

# Voicing Modes

A chord-voicing approach to hearing and practicing modes.  
For comping, improvisation, reharmonization & composition.

By Noel Johnston

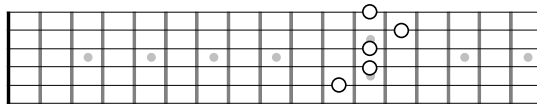
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First Edition

First Printing: July 2016

ISBN XXXXXXXXXXXX



Front cover and other image credits: Adobe Stock images and Noel Johnston

Constellation: Cassiopeia

Chord shape: (All-purpose F Melodic Minor voicing)  $A\flat$ Maj7#5#11 but works with various other roots in F Melodic Minor; E7alt,  $B\flat$ 7#11, etc. (and it also works over C Harmonic-Major)

Big thanks:

To my wife and kids for letting me take the time to do this.

To my friends, Mark Cuthbertson and Mark Lettieri for giving suggestions and feedback.

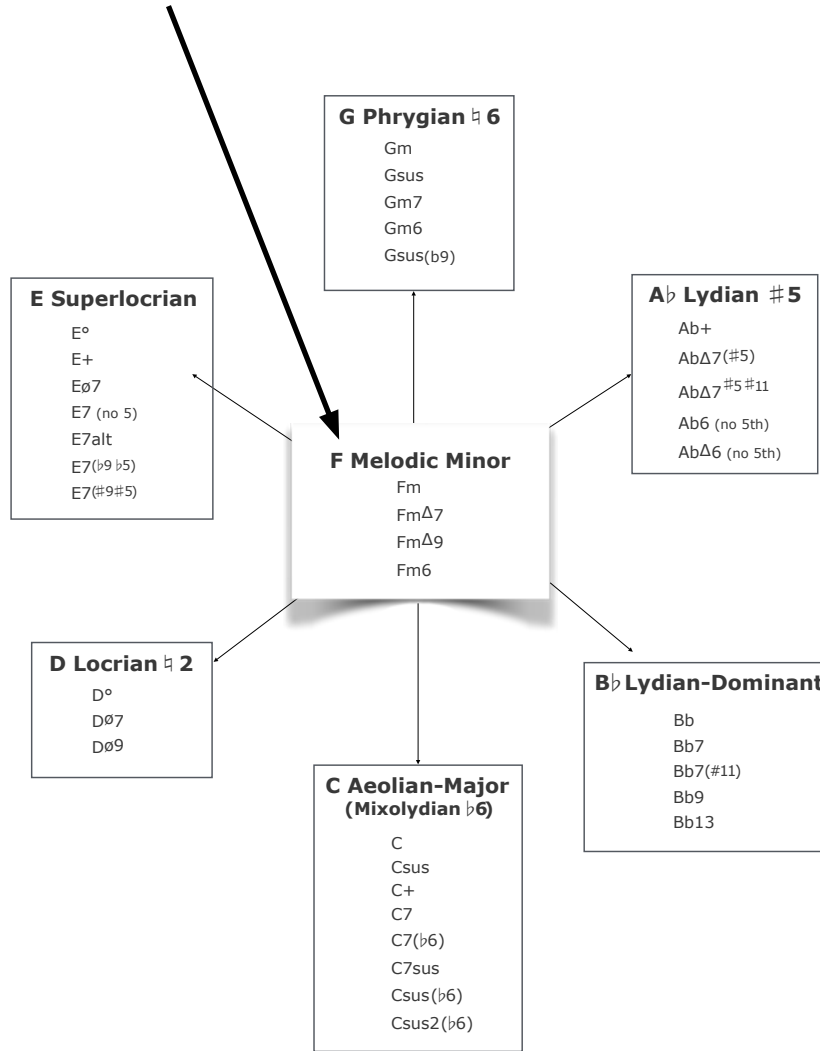
To Emanuel Schmidt for catching some typos for the eBook.

To my students at the University of North Texas and Lone Star Music Academy on whom I have inflicted many of these ideas.

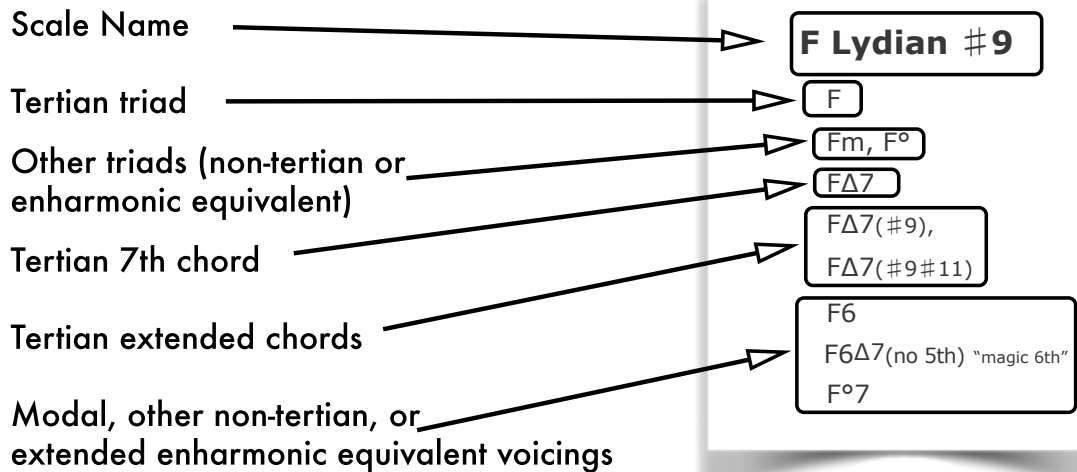
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Fundamental sound surrounded by its related sounds



