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8 Modal influence

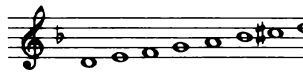
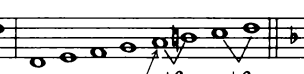
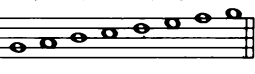
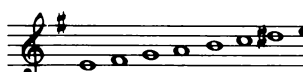
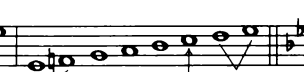
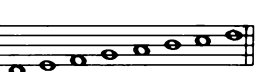
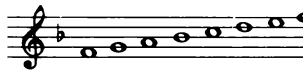
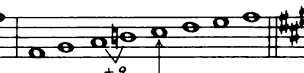
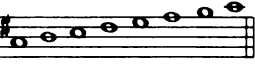
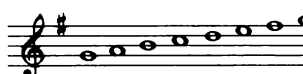
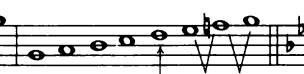
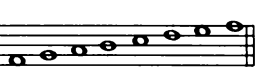
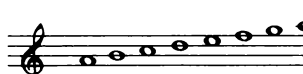

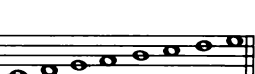

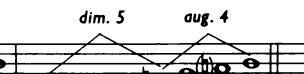

The musical techniques of Impressionism are so different from the Romantic style that to place any one characteristic above another in importance is difficult. The scale, however, is the structural organization behind both melody and harmony, and when this is substantially changed from former musical practices, herein lies the clue toward the recognition and understanding of this new sound. Although the conventional key signatures were generally retained by Debussy and other composers of this style, modal scales were formed by chromatic alterations of tones of the diatonic scale. Ever since the gradual breakdown of the modes during the seventeenth century, composers of all Western music relied on the major and minor scales for their individual creative expression. Now the Impressionists, as if with a bold stroke of their brush, swept aside centuries of diatonic influence and ushered in a return to the old modal scales. They did not restrict their use to the rigid formulas of the past, but rather added these new patterns to all that chromaticism had already achieved. This blend provided new melodies, enriched harmonies and, when woven with a fresh sparkling orchestration, created a style completely original and intriguing.

To determine the specific mode of a melody, decide upon the rhythmically stressed tone around which the others revolve. Organize the tones in scalewise order around this tonic, called "final" in modal terms. A secondary tone of strength may be the dominant (see chart, *example 183*), capable of receiving melodic stress equal to that of the tonic. The mode need not use all of its scale members to achieve its recognition; nor is it necessary that the starting or ending tone of the phrase be the tonic or dominant. Each mode has a particular characteristic that contrasts it with the major and minor scales. The chart indicates this comparison.—By memorizing these different interval changes, one can quickly learn the new scale formulas and transposition of the modes is facilitated. Not all melodies will fit a specific mode, and many will add chromatic

tones, but the modal flavor may still be there. Rarely, will the entire composition fall into a mode. Generally, the theme, or just the main motive, will provide the new color and setting for the piece. The development of the theme continues with full resource of all chromatic elements. Be concerned primarily with the mode in its melodic arrangement. The bass may help to identify the tonic, but the harmonization may be free, just as in a Bach chorale.

Example 183

Comparison of Modes to Major or Minor Scales

Diatonic scales	Modes	Transposed (one example given)
 D minor (harmonic)	 dorian dom.	 G dorian
 E minor (harmonic)	 phrygian dom. (on 6th tone)	 D phrygian
 F major	 lydian dom.	 A lydian
 G major	 mixolydian dom.	 F mixolydian
 A minor; "natural," "pure" is the aeolian mode	 dom.	 E aeolian
 B minor	 locrian	<p><i>This mode exists theoretically, but had been universally discarded because of the tritone relationship, B and F.</i></p>
 C major, called the ionian mode		

Play the melodies in *examples 184a, b, c, and d*, and notice how the selection of the proper mode is determined. In *example 184a*, pitches given the rhythmic stress are B \flat and F. With B \flat as a tonic, the phrygian mode is formed. (In the phrygian mode the dominant is not on the fifth scale tone but on the sixth.)

