About The Modes

SEASONS is built on a cycle of seventy-two modes—akin to scales—drawn from and inspired by Indian classical music theory. When placed in sequence, these modes gradually expand and contract, forming a larger cycle that traces the passage of light across times of day and seasons. Each Blueprint is grounded in a single primary mode, and no mode is repeated as the main tonal world of another piece. Together, they create a self-contained system in which each piece occupies a distinct tonal space while contributing to a broader seasonal arc.

I first encountered Indian classical music while cataloging recordings as a work-study student at Oberlin Conservatory. I later studied the tradition with the sitarist Shujaat Husain Khan and was drawn both to its sense of freedom—deeply rooted in an ancient cultural lineage—and to the idea that modes could carry the qualities of a season or a time of day. That way of listening and thinking about tonal color eventually informed how I approached the musical worlds of the Blueprints.

In my system, each mode is divided into two parts. The lower four notes (or tetrachord) anchor the scale in a particular seasonal quality, while the upper tetrachord shades it with light. Each tetrachord sits on a spectrum and can contract inward through close intervals or expand outward into wider ones. Many modes combine these tendencies—for example, a contracted lower tetrachord paired with an expanded upper one, or the reverse. The tonal colors that arise from these combinations became the distinctive identities of the Blueprints.

I've divided the seventy-two Blueprints into four books: Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall. Although the modes can be arranged from tightly contracted intervals to fully expanded ones, I didn't compose the pieces in that order. The books emerged intuitively, guided by the sonorities and colors that felt necessary as each Blueprint led to the next. Within each of the four overarching "seasons of life," I move freely among temporal seasons and times of day. Sometimes those qualities shape the piece directly; at other times the mode simply offers the first impulse, and the music grows in the direction the cycle itself seems to want to go.

A Deeper Dive: The Modes

While the modes used in the Blueprints are inspired by Indian Carnatic music theory—which also explores tetrachords and associations with season and time of day—they serve a different function here. Rather than prescribing melodic behavior or performance practice, these modes act as tonal frameworks that shape color, range, and harmonic gravity within each Blueprint.

Each mode in the system is built from two tetrachords. Using C as a tonic for illustration, these are:

- First tetrachord: C–D–E–F
- Second tetrachord: G–A–B–C

Together, these two tetrachords form a complete octave, but each tetrachord can take on multiple intervallic shapes.

The First Tetrachord: Seasons

The first tetrachord defines the seasonal quality of a mode. It always begins on C and ends on F, but the pitches in between can vary:

- C
- D ♭ / D / D♯
- E𝄫 / E ♭ / E
- F / F♯

No pitch can be duplicated or enharmonically repeated within a tetrachord (for example, D♯ cannot appear alongside E ♭). Given these constraints, there are twelve possible configurations of the first tetrachord.

These twelve configurations correspond to twelve seasons across the year. As the cycle progresses, the intervals within the tetrachord gradually expand and contract. For example:

- Winter Solstice represents maximum contraction: C–D ♭ –E𝄫–F
- Summer Solstice represents maximum expansion: C–D♯–E–F♯

The seasons in between use intermediary combinations, tracing a gradual expansion from Winter to Summer and a contraction back toward Winter.

The Second Tetrachord: Times of Day

The second tetrachord shades the mode with a quality of light and corresponds to times of day. It begins on G and ends on C, with the following pitch options:

- G
- A ♭ / A / A♯
- B𝄫 / B ♭ / B
- C

There are six possible configurations of this tetrachord, each representing a different time of day. As with the seasons, these configurations follow a principle of expansion and contraction:

- Night represents maximum contraction: G–A ♭ –B𝄫–C
- Noon represents maximum expansion: G–A♯–B–C

The times of day in between trace gradual transitions between these extremes.

The Complete Cycle

By combining the twelve seasonal tetrachords with the six time-of-day tetrachords, the system yields seventy-two unique modes. Each mode represents a specific intersection of season and light, and each Blueprint is grounded in one of these modes as its primary tonal world. What matters most is not the theoretical construction itself, but how these intervallic shapes give rise to distinct tonal colors—colors that inform pacing, register, gesture, and the expressive atmosphere of each piece.