How to interpret the mode/chord boxes:



Introduction.

Modes are often at first understood in relation to a parent scale. While this can be helpful as a starting point and for developing muscle memory, in practice it doesn't always point the player to the right chord tones in relation to the sound. In other words, it doesn't help make the changes.

To use modes to make the changes, one must be able to relate the scale shape to a chord voicing - a chord voicing that outlines the essential few tones in a sea of seven notes. These voicings can vary depending on the amount of color desired. The color desired is dependent on musical style/genre, and whether or not the chord is functional in a progression or static in its modality. These essential tones are not always 1,3,5,7 (tertian harmony - stacked in 3rds).

While most chords in jazz and improv-based music are expressed in one of four tertian-voicing archetypes (Major, Minor, Dominant, or Diminished) — this is a false tetrachotomy. There are more than four.

To capture some other sounds that many composers intend, especially in compositions written in the last 50 years (and in Classical music, 150 years) one must add a few other archetypes. While those indicated in this book are not exhaustive, they will open your ears to other ways of expressing harmony while still staying true to the key center.

While exploring other ways to voice the modes, keep in mind that these are not just for comping and soloing. Feel free to use them as a starting point for composition and reharmonization. The use of “pivot voicings” instead of just pivot chords can open up your understanding of harmonic relationships in multiple ways.

Enjoy exploring.

-Noel

P. S. This book is way more fun if you use a looper pedal.

Now go eat before you turn the page...



## Triads and basic 7th chords

- Everything on the plate is nutritionally “functional”
- Flavoring/spices/sauce is mostly unimportant
- The ‘staple’ is the essence of the dish.
- Every note is functional - each note has harmonic purpose & direction.
- Harmonic gravity (tension/resolution tendencies)
- 3rds (maybe 5ths) & 7ths make up the essence of the sound





## Extended chords & idiomatic Jazz voicings

- While the protein & starch ("functional" food) may make up the foundation of the the dish, the flavoring/spices/sauce is also essential to the recipe.
- The 'staples' with the extra stuff on top make up the essence of the dish.
- Notes in the lower register are functional
- Harmonic gravity (tension/resolution tendency) is somewhat important
- The addition of one or more upper extensions (color tones, flavor notes) such as 9th, 11th, 13th, #11 are essential.



# Modal Voicings



- The recipe starts with the spices.
- Flavoring/spices/sauce is the foundation.
- The choice or omission of a 'staple' is irrelevant to the essence of the dish.
  
- Every voicing note is for flavor.
- Hidden or no harmonic gravity, can vamp or stay on one sound.
- Non-functional - does not obey tension/resolution tendencies.
- 3rd & 7th not necessary because upper extensions/color tones make up the essence of the sound.





## Some different VOICING ARCHETYPES and their essence (fundamental characteristics)

<b>Functional:</b>	
Major:	3rd, 7th
Minor:	b3rd, 5th
Dominant:	3rd, b7th
Diminished:	b3rd, b5th
<b>Non-Functional:</b>	
Sus:	2nd, 5th / 4th, 5th
Phrygian:	b2nd, 4th
Aeolian:	2nd, b6th

### What's in a name?

Some scales can have more than one name, but differences in name can evoke different properties. In other words, a name can hint at a certain way to voice a sound. One may be more interesting/useful than the other depending on the context. Take these examples:

#### ▫Example 1

5th-mode Melodic Minor. Interval structure: W-W-1/2-W-1/2-W-W (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, b6, b7).

It can be voiced and named these two ways:

*Mixolydian* b6 -- evokes a Dominant voicing: 1, 3, 5, b7 with a b13 ("French food" voicing)

*Aeolian-Major* -- evokes a non-functional, Aeolian voicing: 1, 2, 5, b6 but with a major 3rd ("Indian food" voicing)

#### ▫Example 2

2nd-mode Melodic Minor. Interval structure: 1/2-W-W-W-W-1/2-W (1, b2, b3, 4, 5, 6, b7).

