

Revisiting Roots: Reviving Folk Songs

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Folk songs have much to offer the developing student: accessible and pleasing melodies, limited harmony, balanced phrases, and great variety in character, as well offering an opportunity to connect with past generations and to explore a student's cultural background. However, a common lament is that many children no longer know many folk songs. There are strategies for teachers to bring folk songs into their student's lives, including using them as a vehicle to develop music theory, harmonization ability, singing and playing, and other musicianship skills. In addition, folk songs can be selected to show multicultural awareness and to support the cultural identity of one's students. Equity of representation and avoiding a lack of contextualization is important to consider, as well as taking the time to evaluate the historical context of folk songs to make sure they don't have a problematic past.

What can folk songs teach?

- Simple, singable melodies
- Basic harmonic progressions
- Common rhythmic patterns
- Cultural elements
- Historical background
- Range of emotions
- Exposure to languages and new vocabulary

Folk songs for teaching musicianship skills:

- Demonstrate fundamental building blocks
- Teaches analysis
- Improves musicality (phrasing, dynamics, tension/release)
- Get students sight singing
- Teaches elements of improvisation
- Students learn to play more than what is written on the score

The culture of folk songs:

- Foster diversity and support the diversity of our students
- Students love looking up songs from the cultures with which they identify
- Include folk songs from diverse backgrounds in a regular and meaningful way to avoid tokenism
- Folk songs are cultural ambassadors, bringing language, culture and history in short, fun and easily learned packages

Resource for folk songs from around the world:

[HTTPS://WWW.BETHSNOTESPLUS.COM/COUNTRYREGION](https://www.bethsnotesplus.com/countryregion)

Importance of doing one's research to avoid assigning problematic folk songs:

- Folk songs from anywhere can have a problematic history, may have unintended references, or can hide adult themes.
- Consider substituting other songs in place of those written as part of Minstrelsy.

List of 82 songs with problematic histories:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/17a9bbjGLN5ileZf957adkBB0RFSOGOWJ4B8ULrpmUYQ/edit#gid=0>

More songs with problematic histories:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1k4G98nFyDJqBpH3aogYx62EWiFL-lj4vuodZhiQoiy0/edit?fbclid=IwAR1AnH2-LLx9fYblfxH_gov3kEnBDXfR8nYJi-MQl17yLJmP5Y0C9DE31cc#gid=0

Talking About Race and Ice Cream Leaves a Sour Taste For Some, by Theodore Johnson

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/05/21/314246332/talking-about-race-and-ice-cream-leaves-a-sour-taste-for-some>

Why I'm Not Teaching That Song, by Jennifer Bailey

<https://singtokids.com/why-im-not-teaching-that-song/>

The Racist Children's Songs You Might Not Have Known Were Racist, by Alex Abad-Santos,

<https://www.vox.com/2014/5/21/5732258/the-racist-childrens-songs-you-might-not-have-known-were-racist>

You Might Be Left with Silence When You're Done, by Martin Urbach with the National Association for Music Education (NAFME)

<https://nafme.org/you-might-be-left-with-silence-when-youre-done/>

Anti-Racism Music Resources, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

<https://music.unc.edu/about/diversity/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-music-resources/antiracism-music-resources/>

Useful Resources:

In case you are looking for music theory examples to teach harmony, check out

<https://diversemusictheoryexamples.com/examples/>

Recordings of songs and lyrics grouped by topics including diversity, multiculturalism, etc:

<https://www.songsforteaching.com/diversitymulticulturalism.htm>

How/When to include folk songs in the lesson?

- Great as a group class activity

- Include at MLP preparation

- Fun to include after MAP or a big performance

- Include at some regular interval, once a month, etc.

