

**Using Ancient  
Greek Music for  
Care of the Soul:**

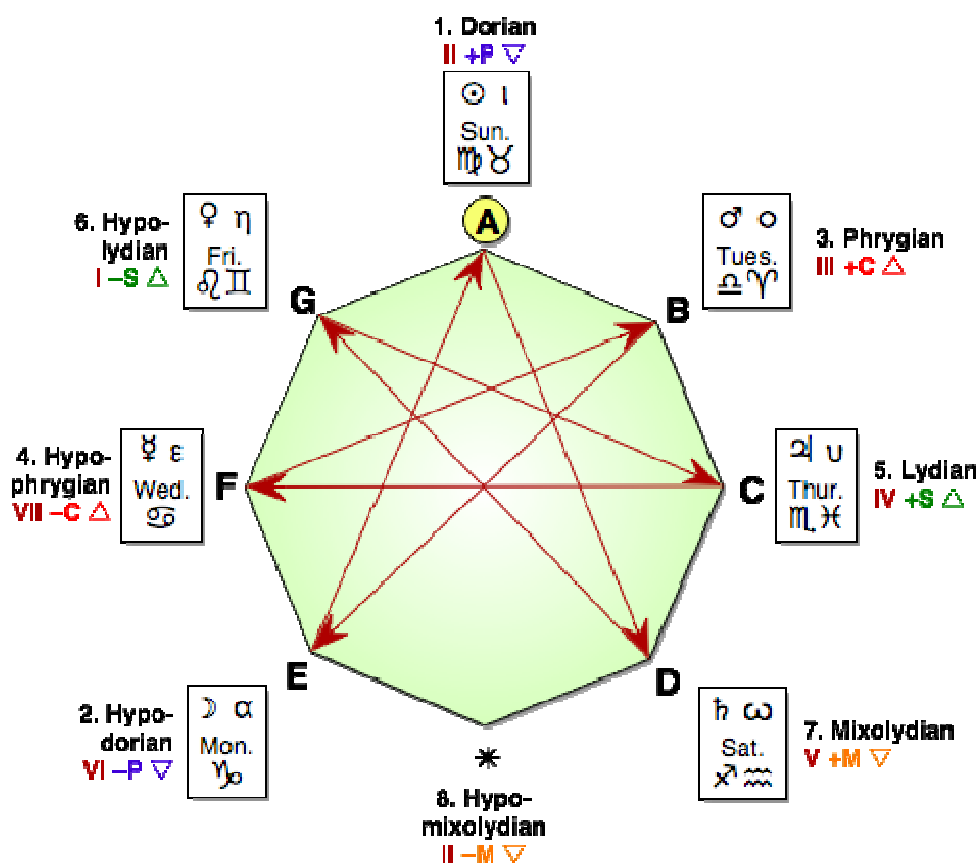
***Hê Mousikê  
Therapeia***

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## **Introduction**

The ancient Pythagoreans used music as a means of curing and caring for the soul, as we read in biographies of Pythagoras (e.g., Iamblichus' *Pyth. Way of Life*, ch. 25, in Guthrie, 84-5). In one case, a young man was about to burn down the house of an unfaithful girlfriend. Pythagoras realized that he was being agitated excessively by the music played nearby, and so he told the musician to play in a different mode, which immediately calmed the young man. In another case, the Pythagorean sage Empedocles was visiting the home of a judge who had condemned a man to death. The man's son rushed in with a drawn sword, intent on killing the judge, but Empedocles sang an enchantment that diverted the son from his rash purpose and saved his host. The Pythagoreans also used music in less extreme circumstances. For example, special melodies were used at night to calm their minds and to ensure peaceful sleep and good dreams, and others were used in the morning to bring alertness. Some of these were wordless "vowel chants," as will be explained below. In general they used enchanting music whenever they needed to alter the state of their own or others'



souls. In this article I will show some ways that you can do the same.