It can be voiced and named these two ways:

*Dorian* b2 -- evokes a minor voicing: 1, b3, 5, b7 with a b2 ("French food" voicing)

*Phrygian* b6 -- evokes a non-functional, Phrygian voicing: 1, b2, 4, 5 but with a b6 ("Indian food" voicing)

# Phrygian

- Phrygian, the 3rd mode of the major scale, has the interval structure:

1/2 - W - W - W - 1/2 - W - W (1 -  $\flat 2$  -  $\flat 3$  - 4 - 5 -  $\flat 6$  -  $\flat 7$ )

- Phrygian can be voiced functionally or modally.

- When voiced in 3rds (tertian harmony), it spells a minor triad, or a minor-7th chord. Extended tertian chords in this mode are not common.

- Functionally, A iii can substitute for a I chord (1st inversion I chords are not true iii chords), and iii chords in a progression are often changed to be secondary dominants - altered (raised 3rd) to give stronger harmonic gravity to the vi; When resolving from iii to vi the 3rd is often raised (making a leading tone to the root of vi) making a III  $\rightarrow$  vi progression. Phrygian with a  $\sharp 3$  is known as "Phrygian-Dominant" or "Spanish Phrygian."

- With traditional tertian chord nomenclature, the MODAL Phrygian sound can be written in a variety of ways such as Fm triad  $\leftrightarrow$  Gm over G bass (cadence or triad pair over a static bass note), or these slash chords or change-bass chords:

$A\flat\Delta 7\sharp 11/G$ , Fm6/G,  $B\flat 13/G$ , or  $D\flat 7/G$ .

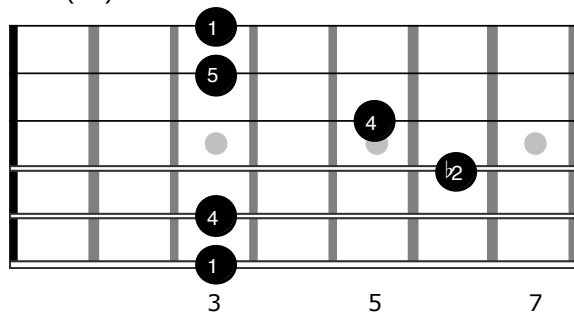
See Wayne Shorter's "Witch Hunt" (Last 4 bars), and John Coltrane's "Naima" (bridge)

- MODAL Phrygian can be thought of as an "indian food" voicing... Where the bass note is the actual root of the sound, and *without the 3rd or 7th* which are non-essential in Phrygian. (Also, without the  $\flat 6$  - an essential Aeolian tone - because it threatens to sound more like a 1st inversion I chord than a true Phrygian) If we assign 1,  $\flat 2$ , 4, 5 as the essential tones, **Gsus( $\flat 2$ )** expresses that interval structure - leaving open the potential for many more types of "Phrygian" will the addition of different types of 3rds, 6ths, & 7ths.

- The following pages contain some different types of Phrygian (& their relatives) and also some shapes for voicing the essence of modal Phrygian. As you will see, multiple possibilities can result from assigning 1,  $\flat 2$ , 4, 5 as the essential tones.

"Essential Phrygian" - made up of 1,  $\flat 2$ , 4, 5

Gsus( $\flat 2$ )



Nerdy Phrygian trivia:

- Phrygian (3rd-major scale) in retrograde is a Major Scale (makes major keys a 3rd away actually 'related')
- Phrygian-Dominant in retrograde is a Harmonic Major Scale.
- Phrygian  $\sharp 6$  in retrograde is a Melodic Minor scale.



# Essential Phrygian

Gsus(b9)

“Essence” of non-functional Phrygian: 1,  $\flat 2$ , 4, 5

(These notes make up the SHELL VOICING and the basic arpeggio)



The non-essential tones are:  $\flat 3$  or  $\Delta 3$

(these notes are the color tones or upper extensions)  $\flat 6$  or  $\Delta 6$

$\flat 7$  or  $\Delta 7$

*With those variables, there are 8 possible combinations:*

$\flat 3$   $\flat 6$   $\flat 7$  \*

$\Delta 3$   $\flat 6$   $\flat 7$  \*

$\flat 3$   $\Delta 6$   $\flat 7$  \*

$\flat 3$   $\flat 6$   $\Delta 7$

$\Delta 3$   $\flat 6$   $\Delta 7$  \*

$\Delta 3$   $\Delta 6$   $\flat 7$  \*

$\flat 3$   $\Delta 6$   $\Delta 7$

$\Delta 3$   $\Delta 6$   $\Delta 7$

(\* indicates sounds that are less obscure and more 'useful' than the others)

Here are those 5 useful sounds that fit this Phrygian voicing:

1,  $\flat 2$ ,  $\flat 3$ , 4, 5,  $\flat 6$ ,  $\flat 7$  (Basic Phrygian - 3rd mode of the Major Scale)

