

Invoking the Modal Nymph

The Emergence and Dissemination of the Concept of
Modality in Swedish Folk Music

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Abstract

Since the emergence of a concept of *folk music*, the study and practice of certain Western European musical traditions has been informed by notions of the music's modality. Specifically, the idea that older or more indigenous layers of traditional repertoires manifest an underlying, pre-tonal structure of their own has been significant in scholarship, musical education, and performance. This study seeks to shed light on this idea through the particular case of the conceptualisation of modality in relation to Swedish folk music. It asks what music-theoretical ideas on modality have risen through various scholarly and editorial endeavours, how these ideas have emerged, and in what shape they have been further disseminated in contemporary research and education. It addresses these questions by tracing the history of the modal discourse about Swedish folk music at two of its main stages: its inception and formation throughout the 19th century, and the establishment of a consensus around it from the late 1970s onwards. Through close readings of a wide selection of sources, the study offers an analysis of the ensuing concept of modality from a critical, historically informed, music-theoretical perspective. Looking at modality as an *open concept*, it proposes that the concept of modality that has been attributed to Swedish folk music concurs with a specific type of romanticist, neo-modal construction, in which scale-degree theory gives rise to dichotomous, evolutionist and organological definitions of mode as a marker of "musical otherness". The study further explores the emergent aspect of this construction, as well as its projective and regulative force on the analysis and assessment of traditional repertoires.

KEYWORDS: Swedish folk music, modality, neo-modality, modal theory, scale degree theory, romanticism, open concept