

Russell A. Kahmann

[pmakahmann@hotmail.com](mailto:pmakahmann@hotmail.com)

Modal Ambiguity and the Hybrid Mode in the Music of Gryphon

Presented at the 2008 meeting of the  
Music Theory Midwest Conference

During the time following the British and American folk revivals (c. 1955-1975)<sup>1</sup> and at the height of the progressive rock movement (early and mid-1970's), the British band Gryphon entered the musical scene with its self-titled debut album, *Gryphon* (1973). The album contained folk songs and arrangements of traditional tunes that highlight the early music influences of the founding band members. Throughout the next three albums, the music of Gryphon underwent a rapid development of style, timbre, and harmonic language. **Examples 1 and 2** in the handout illustrate the changes that occurred in band membership and instrumentation. One specific aspect of Gryphon's harmonic language will be examined today through analysis of three compositions, taken from the albums *Gryphon*, *Midnight Mushrumps*, and *Raindance*. Although much of Gryphon's music utilizes the Ionian mode and harmonic minor scale, in sections of modal ambiguity, the band pulled from a distinct collection of pitches that draws upon inflections from multiple modes. It is this hybrid mode that will be examined here today.

Before presenting any analysis, I feel it necessary to present a brief history of the band's founding members; their diverse musical backgrounds play a role in aspects of the band's harmonic language. Gryphon began as a trio, with members Richard Harvey, Brian Gulland, and Graeme Taylor.<sup>2</sup> Richard Harvey was trained in clarinet, theory, harmony, and choral singing as a youth and studied clarinet<sup>3</sup> at the Royal College of Music in London.<sup>4</sup> Through recorded

---

<sup>1</sup> This twenty-year time period is a generalized amalgamation of the two folk revivals, created to better facilitate an overview of the two country's folk revivals. A more specific date span for both revivals will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Welch, "Gryphon: the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Slade," *Melody Maker*, (August 4, 1973): 45. Other names by which Gryphon was called were Willowbasket, featuring Harvey and Taylor (Gryphon: the Complete Hybrid), Spell Thorn, featuring the original quartet, and Cod Piece, which was suggested by the band manager and rejected by the band.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Dallas, "Gryphon: The Complete Hybrid," *Melody Maker*, (January 6, 1973): 17.

<sup>4</sup> "The Gryphon File," *Melody Maker*, (October 6, 1973): 24.

broadcasts of songs by David Munrow,<sup>5</sup> Harvey became reacquainted with the recorder and, from there, other early instruments (namely the crumhorn). In addition to playing with Gryphon, Richard Harvey played with Musica Reservata, an early music ensemble founded by Micheal Murrow in the 1950's that was focused on creating a more historically accurate manner of performing early music.<sup>6</sup>

Brian Gulland studied bassoon, voice, and piano both privately and at the Royal College of Music. Although trained as a classical musician, Gulland said that he became disenchanted with this career path owing to the, “[E]xtremely narrow lives that so many classical musicians live, both socially and musically.”<sup>7</sup> It was during Brian's first year at college that he began to entertain the thought of joining a rock band.<sup>8</sup> Gryphon guitarist Graeme Taylor observed that, “Richard Harvey was more classically [driven], while I was more into the rock side, and Brian Gulland was somewhere in the middle.”<sup>9</sup>

The only member of the original trio not to attend the Royal College of Music is guitarist Graeme Taylor. Taylor studied piano for two years but was self taught on guitar.<sup>10</sup> Taylor is also credited with, “Form[ing] one third of the Gryphon recorder choir.”<sup>11</sup>

### Modal Usage

Let us turn now to the musical passages under discussion today. An examination of scale choice and pitch inventories in the early music of Gryphon has proven useful in understanding later developments in the band's style. The introductory section of “Juniper Suite,” Gryphon's

---

<sup>5</sup> David Munrow was a performer with an interest in renaissance and baroque instruments. In 1976 he also published *Instruments of the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Musica Reservata (ii),” (by David Fallows), <http://www.grovemusic.com> (accessed 1/30/07).

<sup>7</sup> Dallas, “Gryphon: The Complete Hybrid,” 17.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Graeme Taylor, telephone discussion with the author, May 2, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> “The Gryphon File,” *Melody Maker*, (October 6, 1973), 24.

<sup>11</sup> Welch, “Gryphon: the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Slade,” 45.

first group composition, is a clear demonstration of the band's modal usage. **Example 3** provides a transcription of the opening of "Juniper Suite." Certain sections of this piece move frequently between different modalities based on the same pitch center, creating a definite pitch centricity but weakening the expected tendencies of popular music harmonic progressions. Let us listen to the following example. (Play intro to *Juniper Suite*).

