

THE RETURN OF THE PLANETARY MODES

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Since the earliest beginnings of the Art of Music, the modes have always been intimately connected with the mysteries of the Sun through the ritual use of the reed-blown pipes. These little instruments, greatly beloved by the people of all nations at all times, bear the secret of the modes embodied in the borings of the lateral holes which utter, as the fingers uncover them, what the soul of the musician breathes into the pipe.

In those ancient epochs man was kept continually in touch with the spiritual worlds by means of the two potential streams of sound, the one descending, the other ascending, born ever anew from each other, interweaving and working together to help on the evolution of man in the Cosmos. These two streams of sound were symbolised by the sunshaft or arrow falling aslant to earth, and crossing an arrow winging its flight upwards. It is to this two-fold stream that the ancient philosopher Heraclitus alludes when he speaks of the Harmonia (the Greek word for Mode) as a twice spanned bow that shoots the arrow through the contraries.

The flow of sound typified by the descending sun-shaft gives man the modes through the medium of some musical instrument that in its proportions embodies a cosmic law.

The ancients experienced through their music, based on the modes, the living forces of the Planets, each of which they associated with a mode, and this music came in later times to be called the 'Music of the Spheres'.

The second stream of sound is liberated, through the very energy used to produce it, as a fundamental note accompanied by a mass chord of ethereal notes, followed by polyphonies exquisite, varied and amazing beyond belief, when reinforced by the sympathetic vibrations of adjacent bodies such as strings.

The mass chord and its polyphonies constitute what are known as the Harmonics, the physical basis of sound; the ear records them faithfully, but few are aware of them through perception.

This proffered revelation of the mystery of sound has during the development of man's material consciousness been brushed aside and merged in the vague psychological impression known as Timbre.

This sensation which is a gateway and not a barrier will one day become a living thing once more and a spiritual experience. It is the depth or fourth dimension of sound, the other three being (1) height in pitch; (2) length in time; (3) amplitude or breadth in intensity, the emotional quality. Depth in a musical note indicates the power of penetration, the impulse of the rhythmic will working its way into man's inner consciousness.

The modes have been preserved through the ages by the Spirit of the Folk, and still linger at the present day in Europe among the unsophisticated peasants in Sicily, in Scandinavia, in Brittany, in the Slav countries.

They are, however, unrecognised by musicians, who only regard FolkSongs in the modes as melodies sung slightly out of tune. Of the genesis and scientific basis of the modes, without which no use could be made of them in modern music, not a trace had remained, not a hint of that ingenious but simply genesis through a determinant number.

In order to take up their position in the new epoch we are now entering upon, as a factor in the spiritual evolution of mankind, the modes had to be rediscovered by the grace of God, and something new must be born out of them, of which the world does not dream; it is the ideal privilege of the few to give back the modes to the world.

According to Dr. Steiner, in each race the evolution of the FolkSpirit is guided by an Archangel. To what end then, may we ask, have these modes been thus preserved and given back to man at this

significant time? Assuredly not that an atavistic return may be made to the simple music of primitive civilisations.

There is an occult healing for the sick soul of man in the modes; they hold the power of liberating the forces of the Spirit that are seeking to become articulate,

Let us see how the two streams work through the modes.

Each mode has a Tonic or starting note and a Key-note which indicates the meeting-point of the two streams, for although all the modes have a common Tonic, each has its own individual key-note on a different degree of the scale, determined by the position of this key-note in the Harmonic series (the second stream).

The point of impact of the two streams, marked by the key-note, impresses upon the mode its individuality. From this generator proceeds a sequence of sound-relationships forming all the notes available for use in the mode, each mode possessing a series peculiar to itself.

It is significant that in the mode of Saturn (Hypodorian), based on the determinant number 16, the meeting of the two streams falls upon the note of the beginning and end of the scale, which indicates that the mode is enclosed within the two streams flowing together as one.

In the mode of the moon (Mixolydian), having 14 as its determinant number, the key-note or junction occurs on the 7th degree, the last available position within the octave.

The Sun mode (Dorian) has the junction in the central position, as befits the belief of the ancient Pythagoreans that the Sun in its spiritual essence was the central point of intense divine fire round which the earth and the planets revolved while the planetary Sun pursued its path round the fourth (middle) sphere or orbit.

The practical utility of the modes as a medium of expression can hardly be realised from what has been said; it is certain, however, that composers will find in the modes a wealth of material and a source of inspiration almost illimitable, as soon as they feel at home in them, and discover for themselves the laws of their inner harmony.

Up to the present, Elsie Hamilton is the only composer who has had the courage to make the attempt; it is hoped that before long readers of Anthroposophy may once more have an opportunity of enjoying some of the highly original and beautiful music she has produced in London since 1917, Over the unspeakable technical difficulties, the disappointments and labours, with which Miss Hamilton had to wrestle during these first years of pioneer work, we may discreetly draw a veil.

Music in the Planetary modes would be eminently suitable for use with the art of Eurhythmly since the natural speaking voice moves in modal sequences of infinitely fine and delicate intervals.

A future development of Tonal (or Modal) Eurhythmly on these lines suggests itself as a practical possibility in the near future: to have a Saturn measure, a Sun measure, or a measure of all Planets, to music in their own individual modes, and modulating from one mode to another, is a dream which may yet be realised.

In the Zodiac we have a wondrous cosmic instrument of music, while from behind, the planetary gods are playing upon this instrument.

Rudolf Steiner.

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