GUIDELINES FOR HARMONIZING ENGLISH-LANGUAGE FOLK SONGS: SPECIAL PROBLEMS

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In a previous article in this journal,[1] I outlined some general considerations involved in harmonizing English-Canadian folk songs. These considerations included the singing ranges of those who will use one's setting, the performance capabilities of those who might perform one's arrangement, one's taste for relatively simple or complex harmonizations, and the underlying harmonic structure of the songs. In the previous article, I showed how such factors might affect one's choice of a key, the frequency and rhythmic arrangement of the chords one selects, and one's assessment of prominent notes in the melodies. I dealt with these factors in the earlier study, because they might emerge in the process of harmonizing any English-language folk song. But I illustrated my approach to the problems that arise from a consideration of these factors by means of songs that can be harmonized effectively using only I, II$^{(7)}$, IV and V$^{(7)}$ chords, because such songs are by far the most frequent in the repertoire and the easiest to perform (from the point of view of the novice instrumentalist). In order to broaden the considerations dealt with in the earlier article, I now undertake a discussion of special problems that arise in the harmonization of English-language folk songs — in particular, problems that involve formal aspects of the songs, modal melodies, melodies with gapped scales and melodies having so-called "mixed modes."

FORMAL ASPECTS OF THE SONGS

Like most classical pieces, the majority of English-language folk songs begin and end on the I-chord. Every so often, however, one encounters an English-language folk tune that begins on V (see my setting of "Kitardine," Example 1, below) or even IV (see "The Doctor-Man," Example 3, in the article cited above), and from time to time one runs into a tune that has a "circular" ending on V (see my arrangement of "Going to Boston," Example 2, below).

The main internal units or sections of English-language folk tunes consist of phrases, each phrase corresponding to a line of text. In the adult repertoire, lines of text are generally the largest units marked off by rhyme (see Examples 2,3,5 and 6 in the article cited above, and Example 1 in the present article, where lines are indicated by commas at the top of the music).[2] In the children's repertoire, one finds lines marked off by rhyme, too, but one also finds lines, half-lines and quarter-lines of text that are repeated as a whole and lines that do not rhyme (see Examples 4 and 7 in the article cited above, and Example 2 in the present article, where lines are again indicated by commas at the top of the music).

In classical music, the types of chord progressions that appear at the ends of phrases (i.e., cadences) tend to be quite restricted as formulas and are given names such as perfect, imperfect, deceptive and plagal. In English-language folk song, there is more variety in cadences. For example, plagal cadences (consisting of a progression from IV to I) appear not

only after perfect (i.e., V to I) cadences or deceptive cadences (V to VI) and at the end of the whole piece, as is the norm in classical music, but also in isolation (i.e., without any prior perfect or deceptive cadence) and in the middle of a piece (see measures 3 and 4, and 15 and 16 in my setting of "Kitardine," Example 2 in the article cited above). Moreover, unlike classical pieces, English-language folk songs frequently feature cadences in which there is a progression from a "non-IV-chord" (e.g., a I-chord or a V-chord) to a IV-chord (e.g., I or V to IV: see measures 3 and 4 of my arrangement of "The Larrigans," Example 3, below).
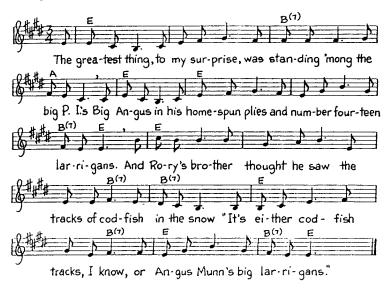
MUSICAL EXAMPLES:

Example 1. "Kitardine," after Randall Dibblee and Dorothy Dibblee, *Folk Songs from Prince Edward Island* (Summerside, P.E.I., Williams and Crue, © 1973): 42.

Example 2. "Going to Boston," after Edith Fowke, *Sally Go Round the Sun. 300 Songs, Rhymes and Games of Canadian Children* (Toronto, McLelland and Stewart, 1969): 39.

Example 3. "The Larrigans," after Dibblee and Dibblee: 34.

