

Chapter 36 Borrowing tones

In old times already, composers tend to borrow tones from another modal or tonal world. What is the effect? It depends. Sometimes a foreign tone looks like adding a bit of salt on a cooked egg, sometimes like eating a peach with hot pepper. Anyway, a borrowed tone is a deviation from what one expects and spices up the normal musical context.

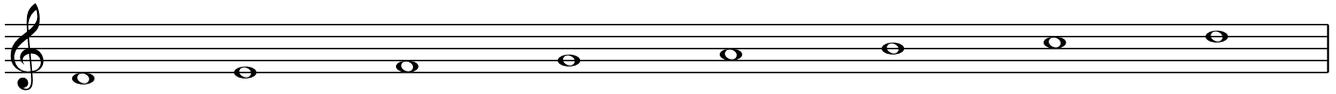
Technically spoken, borrowing foreign tones can be just a means to colour your music, without having a modal or tonal change. But it can also used as a means to switch to another mode or key (mutation, modulation). This chapter is about colour. Chapter 37 covers the mode and key change aspects.

36.1 Requirements

For our discussion of foreign tones, it is necessary to define the regular modal or tonal context. This can be done by referring to theoretical constructs as **hexachords**, **church modes** and keys etc.. Notice however that theoretical construct and musical practice can vary -as we will see!

36.2 The myth of the Dorian church mode

Search the Internet on what a Dorian mode is. You'll find with one exception the following collection.



Example 1

Although scholars have given a more realistic view (1), this definition still exists persistently. Let's have a closer look. Till the beginning of the seventeenth century there was no major and minor tonality. Three hexachords, i.e. collections of six consecutive tones, defined the musical world.

Example 2

The hexachordum naturale starts on Do (here on C), the hexachordum molle starts on Fa (here on F) and the hexachordum durum on So (here on G). All these hexachords have between the third and fourth tone a half step. The melodies till the 17th century can be described as a mix of these hexachords. Example: a Dutch Christmas song from ca. 1500 with a verse and refrain structure:

Three staves of musical notation in treble clef. The first staff shows a sequence of notes with 'naturale' and 'durum' labels and brackets below. The second staff shows a similar sequence with 'naturale', 'durum', and 'naturale' labels. The third staff shows a single 'naturale' label at the beginning.

Example 3

And as you probably expect, a combination of the hexachordum naturale and durum has another colour as hexachordum naturale and molle. Study the following dorian melody of the German 'Hildebrandslied', found in Georg Rhau's 'Bicinia' (1545). Notice the end where the B \flat (Fa in molle) is the neighbour tone of A (La in naturale) (2).

Three staves of musical notation with German lyrics underneath. The lyrics are: "Ich will zu Land aus - rei - ten sprach sich Meis - ter Hil - de - brand, der mir die Weg tät wei - sen, gen Bern wohl in die Land Die sind mir u - kund ge - we - sen, viel man - chen lie - ben Tag - - - Ei ja! In zwei - und - dreis - sig Jah - - ren Frau U - ten ich nie Ge - sah"

Example 4

So a true Dorian melody with B and B flat, the latter borrowed from the hexachord molle.

36.3 'Tones' or instrumental modes.

The church modes Dorian (mode 1), Phrygian (mode 3), Lydian (mode 5) and Mixolydian (mode 7) (3) were related to the practice of singing the Gregorian plainsong. During the second half of the 16th century the modes with the instrumental context were modified in several ways and became known as 'tones'. Studying these 'tones' make the drift towards major and minor tonality already apparent. Major and minor became the default tonality in the 17th century.

These 'tones' can be described by the works of famous 16th century composers as Cabézon, Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli and John Bull. Study the following two examples of the dorian and hypophrygian mode. The accidentals above the tone could be used.

Die bes - te Zeit im Jahr _____ ist mein da sin - gen al - - - le Vö - ge -
 - lein. Him - mel und Er - den ist der voll, viel gut Ge - sang da lau - tet wohl.

Example 8

In short: two foreign tones -assuming the reality of a pure Dorian mode- elaborates the Dorian melody.

The recitative 'Thy Hand, Belinda' of Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (1689) gives an intriguing example of using artificial leading tone figures.

