

MUSIC THEORY.aargh©

Why does music sound the way it does?

(For ringers: Session 4a: pitch) *The Modes*

By Dr. Ona Pinsonneault

Modes appear often in modern music. Modes were first used in early music, before the Major and Minor scales became the preferred scales (about the time of J. S. Bach). One mode is identical with the Major scale. In today's music this mode is simply called Major. (Ionian = Major)



The remaining modes are called Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian and Aeolian.

- ✓ Dorian = D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D. D is tonic and half steps are between 2-3 and 6-7.
- ✓ Phrygian = E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E. E is tonic and half steps are between 1-2 and 5-6.
- ✓ Lydian = F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F. F is tonic and half steps are between 4-5 and 7-8.
- ✓ Mixolydian = G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G. G is tonic and half steps are between 3-4 and 6-7.
- ✓ Aeolian = A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A. A is tonic and half steps are between 2-3 and 5-6.

Let's consider a Fiddle tune called "Old Joe Clark". This composition uses the pitch "D" as tonic. (Remember the ways to find the tonic pitch? "D" is the last note, it is used more often than any other pitch { 13 times}, the pitches "F#" and "A" used next most often outline the Major triad based on "D", "A" begins the melody as part of the chord build on D.) If we spell a scale using the key signature of one sharp and starting on "tonic" of "D", the scale is: D, E, F#, G, A, B, C, D. The half steps are

Old Joe Clark

Fiddle tune

arr. Gilbert DeBenedetti

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between F# and G (3 and 4) and B and C (6 and 7). This scale is called Mixolydian. The pitch organization of the composition is "D Mixolydian".

There are two chords used in the composition, D Major (D, F#, A) and C Major (C, E, G). Play them at your next handbell choir rehearsal, or on a piano. The unusual sound of the composition is that of "C". If the scale were called Major it would use a C#. The sound of Mixolydian gives composers a way to write music that has a little different twist, one that brings your attention into the music.

Why does the music sound the way it does?

(For ringers: Session 4b: pitch) *The Irregular meter*

Now, let's say we rewrite the rhythm of "Old Joe Clark". We can create an arrangement of the composition and then score it for Handbells. I am going to suggest that the meters alternate between 2 and 3 beats per measure.

Once you see the score and realize that there is a pattern to the beats, you might suggest that a meter of 5 beats per measure be used instead of alternating between 2 and 3. This change would put one meter at the beginning of the music and the meter would not need to change. You could still see the intent of the arranger (that there are 2 plus 3 beats per measure) because of how the chords have been arranged. The chords have the name of the chord (D or C) played alone where the accent is intended.

Old Joe Clark

Fiddle tune

arr. Ona Pinsonneault

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Until next time,
Dr. P
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