The grea-test thing, to my sur-prise, was stan-ding 'mong the big P. I's Big An-gus in his home-spun plies and num-ber four-teen lar-ri-gans. And Ro-ry's bro-ther thought he saw the tracks of cod-fish in the snow "It's ei-ther cod- fish tracks, I know, or An-gus Munn's big lar-ri- gans."

In general, many English-language adult folk songs appear to be "skewed" towards the IV-chord, in the sense that the IV-chord plays a much more prominent role in these songs than it does in other styles. In addition, progressions that function as cadences in English-language folk songs are much wider in scope than in other styles. Indeed, any progression between two different chords might function as a cadence in English-language folk song. And the degree of contrast between the two chords is sometimes very slight; for example, a progression from a V-chord to a V7-chord might serve a cadential function.

By and large, internal cadences (i.e., all cadences except the last) tend not to be very final; for example, they tend not to be, in the terms of conservatory harmony texts, "perfect" (i.e., V to I) or "plagal" (i.e., IV to I). However, avoidance of finality is not universally observed in English-language folk songs. In particular, certain tune-types tend to have internal cadences ending on a I-chord. Many tunes of what one can term the "come-all-ye type," in which the repetition pattern of the melody can be summarized by the formula ABBA, ABB'A or ABCA, generally feature a final cadence (e.g., V to I or IV to I) at the end of the first line as well as at the end of the fourth, last line (see measures 3 and 4, and 15 and 16 of "The Doctor-Man," "My Seventy-Six Geared Wheel," and "Kitardine," Examples 3 and 5 in the previous study, and Example 1, above, respectively). Many songs having the form AA'BA', which might have been borrowed from urban popular music, feature a final cadence at the end of the second line (i.e., the end of the first half of the melody) as well as the end of the last, fourth line (see measures 7 and 8, and 15 and 16 of "The Battle of the Windmill," Example 2 in the previous study). Similarly, several tunes with the form ABCB or ABA'B have final cadences at the end of the second line (i.e., the end of the first half) as well as at the end of the fourth, last line (see measures 8 and 16 of "The Larrigans," Exam-

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ple 3, above). Otherwise, however, internal cadences tend not to be final and consist of progressions to IV, V or V^7 in the I-II$^{(7)}$p'-IV-V$^{(7)}$ style. Fairly frequent are cadences at the end of the first half in which there is a progression from a II$^{(7)}$-chord to a V$^{(7)}$-chord (see measures 7 and 8, and 11 and 12 of my setting of "The Petty Harbour Bait Skiff," Example 4, below). And especially in the children's songs, one often finds that a phrase ends without any cadence at all (see the first four measures of "The Mulberry Bush," Example 4 in the previously cited article; the first two measures and measures five and six of "The Jolly Old Miller," Example 6 in the previously cited article; the first four measures of "Old Roger is Dead," Example 7 in the previously cited article; and the first four measures of "Going to Boston," Example 2, above).

Example 4. "The Petty Harbour Bait Skiff," after Edith Fowke, *The Penguin Book of Canadian Folk Songs* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973): 44.

Within a phrase in the I-II$^{(7)}$-IV-V$^{(7)}$ style, just about any permutation of the available chords might be found, with the exception that a II$^{(7)}$-chord is always followed by a V$^{(7)}$-chord (i.e., not by a I-chord or a IV-chord). In addition one can note that when a V-chord and a V$^{(7)}$-chord are used next to each other, it is generally more effective to have the V-chord immediately followed by the V$^{(7)}$-chord rather than *vice versa* for much the same reason as one finds for this practice being recommended in conservatory harmony, namely, to avoid the anti-climatic drop in tension that would result if the seventh-chord (V^7) were immediately followed by the triad (V). (Much the same holds for the II-chord *vis-à-vis* the II^7-chord: if both are used in immediate succession, II should precede II^7, not *vice versa*). Furthermore, one can note that one will provide a firmer support for the singer if one uses a V^7-chord (rather than a V-chord) when the seventh of the chord (e.g., g of the notes a, c$^\#$, e and g

that belong to the A[7]-chord in D major) is prominent in the melody. (Again, much the same could be said of the II-chord *vis-à-vis* the II[7]-chord, but the seventh of the II[7]-chord (e.g., d of the notes e, g#, b and d in D major) seems to be much less frequently used as a prominent note in this style.