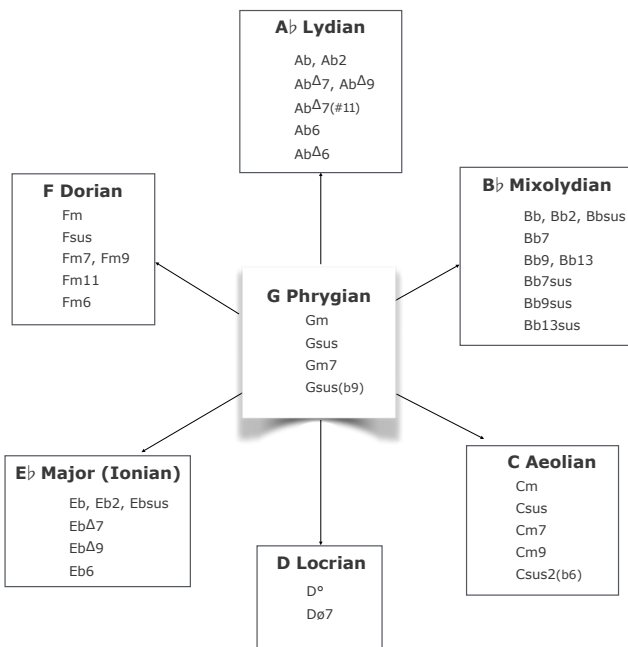
1,  $\flat 2$ ,  $\Delta 3$ , 4, 5,  $\flat 6$ ,  $\flat 7$  (Phrygian-Dominant / Spanish Phrygian - 5th mode Harmonic Minor)

1,  $\flat 2$ ,  $\flat 3$ , 4, 5,  $\Delta 6$ ,  $\flat 7$  (Phrygian  $\flat 6$  / Dorian  $\flat 2$  - 2nd mode Melodic Minor)

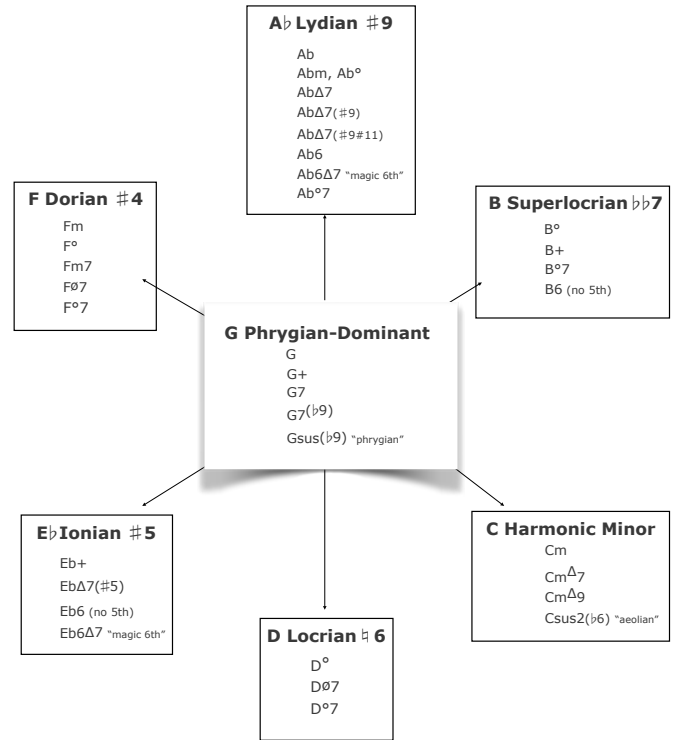
1,  $\flat 2$ ,  $\Delta 3$ , 4, 5,  $\flat 6$ ,  $\Delta 7$  (Double Harmonic Major - 5th mode Hungarian Minor / Double-Harmonic Minor)

1,  $\flat 2$ ,  $\Delta 3$ , 4, 5,  $\Delta 6$ ,  $\flat 7$  (Mixolydian  $\flat 2$  / Phrygian-Dom ( $\flat 6$ ) - 5th mode of Harmonic Major)

