

My name is Ross Daly, I'm a musician and a person of what you might call a trans-cultural identity. By this I mean that the circumstances of my life, from my very earliest years, have taken me to many different parts of the world as a **resident**, not merely as a visitor, and that I really don't feel able to define myself according to the characteristics of any single ethnic or regional culture. To put it simply, I have had the extreme good fortune to have lived my life in the native environments of many different cultures, each of which has influenced me to an almost equal degree resulting in my feeling them all to be mine. When I say mine however I don't mean this in a possessive sense, it's not a question of them belonging to **me**, rather it is one of me belonging to **them**.

Please excuse my choice to speak in my native language English today, this is not because this is easier for me, but because the culmination of this talk is actually a rather specific proposal which I feel could potentially be of interest to people in other regions of the world (not just here in Greece) and that, through the medium of the internet, where this talk will eventually end up and most people will hear it, this proposal will be more easily communicated by that which, for better or worse, has come to be the lingua Franca of our age, the English language.

As I said previously, I'm a musician. A musician however somewhat obsessed for many decades with what many would consider to be a rather obscure interest: **modal music**. Throughout all of my life I have been deeply interested in and inspired by this genre of music in its multitude of manifestations. I discovered this interest at a relatively early age (I must have been about 14 years old) after hearing a concert of one of the world's major modal traditions, North Indian classical music, performed by one of its greatest exponents at the time, the late Sarod virtuoso

Ustad Ali Akbar Khan. This concert took place in a relatively small theater at a college just south of San Francisco where I was living at the time. Up until then I had been studying, as a child, cello and, during my adolescence, classical and contemporary guitar styles. After listening to this concert of Indian classical music however, despite the fact that the music played was obviously quite new to my ears, I immediately felt a strange affinity for and even familiarity with it. It touched me in such a way as I had never previously experienced and on a level far deeper than any other previous musical experience of mine. On returning home after the concert, I tried, as best I could, to reproduce on my guitar some of the sounds which I had heard in this concert, but quickly realized that, in order to play this music, an instrument specifically designed to play it would be necessary. Therefore, for me, this single concert together with my newfound desire to study such an instrument, marked the beginning of what would be for me a very long journey through various regions of the world, studying under the guidance of some of the greatest masters of the various traditions belonging to the broader world of modal music.

My travels and studies took me to many places and, during the course of my research, I began to get a clear picture of something which, I get the impression, not many people in the western world seem to be aware of: The world of modal music extends roughly from Western Africa to Western China and encompasses almost everything in between. Not only does *this* seem to be true but all of the many and extremely varied traditions found in this vast geographical region seem to be interconnected in a way such as to render them somehow familiar and even accessible to almost all of the region's inhabitants. For example a piece of mugam music played by an Uyghur ensemble from western China would sound strangely familiar to a Moroccan just as a piece of Naubat music performed by a Moroccan ensemble would not sound entirely foreign to an Uyghur from Qashgar. A German or a Belgian, on the other hand, would most

likely find nothing at all familiar, let alone accessible, in either of these examples. The more I delved into these various musical traditions, the more I came to realize that there is a clear and traceable historical dimension, extending over several millennia, to this vast musical community of modality. At this point, perhaps I should give a concise definition of what exactly modal music is.

Modal music is quite simply a musical genre which employs and focuses on the use of modes. Modes are actually surprisingly difficult to accurately define. They are often regarded as mere tone material or scales, much as people in the west regard major and minor scales. These scales, which are perceived as being many in number (some traditions actually count in the hundreds), apart from using what, for a western ear, are strange tonal configurations, also make use of intervals of what we call a non tempered nature. To put it simply, this means that they don't just have, as does the tempered scale of western music, an octave comprised of 12 equidistant semitones. Rather they have a whole gamut of other intervals, deriving from specific and precise mathematical calculations, which open up a vast array of equally precise *melodic* and, subsequently, *expressive* possibilities. However, to define these modes as mere scales comes nowhere near to comprehending their true nature.