MODAL MELODIES[3]

Quite frequently, one encounters modal melodies in English-language folk songs. One can generally decide whether a melody is modal or not by examining its last note. If the last note is doh (relative to the major key that is indicated in the key signature), then the melody is probably major, whereas if the last note is not doh, then the melody is probably in one of the modes.[4] The most frequent modes that one encounters in English-language folk songs appear to be Mixolydian, which ends on sol, Dorian, which ends on re, and Aeolian, which ends on la.
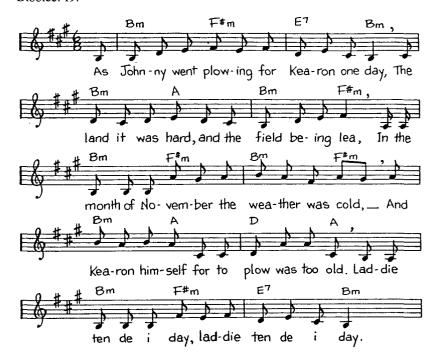
How can one harmonize a modal melody of the sort that one encounters in English-language folk songs? One cannot use the I, II[(7)], IV or V[(7)] chords as one would in most major melodies. However, one can still employ some of the guidelines that were introduced in my treatment of major melodies, particularly the guidelines concerning harmonic rhythm and prominent notes.

With regard to harmonic rhythm, one finds that the injunction to employ as few chords as possible is still useful. And just as the case of major melodies, one will find in the case of modal melodies that effective harmonizations result if one tries to make sure that relatively prominent notes of the melody are members of the chord being used at a given time.
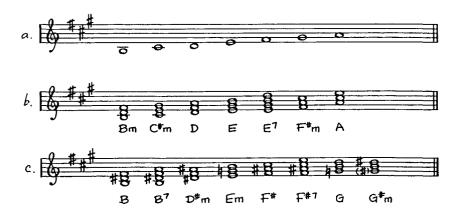
In contrast with the situation one encounters when harmonizing most major melodies, one finds that there is generally a wider array of chords available for an effective setting when one harmonizes a modal tune. In particular, there are generally several minor triads, just the sort of chords that would not appear in a I-II[(7)]-IV-V[(7)] harmonization. In order to determine which chords are most readily available for the simplest sort of harmonization of a modal melody, one can undertake two steps: tabulating the notes of the mode and tabulating the triads that arise immediately from that mode.

In order to tabulate the notes of the mode, one can take as one's starting-point the last note (or *finalis*) of the melody. In the case of "When Johnny Went Plowing for Kearon" (Example 5), the notes of the melody, arranged upwards from the last note, would be b, c#, d, e, f#, g# and a (see Example 6a). In order to determine what triads emerge most immediately from this mode, one can erect triads on various scale degrees (see Example 6b). Those triads that are a) made up of notes belonging to the mode, and b) major or minor (i.e., so-called "common" chords) will serve for the most straightforward harmonization of the tune. (Note that no triad is built on g# in Example 6b, because a diminished chord would result). In addition, any chords that have a dominant-seventh structure (e.g., E[7] in Example 6b) might serve as well, since chords with this structure represent the simplest extension of a basically triadic vocabulary. Thereupon, one can apply the guidelines for harmonic rhythm and prominent notes (see above) and arrive at a fairly workable setting (see my chords for "When Johnny Went Plowing for Kearon" at the top of Example 5).

Example 5. "When Johnny Went Plowing for Kearon," after Dibblee and Dibblee: 19.

As John-ny went plow-ing for Kea-ron one day, The land it was hard, and the field be-ing lea, In the month of No-vem-ber the wea-ther was cold, __ And Kea-ron him-self for to plow was too old. Lad-die ten de i day, lad-die ten de i day.

