

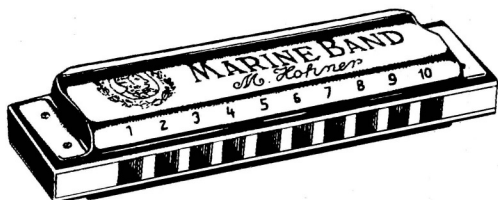
TEACH-IN: HARMONICA

by Glenn Weiser

Helpful hints & suggestions from instrumental masters

MODAL MUSIC

Any diatonic instrument such as the harmonica, tin whistle, folk harp, etc., can be played modally as well as in the major key. Modes, which are altered scales derived from the major, can profoundly change the mood of a melody. In fact, the word *mood* comes from the Latin *modus*, or mode.



Modes originated in ancient Greece and take their names from regions of Greece and Asia Minor. They were used in Gregorian chants and other early church music. They were also used in folk music – it is even thought that in Anglo-Celtic music, modes predated the major scale.

If you're unsure of how modes work, start by visualizing a piano keyboard. Using only the white keys, the C major scale goes from do to do. That is also called the *Ionian* mode. If you then follow the white keys from D to D (or re to re), you have the *Dorian* mode. The other modes are built the same way, but with different starting and stopping points in the original major scale. Here's a list of modes and where each one starts:

- Ionian – Do
- Dorian – Re
- Phrygian – Mi
- Lydian – Fa
- Mixolydian – Sol
- Aeolian – La
- Locrian – Ti

The modes most often used are the Ionian (major), Dorian, Mixolydian and Aeolian (natural minor). In all four of these, the first, second, fourth and fifth steps of the scale are in the same position, with the third, sixth and seventh steps being variable. We've already used the Mixolydian mode for blues, so I thought I'd give you a Celtic tune in the Dorian mode to try.

First, let's try the Dorian mode on the harmonica, beginning on 4-draw:

C-Scale Harmonica

Example 1



The sequence of half steps and whole steps in this mode is as follows: whole step, half step, whole step, whole step, whole step, half step, whole step. In scale degrees this would be 1, 2, b3, 4, 5, 6, b7, 8. Because the third is flattened in the Dorian mode, it is considered minor rather than major. In accompanying Dorian fiddle tunes, the VII chord is usually substituted for the V, resulting in chord progressions like this:

Am/Am/G/G/Am/Am/G/Am

You can also play the Dorian mode in the lower reeds if you use note bending. This will come in handy later when we go back to the blues and play in the Dorian-based third position. Try this:

Example 2



I first heard the Irish reel "Pigeon On The Gate" on the Kicking Mule LP *Flatpicking Guitar Festival*. It is one of my all-time favorite fiddle tunes. In the first measure there is a *burl*, or staccato triplet that must be tongued rapidly. The tonguing indications are given over the first measure, and an easier variant of the measure is also provided in the footnote. Questions? Write to me in care of *Sing Out!*, or send e-mail to harmonicati@singout.org.

Later!

PIGEON ON THE GATE

1 **Em** 3

2 3

3 **D** 4

5 **Em** 3

6 3

7 **D** 8 **Em**

9

10 3

11 **G**

12 **D**

13 **Em**

14 3

15 **D** 16 **Em**

Simplified Version of M 1, 2, 5 and 6 of the A Part

Glenn Weiser is the author of two harmonica books (*Fiddle Tunes for the Harmonica and Blues and Rock Harmonica*), two Celtic guitar books (*The Minstrel Boy and Harp Music of O'Carolan for Solo Guitar*) and the transcriptions of 70 Little Walter solos. In addition to teaching professionally, Glenn performs solo acoustic blues, Celtic music with Greg Schaaf, and blues and old-time music with the St. Regis String Band. You can write to him in care of Sing Out!, P.O. Box 5253, Bethlehem, PA 18015-0253, or send e-mail to harmonicati@singout.org.