These modes in various languages are referred to as Ragas (in Indian music, the word raga derives from the Sanskrit word for color), Makams (in Middle Eastern and Central Asian music, the Arabic word Maqam denotes a position, level or station, referring equally to levels of spiritual development as to musical modes), Ichos (the Greek word which generically refers to sound is used to refer to the modes in Byzantine church music) or Tropos (in Ancient Greek, the term for a mode was tropos, a multifaceted term which refers to a manner, a style, a dimension of logic, or even in some circumstances, that which is in a state of change or flux). These terms alone, as well as many others in

other languages, clearly indicate a reference to something far more comprehensive than a mere scale.

A well known Persian musicologist once gave the following definition of modes which I have always found very helpful in clarifying the issue. If we have a line of a fixed length beginning at point A and ending at point B, and if we say that point A refers simply to tone material, a scale, and that point B refers to a full fledged melody, then all modes find themselves somewhere on this line in between. Some are a bit closer to being scales and some are closer to being full fledged melodies, but none can be properly defined by only one of these two aspects.

Modes are very much concerned with musical phrasing. These phrases are usually very simple but highly flexible in nature, each one acting as a melodic nucleus which can extend and expand into various forms and manifestations whilst always remaining clearly recognizable to those who have acquired an acquaintance with them. Perhaps the best analogy that I can give would be to say that becoming acquainted with a mode is very much like making the acquaintance of a person. This is of course a very complex, comprehensive and indeed time consuming process which requires that we creatively employ all of our senses and faculties. The same is true of getting to know a musical mode. In light of this analogy we could say that trying to understand modes by simply studying scales is a bit like trying to get to know people by studying skeletons. It's not the way to go....

As I stated previously, modal music is prevalent throughout a vast geographical area and the network of relationships between its various ethnic and regional manifestations are clear to see both from the point of view of historical analysis as well as being self-evident even to a relatively untrained ear. Unravelling this intricate and extremely complicated network of cross influences over the centuries and even millennia is a singularly difficult task which, even today, is anything but complete. Suffice it to say however that what quickly becomes evident to anyone studying

these musical idioms is that the richness and the beauty of each depends integrally on a continuing flow of influences coming and going, ebbing and flowing, rather like the tides of a vast sea.

This process, in many ways, also resembles that of cross-pollination in the plant world and indeed I've often found the analogy of regional variety in the plant world to be relevant to that of modal music in particular. Often a phrase or a mode can come into being in one region and spread like pollen or even as a seed to another region where it will mingle with other organisms, so to speak, and eventually blossom according to the circumstances of the new environment.

Perhaps for this reason, I have always regarded music more as a natural phenomenon than as a specifically human creation, as something coming through people, not from them. As for the source, each can name it as he or she will, and some, perhaps the wiser, prefer to leave it unnamed.

One interesting and often confusing detail about the region of the world in which we live here is that it is home to a number of contemporary nation states with extremely ancient names: Greece, Egypt, Syria, Israel, Armenia, Persia, India etc. all of which however, as nation states, as political entities, are considerably younger than Australia.

This fact doesn't sit comfortably for those who have taken it upon themselves to craft the cultural profiles of these states, a process which often results in the delineation of a somewhat narrow and usually seriously distorted ethno-centric cultural stereotype which, as a rule, insistently stresses the absence of any foreign influences. This tendency unfortunately seems to have dominated cultural attitudes throughout the recent history of the region. The confusion between grassroots regional or ethnic cultural identity and top-down state-crafted cultural stereotypes has often proven to be highly problematic and in some extreme cases to be very ugly indeed. In any case it has certainly proven

to be counter-productive with regards to the continuing inter-regional flow of influences so necessary for the continued flourishing of the region's rich musical traditions. It is of course true that most people in all of the countries in question, do usually have at least a fair knowledge of their own local culture, but they equally have little if any knowledge of the culture of their immediate neighbors. Add to this the rather heavy handed cultural hegemony frequently exerted by the western world resulting in anomalies such as massive numbers of the youth of the region being fully informed, down to the last detail, about Lady Gaga's latest hit but without a clue as to what their next door neighbor, so to speak, is up to culturally.