- Focus on them during the summer or during a specific month

- Consider including holiday themed folk songs to celebrate throughout the year

A Harmonic Approach:

- Start with songs that only use tonic and dominant

- Move to songs that use I, IV, and V

- When ready, find songs that allow substitutions of secondary chords

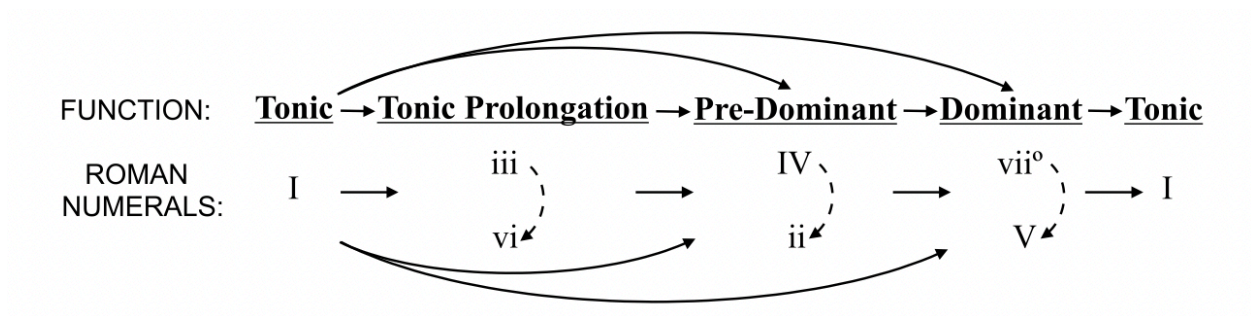
 - ii instead of IV

 - vi instead of I

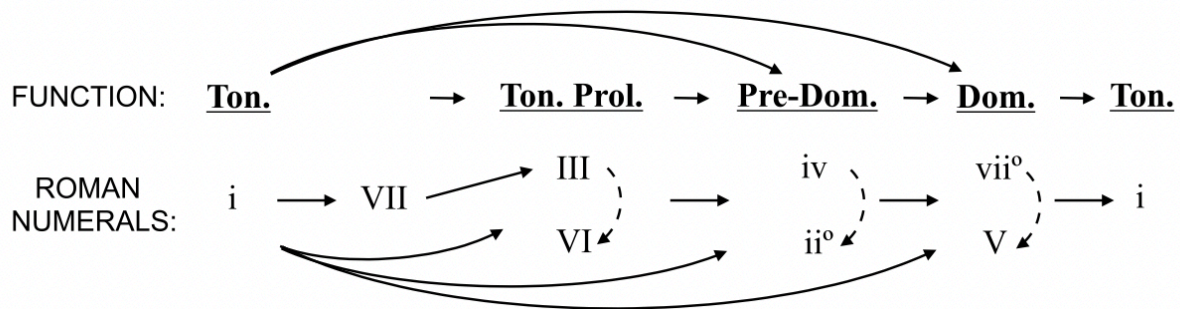
 - vii instead of V

- Add secondary dominants

Harmonic flowchart, major: Make sure to follow a logical progression



Harmonic flowchart, minor:



Consider teaching **roman numerals** for a focus on harmonic function and to help with transposition, or **lead sheet symbols** for the ability to read chord charts.

How to harmonize a melody:

1. If available, listen to a recording of the melody already harmonized. Write down what can be heard and identified harmonically.
2. Determine the tonality. Make sure the mode is considered accurately (major/minor)
3. Fill in the obvious chords first (usually songs start with a I chord, and end V-I).
4. Remind the student which notes fit into the chords you're going to use (I chord= scale degrees 1, 3, and 5, etc.). Draw this to the side if needed.
5. Look at the melody, and see which chords seem to be outlined.
6. What is the harmonic rhythm? Often (not always) chords change at regular intervals (often once a measure). Confirm phrase length - they'll usually be four bar phrases.
7. Remember a 5th scale degree can mean a I chord or a V chord.
8. Refer to the harmonic flow chart to make sure a logical chord progression is being followed.
9. Play the proposed solution and have the student use their ears to correct. There are usually many correct solutions.

