

Modality, an Essential Feature of Albanian Folklore

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Abstract

Albanian folk music is based on the mode of all forms, but the greatest dominance in some regions defines the conclusion that Albanian musical folklore is based on three modal forms: Diatonic, Chromatic and Pentatonic⁸. In general, we can conclude that in the northern part of the Albania dominates the monodic singing, and it is based on two modal, diatonic and chromatic groups. On the other hand, the south of the Albanian territories appears completely opposite to modal structure and it is now known that it is based on pentatonic, even here starting from the reduced pentatonic stretches to the phenomenon known as bi-pentatonic, the appearance of altered sounds - small ones, etc⁹. In this fascinating part of Albanian musical folklore there are many types of singing and each of them has something special in their modal structure.

Key words: Albanian folklore, modality, musical scales, polyphony, monody, diatonic, chromatic, pentatonic, etc.

Treating the musical modes is very complex and difficult. This situation becomes even more difficult when one considers the circumstances that have accompanied their development over many centuries. They must be treated from antiquity to the present day. These edges of modal development cannot be definitive references because even outside of those frameworks modality has had a development or better said a genesis from which many things commenced and unfolded through time. Starting from the nucleus of modality, on sound stretches of two, three and four sounds (bitonal, tritonal, and tetratonal) that we encounter in many old songs to the most developed ones that affect the edges of vocal and instrumental extents, we recall that mode has had a continuous development and has managed to create its own colouring, making the music richer in general. The possibilities of tonal range extensions to build a melody constantly changed and adapted to the requirements of the human vocals and especially requirements that came from many and varied options of the instruments. Modes at a certain stage were determined and depended on the exact sciences, such as physics, acoustics and mathematics, because they dictated their construction, with the measurements made to the length of the wires and the distance between tone and semitone, etc. Modes on the other hand continued to develop even in their most spontaneous form, used by amateur performers and isolated from external influences. In this regard, for the in-depth study of this issue, the special and convenient relief for this is considered the one of our Albanian lands. In this part of the Balkans, numerous historical events have taken place, thinking primarily of many wars, destructions, and the invasions and conquests that we experienced as people. By this we mean the external influences that came for centuries. We find them in Albanian folklore and treat them as folklore riches. Their influence on Albanian folklore has made it even more diverse, because it became part of a new reality - combining two great types of modes, diatonic and chromatic. As rarely in other ethnic cultures, our people experience a harsh regional separation, differentiating themselves from one another with many musical elements. The traditional music of the north of the Albanian territories with all the characteristics that follows it is very special and is very precise distinguished with the music of southern Albanian territories, both by their content and by the way of interpretation.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of AAAS, 2015.

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⁸ S. Çefa, "Harmonia", Tirana, 1997, p. 97.

⁹ Vasil Tole, "Folklori muzikor – Isopolifonia dhe monodia", Tirana, 2007, p.14.

The modal scope is considered the essence of this differentiation between the two Albanian ethno musicological regions. The modal range of Albanian songs starts from the simplest-elementary with two sounds, continuing with complex stretches that nigh to where there are combinations between two and more modes. Not only in those well-known standard forms, diatonic, chromatic, pentatonic, etc. but also in other variants which come precisely as a result of these combinations, the influences of the external elements with interesting nuances, the combination of local traditions with external influences, etc. The claim of Albanian folklore classification in northern and southern is the result of the factual situation on the ground. North with monodic songs that extend in simple diatonic modes, based on the medieval church gradations appears more authentic and more unaffected.

Figure 1. Diatonic mode – Dorian (“Moj ti çik’ o”)

Moj ti çik' o lum, o j te bu - na - ri,
ku m'je ko - nun, lum, o j, m'ka marr' - ma - lli.

In spite of them, there are chants and interpretations on which the modal range is more diverse, which in essence represent the oriental influences. These two forms of northern modes go parallel with each other, but it is also proven based on the researches that were proved in the great number of examples, those mountainous areas are those that represent the earliest and simplest forms in their construction. It should be noted that chromatics as a phenomenon was not found solely in its form derived from oriental influences, but it is also presented as authentic chromaticity reflected by the spontaneity of our rhapsodists or as a result of the construct of our folk instruments. Chromatics in the songs of the “Këngët kreshnike” (“Warriors songs”) and “Këngët malësorçe” (“Highlanders songs”) can be a proof of this. In general, we can conclude that in the northern part of the Albania dominates the monodic singing, and it is based on two modal, diatonic and chromatic groups.