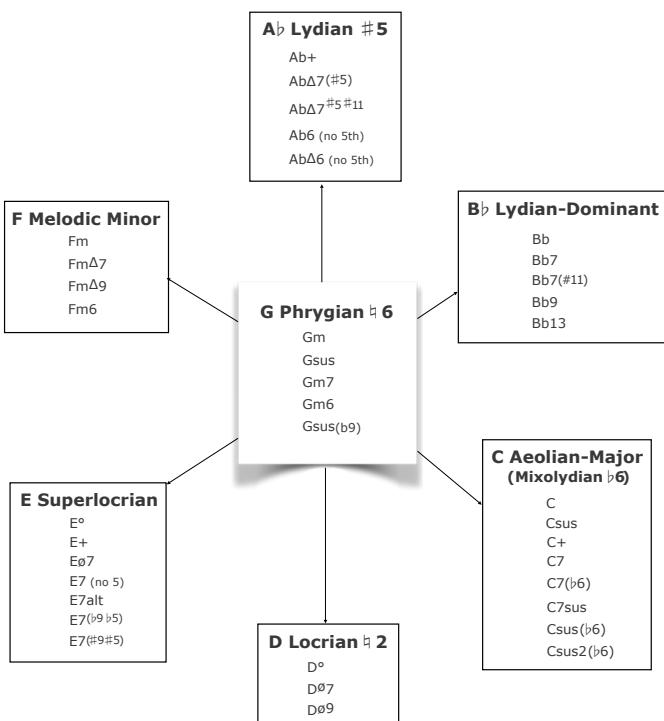
## iii. G Phrygian



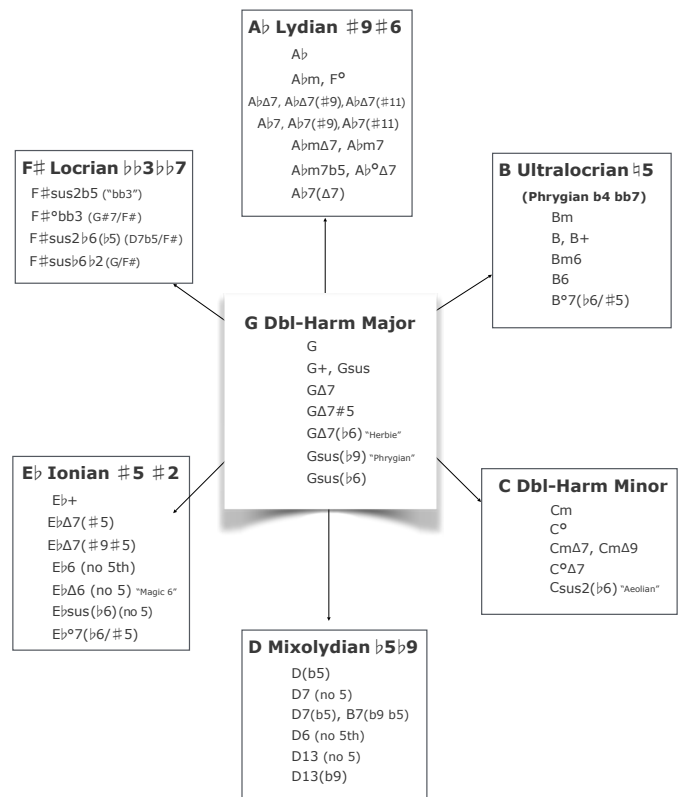
## V. G Phrygian-Dominant

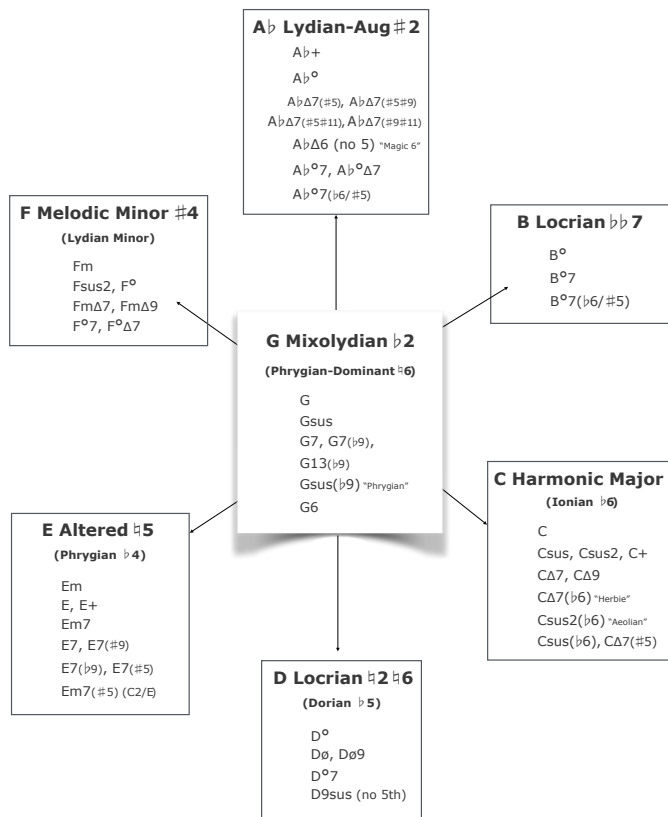


## ii. G Phrygian $\natural 6$



## I. G Double Harmonic Major (5th mode Hungarian Minor)

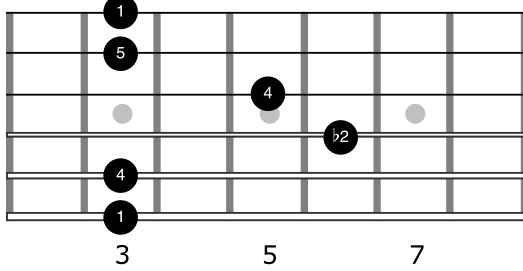


V. G Mixolydian  $\flat 2$ 

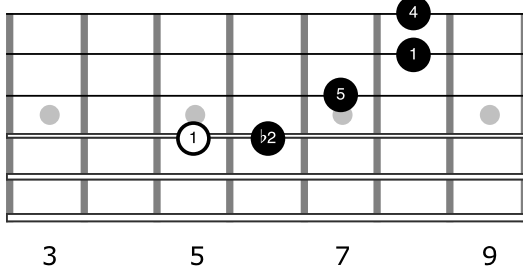
Larger size modal relative diagrams are in the reference section of this book starting pg. 72.

