
Relations between Keys and Modes

6. *Floating Tonality*

Floating (*schwebend*) tonality was Arnold Schoenberg's term to describe music that oscillated between two or more keys regardless of whether they were major or minor. It was a treatment he explored extensively in his early music (in the Op. 6 songs, for example). However, the approach had been well established by, say, Robert Schumann in the celebrated opening songs of *Dichterliebe*, or Richard Wagner in the equally celebrated prelude to *Lohengrin*: in both cases a fundamental (light) key of A major is challenged by a subordinate (dark) key of F# minor. The complexities of the prelude to *Tristan and Isolde* grow out of this kind of handling. Bipolar thought of one kind or another was fundamental to Britten's music, and this is one of its important backgrounds.

7. *Neapolitan*

Both Schubert and Brahms created high drama by relating keys a semitone apart with affective intent (as described in the Appendix). The tonic was often serene, and the Neapolitan key turbulent, but sometimes the reverse could be true. The 'Neapolitan complex' shown here, for example, is an ideal form of connecting a balmy E major with a portentous F minor, with a return to E major via the dual function of the dominant 7th/German sixth harmony. The complex also includes E minor and F major. This kind of thinking is crucial to *Night-piece*, which likewise relates Bb major to both B major and B minor for lyrical and dramatic purpose.

8. *'Sonorità'*

Modern theorists of Italian opera refer to the principle of hanging different triads below a fixed pitch as the exploration of a particular sonority (*sonorità*); others include it within the idea of common-note tonality. The six distinct triads that emerge can form a collection with its own momentum and demand for completion (as in Schubert's *Der Doppelgänger*). It is a principle especially favoured by composers for the voice, above all by Verdi. In *Night-piece* Britten extends a single F over the work and supports it with four different triads (Bb major, Bb minor, F major and an implicit Db major). Elsewhere he exploits the sounding-note more openly, as, for example, in the Sonata in C for Cello and Piano with its sonority E.

9. *'Axial'*

Few modern composers have not adopted the 'diabolical' tritone as an alternative dominant: even in their serial works Schoenberg and Webern set out to do just that. As Erno Lendvai has shown, Bartók divided a diminished seventh into a pair of tritones and created a little 'axial' complex from it. Britten's exploration of tritone relationships in the *War Requiem* is there for all to hear.

10. *Bitonality (Tritonality, Polytonality)*

Bitonality, or bipolar key-relations, draws on the previous categories, and asserts two concurrent keys locked into a dialectical relationship from which there seems no escape. In effect, it turns what had been consecutive in, say, floating tonality or the Neapolitan Complex into something concurrent. Bitonality represents one of Britten's important debts to Stravinsky and pervades much of his early and middle works. Bitonal thought stands behind most of *Night-piece* and occasionally comes to the fore. Other composers such as Holst pursued tritonality and polytonality.

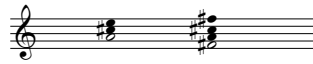
11. *'Modes of Limited Transposition'*

Olivier Messiaen demonstrated that it was possible to construct other symmetrical modes in addition to the whole-tone scale ('Mode 1') and the two octatonic scales in general use ('Modes 2 and 3' discussed under 13 below and 5 above). Their symmetry was such that they could be transposed only a certain number of times before their content repeated itself: each of Modes 4, 5, 6 and 7 is polarised around the tritone, but each contains a distinct number of notes (6, 8 or 10). These modes were intended to interact in ambiguous ways with a prevalent key centre.

12. *Exotic and Ethnic Modes*

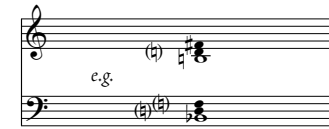
Composers create unique modes for local and dramatic purpose. A great many of these can be extracted from the chromatic collection. The example shows just one, the uncanny locrian-flavoured mode used for Tadjio in Britten's *Death in Venice*. That is to say, modes belong to time and place and distil affect. Modes drawn from folk music are another source still but do not concern us here.

6. Floating Tonality (between or among two or more centres)



Schumann Dichterliebe, songs 1-2
Wagner Lohengrin, Act 1 Prelude

10. Bitonality (Tritonality, Polytonality)



Stravinsky, Britten, Holst, etc.

7. Neapolitan Complex



E major ————— F minor ————— E major

Many applications in Schubert and Brahms, using a variety of keys

11. 'Modes of Limited Transposition' (Messiaen)

Mode 1 (whole-tone scale)



etc.

Modes 2-3 (octatonic scales)



etc.

etc.

8. 'Sonorità' (tonalities suspended from a 'sounding tone')



Schubert, Verdi, Britten especially

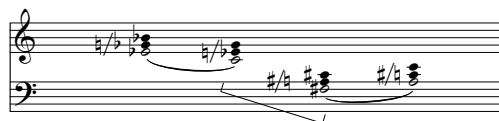
Modes 4-5



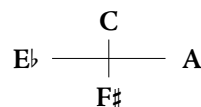
Modes 6-7



9. 'Axial' Tonality



major/minor triads



Lendvai : Bartók

12. Exotic and Ethnic Modes



Britten Death in Venice, etc.