

Tones, Modes and Moods.

Sounding Bowls with 12 strings or more have the flexibility of tuning that makes exploring modal music easy. To gain a feeling for a mode all you have to do is play spontaneous composition based around a key note. Because of our familiarity with the Major/minor system most ad-hoc creativity, or in 'the moment' playing tends to begin or end on the key note. If one wants to explore the moods of modes one has to choose a note as the focal point and stay with it.

Working with the tuning chart of your bowl you will have selected a key to tune to. In order to make this description clear I will choose an example, say, D.

Most 12 string Sounding Bowls are tuned from a lowest note of E. for the sake of this description I presume the bowl has been tuned to a C scale from E, with no sharps or flats. Like this music played from the base note will have a particular mood. This scale would be called the Phrygian Mode. However one can easily play from the second string, from the F. if one does this, focuses the music around the second string and those others that have a harmonious relationship with it the music will be in a Lydian Mode. Similarly one can focus on the third note to gain a Mixolydian mood to ones improvisation, playing in that mode. Further up the 'keynote' for that tuning, the C gives a major scale, known in the modal system as the Ionian Mode.

This rule remains true, that whichever note one has tuned as key note for your Sounding Bowl, playing from the key note gives an Ionian Mode, choosing the next note up as your 'key' note gives the Dorian Mode, using the third note as start, finish and emphasis point in your playing creates the Phrygian mode, the fourth note the Lydian mode, fifth is

Mixolydian. Fifth above is same as third below, thus choosing the third string below the key note, a popular option with song writers creates Mixolydian music. The second string below the key note is also a common choice, creating the natural minor or Aeolian mode. One note down gives the Locrian mode.

The moods of the modes are difficult to characterise as every human experience has its shadow and is viewed through the lens of individual attitudes and experience. For example some find the Aeolian mode to be spiritual and refined, others find it sad or even melancholic; Some find the Mixolydian mode round, warm and friendly, others feel it as lacking refinement, shallow or just 'bom-di-bom-di'. The Dorian mode has a reputation as being comforting and inspiring for children, I find it subtle in an epic sort of way, the sort of music I would use when relating 'The Hobbit' but not complex enough for 'Lord of the Rings'. The Phrygian mode to some is infinitely sad, others feel a sense of vast spaciousness in it, perhaps like standing in the middle of a vast plain. The Locrian mode and the Lydian mode I have not found a relationship with yet. There is a kind of dark restlessness there that I do not yet understand enough to comment on. Whether this is because they both contain the 'tri-tone' that restless dissonant interval that was banned from European music by the Roman church for many centuries as 'The Devils Interval' I do not know, though it is interesting to note that the tri-tone occurs in the Lydian mode as Augmented Fourth, e.g. F - B, and in the Locrian mode as diminished fifth, e.g. B - F. however that may be the modes are rewarding to experiment with and can help to highlight moods of soul that the Major/minor system passes over.