For interactive modal relative diagrams, download the "Voicing Modes" iOS app, or "Voicing Modes" web app at [www.noeljohnston.com](http://www.noeljohnston.com)

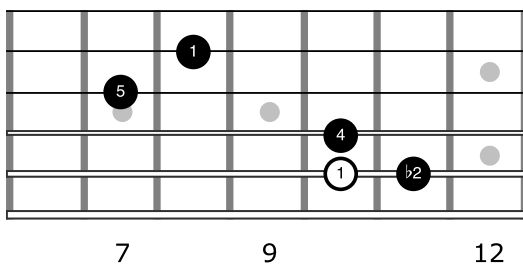
Gsus(b2)



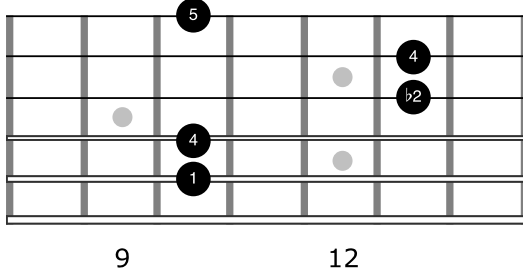
Gsus(b2)



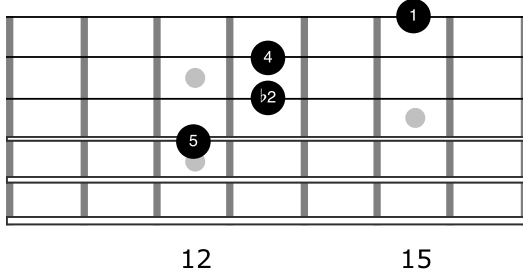
Gsus(b2)



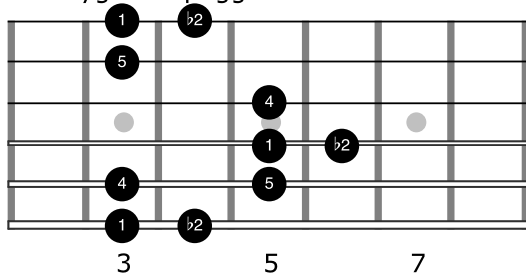
Gsus(b2)



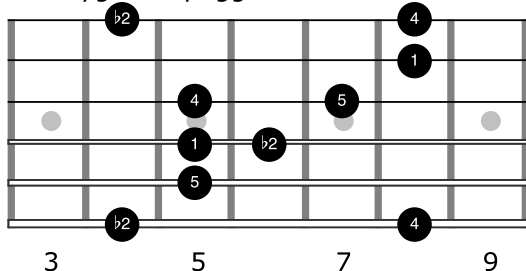
Gsus(b2)