## The Modal Glyph

Although much of the Pythagorean lore has been lost, we can understand some of the

techniques for using ancient Greek music for healing and magical purposes by looking at the *Modal Glyph*, a diagram that summarizes some of the correspondences of the tones and modes. (These correspondences were given by ancient musical philosophers such as Aristides Quintilianus and Ptolemy; see [Barker 1984, 1989](#), and [Godwin, 1991, 1993](#).) First consider the Heptagram, the star of seven points connected by red arrows. Around these points are the letters A-G, which represent notes in a C-major scale (CDEFGAB). (Since absolute pitch is not important for our purposes, these letters can represent any major scale; what matters is the pattern of tones and semitones. Simply place the lowest note on the point marked C, and write the rest around in order. For example, for a D-major scale, instead of C D E F G A B we write D E F# G A B C#.) The boxes beside each note give a number of correspondences: on the top line we have a planetary symbol and a Greek vowel (αεηιωω), on the second line a day of the week, and on the third line either one or two Zodiacal signs. The inner Heptagram represents the cycle of the days of the week and the corresponding planets. To see this, begin with Sunday at the top and follow the line (against the arrow) to the lower left to Monday and continue around the Heptagram until it returns to Sunday.

The outer Octagon represents the eight *modes* (similar to major and minor scales), the Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, etc. In ancient times the Greeks recognized only seven modes, which follow the Heptagram in order like the week: (1) Dorian, (2) Hypodorian, (3) Phrygian, etc. (These are the better known medieval names; the ancient Greeks used similar names, but in a different arrangement.) Each mode has a corresponding planet and Zodiacal signs, and each sign has a divine *guardian* (Lat., *tutor*) (given, for example, in Manilius' *Astronomica*, 2.433-52), which is not shown in the diagram, but will be mentioned below. (They are different from the planetary houses.) The signs are also associated with parts of the body, as can be learned from any astrology text (e.g. Manilius, 2.453-465).

In later times an eighth mode was added, giving two for each element, which means that we can increase or decrease each of the four humors (as will be explained shortly). The eighth mode, the Hypomixolydian, corresponds to the Fixed Stars, whereas the seven ancient modes correspond to the planets, the Wandering Stars, among which the Heptagram cycles endlessly. Further, clockwise around the Octagon, from the Moon, to Mercury, etc., to Saturn and the Fixed Stars, the eight celestial spheres are listed from inner- to outermost in the ancient Chaldean order (that is, from fastest to slowest motion).

Each mode is under the patronage of a Muse: Clio, Calliope, Terpsichore, Melpomene, Erato, Euterpe, Polyhymnia, Urania (according to the Chaldean order). The ninth Muse, Thalia is assigned the Terrestrial Sphere and governs Silence for, as Ramis says, "Thalia remains silent, like the Earth." Apollo governs all nine Muses, their spheres, and the modes together with Silence. To remember the correspondences, you may use the verses of Agrippa (*Three Books Occult Phil.*, 1651, II.xxvi):

*Silent Thalia we to th' Earth compare,  
For She by music never doth ensnare;  
After the Hypodorian Clio sings,  
Persephone likewise doth strike the bass strings;*

*Calliope also doth chord second touch,  
Using the Phrygian; Mercury as much:  
Terpsichore strikes the third, and that rare,  
The Lydian music makes so Venus fair.  
Melpomene, and Titan do with a grace  
The Dorian music use in the fourth place.  
The fifth ascribed is to Mars the God  
Of war, and Erato after the rare mode  
Of th' Phrygians, Euterpe doth also love  
The Lydian, and sixth string; and so doth Jove.  
Saturn the seventh doth use with Polymny,  
And causeth the Mixed Lydian melody.  
Urania also doth the eighth create,  
And music Hypo-Lydian elevate.*

(Note that Agrippa is a bit loose with the names of the modes.)

