

## Types of modal cadences in Romanian folklore

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**Summary:** *The high frequency of final modal cadences in Romanian folk songs imposes – for a correct interpretation of tonal-modal structures – a new principle, according to which the true tonal-modal structure of Romanian folk songs is not always determined by the final note. This fact thus contradicts the general validity of the medieval principle according to which the mode or tone of a melody is given by its finishing note, which is considered by some local musicologists as an absolute principle. On the other hand, modal cadences on a note other than the fundamental of the basic mode also reveal - finally - the true modal dominance of entire series of structures. The notes that are here imposed as the main tonal pillars of the cadence are not found in the relations 1 - 5, 5 -1, 1 - 4, 4 - 1, as in music based on the Western concept, but in: 1 - 2, 2 - 1, 1 - 6, 6 -1.*

**Keywords:** *cadence; folklore; traditional; song;*

### Introduction

A notable feature of Romanian folk music – and of South-Eastern European folk music in general – is the frequent change, within the same melody, of modal characteristics throughout the melody, or only in the final cadence on the same fundamental or on another note of the initial or dominant mode throughout the whole song.

Modal cadences have only occasionally been reported, in a few works of our forerunners – G. Musicescu, B. Bartok, C. Brăiloiu, G. Breazul, and in the preface to S. Drăgoi's “303 colinde” (303 Carols). The ethnomusicologist Traian Mîrza studied the final modal cadences of Romanian folk songs, only analysing samples selected from among the songs with a diatonic modal structure, including those acoustic in nature – selecting from among them only those that “clearly hold the characteristics of a mode and of the cadence”<sup>2</sup>.

### 1. The research

In his study, Traian Mîrza points out that “melodies in authentic Lydian mode almost without exception have the final cadence on the second note of the mode, the structure of the concluding melodic formula thus displaying the characteristics of a mixolydian tetrachord”<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Traian Mîrza. 1996. *Final modal cadences in the Romanian folk song*. [Cadențe modale finale în cântecul popular românesc], in *Studii de muzicologie*, București: Editura Muzicală, pp. 85–108.

<sup>3</sup> The note enclosed and numbered 1 represents the base of the mode, the crown marks the final sound and the group of notes joined with an arrow mark the cadence formula scheme.

Fig. 1. *Authentic Lydian*

This cadence also occurs in pre-modal Lydian structures, which is why it can be considered as belonging to modal thinking.

Fig. 2. *The lidic premodal structure*

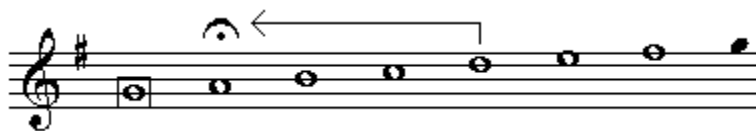
Traian Mîrza observes the above cadence also appearing in the melodies from the Bihor region which are based on the hemitonic pentatonic scale Fa – Sol – Ti – Do – Re, or on the pentatonic Fa – Sol – La – Do – Re. Also, the melodies from the Bihor region with a hemitonic pentatonic substrate that reach the seventh-note ambitus “rather present the characteristics of the acoustic 1 and their final cadence is also on the second note of the mode”.

Fig. 3. *Hemitonic pentatony*

Due to the high frequency of the cadence on the second note of the Lydian and acoustic 1 in the Bihorean songs, some folklorists (such as Ioan Radu Nicola, Ileana Szenik, Traian Mîrza) call it Bihorean cadence; it can also be called mixolydian cadence, because it brings new modal characteristics. Its role is to soften the excessively major and harsh character of song endings, such as that given by the Lydian perfect fourth, through a perfect major.

Another type of cadence is the Dorian cadence, in the form of a Dorian tetrachord (hence the name) which occurs in the second note of the authentic Ionian mode.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Gheorghe Oprea. 2002. *Romania musical folklore* [Folclorul muzical românesc]. București: Editura muzicală, p. 408

Fig. 4. *Doric tetrachord*

The Dorian cadence is frequent in the melodies of the traditional repertoire with major pre-modal structures (tetrachord, pentachord, major hexachord) and through this cadence the Romanian musical folklore is related to the Greek, Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian, Albanian folklore and even to the old Gregorian and Byzantine chant.