Both *examples 184b and c* are in the dorian mode transposed from F. Observe that Debussy's key signature in *example 184c*, confirms it. The range includes the four scale tones below the tonic, F, and this more exactly identifies the mode as hypodorian. Because the instrumental use of all of the modes is less strict today than during the original vocal period, the distinction of range is relatively unimportant.

Example 184a

String Quartet. Debussy



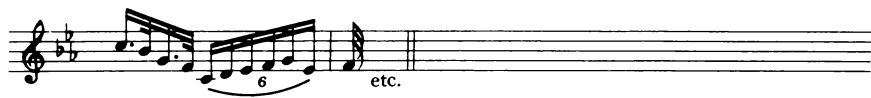
b

Fêtes. Debussy



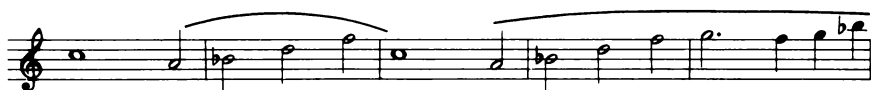
c

Prelude XI, Vol. I. Debussy



d

Prelude X, Vol. I. Debussy



In the excerpt from “La Cathedral engloutie” (*example 184d*), the theme has been separated from its parallel triad harmonization in order that the mode of the melody be more clearly identified. This section (measure twenty-eight in the prelude) ushers in, for the first time, the chief tonality of C major. Against this firmly established tonic, the mixolydian mode is recognized by the melodic arrangement of tones in which B \flat is present instead of B \natural .

Frequently, the melody alone will not give away its modal application. The tonic may be recognized through the total harmonic structure against which the scale tones of the melody may then be properly arranged. The “Musette”, *example 185*, from Ravel’s *Le Tombeau de Couperin* is indicative of this situation. Without the repeated reference to the tonic and dominant, G and D, in the bass line, the melody might be mistakenly analyzed in B \flat . Played alone, this melody would not have a modal conviction.

Example 185

Ravel

Musette

The musical score for "Musette" by Maurice Ravel is presented in a grand staff. The right hand (treble clef) plays a series of chords, starting with a piano (pp) dynamic. The left hand (bass clef) plays a melodic line with a repeating eighth-note pattern. The piece is marked with a repeat sign at the end.

It is possible to have a dual reaction to the mode of a certain phrase. The melody may suggest one mode and the harmony another. Generally they merge in favor of the mode that is produced by the harmonic background. Even so, a melody may be so individualistic as to command its own recognition, if only temporarily. In the opening of the song, *La Flûte de Pan* (*example 186*), the ascending sextuplet, suggesting the flute, uses the lydian scale. The starting tone, B, had the strength of a tonic when placed in this scalewise order and also is prominent at the motive’s conclusion at the end of the second measure. In the meantime, however, the harmony announces the perfect fifth, D \sharp down to G \sharp on the very first beat, out of which the chord on beat two is an inversion of this G \sharp harmony rather than a switch to a B major large seventh. The return of the chord of G \sharp minor in the second measure helps to remind the listener of the opening chord before the motive moves on to B major. The conflict between the melodic reference to the lydian scale from B and the harmonic opening on G \sharp as a dorian influence remains unresolved until the voice enters in the third measure. Here, the chant effect stresses the G \sharp dorian contour. Nevertheless, the fluctuation between roots of the minor and relative major is a modal characteristic and not uncommon. In this particular song, the final cadence

recalls the opening motive and so retains the tonal ambiguity of this modal relationship.

Example 186

La Flûte de Pan (Chansons de Bilitis), Debussy

Lent et sans rigueur de rythme

Voice

Piano

pp

p

pp

etc.