So now to my proposal, if any of the cultures of the region in question are to be able to continue to give rise to inspiring cultural prototypes which will encourage full-fledged artistic participation in them by their very own people, this will necessitate a similar network of inter cultural exchange and dialogue as that which existed in the past. A similar exchange and dialogue as that which in previous ages gave rise to each of the remarkable individual traditions which we still encounter, albeit in a state of relative stagnation and, in many cases, decay. At best many of these traditions have been relegated to the role of "folkloric relics" and at worst to that of cheap fodder for an even cheaper pop culture which is little more than a poor imitation of the not so enviable pop culture of the western world.

The rekindling of this dialogue actually requires a whole new cultural perspective on the part of all of its participants, a perspective which entails a complete rethinking of what is generally perceived as cultural politics in general. For a start, it is necessary for all to clearly recognize that any form of cultural interaction, by definition, is a process of give and take, it is an exchange. Regrettably, official cultural policies, especially in our region of the world, seem to overstress the "give" and to

understate the "take". In other words everyone seems to be very proud of the "masculine" or, as the Chinese would say, "yang" aspect of their culture (that which disseminates, which influences others, the assertive aspect), but they also seem to want to play down somewhat the "feminine", the "yin" aspect (the receptive, accepting or assimilating aspect). It's as though they feel their identity to be *affirmed* by the fact that they have *influenced* others and that it is somehow *negated* and lost when they are *influenced by* others. This attitude however is quite simply unrealistic. If we are not able to assimilate and to work creatively with that which is offered to us, what hope do we have of actually having something to give when our turn to do so comes, unless of course we believe in virgin births which, for the last 2014 years at least, don't seem to have been a very regular occurrence. In culture, and most specifically in the arts, every creative act is the result of the interplay of give and take. It really is that simple.

For many years now I have been the artistic director at the Musical Workshop Labyrinth, currently situated in the village of Houdetsi here on Crete. One of our primary activities at Labyrinth is the organization on a regular basis of seminars and master classes focusing on the various modal musical traditions of the world. Throughout our many years of activity we have been host to literally dozens of some of modal music's greatest masters as well as to thousands of students. During this time we ourselves however have never sought to actually promote one culture or another, we don't even try to promote modal music in general. All that we do is to give to all who come to us a place and a chance to be themselves and to interact on equal terms with all of the others with as little interference as possible from us ourselves or anyone else. The result inevitably has been that each discovers the other, or to be more precise, the others, in his or her own time and manner and each gradually establishes a dialogue, often leading to a full fledged cooperation or collaboration with the others according to his or her own needs and nature. I could

recount for hours literally hundreds of stories about all that I've witnessed at Labyrinth over the years reflecting the amazing ability that people have not only to actually work together, but also just to simply enjoy each other's company regardless of ethnic, religious or cultural background, but unfortunately time will not allow for that right now. Suffice it to say that any intelligent person can't help but to realize that the only viable future for our world is simply this: ***increased cooperation between different people of different backgrounds on equal terms in the service of a goal which is clearly and demonstrably beneficial to all.*** Applying this general axiom to my "obsession", modal music, I sincerely believe that the island of Crete, where we find ourselves today, in the very middle of the Mediterranean, with cultural ties to and good relations with east and west, north and south, is an ideal location to host, with courtesy, subtlety, and humility, just such a many sided dialogue, which is so necessary for the continued cultural integrity and viability of all concerned. As I said previously, I've seen this in practice on a small scale at Labyrinth in Houdetsi, not only how the individual musicians integrate harmoniously amongst themselves, but also, very importantly, how the Cretan people themselves, with their long history of hospitality and creative assimilation of a myriad of cultural influences respond in a very positive way to just such a challenge. It's no mere coincidence that people from as far afield as Afghanistan, North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Transcaucasia, the Balkans, Turkey, India, Spain, and countless other regions of the vast geographical area in which we find modal music, all felt very much at home here. Very important also is that the music of Crete itself clearly belongs to this greater family of modal traditions. Who knows, perhaps if we're able to successfully establish such a dialogue and cooperation focusing on the humble subject of modal musical traditions, it might even serve as a good example for the establishment of a similar dialogue relevant to other issues rather more critical to our survival as a species.

