

Musical Musing No. 3:

Ziggy Harpdust sips Mountain Dew ... and senses its modal spirit!

(Preliminary remark (Ziggy can't do without¹): A first draft of this paper was finished the day I embarked on the journey to Sore Fingers Week (SFW) 2009. Among the many tunes our tutor, Karen Mueller, taught us then was also an O'Carolan tune, which seemed to fit in with this paper's reflections. So, after returning from England, I began adding a few paragraphs at the end. And then I had problems finishing this piece because other projects needed more attention. "Haste makes waste", anyway! ... Well, to tell the truth, over time I totally forgot about it after all that fresh input from the Sore Fingers October Weekend (tutored by June Maugery) and another SFW (tutored by Cathy Britell), and over re-building my Web site (<http://ZiggyHarpdust.net>) and putting up all the new content. But the hiatus of a year and a half ends now in a heroic effort of trying to remember what my line of reasoning originally was and to which conclusion it was intended to lead! ©)

The song *That Old Mountain Dew* (or, in the following shortly: OMD) will be in the focus of today's musical musing, cf. the first two pictures below.

I encountered this song so many years ago that I don't remember really when, but surely long, long before I have heard of autoharps the first time. I think this song once got my attention because of its rhythmic structure that is quite different from traditional German folk and dance music, a rhythm in clear contrast to the beat. This rhythm is accomplished by lengthening and sometimes also raising notes which actually receive no stress from their position within the measure.

You can see this effect on page 1 of the sheet music (see the first picture, below) in the first measure, in the third one, in the fifth and in so many more — most striking examples being the third and the fifth measure on page 2 (see the second picture). This is the one feature that kept this song interesting to me over all those years; the other feature will be looked into later.

In early 2009, reading a phrase like "refused by only few", I was reminded of the song again and decided to deviate from my agenda of songs to learn on the autoharp and to tackle this one. Fortunately, I found a version (for electric organ) in a songbook, from which I took the classification ("Traditional Country Folk") as well as the tune and the lyrics. On my own, I chose the chords for melody playing on autoharp according, trivially, to the basic need of having the required note in the chord and according to what I thought most appropriate considering the flow of the tune as well as the feeling the song evokes in me. (That is then the usual opportunity for adding colour to the arrangement.)

When I first got aware of the lyrics, decades ago, I was then totally unaware of Appalachian mountain customs and assumed in my youthful ingenuousness² and naivety that the words speak of a kind of very special spring water, a tasty mineral water perhaps. Meanwhile I got wiser (a tiny wee little bit!) and suspect now that Mountain Dew is not heaven-sent any more than is Moonshine; on the contrary, there may be a devilish source for these kinds of stuff. This disillusionment is one of two reasons for my feeling that minor chords ought to have a place in this tune.

Let me (seemingly) digress a bit. With "modal" tunes, especially those of the Anglo-Celtic tradition, minor chords are quite common and therefore less "emotionally loaded" than they are in the musical tradition here in Germany, at least for me and for people with whom I discussed this matter. This heavy emotional undertone is felt, however, quite commonly worldwide, a fact I illustrate here with an interesting statement:

¹ The parenthesis refers to preliminary remarks in earlier instalments of Ziggy's Musical Musings. The first one was titled "A glimpse into DustyHarpZiggy's Creative Laboratory" and began thus: "(Preliminary remark: Contrary to dust on the bible, which comes from not reading it and is therefore deplorable (as we know from a famous song), the dust on Ziggy's autoharp comes from having the 'harp lying on top of the nearby desk in order to have it always ready for being taken up and played. So DustyHarpZiggy does not at all feel guilty for the dust on the 'harp!') [I'd like to add today that that famous song, "Dust on the Bible", can be found on Drew Smith's wonderful CD "Now that's Autoharp!"]."

The second instalment of Ziggy's Musical Musings had the title "DustyHarpZiggy's First Selection of German Folk Songs" and the "(Preliminary remark: Last time, DustyHarpZiggy revealed the reason for the dust on his 'harp. This time it's revelation time again, namely concerning his real name: It is of course Ziggy Harpdust! Then there is also his pen name, which you'll find on the sheet music shown below. ©)". That "pen name", Siegfried Knöpfler, will be used in the future only for really original work, no longer for autoharp arrangements.

