

Quench Arts Musical Connections Special Interest Session Folk Music by Katie Stevens (June 2020)

This worksheet can be used alongside a video which can be viewed at: <https://tinyurl.com/KatieFolk>. If you are receiving this newsletter in the post then the video will be on your DVD.

Folk Music



What do I mean by folk music? Well there are lots of interpretations... Some people think it means Morris dancing others might think it means American country music. For me, folk can mean both of those and anything in between! The word **folk** means 'people' so I think of 'folk music' as 'music of the people.'

I love learning about other people and the music that they love in turn. At the moment, in particular, I enjoy learning Irish, Klezmer (Jewish folk music), Swedish, Bulgarian and Brazilian music. I'm keen on playing woodwind instruments in these traditions but you can also play them on any instrument of your choosing! There are many things which make folk music from different countries different from one another but also many elements are also the same. This helps to keep me always challenged in what I am doing but also reminds me that we are universally joined to one another.

Irish Music

One thing that is very common in folk music is that it is taught or passed down to people 'by ear'. This means that you don't need to read music to learn it but you can listen and pick up the tune! One of the best ways to internalise a tune is to be able to sing it. So I'm going to teach you an Irish polka in the way my teachers have done for me. I'll break it down into smaller parts and then we'll put it together at the end – just like you would with a song!

Ryan's Polka

I'd like to teach you an Irish *polka*. A polka is actually a Czech dance which made its way over to Ireland in the late 19th century. It is a lively dance with 2 beats in the bar. You might recognise this polka if you watched Titanic (the scene when Rose goes to the party in 3rd class!). This polka is written in the key of D which means that it uses an F# and a C#. (If you don't have an instrument with you why don't you try 'diddling'. This means making wordless sounds to sing the melody!)

Listen to sound file: **No.1: Learn the tune**

https://soundcloud.com/quench_arts/1-learn-the-tune

If you'd like to play some chords on the piano then have a go! Irish music doesn't need lots of complicated chords. (Obviously, you can feel free to experiment if you are an experienced pianist or just feel like being creative.)

The chords we are using are D, G and A.



Give it a try by listening to sound file: **No. 2: Piano accompaniment**

https://soundcloud.com/quench_arts/2-guitar-accompaniment

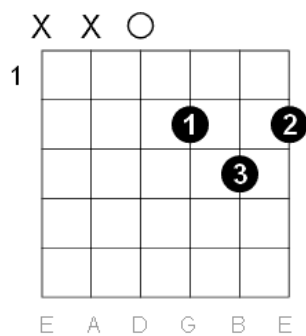


Traditionally, in an Irish session, it is less likely that you'd hear someone playing the tune on a guitar. Irish music is often played at a '*session*' which involves lots of people playing together and they are often held in pubs! This means that it can be a very loud environment and it would not be likely to hear the melody being played on a guitar in amongst the other instruments

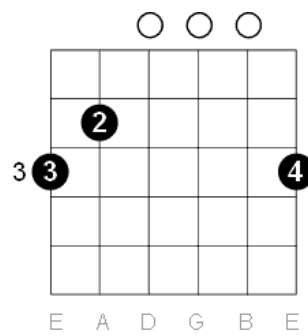
(bagpipes and whistles etc.) The string instruments which usually play the melody are tenor banjos or mandolins. I do, however, think Irish tunes sound lovely when picked on a guitar and it is definitely worth learning them to play by yourself or with just a few (quiet!) others.

So normally, people play the guitar to accompany. Again we'll use the same three simple chords. See if you can follow the chord structure whilst playing along with sound file **No.3: Guitar accompaniment**. (Don't forget to repeat each section!)

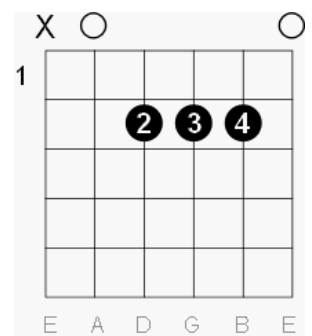
https://soundcloud.com/quench_arts/3-piano-accompaniment



D



G



A

John Ryan's Polka





Now try sound file **No 4: Play along with the whole tune!**

https://soundcloud.com/quench_arts/4-play-along-with-the-whole

If you found learning the tune by ear difficult, don't worry! It is a skill that you can develop like any other. If you like the sound of Irish folk music, why don't you try learning some more?! Check out www.thesession.org. Here you can find more polkas and hundreds of other traditional Irish dance tunes. The most famous types of Irish tunes are jigs and reels. If you want to work out if a tune is a jig or a reel try and say these phrases ***Black'n'Decker*** or ***rashers and sausages***. If '*Black n' decker*' fits then it is a reel and if '*rashers and sausages*' fits it is a jig! (If you are a guitarist or drummer then these rhythms should help you when playing the chords to fit with the tune.)

[Thesession.org](http://www.thesession.org) website is great in that it also caters for different types of learners. It offers midi sound recordings of the tune if you like to learn by ear, notation and it also offers ABC notation. This is a way of writing folk music that has been developed as an alternative to the usual way of writing music. The letters correspond with the note names on your instrument. Here is how John Ryan's Polka could be written.

: John Ryan's
: polka
: 2/4
: Dmaj
dd B/c/d/B/ | AF AF | dd B/c/d/B/ | AF ED |
dd B/c/d/B/ | AF Ade | fd ec | d4 ||
l: fd de/f/ | gf ed/ | fd Ad | fA A2 |
gfd de/f/ | gf ed/e/ | fd ec | d2 d2 :|

Good luck and I hope that we can play some music together soon!



Katie