Even upon a first listening, the use of multiple modes is apparent. One possible explanation for this modal mixture comes from Edward Macan. In an examination of general stylistic features of progressive rock in his text Rocking the Classics, Macan traces the influence of modal harmony on the genre from the folk revival of the 1960's and, to a lesser degree, from the classical music of North India.<sup>12</sup> In his discussion on modal usage he goes on to say, "Progressive rock musicians often choose to accent [a] sense of unpredictability even further by using ... chromatic variants of a note which occur at or near the same time in different parts. The three most common major modes are the mixolydian mode, the ionian mode, and the hybrid mode that contains a lowered seventh and alternately raised and lowered third and sixth degrees."<sup>13</sup> An illustration of this mode can be found as **Example 4** in the handout.

Before closer examination of Macan's proposed hybrid mode, two statements from his dissertation on the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst may help to explain a possible link between the earlier British folk revival, in which Vaughan Williams and Holst participated, and progressive rock music. The first is a quote from Vaughan Williams:

The [English folk-song] movement is now fifty years old, the tunes are again common property, and every English child must know them as well as he knows his own language, whether he likes it or not. Composers of the younger generation emphatically do not like it, but they cannot help being influenced by these beautiful tunes."<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 51-52.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>14</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, *The Making of Music* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1955), 52.

In connecting this with his discussion of progressive rock, Macan remarks that:

“[A]t the same time that the harmonic and melodic modality of Vaughan Williams and Holst disappeared from English art music, it reappeared in English popular music...”<sup>15</sup>

In the case of Gryphon, it may be that the use of modality is influenced both by its members’ inherent knowledge of English folk music indebted to the folk revival and by their first-hand experience of playing early music (from which these folk songs originate).<sup>16</sup> While both the “inherent knowledge” of modality and Macan’s idea of a “hybrid mode” could explain the changing modal inflections of “Juniper Suite’s” expository phrase, the best explanation might be a combination of both ideas.

Let us now return specifically to the hybrid mode. While several of these modal inflections are also used in the blues scale (which progressive rock bands frequently drew upon) the hybrid mode more fully accounts for the alterations taking place. The primacy of the hybrid mode is further apparent in that the band rarely alters the second, fourth, and fifth scale degrees, while the flat fifth/sharp fourth scale degrees are used commonly in blues music.

Another factor that attests to the primacy of the hybrid mode is that the mode itself is an amalgam of the Dorian, Mixolydian, and Aeolian modes, thus allowing for rapid fluctuations between these collections. Studies of English folk music indicate that approximately two thirds of the folk melodies are in the Ionian mode and the remaining third are in the Dorian, Mixolydian, and Aeolian modes. The Phrygian mode is rarely used, while the Lydian and Locrian modes and the harmonic minor scale are almost nonexistent. From these findings, it

---

<sup>15</sup> Macan, *An Analytical Survey and Comparative Study*, 383.

<sup>16</sup> The bVI chord was used extensively in classical music of the Romantic period, and is not limited to the time periods previously discussed. Taking the background of the band members into account, it seems that they would be less influenced by “common practice” classical music and more by pre-common practice music. The classical influence is best attributed to the “inherent” knowledge of British composers such as Holst and Vaughan Williams, as previously stated.

appears clear that the hybrid mode proposed by Macan is an appropriate scalar basis for analysis of British folk-inspired music that rapidly fluctuates between three of the most common modes used in British folk songs.

### **Juniper Suite in Depth**

Let us return to **Example 3** to more fully examine the specific passage in question. The first three-measure phrase utilizes the entire pitch collection found in the hybrid mode, the flat seventh and both flat and natural third and sixth scale degrees. Despite these modal alterations, there is no ambiguity regarding a tonal center of G. It is of interest that no form of dominant harmony is present in this first phrase. The next phrase steps outside of the hybrid scale during the implied planing that occurs in the organ accompaniment, but the melody remains within the hybrid scale. The chromaticism that occurs in measure five is a direct result of a three measure descent from the dominant to the tonic through the planing of major triads, all but one of which is in root position. Also, the leading tone found in measure five (in contrast to the subtonic, possibly the most important non-inflected pitch of the proposed hybrid scale) is made less functional as it does not ascend to the tonic. Rather, the chromatic motion generates from descending passing tones and, when taken into consideration with the melody, does not greatly alter the overall collectional identity created by the hybrid scale.