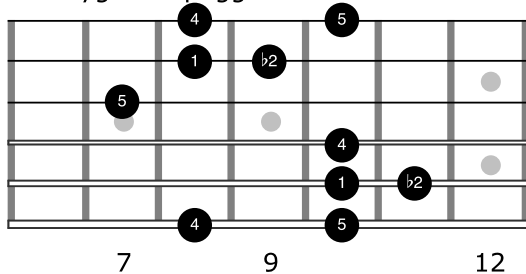
G Phrygian arpeggio Position 1



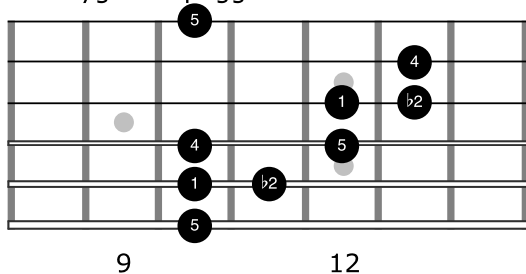
G Phrygian arpeggio Position 2



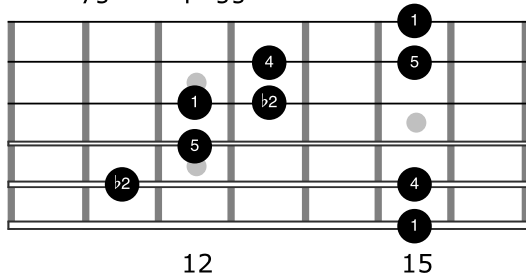
G Phrygian arpeggio Position 3



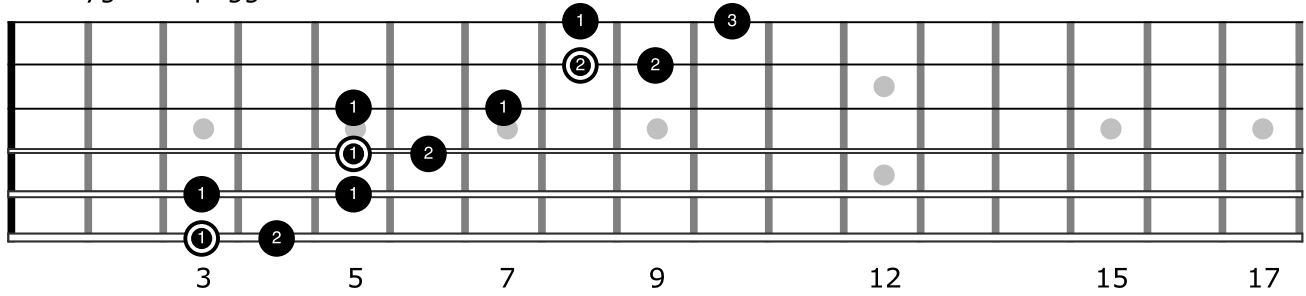
G Phrygian arpeggio Position 4



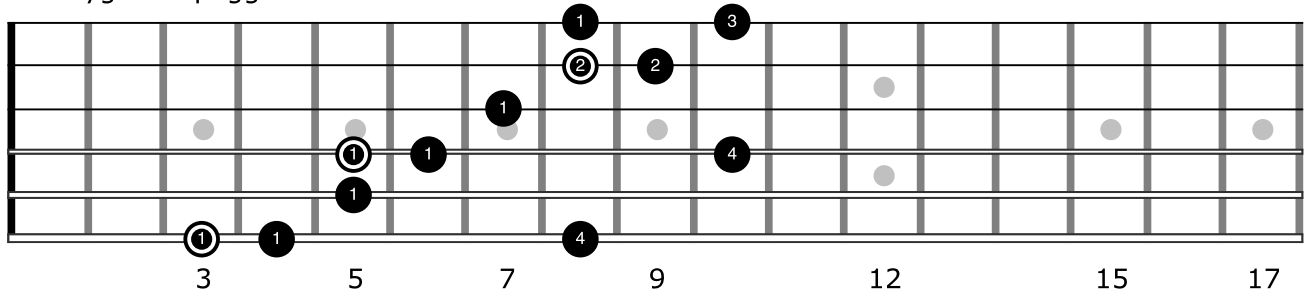
G Phrygian arpeggio Position 5



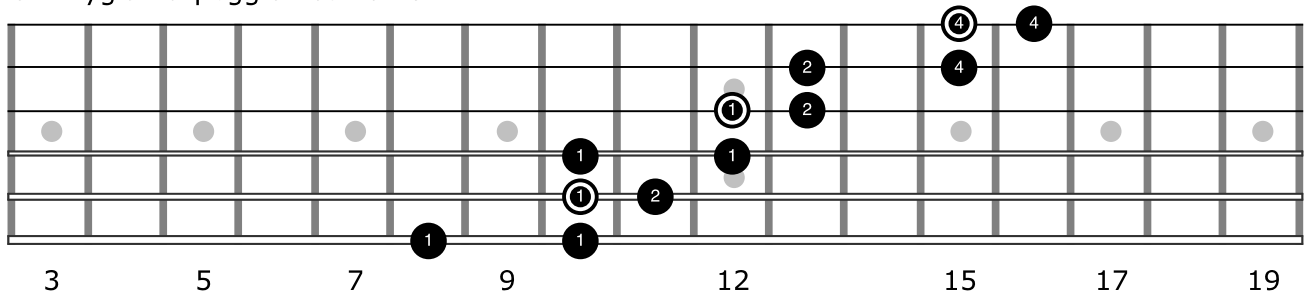
G Phrygian arpeggio Position 1



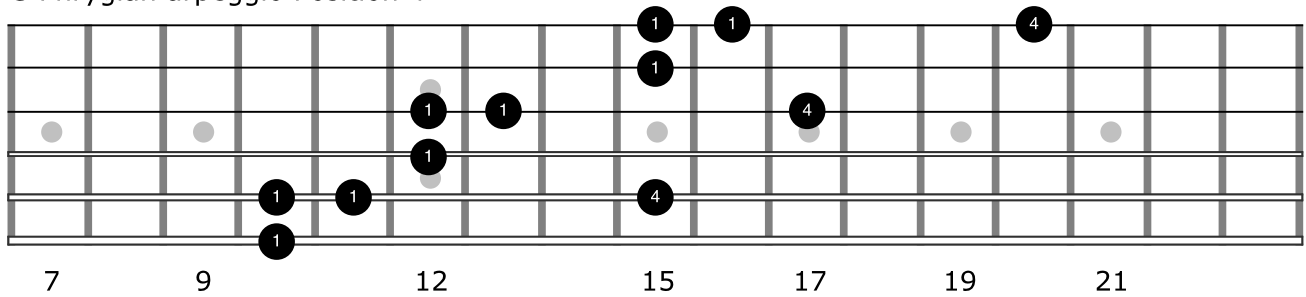
G Phrygian arpeggio Position 2



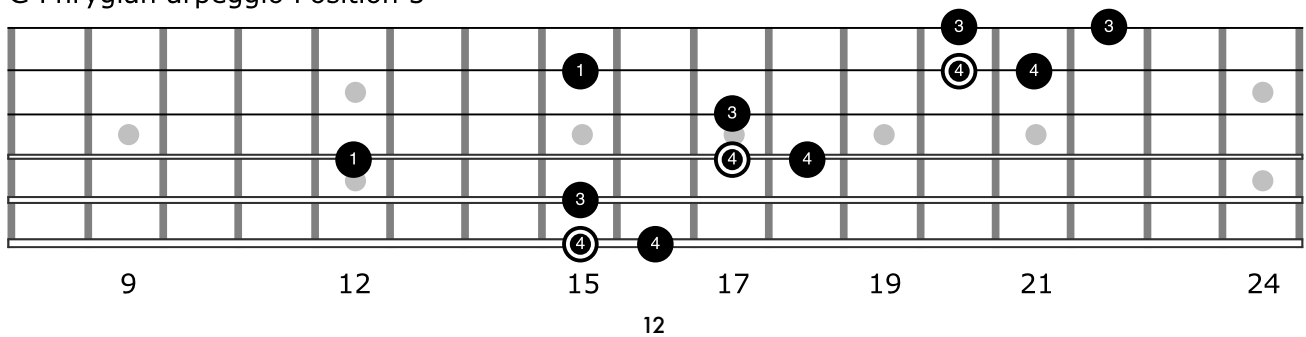
G Phrygian arpeggio Position 3



G Phrygian arpeggio Position 4



G Phrygian arpeggio Position 5





- This etude uses mostly Phrygian voicings.
- Keys used: A Phrygian (F Major), A Phrygian  $\natural 6$  (G Melodic Minor), A Phrygian-Dominant (D Harmonic Minor)
- Measures 9-12 should be thought of as F Phrygian-Dominant  $\natural 6$  (Bb Harmonic Major).

# Phrygian Etude #1

Noel Johnston

*freely* A sus(b9)

TAB

12	12	10 8	5	5	8 6	5	5	6 5	3
10			7			3			0
9			8			2			0
0			0			0			0

C7#11 B $\flat\Delta^{\#5}$  A sus(b9) A 7 $\flat 9$

TAB

5	6 5	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