Example 6. Notes employed in, and chords available for, melody of "When Johnny Went Plowing for Kearon," Example 5, above.

a.

b. Bm C#m D E E7 F#m A

c. B B7 D#m Em F# F#7 G G#m

In addition, one should note that other guidelines for the I-II[(7)]-IV-V[(7)] type apply for modal melodies. In particular, it is typical, though not universal, for modal melodies to begin and end on the tonic chord (which, in the case of modal melodies, is the triad built on the last note — in "When Johnny Went Plowing for Kearon," this would be the B-minor chord). Moreover, in adult modal melodies — virtually all the modal tunes appear to be adult in provenance — it is typical for each phrase to conclude with a cadence, which, again, can be any progression in which there is at least a slight contrast between chords. Further, one should observe that though there are in general seven chords that are immediately available to harmonize a modal melody (three major and three minor triads as well as a chord with the dominant-seventh structure), one need not employ the immediate resources to the full. By and large, though there is opportunity for greater harmonic variety in setting a modal tune, the guideline according to which one avoids unnecessary complexity often leads one to a very simple arrangement. However, although such an arrangement might be quite simple, a modal melody generally leads to quite a colourful harmonization in comparison with a major, I-II[(7)]-IV-V[(7)] type of melody. This is largely because of the presence of minor triads in most modal settings and because of the appearance of major and dominant-seventh-style chords on different degrees than would be the case in a major song.

MELODIES WITH GAPPED SCALES

Frequently, in English-language folk songs, one encounters tunes that are clearly modal but that do not have all seven notes of a given mode. For instance, in "Jimmy Hughes's Feastio" (Example 7), one finds that only six of the seven scale degrees are presented in the tune: b, d, e, f#, g, and a (cf. Example 8a). As before, one can begin to determine what chords are immediately available for one's harmonization by writing out the notes of the melody upwards from the last note (as in Example 8a, again). However, if one does so, one finds that there are gaps in the scale: in "Jimmy Hughes's Feastio," for instance, there is no note in the melody that corresponds to the degree between b and d. The absence of degrees can have a great effect on one's choice of chords for such a melody. Essentially, there are two ways of handling such a situation: the literal and the imaginative.

Example 7. "Jimmy Hughes's Feastio," after Dibblee and Dibblee: 12.

sto- ri- o; Let Grit and To- ry all a- gree, For

he's both Grit and To - ri - o.

Example 8. Notes employed in, and chords available for, "Jimmy Hughes's Feastio," Example 7, above.
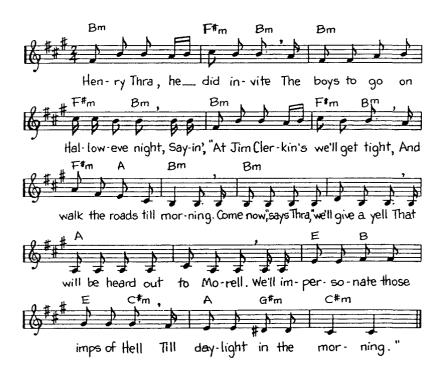

Bm (C) D (D⁷) Em (F♯m) G (Am)(A) (A⁷)

According to a literal approach, one might choose to employ only those chords that can be directly derived from the notes of the mode that actually appear in the melody. In the case of "Jimmy Hughes's Feastio," these chords would be Bmi, D, Emi and G. According to an imaginative approach, one might regard the presence of gaps in the melody as an opportunity rather than a restriction. For instance, in "Jimmy Hughes's Feastio," one might view the absence of a note between b and d as an opportunity to employ c-natural or c-sharp as a note in a chord. If one does so, one finds that the following chords are available: Bmi, (C), D, (D⁷), where imaginative chords are placed in parentheses (as in Example 8b).

Depending on one's choice of approach, quite different settings of a gapped tune might result. Two such settings are indicated in the chord symbols above the music in Example 7: the bottom row of chords represents a literal approach; the top row, an imaginative approach. By and large, an imaginative approach gives rise to a more colourful arrangement by virtue of there being a larger number of chords from which to choose. However, as was the case with the relatively straight-forward modal melodies considered above, there is no obligation to employ the full resources that one has discerned, and in many cases, an effective arrangement can be quite restrained in its chordal vocabulary.