The third phrase, measures 7-8, begins in the same manner as the first, and the resulting cadence itself utilizes both inflections of the third and sixth scale degrees. If the purpose of the varied inflections present in this hybrid scale is to create modal ambiguity, as I believe they are, then the IV-bVI-I cadence is a prime example. The final G-major chord confirms the tonal center of the section and, although the cadential harmonic motion is softened by the lack of strong “dominant-tonic” tonal direction, there remains voice leading to create forward

momentum to the cadence. The melody remains on G, acting as a common tone between the three chords. In the organ accompaniment beneath, forward momentum is created through a chromatic melodic enclosure (C-Bb [A# enharmonic]-B) and a three pitch chromatic descent (E-Eb-D), both occurring over the bass motion of C-Bb-G (a retrograde of the section's first three bass-line pitches). The introductory section of "Juniper Suite" has therefore utilized the hybrid scale to create modal ambiguity while still retaining a sense of forward motion as well as cadential closure without the use of standard, common-practice harmonic tendencies.

### **Midnight Mushrumps**

Let us now examine "Midnight Mushrumps," a song from Gryphon's second album.

**Example 5** provides a transcription of the B section of Midnight Mushrumps, which features guitar, organ, bassoon, and electric bass. Here is an excerpt of the section (*play recording*). It is important to note here that this passage also functions as a transition from a D tonal center to a G tonal center.<sup>17</sup> The electric bass in measures 1-4 outlines a d-minor triad (excluding the additional tone G)<sup>18</sup> and then moves to and repeats a c-natural. Both the flat third and flat seventh scale degrees used here occur within the D hybrid mode. This passage could possibly be viewed in a modally altered G tonality; however, the bass does not support this. Accordingly, this section appears to be another instance of a hybrid mode that creates modal, and in this case, tonal ambiguity.

Section C, **Example 7**, provides a clue as to the working out of the tonal G vs. D ambiguity. Let us listen to this section (*play recording*). The first two measures are a repeated motive featuring thirds in the upper two voices, with all three voices coming to rest on octaves of

---

<sup>17</sup> There are several cases in which Gryphon gives the appearance of one tonal center, while the bass voice is clearly outlining another, creating the appearance of similarity through modal alterations, particularly in "Juniper Suite" where these same two tonal centers are placed in conflict with one another.

<sup>18</sup> While this section is tonally centered in D, the modality is contextually a move away from D major toward the D hybrid mode that was briefly touched upon in the song's introductory section

D. The harmonic progression is a basic tonic-predominant-dominant half cadence, I-ii-V, with an added secondary dominant of ii, creating the progression of I-V/ii-ii-V in G. The V/ii also may shed some light on the E-major chord that opens “Midnight Mushrumps”, which is labeled **Example 8**; however, it does not function as a secondary dominant in the introduction. Another possible connection between section C and the first chord of “Midnight Mushrumps” is the A/G# resolving to B/G# in the bassoons. Measures 3-4 become a repeated unit that is best understood as tonally centered in G, ending once again on a half cadence.

Some may view measures 3-6 as a simple case of modal borrowing; however, I believe that this is not the case. A majority of Gryphon’s harmonic vocabulary is based on the major/minor tonal system. In sections of modal ambiguity, such as those under discussion here, the band appears to be drawing from a selective inventory of pitches that remains tonally centered, but with a flatted seventh and alternately raised and lowered third and sixth scale degrees. It is the case in this example that the modality is not fluctuating as rapidly as in the previous examples. Therefore, instead of classifying this section as an instance of modal borrowing, in the case of Gryphon, the utilization of the hybrid scale provides a more nuanced description of the harmonic language. Just as in “Juniper Suite,” the playing out of tonal ambiguity is most certainly a powerful tool in Gryphon’s compositional repertoire.

### **(Ein Klein) Heldenleben**

Moving on to a selection from a later composition, allow us to look at example **Example 9**. The dance section of “(Ein Kleine) Heldenleben,” is a folk inspired passage that appears more archaic because of its appearance in a piece that features common-practice harmonies and style blended with rock and blues influences and includes a “West Coast Cool Jazz” flute solo. The selection considered here begins with a reduction of the texture from the previous contrapuntal



section. The bass begins with an ostinato pattern in 6/8 in the rhythm of a jig. The percussion here eschews the rock drum set in favor of a more traditional folk percussive accompaniment. Due to the commercial nature of Gryphon's later albums, the possible influence of a change in band members, and the influence of a recent American tour with the popular progressive rock band Yes, Gryphon's style has shifted: this is one of the only sections found in this later composition that utilizes nuanced modal inflections. For the sake of time, let us listen to only the third and fourth phrases of this section (*Play example*).