3	4	0	1	4	0				

F sus(b9) F 13(b9) F 7 sus(b9) F 13 sus(b9)

TAB

1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

A sus(b9) B $\flat\Delta 9$  G m11 E $\natural$  G m/D A sus(b9)

TAB

5	5	8 6	3	3	3	1	0	1	10	8	12
			3	3	3	3			7	7	10
			7	7	7	3			8	8	9
			6	6	6	3			7	5	8
											5

- This etude uses the "essence" of G-Phrygian (1, b2, 4, 5) as the only common thread throughout the various key centers used.
- It uses chords from Eb Major (G Phrygian), F Melodic Minor (G Phrygian #6), and C Harmonic Minor (G Phrygian-Dominant).
- This one can be played chord-melody style (rubato or in time).
- Also, try recording the changes in a looper and hear how G-phrygian arpeggios will sound through the changes.

## Phrygian Etude #2

Noel Johnston

Chords:  $Bb^9_{sus}$ ,  $Bb^9(\#11)$ ,  $A^b\Delta 7(6)$ ,  $A^b\circ 7$ ,  $B\circ 7$

Chords:  $Fm/G$ ,  $C/G$ ,  $Fm/G$ ,  $C$ ,  $D\emptyset$ ,  $E\emptyset$

Chords:  $Fm(4)$ ,  $G/A^b$ ,  $E 7(\#9)$ ,  $E^b\Delta\#5$   $E^b6$ ,  $D\emptyset$

Chords:  $Cm(A9)$ ,  $B\circ 7$ ,  $B6(no5)$ ,  $Cm$ ,  $G/B$ ,  $A^b6$ ,  $G_{sus}(b9)$

For performance examples: <https://www.youtube.com/user/nohjoh08>