Figure 2. Chromatic mode – Divan (“Une ty moj të kam dashte”)

U - ne ty moj të kam dash - te i - je Prej së vog - li
der - fë - mi S'të vjen keq e je E me më lan' e i -
je e të ma - rri sh haj - de tje - tër nje -
ri S'të vjen de tje - tër nje - ri.

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On the other hand, the south of the Albanian territories appears completely opposite to modal structure and it is now known that it is based on pentatonic, even here starting from the reduced pentatonic stretches to the phenomenon known as bi-pentatonic, the appearance of altered sounds - small ones, etc¹⁰. In this fascinating part of Albanian musical folklore there are many types of singing and each of them has something special in their modal structure, although pentatonic they were presented in various forms as anhemitonic and hemitonic pentatonics, enriching even more the phenomenon of polyphonic singing. The different scope of the isos (as orgelpunkt or figurative) further confirms the support given to this form of singing and the power of support it has in these Albanian lands. Polyphony is presented in two-voice, three-voice and four-voice music.

Figure 3. Pentatonic mode - polyphony

Na - tën e bo - rës së ke - qe na - tën o ve - tēm o
o ve - tēm o
ve - tēm o

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na - tën e bo - rës së ke - qe na - tën o, ve - tēm o
na - tën e bo rës së ke - qe na - tën o ve - tēm o
na - tën e bo - rës së ke - qe na - tën o ve - tēm o

¹⁰ V. Tole, *Folklori muzikor*, Tirana, 2007, p.5

Interesting in its form is presented saze-ja which came as a transformation of the vocal polyphonic "formula" into instrumental one but always preserving the essential features.

Figure 4. Saze – instrumental folk music

The image shows a musical score for the instrument 'Saze'. It consists of five staves. The top staff is for 'Klarineta' (Clarinet), written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The second staff is for 'Violina I' (Violin I), also in treble clef with the same key signature and time signature, featuring triplets and a sextuplet. The third staff is for 'Violina II' (Violin II), in treble clef with the same key signature and time signature, showing sustained notes. The fourth staff is for 'Lautra' (Lute), in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature, also showing sustained notes. The fifth staff is for 'Dajre' (Dajre), in a simplified notation with a 4/4 time signature, showing rhythmic patterns. The score is enclosed in a rectangular box.

As mentioned above, mode has roots deeper in the history of music in general, especially the simplest forms of modality, ranging from antiquity, where the human being has interpreted modes in perhaps more spontaneous form but that over time early forms of tonal strings begin to be standardized by being conveyed to generations after generation. Particularly important here is the establishment of the basics of Greek musical theory where the modes are clearly defined, each being named by their origin or based on other characteristics. Types of tetra chords also create types of modes. With the joining of the two tetra chords, the modal systems are created that today are known as the musical scales. All this "controlled" development of mode laid the foundations of a modal system that will continue to be applied by ancient Greece to date. Widespread inclusion of the modes is evidenced during the middle ages when the church established the system of ecclesiastical modes that were the basis of medieval ecclesiastic musical theory. Naturally the Albanian lands have been influenced by this sound system, and the music that has been developed especially in Christian temples of worship has been based on these modes¹¹. Therefore, during the researches in our music melodies, modes that are based on Greek scales can be easily noticed (ecclesiastical modes)¹². Understandably, not all of our music is based on the ecclesiastical modal diatonic, but it is considered that it was older and more rooted than the modes that will come later in Albanian lands and which will be dealt with later. These variants of ecclesiastical modes are also found in our vocal and instrumental music. Of the modes which have greater involvement in our music folklore, they are singled out the Aeolian, Dorian, and Phrygian¹³. Neighbourly coexistence with different peoples and cultures, centuries-old conquests and their influence have made Albanian modal melodic to be diverse but also unique. Simple songs starting with those that have only two sounds with narrow extensions of the larger and smaller second, then with three sounds – extension from the small and large thirds (not excluding even the lowered thirds), then three tones with wider extension that third, and so on, are proof of their simplicity but also of their antiquity.

¹¹ Avni K. Këpuska, "Qenësia e territorit dhe e kufijve etnik autoktonë të Kosovës", Prishtina, 2003, p.126.

¹² Andreis J., *Historija Muzike*, Zagreb, 1966, p.30.