Textures:

Let the student's level and needs be the guide

Options for keyboard players:

- two handed accompaniment with singing
- right hand melody/left hand accompaniment texture
- keyboard style (single note or octave in bass, three note chord in RH with melody on top)

Consider the meter and mood of the tune

If the student is learning a new texture in one of their pieces, incorporate it for this kind of exercise for extra practice (Alberti bass, waltz, etc.)

For examples on textures and voicing, check out eNovativepiano.com for many harmonizations with varied voicing suggestions. In addition, the book *Functional Piano for Music Therapists and Music Educators: An Exploration of Styles*, by Josh Massicot has many ideas.

Left hand accompaniment patterns:

Broken perfect 5th



Broken Inversion Shells

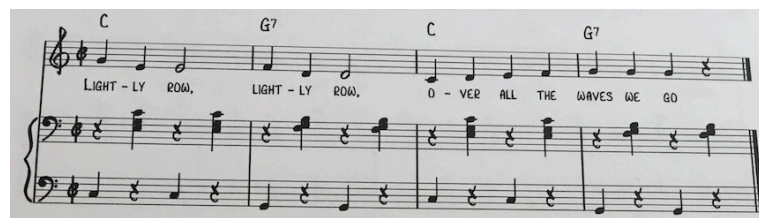


Oom-pah

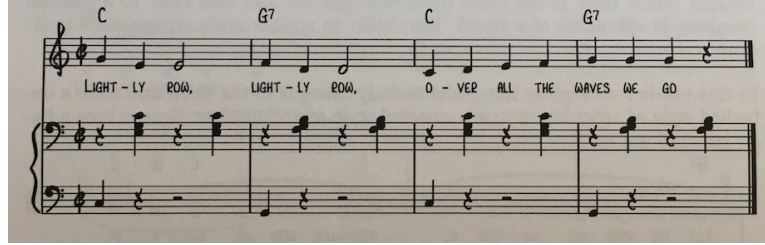


Some two handed accompaniment options:

boom-chuck



Alternate boom-chuck



Two-handed oom-pah

Voice: 'Tis the gift to be sim-ple, 'tis the gift to be free, 'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be, And
 Pno.:

Broken chords

Handwritten musical score for the hymn "Let the Wind and Waters Be Mingled with our Melody". The score is written on two staves: a treble staff for the vocal melody and a bass staff for the piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in a simple, singable style with a range of one octave. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady bass line in the left hand and a melody in the right hand that follows the vocal line. The lyrics are written below the vocal staff.

Chord markings above the staff: G7, C, C, G7, C.

Lyrics: LET THE WIND AND WA - TERS BE MING - LED WITH OUR MEL - O - DY

More broken
chords

A musical score for guitar in 4/4 time. The treble clef staff shows a sequence of broken chords: C (C4, E4, G4), F (F4, A4, C5), G (G4, B4, D5), and C (C4, E4, G4). The bass clef staff shows the corresponding bass notes: C3, F3, G3, and C3. The notes are beamed together in groups of four.

A musical score for piano in 4/4 time. The treble clef staff shows a sequence of broken chords: I (C4, E4, G4), V7 (F4, A4, C5), V7/IV (G4, B4, D5), and IV (C4, E4, G4). The bass clef staff shows the corresponding bass notes: C3, F3, G3, and C3. The notes are beamed together in groups of four.

A musical score for piano in 4/4 time. The treble clef staff shows a sequence of broken chords: C (C4, E4, G4) and B7 (B4, D5, F5, A4). The bass clef staff shows the corresponding bass notes: C3, F3, G3, and C3. The notes are beamed together in groups of four.

A musical score for piano in 6/8 time. The treble clef staff shows a sequence of broken chords: I (C4, E4, G4), IV⁶₄ (F4, A4, C5), and V⁶₃ (G4, B4, D5). The bass clef staff shows the corresponding bass notes: C3, F3, G3, and C3. The notes are beamed together in groups of four.