Each mode has a different Form, or pattern of tones and semitones, which determines the character of the mode and is of central importance in applying music to *therapeia* (cure and care) for the soul. This pattern is defined by the Roman numeral at the beginning of the line under the mode's name, which defines the degree of a major scale at which this pattern begins (its *Foundation Note*), as well as by the arrow, which points directly to this degree. For example, the Form of the Dorian mode is what we find beginning on the II<sup>nd</sup> degree of the C-major scale: DEFGABC; the Form of the Mixolydian mode is given by the V<sup>th</sup> degree: GABCDEF. (Remember: absolute pitch is not important; it is the pattern of whole tones and semitones that matters.) Of course, there are only seven tones that can be used as Foundation Notes, so the eighth mode must have the same Form as one of the others. The most useful eighth mode, the Hypomixolydian, has the same Foundation and Form as the first mode, the Dorian.

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## **Effects of the Modes on the Humors**

With these preliminaries out of the way, we can begin to explore the use of the modes for the *therapeia* of the soul. This is based on the influence that the modes have on the *four humors*, the subtle fluids that influence our psychical and bodily state, and which must be in harmony for proper mental, spiritual, and bodily health. Their state of balance determines one's *temperament* (and it is no coincidence the same word is used in musicology). The humors correspond to the four elements, and are called Phlegm or Phlegmatic humor (water), (Yellow) Bile or Choleric humor (fire), Blood or Sanguine humor (air), and Black Bile or Melancholic humor (earth).

We will see that music in a particular mode amplifies or weakens a humor (indicated on the diagram by **+P**, **-P**, **+C**, etc.). In general, the odd-numbered modes are *authentic* and increase the corresponding humor, while the even-numbered are *plagal* and decrease it (recall *hypo-* = less). (Odd and even numbers are respectively male and female, according to Pythagoreans. These mode-humor correspondences are given in Ramis de Pareja's *Musica Practica*, 1482; the *qualities* or *powers* of the planets -- warm, moist, etc. -- are given by Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, I.5.)

Modes (1) **Dorian** and (2) **Hypodorian** correspond to the element water (cool and moist) and govern the Phlegmatic humor, which leads to sleepiness, lethargy, laziness, slowness, mental dullness, and forgetfulness, but also to calm and even-tempered detachment, often resulting from



a state of internal equanimity; it is connected with the *etheric body* and its well-being. These modes govern the powers of the Sun and Moon (see diagram), the Lamps of Day and Night. Hence, Dorian imparts the fiery Solar power and thereby dries the watery Phlegm, which diminishes its tendency to lethargy and leads to calm equanimity (more active Phlegm: **+P**). Hypodorian, in contrast, imparts the watery Lunar power, which reinforces the Phlegmatic tendency, encouraging sleep (less

active: **-P**). Therefore Pythagoreans use Dorian in the morning to awaken and clear their minds, and use Hypodorian before sleep to eliminate stress and promote good dreams. (Ramis says it was Hypodorian that Pythagoras used to restrain the young man from burning his girlfriend's house.)

The guardians associated with the Dorian mode are Demeter (Virgo) and Aphrodite (Taurus), but Hypodorian has only Hestia (Capricorn). This is because Capricorn is one of the two *Gates*; Cancer is the Northern Gate, Capricorn the Southern. More specifically, Cancer is the Gate of the Moon (for Cancer is her House), the path of moist generation, through which souls descend into incarnation, just as Capricorn is the Gate of the Sun by which they ascend to bright Olympus. When a soul is born into earthly life, it descends through the signs Cancer, Leo, ..., Capricorn; on death it ascends through Capricorn, Aquarius, ..., Cancer. Thus the soul visits the signs in the same sequence as the Sun; in each case it passes through the seven planetary spheres. (See Porphyry's *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, chs. 10-13, and Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, ch. 12.)

