

Folk Music

(Exploring Harmony and Accompaniment)

A. History of Folk Music

Folk Music is **TRADITIONAL music of the people** performed by the people themselves and played within their own communities. Folk Music was passed on **ORALLY** (through speech or song) from one generation to the next – the **ORAL TRADITION** (passed down by word of mouth), and many Folk Songs were not originally written down. The Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th Centuries destroyed communities so many of the traditional Folk Songs were lost. Attempts were made to collect these songs and *Cecil Sharp* published a ‘written down’ collection of English Folk Music in 1907 which had taken a lifetime to collect. During the 1950’s a great **FOLK MUSIC REVIVAL** began and bands in the 1970’s ‘mixed together’ Folk and Rock (**FOLK ROCK**) as a type of musical **FUSION** e.g., *Lindisfarne*, *Steeleye Span*. Other musicians created more modern and commercial **ARRANGEMENTS** of Folk Songs such as *Ralph McTell’s* “Streets of London” in 1975. Folk Music influenced bands such as *The Beatles* and artists such as *Paul Simon* and modern-day groups such as *The Corrs* use traditional Folk Music in their songs.



B. Types of Folk Music

People from different countries and cultures have their own **FOLK MUSIC**. However, although it may sound different, **FOLK SONGS** are often include **WORK SONGS**, including **SEA SHANTIES**: songs sung at sea by sailors, the rhythm of these helped the sailors haul the ropes that hoisted the sails, and songs about **EVERYDAY LIFE**, **THE SEASONS, BATTLES AND WARS**, **SHEPHERD’S SONGS** and **LULLABIES** (cradle songs). People also sang Folk Songs to help them forget their aches and pains e.g., *shepherds sang about their sheep and lambs and the bitter weather to help keep their spirits high*. Folk Music can also be **INSTRUMENTAL**, often used for dancing, entertainment, celebration, and religious ceremonies. Dancing to Folk Music still happens such as **MORRIS DANCERS** or **MAYPOLE DANCING**.



C. Folk Song Accompaniments

TONIC PEDAL - A (BASS) PEDAL (POINT/NOTE) is a note of long duration, often held in the bass part (lower down the keyboard) which uses the **TONIC** note, over which the melody line and chords will “fit” e.g.



DRONE - A form of musical accompaniment consisting of continuous sounding pitched notes, usually a **FIFTH** apart (5 notes), again, often in the bass part e.g.



OSTINATO – A repeated musical pattern as an accompaniment, often using notes of the **CHORD** and rhythm patterns from the song e.g.



CHORDS – Many Folk Songs use **PRIMARY CHORDS** (**CHORD I**, **CHORD IV** and **CHORD V**) and sometimes the **SECONDARY CHORDS** of **CHORD III** and **CHORD VI** as a musical accompaniment. The notes of a **CHORD** can be performed in different ways to create different accompaniments:

As a **TRIAD** (all three notes (**ROOT**, **THIRD**, **FIFTH**) performed together, the **ROOT** sometimes in the **BASS** part acting as **BASS LINE**).



As a **BROKEN CHORD** - a way of playing the notes (**ROOT**, **THIRD**, **FIFTH**) of a chord separately (‘broken’ up) in a different order, ascending (going up) or descending (going down).



As an **ARPEGGIO** - playing the notes of a chord ascending or descending (**ROOT**, **THIRD**, **FIFTH**) in order, but separately.



As an **ALBERTI BASS** - a way of playing the notes of a chord in the order: lowest (**ROOT**), highest (**FIFTH**), middle (**THIRD**), highest (**FIFTH**), repeated several times as a bass line **ACCOMPANIMENT**



D. Harmony in Folk Music: Intervals

ACCOMPANIMENT – Music that accompanies either a lead singer or melody line. This can be instrumental performed by members of a Folk Band but also vocal often known as the “backing” provided by backing singers. (see C for different forms of accompaniments).

HARMONY – The effect produced by two or more pitched notes sounding together at the same time e.g., a chord or triad creates harmony or a lead singer and backing singers singing different melodies or parts ‘in harmony’ (**COUNTER MELODY**)

INTERVAL – The distance between two musical notes. The intervals of a **FOURTH** and **FIFTH** are common in Folk Music.



F. Instruments, Timbres and Sonorities of Folk Music

Many **FOLK SONGS** are often performed **UNACCOMPANIED** (with no instrumental accompaniment) = **A CAPPELLA**. However, the following instruments are often used in Folk Music:

Penny/Tin Whistle	Harmonica or Mouth Organ	Acoustic Guitar	Northumbrian Pipes	Accordion	“Fiddle” (Violin)	Mandolin	Banjo	Concertina