A musical score for piano in 3/4 time. The treble clef staff shows a sequence of broken chords: I (C4, E4, G4), vi (D4, F4, A4), ii⁶ (E4, G4, B4), and V⁷ (F4, A4, C5). The bass clef staff shows the corresponding bass notes: C3, F3, G3, and C3. The notes are beamed together in groups of four.

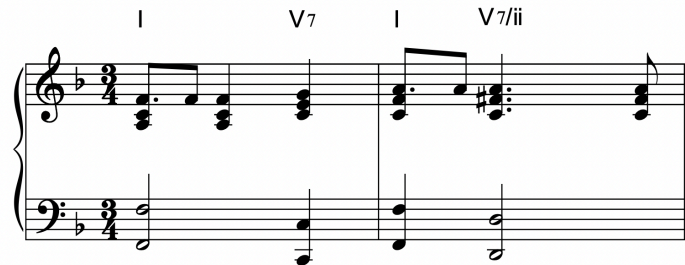
Alberti bass

A musical score for voice and piano in 4/4 time. The voice staff shows the lyrics: "Twin - kle, twin - kle, lit - tle star, How I won - der what you are!". The piano staff shows the Alberti bass pattern: C (C4, E4, G4), F (F4, A4, C5), C (C4, E4, G4), G⁷ (G4, B4, D5, F5), C (C4, E4, G4), G⁷ (G4, B4, D5, F5), and C (C4, E4, G4). The notes are beamed together in groups of four.

Strumming pattern



Keyboard style



Waltz



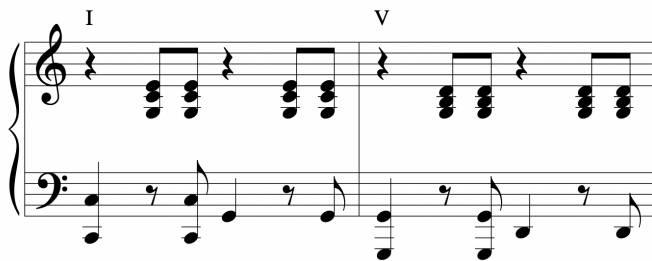
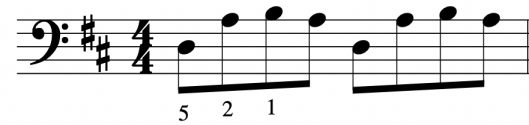
Tango pattern



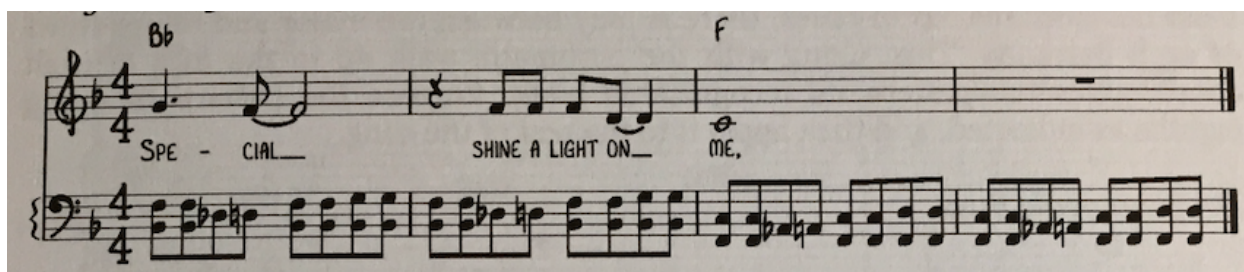
Rock pattern



Blues patterns



Boogie patterns



Single-line instruments:

Students can create a baseline outlining the folk song's harmony, and play it as a duet with a partner or their student

Using a pattern idiomatic to their instrument, a student can create some type of arpeggiated accompaniment to outline the desired harmonies