¹³ S. Çefa, *Harmonia*, Tirana, 1997, p. 97.

On the other hand, there are also the stretches of melodies that reach the extraordinarily wide ambitus, which in some cases reaches even a quintdecima (15 sounds). These extensions to the technical aspect, in most cases, serve to make the modal base easier to define. But, in Albanian folklore, they are often depicted varied, where two or more modes, sometimes two or more tonal elevations (modulations) are included within an extension. Here we are especially dealing with cases where song melodies are based on chromatic scales, with makams base that often vary within their extents. In these cases the modal definition may be complex and distinctive for some Albanian areas, which makes it more interesting and unique. Monody and polyphony represent two main forms of Albanian vocal and instrumental music. This division is factual and is related to the two dialects of Albanian, Ghege and Tosk. To Albanian north belongs the monophony and to the south of the polyphony. The monodic north has diatonic (ecclesiastical) and chromatic (makams) monophony. These songs dominate each region from which they come from and are defined by the River Shkumbin almost strictly with each other (not excluding here also intermediary cases). Songs of the "Warriors songs", "Highlander songs", "Men's lament", etc. lie down on the monody base and of the many treated examples we come to the conclusion that monody is characterized by diatonic and chromatic, whereas isopolyphony and Sazet lie down on the polyphony base and are characterized by the mode of pentatonia and its variants. Polyphony certainly exists in other northern parts, especially the two-voice, but from its internal modal construction is mostly isolated and is not based on the pentatonic. Therefore, we may conclude that the polyphony of the south is constructed in pentatonic and as such is very special, especially because of the modal base it has. On the other hand, as stated above, the northern monody is very little presented with pentatonic; therefore it is identified with the modal bases which dominate diatonic and chromatic. The five variants of pentatonic give a unique colour to Albanian isopolyphony and this is enriched more with the polytonalities and the modulations that we encounter within the polyphonic songs. All this add more value and at the same time the evidence of the logic of modal structuring of Albanian folklore.

Modal differences are manifested also in the songs that dominate the rural and civic traditions¹⁴. This phenomenon is noticed especially during the treatment of the modal base on which those melodies lie. Based on the geography, the largest extension of the villages is in the highest (mountainous) areas and based on the fact that these areas have been less influenced, we conclude that they are more original in their tradition¹⁵. Also based on the Albanian ethnomusicology, which with the help of Albanian folk music scholars have collected an extraordinary number of songs from these regions, and has carefully studied this issue, it is proved that the main and most characteristic forms of Albanian monody are more preserved precisely in these rural areas and continue to live there today. These melodies are largely based on diatonic modes (Aeolian, Dorian, Phrygian, etc.) in crippled diatonic modes (bi, three, tetra, penta and hexatonic), or even natural-spontaneous chromatic modes. Of course, external influence is not excluded even in these areas but is smaller and not significant. In spite of this, chromatic influenced from outside is much more present in the civic music tradition and here are many evidences that we continue still to witness them today. The northern civic songs (gheg musical dialect) have rooted the chromatic brought by the Orient, namely by the so-called Turkish (or Arabic) 'makams'¹⁶. The complexity of makames is also reflected in the analysis of numerous examples in our musical folklore but justified as a result of the intertwining of both the local traditions and the external ones.

¹⁴ Eno Koço, "Kënga lirike qytetare shqiptare në vitet 1930", Tirana, 2002

¹⁵ Eno Koço, "Kënga lirike qytetare shqiptare në vitet 1930", Tirana, 2002, p.145,

¹⁶ E. Koço, *Kënga lirike qytetare shqiptare në vitet 1930*, Tirana 2002, p.143

In this regard, as a meeting point we consider some special forms of modes that we encounter in our lands¹⁷. Apart from the stable structures of makames in our folklore there are also unstable structures in which several degrees "fluctuate" creating a special chromatic. From a large number of analysed examples it turns out that the influence of oriental modes is greater in Albanian civic music, especially in the northern part of Albanian lands. Regarding the southern part, it retains its compactness, which is based on pentatonic, and is stretched for the most part without major splits between the civic and rural musical traditions.