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Fig. 5. *Traditional repertoire*

Ionian melodies with a pentatonic substrate generally take on entirely different cadences. Their most common scale is a hypoionian scale with a Sol centre – very frequent in our folk song – originating from the pentatonic Re - Mi - Sol - La - Ti, in which the final cadence is usually on the sixth note of the mode. The flat that fills the lower third interval below Sol varies, providing two kinds of cadences:

- a) when the flat in question is maintained at the end as Sol sensitive, the ending formula is called Aeolian cadence (brings Aeolian characteristics)



<sup>5</sup> Traian Mîrza. 1996. "Final modal cadences in the Romanian folk song". [Cadente modale finale în cântecul popular românesc]. In *Studii de muzicologie*. București: Editura Muzicală, p. 125

*Repejor* 3—

II. Cocișu Cântec popular românesc

De la Bu-cu resti la va-le Lea-no Tre-ce-un tren cu  
cinci va-goane Tre-ce-un tren cu cinci va-goane Lea-no

Fig. 6. Aeolian cadence

- b) when the same flat is constituted in the ending Mi sensitive, the melodic cadence formula brings the characteristics of the Phrygian, therefore the Phrygian cadence

VI VII VIII 1 2 3 4 5

Fig. 7. Phrygian cadence

The particularly high frequency of these cadences in our folklore leads us to the idea that they can be considered specific to our folk music. For our folk song<sup>7</sup>, Traian Mîrza states, “the Doric cadence (on the second note of the Ionian mode), the Aeolian and Phrygian cadence (on the sixth note) have the functional significance of bringing minor modal characteristics to the end of major melodies”. Traian Mîrza also points out that melodies in the mixolydian mode also make several cadences, among which some “belong to a purely modal thought, and others betray the principle of tonal bipolarity specific to the pentatonic”.

Astfel:

- a) Dorian cadence on the second note

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 127

<sup>7</sup> Dumitru Bughici. 1978. *Dictionary of musical forms and genres [Dicționar de forme și genuri muzicale]*. București: Editura muzicală, p. 110.

*Parlando rubato* Traian Mirza - Crișana

Frun-za ver - de si u - na mai Frun -za ver-de si u \_\_\_\_

na, Rau ma doa-re i \_\_\_\_ ni ma mai!

8

Fig. 8. *Dorian cadence*

b) Phrygian cadence on the second note

*Andante* Sabin Drăgoi - 303 colinde

Scoa-la gaz - da gaz - da ma - re Flo - ri - le-s

dal - be Prin-de bo - ii la tan - ja - la

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Fig. 9. *Phrygian cadence on the second note*

c) Phrygian cadence on the sixth note

Fig. 10. *Phrygian cadence on the sixth note*<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem.* p. 128.<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem.*

d) Aeolian cadence on the seventh note (more rarely)

V VI VII 1 2 3 4 5

*Allegretto*

Foa-ie ver - de trei spa - na - se Li - no Lea - no De la - Ga - lati

mai in coa - se Es - te - o a - pa val isi fa - ce, Lea - no

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Fig. 11. *Aeolian cadence on the seventh note*

The mode known as acoustic 2 (melodic major), less common as a pure acoustic or as the main mode of a song, also has the cadence on the second note:

a) Istrian cadence (acoustic 3):

*Moderat*

Foa-ie ver - de trei spa - na - se Li - no Lea - no De la - Ga - lati

mai in coa - se Es - te - o a - pa val isi fa - ce, Lea - no

Fig. 12. *Istrian cadence*

b) Phrygian cadence:

mai in coa - se Es - te - o a - pa val isi fa - ce, Lea - no

Fig. 13. *Phrygian cadence*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 129.

Melodies in the Dorian mode sometimes make a Phrygian cadence on the second note, seeming to belong to a modal thinking,



Fig. 14. *Dorian mode*

or sometimes (less often) Dorian tunes from Muntenia or Moldova make Istrian cadence on the first note of the mode:



Fig. 15. *Istrian cadence*

## Conclusion

The presentation of modal cadences by ethnomusicologist Traian Mîrza highlights a particularly significant aspect of Romanian folk music, namely that they “follow a unique direction: from major modal characteristics to minor modal characteristics”. In authentic Romanian folk song, the opposite direction of cadences (from minor to major modal characteristics) does not exist”.

## Books

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- Mîrza, Traian. 1996. „Final modal cadences in the Romanian folk song”. [*Cadențe modale finale în cântecul popular românesc*]. *Studii de muzicologie*: 85-108