Both of these earlier instalments appeared in the "Autoharp Notes", the UKA (UK Autoharps) club magazine, the first one in the Fall 2008 issue, the second in the Spring 2009 issue. The first was written answering a call for contributions, the second reported on a presentation given at Sore Fingers October Weekend (SFOW) 2008. Both papers can be found on the Internet (e.g. by asking Google for DustyHarpZiggy or go directly to <http://ZiggyHarpdust.net>).

² Please note that my teenage years' attitude was ingenious while you're reading here an ingenious paper, aren't you?

"Aw rite, s'posin' he has a geetar on night guard. S'posin' he's a settin' there on his hoss a'strummin'. The moonlight allofaquick catches on the shiny surface and flicks in the eye of some half-asleep steer. Whammy! The lid's off! An' what does he do with the geetar? Waa-a-al, he might could swang 'er round n' clout the rump of his hoss t'git a headstart on them boogered beeves, but chances'll take it the cayuse has already lit out like a fart in a windstorm and left the pore poke a'pickin' minor chords fer his requiem." (Shorty Mac McGinnis, recorded in Katie Lee's³ book, *Ten Thousand Goddam' Cattle*, Northland Press / Flagstaff, 1976)

My point is not that a black autoharp with a matt finish and preferably rusty strings might better fit a singing cowboy on night watch, my point is that cowboys find minor chords appropriate for requiems. (And you, dear reader, might see that I've meanwhile studied not only the customs of the eastern US but that of the western as well.)

That Old Mountain Dew

Traditional Country Folk Song

Autoharp chords for melody playing by Ziggy Harpdust, 2009

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of six staves of music with lyrics underneath. Chords are indicated above the notes. The lyrics are: "I know a spot that I'd like to re-late, Where you lay down a dol-lar or two, If you hold up your mug, They will sell you a jug Of That Good Old Moun-tzain Dew, They call it That Old Moun-tain Dew, And those that re-fuse it are few, You may".

On the other hand, coming back to OMD, I always associated this tune somehow with modern Country Music and so I wanted also a more modern chordal feeling. In accordance with this, I especially like the chord sequence Am – Em – Bm – A7 – D7 – G for the phrase at the end of the tune's A and B parts, "Of/For That Good Old Mountain Dew". And I think, the "church ending" at the end of the B part's repetition, G – C – Cm – G, is particularly apt.

³ See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katie_Lee_\(singer\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katie_Lee_(singer)) ← the closing parenthesis is to be part of the URL!

G C D⁷ C G Am Em
 go 'round the bend, But you'll come back a - gain For That

Bm A⁷ D⁷ G C G C
 Good Old Moun - tain Dew, They

G C D⁷ G D⁷ G D⁷
 call it That Old Moun- tain Dew, And

C Am Em Am G C
 those that ref - fuse it are few, You may

G C D⁷ C G Am Em
 go 'round the bend, But you'll come back a - gain For That

Bm A⁷ D⁷ G C Cm G
 Good Old Moun - tain Dew,

At the beginning of this paper I pointed out the special rhythmic structure of OMD. On closer inspection, one sees that its words have a dactyl metrics (i.e. a 3/4 rhythmic structure), whereas the tune is in 4/4 time. So OMD's rhythm results from casting a 3/4 structure into a 4/4 mould, in a way of speaking. This observation suggests testing a change of the tune's meter to 3/4 time. And so I did, see below, picture no. 3.

In the process of changing the meter I followed a few simple rules like "Change the minim (half note) to a crotchet (quarter note) in a measure where there are a minim and two crotchets." or "Change one of a pair of minims to a crotchet." or "Remove the dot from a dotted minim." or "Change a semibreve (whole note) into a dotted minim."