Although based on pentathony, the Albanian isopoliphony is rich in its variants, which makes it even more interesting. Tosk dialect represents the identity of Albanian folklore and is one of national and world values. Over time, the people created a considerable number of variants not only in songs but also in dance and instrumental parts. However, there is a large divide in two characteristic zones: Tosk and Lab, which differ from each other in some elements but also in the variants of the modes on which the tunes are built. The polyphony area of Toska is mainly distinguished by the number of voices ranging from two to three. Because of the close movement of the voices with each other, these songs mainly lie on one mode – one of 5 variants of pentaton. Mode stretches are mostly anhemitonic, without excluding small second or the larger one movement that appear random, transient without a real base. There are rare bimodal¹⁸ presentations in this area. On the other hand, the Lab area is distinguished by four-voice and is characteristic of the south-western part of the coast, where isophony presents the highest degree of its development. Overlapping the four voices creates the possibility of forming a harmony which in itself created the laws of appearances and solutions of consonances and dissonances.

The space of mode development on four voice modes is greater, therefore the vertical and horizontal horizons of the lab polyphony is unique and therefore it is identified as world heritage. The other feature of this area is the modal contrast that is presented within a song–polymodality¹⁹. On the same basis and on the same principles, instrumental music is created – sazeta, the vocal voices taken by the instruments. Based on the music content of the songs, there are also some regions in which traditional folk music gained special characterizations. In the north, first of all we distinguish the region of Shkodra and the "shkodra aheng" which is divided into that diatonic – before the influence of Turkish culture and chromatic – during the influence of Turkish culture.

The influence of foreign elements can not name the songs of the "shkodra aheng" as foreign because the basis of this culture has been created for centuries and are deeply rooted in the folk layers, bringing besides the Turkish modes–makams which have chromatic basis also elements of diatonic modes which existed earlier in these areas.

Especially the songs originating from mountainous areas, which are brought as part of the beano ("aheng"), have more diatonic basis and have managed to resist more to external influences. Of these dominate Doric, Aeolian, Ionic and other modes, while the rest mostly based on chromatic modes of Turkish origin - makams. These modes were inherited by our people and adapted them in their own way²⁰.

¹⁷ Nikriz Makham – enlarged second between the I-II grades

¹⁸ Within a song to different modes

¹⁹ Benjamin Kruta, "Polifonia dzyërëshe e Shqipërisë Jugore", Tirana, 1989, p.143.

²⁰ R. Sokoli, "Folklori muzikor shqiptar", Tirana, 1965, p.25.

Proof of this is finding many songs that are bimodal - mixed, one diatonic mode and the other chromatic. This way other cities of this region, such as Gjakova or Prizren, have been influenced and inherited the same (or similar) traditions by treating the songs, instruments or dances with the same modal base. Despite the Gjakova region, which is more influenced by that of Shkodra, Prizren is presented differently in its civic traditions but also in this region there is a division of civic music which is based on chromatics, and the mountainous village which has more basic diatonic modalities. Here is characteristic the part of the highlands of Opoja and Hasi with narrow modal tetra and pentachordial stretches. From Peja region, the northern part of the mountain is called "Podguri i Pejës", which, unlike the city that does not differ much from the others, has managed to preserve some typologies of singing from external influences. They are based largely on narrow ambituses and modal diatonic bases or even songs with chromatic elements-glissando, trillers, and so on (songs of shepherdesses with fingers on the mouth and lament songs). The ethno-cultural region of Gollak and Karadak presents a real colour of the types of songs, but what separates it from the others is dancing. In the course of this, many examples have been analyzed by our ethnomusicologists and it has been noted that this region has its diatonic and chromatic modal variants incorporated in its tradition. Here, too, there is a division between the mountainous areas dominated by diatonic and civic ones which also treat songs based on chromatic. Special treatment is devoted to so-called "heavy" dances, which in their base have songs from these areas and which throughout history may have been influenced by Slavic neighbourly traditions but always preserving the elements of the Albanian tradition. They, as well as other songs, have a modal base: Aeolian, Doric, Phrygian or even makams: dyqah, zyl, gjyse, etc. In other side, the main typologies of isopoliphony enrich our folklore even more and give the true seal of authenticity. The colour that appears in the Albanian polyphony - with particular emphasis on the polyphony of the south - is manifested with interesting actions such as micro-modulations, hyperbolas, bipentatonites, rhythmic changes, etc. Bipentatonia is a phenomenon that appears mostly in the lab polyphony, not missing also in tosk polyphony. Also pentatonic Albanian is also included by other "passing" sounds that do not belong to the pentatonic range, called "piene." Instability within the pentatonic string often makes the pentatony to widen and to take the character of variants of different hepta cordial scales. All of these and other features make it possible to create some areas that represent the most characteristic iso-polyphonic musical creations, but the interferences they make with each other make us conclude that they have a common intonative bed. However, among them are: "Dy vetçe Dukatce", "Gjirokastra's Senile Songs"²¹, "Sang lab dances with two lines", "Three-voice Lamentations of the Men of Kolonja, Skrapar and Chameria", "Kabaja with Saze" of South Albania, etc. Each of these has their own features, beginning from Dukatas style, which in its interior is of one type. Characteristic of these songs "Dyvetçe të dukatit"²² is presented bipentatonia²³ and microtonal modulation²⁴. Singing in some form gradually moves from a penthaton to another penthaton. "Gjirokastra's senile songs" as a form of singing has evolved further by taking special features. In the most important recipient-return report is the appearance of bimodality²⁵. It has a developed picture which is manifested with the third voice which interprets the extended ambitus (up to the small seventh) which generates queue of the original pentaton by creating the metabol, which is characteristic for this type of singing²⁶.

