrygian mode remains one of the most emotionally resonant and widely used modal frameworks in music worldwide. Its story is far from over; as long as composers and musicians seek to evoke darkness, mystery, and intensity, the ancient Phrygian mode will continue to answer the call.