The bass ostinato remains constant throughout the entire section, outlining a G dyad with an open fifth. This modally ambiguous open fifth allows the recorder solo to fill in the harmony. In this instance, the recorder once again utilizes the G-hybrid scale, although here without altering the 6<sup>th</sup> scale degree, creating a scalar impression more major than minor.<sup>19</sup> The first phrase serves as the foundational melody upon which the other variant phrases are based. The first four measures of the phrase appear to employ a G mixolydian scale, the flat seventh negating a dominant voice-leading. The fifth measure introduces the flat third scale degree, adding a dorian quality, which only lasts for one measure. The only other alteration is during the fourth and fifth phrases. Although the F# leading-tone is briefly used, it is quickly neutralized by an F-natural. The second and third measures of these phrases also focus on the minor modal choice. This minor modality flows directly into the fifth measure which, as noted previously, also utilizes the flat third scale degree. While it is arguable that this dance section offers a less comprehensive example of the proposed hybrid scale because of its use of the leading tone and lack of an altered sixth scale degree, I believe that the fluctuating major and minor inflections that are aurally perceived argue in favor of the hybrid scale. Additionally, the entire melody

---

<sup>19</sup> It appears obvious that this G hybrid scale is a favorite choice of Richard Harvey, possibly due to the ease of performance using this scale. The simpler fingerings of this scale and its alterations would leave room for more virtuosity during live performances.

focuses on a pitch center of G, the modality of which Gryphon has already been shown to have altered with the hybrid scale and is a favorite tonic of Richard Harvey's recorder performances. Regardless, although the virtuosic recorder jig appears quite out of context on the album *Raindance* than it might have on previous albums, it remains a solid display of Richard Harvey's skill on the recorder.

### **Conclusion**

A global view of Gryphon's music reveals that those compositions by guitarist Graeme Taylor exhibit a blues influence while those of Richard Harvey appear more classically oriented. The first major piece discussed, "Juniper Suite," demonstrates a folk background and knowledge of both Renaissance and "common practice" compositional traits. The shifting modality in sections of "Juniper Suite" can be seen as an amalgamation of those modes most commonly used in British folk music. The members of Gryphon were either inherently aware of these modal alterations via the "common property" of folk-song knowledge as proposed by Vaughan-Williams, or through their knowledge of modes gained in study and performance of early music.

The second song discussed, "Midnight Mushrumps," utilizes the hybrid mode in a more "common practice" stylistic setting. While the modal inflections may not fluctuate as rapidly as in the excerpt from "Juniper Suite," they can be viewed as an extension of the modal ambiguity inherent in the hybrid mode and effectively serve to transition from one key to another in these sections. Additionally, the tonal centers in which this mode is used throughout Gryphon's compositions are those of G and D. The choice for these two tonal centers most likely arose from the ease of their fingering schemes on the recorder and crumhorn. The excerpt from the third piece, "(Ein Klein) Heldenleben," hearkens back to the more folk-dance inspired style of Gryphon's earlier albums, as at this point the band had shifted stylistically toward the rock end

of the inspirational spectrum. While longer phrases lie within the Mixolydian mode, the alterations that shift the sonority between major and minor can be viewed as an outgrowth of the band's prior uses of the hybrid mode.

In summation, rather than asserting that Gryphon chose specifically the places in which to use this scale or mode to create modal ambiguity, it is more likely the case that their familiarity with the modalities present in the hybrid mode manifested itself in certain passages of their music. Thus, referring to the hybrid mode as an amalgam relates directly to how the composers in Gryphon, themselves, would have combined the modal influences through their inherent knowledge of the sonorities present in this proposed hybrid mode. It is hoped that this presentation will have piqued your interest in the music of Gryphon, and their highly idiosyncratic musical style.

## Modal Ambiguity and the Hybrid Mode in the Music of Gryphon

Russell A. Kahmann, University of Kentucky

pmakahmann@hotmail.com

Example 1: Gryphon Members, First Four Albums

Gryphon (1973)	Midnight Mushrumps (1974)	Red Queen to Gryphon Three (1974)	Raindance (1975)
Richard Harvey Brian Gulland Graeme Taylor David Oberle	Richard Harvey Brian Gulland Graeme Taylor David Oberle Phil Nestor	Richard Harvey Brian Gulland Graeme Taylor David Oberle Phil Nestor	Richard Harvey Brian Gulland Graeme Taylor David Oberle Malcolm Bennett