I made the new sheet actually not by making changes in a copy of the original; instead I entered the notes into a fresh sheet (a technically easier way!). And when I had the notes there "naked", without words and chord symbols, I suddenly realised that the melody does not contain notes on the fourth and seventh step of the scale: *The OMD tune is pentatonic!*

Moreover, it is "modal", of Dorian mode, I think, but I'm not sure. Since the 4th and the 7th note of the scale are missing in the tune, the key signature can be – more or less – safely derived only from the ending note, 'g' in this case. So I think it is correct to keep the key signature of G.

Anyway, I observed that I only need the *I* and *ii* chords, that is here the G and the Am chords, for being able to play all the tune's notes. Nevertheless, I also use a C chord in certain places; it seems indispensable in the fifth measure, the first one in line two (and because of the structural parallel, also the first one in line 6) in the picture below.

So this clandestine modal character of the OMD tune, at least not obvious in the way it is usually played, is at the same time the second reason for having minor chords in the autoharp arrangement of the original OMD and the second feature that makes this tune so interesting.

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3/4 Mountain Dew

3/4 time version and autoharp melody playing chords by Ziggy Harpdust, 2009

Let's have now a look at the tune ***Bridget Cruise, Third Air*** by Turlough O'Carolan.

It is often deplored that we have only the melody line of O'Carolan's compositions, without (reliant) clues about harmonisation he might have used. This lack, however, is also an opportunity for own creativity — with the additional advantage that nobody can prove you wrong!

Bridget Cruise, Third Air (called BC3 in the following) was one of the tunes that Karen Mueller taught the autoharp class at SFW 2009. Her arrangement for melody playing this tune suggests to use just the ordinary *I*, *IV* and *V* chords — except for measure 9 where the tune modulates one "step to the left" in the circle of fifths, from the key of D into the key of G, explicitly marked by me in the picture below.

When I first heard the BC3 tune – a few days after I've been working on the "3/4 Mountain Dew" tune – I was immediately reminded of that other one, a fact easily explained if you look at the notes of BC3: Apart from the stretch where the tune shifts the tonic from D to G, the tune omits the 4th and 7th steps from the scale just as OMD does. In other words, except for the line before the last one in the picture below, BC3 is also

pentatonic and, moreover, also playable using just the *I* and *ii* chords. Here, in the key of D, they are the D major and E minor chords (and the G major and the A minor chords in the line where the tonic shifts to G). Although I employ here at singular places also other chords (just to add a bit more "colour"), the modal character remains undisturbed.

Rested assured that I can't be proven wrong, I boldly present here the "modalized" version of BC3:

Bridget Cruise, Third Air (Turlough O'Carolan)

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Autoharp chords for melody playing by Ziggy Harpdust, 2009

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (D major) and a 3/4 time signature. It consists of four staves of music. Above the notes, autoharp chords are indicated. The first staff starts with a measure rest, followed by notes with chords D, Em, D, Em, D, Em, D, Em, D, G, D, and Em. The second staff begins at measure 5 with chords D, Em, D, Em, D, Em, D, A7, G, Am, and G. The third staff begins at measure 9 with chords Am, G, Am, G, Am, G, Am, G, Am, G, D7, Am, G, A7, D, and Em. The fourth staff begins at measure 13 with chords D, Em, D, Em, D, Em, D, Em, D, G, and D. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

By the way, "septimophobes" may of course substitute A and D chords for my A7 and D7 without losing much of the flavour. I use here the seventh chords because they sharpen the contour of the tonicization.

Concluding my Musical Musing No. 3, let me summarise the twofold discovery I reported here: First, in order to understand a tune's rhythmic structure, it may be helpful to change the tune's time signature, thus arriving at a new vantage point from where gaining new insight may be facilitated. Second, many a tune may hide a modal trait behind the ordinary major mode appearance. "Modalizing" such a familiar tune, i.e. uncovering its modal character, may open up for that tune a wholly new career, at least as a subject that captures my interest and thus makes it an object of my musing!

I hope, of course, that the tunes and the arrangements presented here also interest my readers.

(End Note: Ziggy's musical musings are brought to you by Siegfried Knöpfler ... or was it the other way 'round? I'm afraid I have to ask if I ever meet one of them. [And who, the heck, is "I"??])