### Modes (3) **Phrygian** and (4)

**Hypophrygian** correspond to the element fire (warm, dry) and control the Choleric humor. It is opposed to Phlegm, and therefore its characteristics are boldness, exuberance, and passion; it is associated with the *ego* and *will*. When well tempered it leads to courage, a quick wit, and leadership, but in excess it produces pride, rashness, irritability, and a hot-tempered, violent personality. Phrygian invokes the power of Mars, which is warm and dry, and therefore magnifies the Choleric effects (+C), whereas Hypophrygian invokes the power of Mercury, which is neutral, and reinforces both good and bad characteristics (-C). In planetary terms, the effects of Phrygian are Martial, for fighters wound with weapons, and the effects of Hypophrygian are Mercurial, for flatterers wound with words. The guardians



associated with Phrygian are Hephaistos (Libra) and Athena (Aries), but Hypophrygian has only Hermes (Cancer, the Gate of the Moon), which corresponds to its planet (Mercury).

**Modes (5) Lydian and (6) Hypolydian**

correspond to the element air (moist, warm) and influence the Sanguine humor, which imparts good cheer, optimism, friendliness, and a tendency to laughter, love, and song; it is associated with the lively *astral body*.



The Lydian mode invokes the power of Jupiter (moist, warm), which reinforces the Sanguine humor (+S), resulting in Jovial happiness. Hypolydian draws down the power of Venus, which is also moist and warm, but more moist than the Jovial power; the results are Erotic sadness (-S), and Ramis calls Hypolydian the Weeping Mode. The guardians associated with Lydian are Ares (Scorpio) and Poseidon (Pisces), those with Hypolydian are Zeus (Leo) and Apollo (Gemini).

Modes (7) Mixolydian and (8) Hypomixolydian correspond to the element earth (dry, cool) and govern the Melancholic humor, which is the most complex humor in its effects; it is associated with the *physical body*. Because of its earthy nature, the Melancholic humor imparts solidity, firmness, and steadfastness, but also therefore a certain indolence and tenacity. Mixolydian invokes the power of Saturn (dry, cool), which magnifies the effect of the humor (+M), leading to Saturnine melancholy. This may lead to paralyzing depression, but, if well tempered, it may produce (sometimes moody) introspection, artistic genius, good memory, a love of scholarship, and the inclination to retire from the world and devote oneself to spiritual matters. Since ancient times Melancholia has been recognized as the dominant humor in many people of exceptional ability, for it provides the sensibilities required to experience deeply,





and thereby to transcend the ordinary (if only the demonic snares of melancholy can be escaped). It may bring all the forms of madness (Grk. *mania*) catalogued by Plato: the frenzies of the philosopher, poet, prophet, lover -- and of the insane. The Hypomixolydian mode is associated with the Celestial Sphere, which tempers the Melancholic humor (-M). "More than any other, this mode has an innate beauty and loveliness; it is free from all qualities and suitable for every use" (Ramis, *op. cit.*). It represents the heavenly repose achieved when one has ascended the planetary spheres; it is the mode of Celestial bliss. The guardians associated with Mixolydian are Artemis (Sagittarius) and Hera (Aquarius); since Hypomixolydian is the eighth mode, it has no specific associated signs or guardians, for it corresponds to all the Fixed Stars and to the Thirteen Olympians.

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### **Performance of Modal Melodies**

Given these principles you can adjust the temperamental balance of yourself or someone else by composing or improvising a melody in the appropriate mode. For example, you might use a Phrygian melody to bolster your courage. Also, different humors tend to dominate different seasons of the year or seasons of life (Sanguine: spring & youth, Choleric: summer & prime, Melancholic: autumn & middle age, Phlegmatic: winter & old age), and music can be used to mitigate these effects. Finally, the modes may be used to good effect in combination. For example, if someone is feeling melancholy, we might begin with a melody in Hypomixolydian mode in order to decrease the Melancholic humor, and then modulate to a Lydian melody to increase the Sanguine humor and bring about a state of happiness and well-being. But how do you compose or improvise such melodies?