Chromatic tones may be added to a modal melody without destroying the original modal feeling. In the following song, *example 187*, the main theme is first presented in the left hand of the piano part. The colorful E# dominates the motive and becomes part of the G# dorian scale. The descending chromatic passing tones, G and E \flat connect tones of the mode in the same way that they

would serve the diatonic scale. The modality is not as obvious, but still is an underlying factor, not to be excluded because of the presence of chromatic elements.

Example 187

Il pleure dans mon coeur (Ariettes Oubliées). Debussy

Modérément animé

Piano

pp

p

p

pp

pp etc.

Motivic construction

Melodies in the Impressionistic style are frequently sporadic in their concept; wishful fleeting images tantalize the listener. This contrasts with the long thematic continuity of the Classical or Romantic conception.

Phrase forms are made up of these motivic units separated by measures of colorful background.

The rhythm sometimes pauses while the harmony provides a restlessness with clusters or whole-tone effects. The phrase may continue by sequential material or move into new melodic thoughts. The total rhythmic effect is one which lessens the rigid movement of pulse, but does not upset its underlying motion.

In songs, this sporadic motivic concept is frequently heard in a recitative style of vocal writing. The text of a poem may be given a setting approximating a prose style. The rhythmic pulsations are not accented, but are delivered in a normal, almost spoken manner, reminiscent of a chant at times. The stress is on the poem and its meaning. This contrasts with the German *lieder*, for example, in that the latter melodies are self-contained. Their flowing lines do not require the text in order to make the musical phrase meaningful. While on the contrary, the Impressionistic song relies heavily on the combination of poem and music.

The preceding techniques are, of course, matters of degree. No song, of any period, regards the text lightly. What is important to understand is the stylistic approach which differs among the vocal art forms of the various musical periods.

Review the vocal writing of *example 186* and look ahead to *example 210*. The text, of necessity, must be omitted in these songs as the fragmentary excerpts would not be sufficient to convey any complete thought.

EXERCISES

The following exercises are designated to produce a familiarity and a recognition of the particular modes. Write the exercises first and then analyze the modes involved in the compositions that follow.

- A 1] Change the *minor* scales of D, F \sharp and B \flat into the dorian mode.
 2] Change the *major* scales of F, E \flat and A into the lydian and mixolydian modes.
 3] Write the phrygian scale from C, A and G.
- B Organize each melodic phrase in *Example 188* into a scalewise order starting from the tone you select as a "final". Mark the mode, the "final" and the "dominant" tone. Continue each melody by developing some of its motives, as described in chapters one and two. Retain the mode, permitting an occasional chromatic tone.

Example 188a



Three staves of musical notation. The top staff, labeled 'b', is a vocal line in 3/4 time, featuring a melodic phrase with triplets and a cadence. The middle staff, labeled 'c', is a vocal line in 3/4 time, also featuring triplets. The bottom staff, labeled 'd', is a piano accompaniment in 3/4 time, featuring triplets and a cadence.

C Analysis

- 1] Example 189 shows the influence of three modes. Mark
 - a] the mode in the vocal line alone, basing the judgement upon the opening scale formation and the stressed tones of the first two measures;
 - b] the mode of the vocal line, apparent at the cadence;
 - c] the mode which arises from the tonic recognition of the harmony.

Example 189

Sonetto LV. Britten

Poco presto ed agitato

Musical score for Example 189, Sonetto LV by Britten. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of two systems. The first system features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment is marked 'poco f'. The second system features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment, with the word 'etc.' written at the end of the piano part.

- 2] Mark the mode of *Example 190* and observe Bartók's rhythmic interest in the phrase. If possible, listen to the recording of *Music for String Instruments, Percussion and Celesta* and identify other modal motives in the fourth movement.

Example 190

Bartók

3] Example 191 illustrates how the mode of the vocal line is carried through in the harmonization. Observe the Modern touch in the cadence and also note the effect of the meter change upon the phrase length.

Example 191

Poulenc

For further study of modal applications, listen to:

Symphony of Psalms, “Movement I”, by Stravinsky

String Quartet, “Movement II,” and the second theme of “Movement I,”
by Ravel

“Le Vent dans la plaine,” “Prelude III”, Vol I, by Debussy