



Medieval Modes & Movement: Easy Access for Grades 3-12

SCMEA Conference 2022 ~ Mary Knysh (www.rhythmicconnections.com)

Learn a sequential, easy and accessible approach for teaching Medieval modes which engages students in self-directed learning resulting in composition, choreography, documentation, reflection, revision, performance, and evaluation. Explore the unique, social, emotional, expressive aspects of medieval modes using barred instruments, small and large percussion, ukuleles, recorders, and boomwhackers.

Here is a mode acronym that my mother taught me: ***I Don't Particularly Like Many Arctic Lands***
(*Ionian Dorian Phrygian Lydian Mixolydian Aeolian Locrian*)

Modes to explore

Ionian	(<u>C</u> D E F <u>G</u> A B C)
Dorian	(<u>D</u> E F G <u>A</u> B C D)
Phrygian	(<u>E</u> F G A B <u>C</u> D E)
Lydian	(<u>F</u> G A B <u>C</u> D E F)
Mixolydian	(<u>G</u> A B C <u>D</u> E F G)
Aeolian	(<u>A</u> B C D <u>E</u> F G A)
Locrian	(<u>B</u> C D E <u>F</u> G A B)



Early instruments often had a limited selection and range of notes that could be played, much like only playing the white keys of a piano (without any of the black, accidental keys). Early musicians created a variety of modes (I like to think of them as moods) by beginning a scale on different notes. The following activities grew out of many years working as a teaching artist in Orff music classrooms and as an Orff Schulwerk clinician. The Orff xylophones are perfectly suited for this activity. I use pianos, mbiras, and several other pitched percussion instruments that offer a basic C diatonic scale. (C D E F G A B C)

Activity Outline:

Choose a Mode - Create Ostinato with Root (I) and Fifth (V)

The leader chooses a mode to work with, for example Ionian mode. Each player around the circle will create an ostinato (short repeating pattern) out of only two notes, the Root of the mode (in this case C), and the Fifth of the mode (in this case G). To reach the Fifth of each mode you will count five steps from the Root or first note. I have underlined the Root and Fifth in the examples above.

Creating Ostinato with C and G (I & V)

The leader begins a short repeating pattern (ostinato) that includes *only* the notes C and G, making sure to leave rests, or moments of silence, in the pattern. It is important that all players lock into the steady pulse set by player 1.

Sample 1: one measure pattern (4 beats)

Sample 2: two measure pattern (8 beats)



The next player creates an Ostinato

The leader looks at the person on their right and visually invites them to create their own ostinato using only the C and G notes. It works very well if each player allows a good balance of sound and silence in their patterns. Patterns interlock when one person plays in the silence of another person's pattern.

Interlocking ostinato patterns

Pattern 1 Pattern 2



Players add their own patterns

One by one, on cue, each player adds their own repeating pattern containing only the notes C and G.

All in, leader plays a solo

When each player in the circle has joined in with their repeating rhythmic part, the leader models a solo played in the Ionian mode (making use of ALL of the notes in the Ionian scale, (see above). It is a good idea to invite players to begin and end their solo on the first note of the scale.

Here is a sample solo:



When solo is done, create a new I/V ostinato

When the leader's solo is finished, the leader creates a new pattern using only the I and V notes of the mode.

Moving Solos

One by one, each player in the circle has the opportunity to play a solo over the I - V group patterns. When player completes solo, he/she then creates a new ostinato and sends the solo to the next player. Solos should be kept short, perhaps one minute at most, so that all in the circle have the opportunity to solo. When each player has had the chance to solo, the leader cues the group to end.



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Medieval Mode Dance

Room Set Up: circle of instrument in the center ~ dancers in circle around the musicians Teach a simple movement structure for the musicians to use as a cue for their solos. Then invite group to create their own version of this dance.

Part A Half Grapevine step around circle to the RIGHT and close. Repeat to the LEFT. Hands are connected shoulder height and flat hand to hand.

Part B Grapevine step that continues to RIGHT for 8 counts.

Part C Step IN four counts and flutter hands (scarves) over the musicians in the middle. Step OUT four counts (with a double clap on the last step- which acts as the cue for the musicians to know that the next solo begins)

Part A

GRAPEVINE STEP R to side	2 L in front	3 R to side	4 L close	1 L to side	2 R in front	3 L to side	4 R close
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Part B

GRAPEVINE STEP to the right	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 CLOSE
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Part C

STEP IN	2	3	4 Flutter hands	STEP OUT	2	3	4 CLAP 2 X
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Each student at an instrument plays a sound story in the mode- Beginning and ending on the home note (root) of the mode

- IONIAN mode: ostinato patterns are created with the I and V notes of the mode- C & G
- DORIAN mode: ostinato patterns with D & A (D is home base for solos)
- PHRYGIAN mode: ostinato patterns with E & B (E is home base for solos)
- LYDIAN mode: ostinato patterns with F & C (F is home base for solos)
- MIXOLYDIAN mode: ostinato patterns with G & D (G is home base for solos)
- AEOLIAN mode: ostinato patterns with A & E (A is home base for solos)
- LOCRIAN mode: ostinato patterns with B & F (B is home base for solos)

Generate movement words on a word wall with the group

- Break into four groups and each group creates a movement section
- Create a dance form that includes all four movement sequences A B C D
- Decide on a form for these parts
- Perhaps ~ A B A C A D

Ideas for Lesson Extensions

- Begin and end with the Root of the mode
Remind players that the effect of the modes (or the mood) can be much stronger if they begin and end with the Root note (first note) of the mode.
- Adjust Ostinato volume to support the solos
Some instruments are much quieter just as some player's solos may be much quieter. Remind the group to listen closely and to continually adjust their volume level in order to remain quieter than and in support of the various soloists.
- Notice the *color* notes
As players explore a variety of modes in this activity, invite them to notice the notes that have color or personality. As players explore the other modes, invite them to notice and *lean into* or pay attention to, the notes that are unexpected or surprising to them.
Color notes are underlined below:
Dorian (D E F G A B C D)
Mixolydian (G A B C D E F G)
Aeolian (A B C D E F G A)
- Talk about the mood of each mode after activity
Invite players to talk about what they noticed as they explored each new mode. They may notice that the Dorian mode has a darker feel to it, or they may describe it in another way. They may notice the happy and bright feel of the Ionian mode. These conversations will help to enhance the level of listening and learning that can take place in this activity.

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color notes
G F C
color notes
Aeolian-color-C-G
Mixolydian-color-F
Dorian-color-F-C



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