

The Modal Music Network

“ *The temperaments (the structure of the musical edifice) peculiar to a repertoire hold within them a key part (...) of the musical message, of its expressive strength and of its uniqueness. A detailed acquaintance with this basic “vocabulary” can only enrich the singing of the performer, composer and educator..* ”

Titi Robin / Erik Marchand

The **Modal music Network** is carried by the association Drom (under the artistic and educational direction of Erik Marchand), of which the objective is to promote and transmit popular cultures from oral traditions and modal music.

Its activities are based on three main lines of work : professional musical training, artist companionship and coordination of a resource network for modal music. This network constitutes a reflection, creation and research tool for modal musics.

THE ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT : A WILL OF HEARING

Although modal understanding was historically present in Western musics, it seems to be reserved solely for the contemporary analyses and descriptions of extra-European musics. Nevertheless, in numerous Western popular cultures, modality and the use of non-equally tempered scales are the building blocks of the traditional musical construction. Which brings us to music from Western Brittany, a modal music from oral folk culture, which is the origin of our reflection.

Taking this reality into account will probably provide an innovative ground for creation, and may throw light on a musical syntax shared between East and West.

Thus, one can enter music with a different approach, both in musicological analysis and in the process of creation that builds upon these aesthetics.

“ *In the 20th Century music from Western Brittany met the prevailing Western musical expressions (classical, folk, pop), during which time it was driven to extremely interesting evolutions. **Yet, such evolutions eclipsed most of the time its modal particularities** : the abandonment of the specific scales in favour of equal temperament, modification of some melodical lines in order to fit to the harmonic grids, establishment and stabilisation of the musical themes, at the detriment of variation systems. The contribution of improvisation, an important and undeniably fruitful innovation, followed the tracks of the harmonic improvisation, influenced by jazz, rather than the ones of modal improvisations (taqsim...).* **At the same time, modal musical forms had kept existing and enticing the audience, using modal interpretations** (using combinations of call and response singing [*kan ha diskan*], laments [*Gwerziou*] and other local forms of singing as well as instrumental duos [*sonneurs en couple*] of clarinets, bombardas and Breton bagpipes [*biniou*]).



Manuel Kerjean & Erik Marchand (F. Morvan)

Up until now, great performers have transmitted their art to new generations, and the numerous available recordings are the examples on which one can lean and thus create upon such aesthetics. ”

Modal Breton music still exists and is still accessible ; along with the need to create and improvise within this heritage.

A FIRST STEP TOWARDS THE MODAL MUSIC NETWORK : TRAINING MUSICIANS

Taking into account the knowledge of other modal cultures, we have been led to form 'Kreiz Breizh Akademi'.



Since 2003, the professional musical training of Kreiz Breizh Akademi (KBA) guides young musicians between 20 and 30 years old. KBA aims to **transmit interpretations of modal music forms (scales, rhythms, variations) into Breton folk music.**

Breton music would traditionally not associate the combination of vocal and instrumental expressions.

The form of the orchestra only appeared in Brittany after a revival during the 50s. On one hand this revival, tightly connected to the introduction of harmony, surely brought about interesting innovations. However, on the other hand, it imposed a way of arranging that eclipsed the characteristics of a capella music.

In order to create modern forms and construct upon modality in folk singing, we were required to invent new orchestral forms, systematise some scales used by local singers and construct arrangements inspired by extra-European examples. Gradually the contributions from other elaborate musical cultures came to be an important part of our research and creation.

KBA gathers young instrumentalists and singers interested in « another » approach towards music. For 16 months, they follow the teachings of **great masters of musical cultures from around the whole world** (Titi Robin, Yair Dalal, Ibrahim Maalouf, Hasan Yarimdünya, Fawaz Baker, ...) **in order to explore improvisation techniques in modality using Breton themes and to create elaborate arrangements.**



Ibrahim Maalouf & KBA 3 - photo by Eric Legret

Interpreting Oriental modes or Western oral and modal traditions with Western tempered instruments sometimes compels the musician to reconsider his tuning and fretting. We are called therefore to work together with luthiers and instrument makers. **With this new approach, the KBA program is leading a large shift in the reflection concerning both musical practice and instrument making.**



The richness of these experiences in research and creation led us to consider the setting of a Modal music Network.

THE INTERNATIONAL MODAL MUSIC NETWORK : CREATION, TRAINING, RESOURCES

The Network aims to gather and stimulate reflections, researches, encounters and thus nourish creation.

It brings together **performers, composers, luthiers, instrument makers, educators, musicologists and ethnomusicologists** from different musical styles : folk and erudite musics of oral tradition, ancient Western musics, jazz and contemporary musics.

FEEDING REFLECTION ON MODAL MUSICS : GETTING INFORMED, SHARING

Beyond informal exchanges, the members of the network gather in the framework of conferences every two years to discuss subjects related to modality and its occurrence in contemporary musical creation.

The first conference launching the network takes place in November 2011 and deals with « **Modal music, a bridge between East and West** ».



On the 17th and 18th of November, the **Quartz, Scène Nationale de Brest**, will welcome researchers, musicians, teachers and cultural performers. During two days of conference, they will raise questions connected to cultural diversity, about the interpretation of modes with Western equally tempered instruments, the existence of modality in Western musics from oral tradition and its possibilities to meet with Oriental musics... The report of these conference discussions will give rise to the publication of conference acts, and set the first step for the constitution of a resource center.

See the conference program on the Drom website www.drom-kba.eu



TOWARDS EDUCATIONAL WORK AND CREATION : ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE

In the frame of this network, **an artist is invited every year for a long residence**, in Brittany and elsewhere according to the evolutions of the structure, in order to work in a thorough way with students and musicians :

- pedagogical training in music schools,
- reflection and educational training workshops,
- master classes,
- composition work for local performers,

- concerts and presentation of new creations,
- analysis and research on scales and modes in Western popular musics.

The first edition will take place in 2012, with the invitation of **Fawaz Baker**. Oud, qanun and fretless bass player, Fawaz is also a singer. Head of the Alep Conservatory (Syria), he works as an architect as well.



Fawaz Baker

The creation of such a centre in Western Europe underlines our will to share musical experiences from various cultures and sectors.

CREATION OF A DATA BASE : FOSTERING RESEARCH

Beyond research and creation, the Modal music network will constitute a **genuine international resource centre**, through the conception of an on-line database meant to enrich and share our knowledge on modal musics of all origins. The resource centre shall gather works, references, videos and oral memory transcriptions as well as other recordings from varied regions of the world.

The multiple origins and horizons of the individuals who take part to the network guarantee the great variety and richness of this database.



⊗ PROMOTION ET TRANSMISSION
DES CULTURES POPULAIRES DE TRADITION ORALE
ET DE LA MUSIQUE MODALE ⊗

INFORMATION

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