Thy hand, Be - lin - - da, dark - - - - ness shades me, On thy
 bos - - om let me rest, More I would - , but Death _____ in -
 - vades me; Death _____ is now _____ a wel - - come guest.

Example 9

36.5 Major or minor triad?

Already in old times, composer loved a major triad (e.g. to end a musical section), although the modal and tonal context would prescribe a minor triad. The arguments could be found in subjective categories as 'pleasant', 'harmonious', 'not sad', 'not melancholic' etc. It refers to a common esthetic criterion of 'sense of beauty', 'expressiveness', which allows decisions, independent of some theory. In fact is this the topic of this chapter!

One term is relevant here, the **Picardy third**, referring to a major third instead of the expected -prescribed by a modal or tonal context- minor third. And indeed, as we look at many works from the Renaissance or Baroque, the Picardy third was alive, not only at the end of a piece but also other places. Really astonishing the beginning of 'Da Jakob vollendet hatte' (Fontana d'Israel -1623- or Israelis Brunnlein) of Johann Hermann Schein (1586-1630). The madrigal opens in the Aeolian mode, but notice how the A major triad at the beginning continues in an A minor triad.

The musical score for Example 13 is written in A major (three sharps) and 4/4 time. It consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system has two measures, each featuring a triplet of eighth notes in the treble clef and a whole note chord in the bass clef. The second system has three measures, each with a triplet of eighth notes in the treble clef and a whole note chord in the bass clef. The third measure of the second system includes a Neapolitan sixth chord (N6) in the treble staff.

Example 13

In a similar way you can use the Neapolitan sixth in the major key.

In rock and popular music, examples of its use include:

- Alexander Rybak's and Paula Selving's "I'll Show You"
- The Beatles' "Do You Want to Know a Secret"
- The Beatles' "Because"
- Jacques Brel's "Ne me quitte pas"
- Lana Del Rey's "Video Games"
- Stefani Germanotta and Anton Zaslavski's "G.U.Y", recorded by Lady Gaga
- Livin' Joy's "Don't Stop Movin'"
- Robin Thicke's "Fall Again"
- The Rolling Stones' "Mother's Little Helper"

Endnotes

- (1) Ina Lohr, *Solmisation und Kirchentonarten* (Basel, 1943).
- (2) Some 16th century theoreticians state that a single tone occurring a step above the range of a hexachord naturale should be sung as Fa (with no mutation implications). Hence called 'fa supra la'. The examples show also a tone below the range of the hexachord naturale, a sort of 'mi sub do'.
- (3) And their plagal counterparts Hypodorian, Hypophrygian, Hypolydian and Hypomixolydian. Later the modes were extended with (hypo)Ionian and (hypo)Aeolian.

Assignments

Application

Make a composition in binary or ternary form and show that 'borrowed tones' can spice up your piece in melodic and harmonic way.

Aural analysis

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Terms text and application

- church modes
- hexachord
- lament bass
- leading tone figure
- Neapolitan sixth
- Picardy third
- Querstand

Terms music examples

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In-depth material

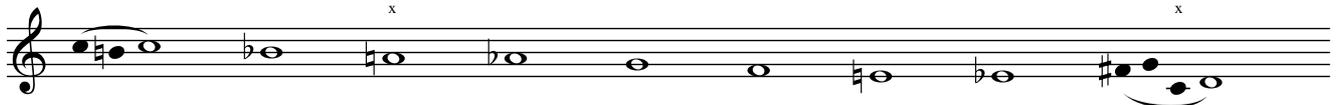
- Excursion 36 Lament bass

Student's elaboration

- 'Comp2', Judith Lobker
- 'Latin song', Weiko Drent

Excursion 36 Lament bass

Apart from the leading tone figure, there is another interesting feature in the previous example: the main tones of the voice is a descending line, where chromatic altered tones play a role:



Example 1

By the way, the marked tones are often sung as A flat and C sharp respectively.

Chromatically descending lines are in the Baroque period typically associated with mourn, sorrow, distress etc.. It is called a '**lament bass**', while normally appearing as the lowest voice. The follow-up of the last example is a lamentation, based on such bass.

When I am laid _____ am laid _____ in earth, may my

wrongs _____ cre - ate no trou - - ble, no trou - ble in thy breast

Example 2