²¹ Sokol Shupo, "Folklori muzikor shqiptar", Tirana, 2000, p.404.

²² Sokol Shupo, "Folklori muzikor shqiptar", ASMUS, Tirana, 2002, p.73.

²³ The inclusion of to pentatonies within a single polyphonic song.

²⁴ ... the movement of sounds in ascension that is made step by step through an unnoticed shift – Benjamin Kruta, "Polifonia dyzereshe e Shqiperise Jugore", Tirana, 1989, p. 143.

²⁵ The presence of two modes between their melodic lines.

²⁶ The shift of generating string of five sounds set in quint rapport with each other, horizontally within a pentatonic musical material.

Another characteristic of the melodic development of "Gjirokastrit singing" is the continuous tendency of extending the range of 6 to 7 and more sounds that are not definitely in agreement of second intervals (large), thirds (small and large), fourth (pure) and fifth (pure) intervals. These moves can also move at other intervals that create hemithonic pentathones²⁷. "Skrapar men's songs" are characterized by a rich melodic line, featuring four different pentathones, which are interwoven with each other by forming metabols I and II grade. The characteristics of Cham singing continue to be interpreted in areas where they were relocated by faithfully guarding their character. Cham polyphonic song is mainly based on Vth pentaton, and IVth pentaton the phenomenon which results in shaping the metabol. In "Cham songs", the melodic lines are very rich with melismas that often are constructed on auxiliary pienes. They are formed with the alteration of the pentatonic sounds. "Singing lab dances" are mostly in service of dancing and due to the difficulty of singing during dancing, they appear simpler and with narrow ambitus²⁸. So the reasons that this form of polyphonic singing is recitative is found in its multiplicity of construction, the simultaneous presence of lines makes that musical thought diffuse to varying degrees. In general, the recitative character of the lab song and in this context also the singing lab dances should be seen as a reflex of its antiquity, as the kind of music is as ancient as the more declamatory it appears. As for the Sazes, it was clarified earlier that we are dealing with an imitation of vocal music with folk music instruments²⁹. On the other hand, replacing folk instruments with new (tempered) instruments is considered as crucial moment in forming the formations of sazes³⁰. These formations began to "sing" the same songs but with different tools. This also brought about changes in the concept of modal construction, because many of the tempered instruments did not have the technical ability to interpret (or imitate) correctly the singing vocal. The modality of our musical folklore is diverse and very interesting to be treated by classical composers. Their simplicity or complexity presents a great material for shaping artistic works. Also important was the reflection of the modes in the first three great works of our composers, the first symphony, opera and ballet. The modes in which they were made belonged to the traditional Albanian music, especially of the north of the Albanian territories (diatonic and chromatic modes), but not to be let aside at any moment the pentatonic modes, which were part of the compositional combinatorial, especially of the second part of the 20th century³¹.

²⁷ Musical scale within which there are intervals of one or more semitones.

²⁸ Spiro Shetuni, "Polifonia labe", Tiranë, 1998, p.38.

²⁹ Pirro Miso, "Muzikë popullore instrumentale", Tiranë, 1990, p.5.

³⁰ Lortenc Antoni, "Folklori muzikor shqiptar", Bleni shtatë, Prishtinë, 1977, p.7.

³¹ Spiro Kalem, "Arritjet e artit tonë muzikor", SHBLSH, Tiranë, 1982, p.35.

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