MELODIES IN MIXED MODES

Quite often, when dealing with English-language folk songs, one finds that a melody seems to imply more than one mode. If one writes out the notes of the melody upwards from the last note, it is generally evident how this effect is created. An instance of mixed modality can be discerned in "Thra," Example 9. I have written out the notes used in the melody upwards from the last note in Example 10a. In Example 10a, one can discern a frequent indicator of mixed modality: the appearance of two versions of a given scale degree. In this case, the ambivalent scale degree is the second from the bottom, where one can observe that both d and d# are used. Such a situation opens up the possibility of using more chords than one might have if the tune were not mixed in its modality. The immediate resources of "Thra" are listed in Example 10b, and a harmonization employing some of these resources is presented at the top of the music in Example 9. Again, one can note that a more colourful arrangement results if one makes use of a wider range of chords.[5]
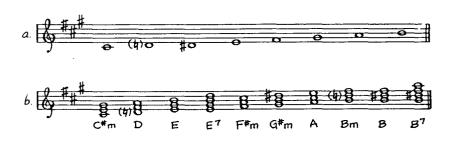
Example 9. "Thra," after Dibblee and Dibblee: 16.

Generally, one finds in English-language folk song that the third, sixth and seventh degrees are somewhat unstable. In melodies with gapped

scales, one or more of these degrees is often omitted, and in mixed-mode tunes, there are frequently two or more versions of one or more of these degrees. Accordingly, when one harmonizes modal melodies, it is often valuable to consider the chordal possibilities that would arise if both versions of these degrees were available even though only one or neither might actually be present. In harmonizing "When Johnny Went Plowing for Kearon" (Example 5, above), one might consider the possibility of using d#, g-natural and a#, in various chords. The chords that would arise in such a situation would be B, B[7], D#mi, Emi, F#, F# F#[7], G and G#mi (see Example 6c). Once again, it should be noted that such additional chords are merely some of the many resources that are immediately available. Depending on one's esthetic and practical aims as well as the structure of the tune, one might or might not use all, any or none of the "extra" possibilities.
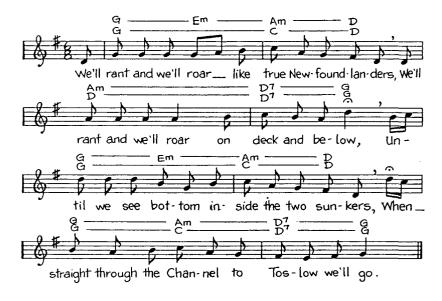
Example 10. Notes employed in, and chords available for, melody of "Thra," Example 9, above.
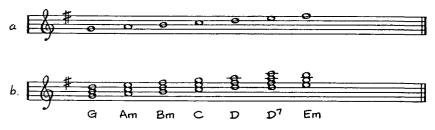

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Towards the outset of this study (in the previously cited article), I note that, in English-language folk song, a) some major melodies might be harmonized using minor chords (i.e., common chords other than I, II[(7)], IV and V[(7)]), b) some minor melodies might appear, and c) chromaticism (as indicated by accidentals) might arise. One might be motivated to employ minor chords in a major melody in order to achieve variety. For instance, although "The Ryans and the Pittmans" (Example 11) can be harmonized with just the I, IV and V[(7)] chords, one could also introduce minor chords from time to time in order to achieve a richer, more variegated effect. Example 12a describes the notes that are used in the melody. Example 12b outlines the immediately available major and minor chords (and the dominant seventh, D[7]). And Example 11 presents two harmonizations of the tune: the bottom row of chords consists only of the I, IV, and V[(7)] chords; the top row of chords includes minor triads as well (Bmi and Emi). Once again, one can note that the immediately available chords are drawn from notes of the melody, and the full resources of available chords need not be employed.

Example 11. "The Ryans and the Pittmans," after Fowke, *The Penguin Book of Canadian Folk Songs:* 42.

