

Monteverdi's Gloria for 8 voices M 10

Find out why “Scarborough Fair” and “I will Give my Love an Apple” aren't in C major
You need the tunes in Activity 9 for this – and a keyboard would be handy

1. It would be reasonable to question why you're told in Activity 9 that the first two tunes are in the Dorian and Aeolian modes. They only use white notes – surely that means they are in C major.

The response is that the key or mode doesn't only depend on the notes used. It's the hierarchy within those notes. Which of the 7 notes makes the tune sound finished?

Look again at “Scarborough Fair”. If the note C makes the tune sound finished, then it is in C major. The second to last note is C. Play or sing the song, and repeat the C for the last note instead of going up to D. Does that sound finished? Try different white notes to see if you can find the best ending note. Which is it?

Repeat the experiment with the other tunes. Do you agree that the given ending note is best?

2. The chances are you feel D is the best ender for “Scarborough Fair” and A for “I will Give my Love” and C for “Water of Tyne”. Those are the notes the people who made up the tunes chose. You may say it's because we know how the tunes go. But there is more going on than that.

In point 1 above, there was reference to a hierarchy of notes. In any tune, some notes will happen more than others. It's really unusual to have a tune where each note comes exactly the same number of times as all the others. Moreover, there are more important places to occur – the beginnings and endings of phrases, the start of bars and being jumped onto. Finishing off the whole tune is a very high status position.

3. Discover the hierarchy of notes in “Scarborough Fair”

There are 35 notes in this version of the tune. Count up how many of each letter name there are:

D E F G A B C

There are 4 phrases in the tune (one for each sentence). Which notes start and finish each phrase?

Phrase 1 Phrase 2 Phrase 3 Phrase 4

Which note finishes the whole tune?

Taking all your findings together, which of the 7 notes is the most important note in this tune?

You'll have noticed that A was a close second to D. It's normal for the note 5 notes above the key or home note to be the second most important note. By happening a lot, it actually reinforces the strength of the key or home note. You'll follow this up in Activity 18.

4. Discover the hierarchy of notes in “I will Give my Love an Apple”

A B C D E F G

Start and finish notes for each phrase: 1 2 3 4

Note which finishes the whole tune

In this tune, the note 5 notes above the key note comes most often – especially in phrase 3 where it comes lots of times. But it doesn't get that final note position. A still wins the top place, and is the key or home note.

5. Now do the same for “Water of Tyne”

Before you do the count, predict the two notes that are likely to come more often than the others – you're told that C is the home note. Count C as no. 1, and count up the music alphabet to 5 to find the note 5 notes higher. What is it? Do the count. Check the important places. Was your prediction correct?