Example 2: Instrumentation, First Four Albums

Gryphon (1973)	Midnight Mushrumps (1974)	Red Queen to Gryphon Three (1974)	Raindance (1975)
1. Recorder 2. Crumhorn 3. Bassoon 4. Harmonium 5. Glockenspiel 6. Mandolin 7. Guitar (Acoustic) 8. Harpsichord 9. Organ 10. Percussion (no set)	1. Recorder 2. Crumhorn 3. Bassoon 4. Harmonium 5. Glockenspiel 6. Mandolin 7. Guitar (Acoustic) 8. Harpsichord 9. Organ 10. Percussion (no set) 11. Timpani 12. Piano 13. Electric piano 14. Electric bass	1. Recorder 2. Crumhorn 3. Bassoon 4. Harmonium 5. Glockenspiel 6. Guitar (Acoustic) 7. Guitar (Electric) 8. Harpsichord 9. Organ 10. Percussion (with set) 11. Timpani 12. Piano 13. Electric piano 14. Electric bass 15. Synthesizer	1. Recorder 2. Crumhorn 3. Bassoon 4. Glockenspiel 5. Guitar (Acoustic) 6. Guitar (Electric) 7. Organ 8. Percussion (with set) 9. Timpani 10. Piano 11. Electric piano 12. Synthesizer 13. (Mini-moog) 14. Electric bass 15. Mellotron 16. Clarinet 17. Flute

Example 3: Juniper Suite – Introduction

Phrase 1

Phrase 2

Crumhorn

Organ

5

Phrase 3

5

Planing

Extension of Plagal Cadence

IV bVI I

Example 4: Hybrid Scale (in G)

Hybrid Scale

Mixolydian

Dorian

Aeolian

Example 5: Midnight Mushrumps – Section B, 2:49

Guitar

Bassoon

Bass

Organ

Bsn.

Bass

Example 6: Hybrid Scale (in D)

Hybrid Scale

Mixolydian

Dorian

Aeolian

Example 7: Midnight Mushrumps – Section C, 3:11

Bassoon 1

Bassoon 2

Bass

G hybrid: I V/ii ii V I V/ii ii V I bVI bIII bVII

Bsn. 1

Bsn. 2

Bass

bIII bVII i V

Example 8: Midnight Mushrumps - Introduction

Organ

Bassoon

3rd and 4th times only

Example 9: (Ein Klein) Heldenleben – Recorder Jig, 6:53

Bass Ostinato

Phrases 1-3

Phrases 4-5

## Bibliography

### Books

Goldstein, Kenneth. "The Impact of Recording Technology on the British Folksong Revival," In *Folk Music and Modern Sound*, ed. William Ferris and Mary L. Hard. Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 1982.

Kidson, Frank and Neal, Mary. *English Folk-Song and Dance*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1915.

Macan, Edward. "An Analytical Survey and Comparative Study of the Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst, c. 1910-1935." Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1991.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Rosenberg, Neil, ed. *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*. Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

Sharp, Cecil. *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Revised by Maud Karpeles. London: Methuen and Company, 1954.



Stump, Paul. *The Music's All That Matters: A History of Progressive Rock*. London: Quartet Books, 1998.

### Articles

Beale, Lizzy. "Caught in the Act: Gryphon." *Melody Maker* (February 7, 1976): 47.

Dallas, Karl. "Gryphon: The Complete Hybrid." *Melody Maker* (January 6, 1973): 17.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Gryphon go for Music (An interview with Richard Harvey)." *Melody Maker* (May 18, 1974): 55.

Foulds, Gordon. "Caught in the Act: Gryphon." *Melody Maker* (October 13, 1973): 31.

Irwin, Colin. "Caught in the Act: Gryphon – Not a Novelty." *Melody Maker* (July 20, 1974): 52.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Caught in the Act: Gryphon." *Melody Maker* (November 15, 1975): 75.

Macan, Edward. "'The Spirit of Albion' in 20<sup>th</sup> Century English Popular Music: Vaughan Williams, Holst, and the Progressive Rock Movement." *Music Review* 53 (May 1992).

Welch, Chris. "Gryphon: The 13<sup>th</sup> Century Slade." *Melody Maker* (August 4, 1973): 45-46.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Albums: Midnight Mushrumps." *Melody Maker* (July 13, 1974): 39.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Making Music: Brass, Woodwinds, Reeds." *Melody Maker* (November 17, 1974): 42-43.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Albums: Red Queen to Gryphon Three – Gryphon Ring the Changes." *Melody Maker* (November 16, 1975): 69.

### Discography

Gryphon. *Gryphon*. Arcángelo ARC 7029, 2003.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Midnight Mushrumps*. Arcángelo ARC 7030, 2003.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Red Queen to Gryphon Three*. Arcángelo ARC 7031, 2003.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Raindance*. Arcángelo ARC 7032, 2003.