There are many uncertainties about ancient Greek melodic structure, but the following suggestions will suffice for esoteric

purposes (see Barker II.316nn3, 20; 336n78; Pole 122; Winnington-Ingram 4-9, 34-40, 46). The melody should emphasize or focus on the *Dynamic Middle* (which functions somewhat like the tonic of tonal music or the dominant of medieval modal music). The Dynamic Middle always corresponds to the note A (think "Apollo") when a mode is transposed to a step of the C-major scale (so A is circled on the diagram), but it is never lower in pitch than the scale's Foundation Note. Thus the Dynamic Middle is "a" within the E-d range of Phrygian, and within the D-c of Dorian, but it is the lowest note (Foundation Note) of Hypodorian (A-G). For instruments whose primary major scale is not C, the Dynamic Middle is the sixth degree of its primary major scale (e.g. B on a D-major instrument). The melody generally begins on the Dynamic Middle, which is therefore called Beginning (*Arkhê*) or Leader (*Hêgemôn*), and it typically ends on the lowest note of the mode (the Foundation Note), which is therefore called the End (*Teleutê*) or Final Note (similar to a final cadence in medieval modal music). Thus it will end on E for Phrygian and on D for Dorian (if C is our major scale). Once you have found the Foundation and Dynamic Middle of any particular mode on your instrument, it is relatively easy to improvise a melody in that mode; let your ear be your guide.

The Dynamic Middle occupies the same position within the scale structure (pattern of tones and semitones) of each mode, a position associated with the Sphere of the Sun and representing the power of Apollo. On the other hand, each mode begins at a different place around the planetary Heptagram so that a different planetary pitch becomes the Foundation Note and therefore the End at which the melody is directed. The initial sounding of the Dynamic Middle, and every repetition of it, invoke the power of Apollo and direct it to the End, for example, at the Moon in the Hypodorian Mode, and at the Sun itself in the Dorian. The melody creates a pattern of invocation of the planetary powers as it visits their notes. Since the melody ends on the Foundation Note of the mode, it brings into manifestation the qualities of that mode.

If you have been paying attention, you may be wondering how a Hypomixolydian melody is different from a Dorian, since these modes have the same Form (scale structure). The Dynamic Middles are the same, but for the End of the Hypomixolydian we use the Foundation of the corresponding authentic mode (Mixolydian), that is, G (or in general the V<sup>th</sup> degree of a major scale). Therefore the final resting place is the sphere of Venus, the Celestial Bliss of Aphrodite Urania.

There are many ways you can perform your composed or improvised melody in order to achieve its intended effect. Most simply it may be performed as an instrumental solo. If you have composed words for the melody, then it can be performed *a cappella* or with (unison) instrumental accompaniment. However, an important ancient practice is the *vowel chant*, in which we intone the Greek vowels corresponding to the notes (see [Glyph](#)). The approximate ancient pronunciations are (alpha): ah, (epsilon): eh, (eta): ay, (iota): ih, (omicron): awe, (upsilon): oo (like German ü), (omega): oh. (See [Godwin, 1991](#), for much more on the vowels, planets, etc.) Naturally, rhythm, tempo, and dynamics also should be appropriate to the intended *therapeia*.

The effect of a mode may be enhanced by performing the music on the corresponding weekday and/or in the corresponding planetary hour, which may be determined as follows: Divide the hours of daylight into 12 "solar hours" and do likewise for the hours of darkness. The first solar hour after dawn corresponds to the same planet as the day; that is, the first hour of Sunday is the Sun's, the first hour of Monday is the Moon's, etc. The remaining hours of the day or night follow in order, counter-clockwise around the Octagon. Thus Sunday's hours are Sun, Venus, Mercury, etc.; Monday's hours are Moon, Saturn, etc.

For additional information, including many tables of correspondences, see "[Greek Esoteric Music Theory Charts](#)" ([omphalos.org/BA/GEM](http://omphalos.org/BA/GEM)).

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