Example 12. Notes employed in, and chords available for, melody of "The Ryans and the Pittmans," Example 11, above.

With regard to minor melodies, it should be pointed out that in English-language folk songs, "natural" minor (i.e., Aeolian mode) seems to be employed more often than the so-called "harmonic" minor or "melodic" minor. In any case, one can harmonize such minor melodies, whichever form they might take, according to the guidelines provided above for modal melodies (and also, as appropriate, according to the guidelines provided above for gapped and mixed-mode tunes). Much the same holds for chromatic melodies, which can generally be treated in quite the same way as mixed-mode tunes.
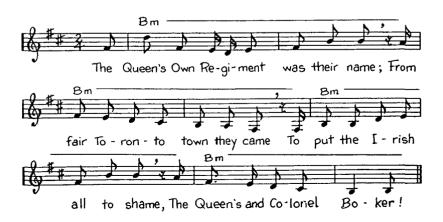
It should be emphasized again that the simpler an arrangement is, the more accessible it will be to a broad readership (or "player-ship"). The potential for simplicity in English-language folk-song arrangements is often far greater than it might appear to be at first. For concluding illustrations of this point, one can examine my settings of "Merchants of the

Bay" and "A Fenian Song" (Examples 13 and 14). In the first, only three chords are employed, although many more are immediately available, and in the second, where, again, there are several chords immediately available, only one need be used.

Example 13. "Merchants of the Bay," after Dibblee and Dibblee: 23.

Kind friends, at-ten-tion if you please, and lis-ten for a-while__ To these few lines a-bout old times and all the la-test tyle.__ By a ri-ver-side, where fiows the tide, there stands a vil-lage gay;__ It will ap-pear five miles from here; it's called Saint Pe-ter's Bay. __

Example 14. "A Fenian Song," after Fowke, *The Penguin Book of Canadian Folk Songs:* 17.

The Queen's Own Re-gi-ment was their name; From fair To-ron-to town they came To put the I-rish all to shame, The Queen's and Co-lonel Bo-ker!

It seems to me, as well, that there are definite harmonic styles in English-language folk song. I have already pointed out that a certain group of children's songs can be harmonized with only I and $V^{(7)}$ chords and that a large number of adult songs can be harmonized with only I, IV and $V^{(7)}$ chords. There would appear to be other groups of songs that have distinctive harmonic profiles, and discerning such profiles might lead to a richer view of how the songs were composed (consciously or unconsciously) and a finer account of the various styles that exist in English-language folk song. In this regard, if one were to examine the melodies from a chordal point of view, it would seem methodologically prudent to adopt the procedure of seeking out the simplest harmonization first and systematically keeping track of the most immediate elaborations of such a simple chordal framework.

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NOTES

1. Jay Rahn, "Guidelines for Harmonizing English-Canadian Folk Songs: General Considerations," *Canadian Folk Music Journal,* 14(1986): 35-48.
2. Note that the tune of "The Jolly Old Miller" (Example 6 in the article cited above) was originally the melody of the American adult song "Turkey in the Straw" (or the minstrel song "Old Zip Coon"). In its prosody, the children's song of "The Jolly Old Miller" follows the conventions of adult practice.
3. I am greatly indebted in this part of the study to the exemplary harmonizations made by Keith MacMillan in *The Penguin Book of Canadian Folk Songs,* Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973 and by Richard Johnston in *Folk Songs of Canada,* Waterloo, Waterloo Music, 1954.
4. For ease of discussion, I am presuming that major is not a mode, though one often encounters references to the "major mode."
5. "Thra" appears to be a mixture of gapped B-Aeolian C#-Aeolian, though other interpretations of this distinctive melody might be advanced.

Resumé: *Jay Rahn discute les problèmes particuliers aux chansons caractérisées par 1) des aspects formels; 2) des mélodies modales; 3) des mélodies aux gammes «trouées»; et 4) des mélodies contenant plusieurs modes. Il base sa discussion sur l'harmonisation d'un échantillon représentatif de chansons folkloriques canadiennes.*