Non-wind or non-vocalists can sing the melody while playing a baseline or broken chords

Folksong Project Functional Piano, spring 2023

1. Please select a folk song that speaks to you, whether it is from a culture with which you identify, or from a culture you'd like to learn more about. Find several recordings of this folk song. If it is in a language you don't speak fluently, be sure to translate the text (you may need to look up the text if it isn't printed on the score for your melody). Write the original and translated text into your score.
2. Come up with an interesting harmonization for your folk song, and write it into your score with roman numerals. Please use as many varied chords as you can, including secondary chords and secondary dominants, etc. Do make sure your chord progression is logical and follows the standard rules of harmony.
3. Once you have your harmony written in, consider the character of your piece and create a two-handed accompaniment that fosters and develops this character. Write in a measure or two of this voicing so someone else would be able to figure out the pattern (don't write in all of the measures).
4. Prepare a performance of your folk song for the class. Be able to sing the melody on words (either original language or the translation - you may have to tweak your translation to fit the rhythm of the melody).
5. Last step, do some research about this folk song and prepare at least a 5 minute presentation to share with the class to go along with your performance. Be able to discuss the song and the culture from which it comes. For example, perhaps it is a song sung by a specific group of people during harvest time. Who were these people, where were they living, what were they farming? What was the role of this song in their lives? What can we learn about their culture from this song? Are there any interesting words or phrases which can be explained to give more context?

Resource for finding folk songs:

<https://www.bethsnotesplus.com/countryregion>

Songs using I and V

Frère Jacques
Ode to Joy
Simple Gifts
Lady, Lady
We're Going Round the Mountain
Hot Cross Buns
Mary Had a Little Lamb
Molly Malone
London Bridge
The Farmer in the Dell
Alouettes
The Itsy Bitty Spider
Little Bo Peep
Three Blind Mice
We Will Rock You
Taps
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot
Hey Ho, Nobody Home
Are You Sleeping
Drunken Sailor
Farmer in the Dell
Go Tell Aunt Rhody
Hokey Pokey
He's Got the Whole World in His Hands
Hush Little Baby
I'll Fly Away
Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho
Lightly Row
O My Darling Clementine
Row Row Row Your Boat
Sur le Pont d'Avignon
Biddy Biddy
Wayfarin' Stranger
Angels We Have Heard on High
I Saw Three Ships
O Christmas Tree

Songs using secondary dominants

Red River Valley (V/V)
My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean (V/V)
This Train (V/IV)
De Laredo (V/IV)
Jolly Old St. Nicholas (V/V)
If You're Happy and You Know It (V/vi)
Auld Lang Sang (V/vi)
Blow the Man Down (V/ii)
Caribbean Tune (V/ii)
O Christmas Tree (V/ii)
Jingle Bells (V/V)
Will the Circle Be Unbroken (V/IV and V/V)
My Home's in Montana (V/IV and V/V)
Amazing Grace (V/IV and V/V)
Wabash Cannonball (V/IV)
Aura Lee (V/IV, V/V and V/vi)

Songs using I, IV and V

All Through the Night
O Mary Don't You Weep
Amazing Grace
America
America the Beautiful
Auld Lang Syne
Battle Hymn of the Republic
Brahms' Lullaby (Go to Sleep Little Baby)
Down By the Riverside
For He's a Jolly Good Fellow
Go Down, Moses
La Rama
Happy Birthday
Hickory Dickory Dock
Home on the Range
If You're Happy and You Know It
It's a Small World
Jamaica Farewell
Kookaburra
Kumbaya
Lavender's Blue
Marine's Hymn
Michael Row the Boat Ashore
Old McDonald
On Top of Old Smokey
Rockabye Baby
She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain
This Land is Your Land
This Old Man
Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star
When the Saints Go Marching In
Yankee Doodle
You Are My Sunshine
Holly and the Ivy
Go Tell it on the Mountain
Joy to the World
Silent Night
Up on the Housetop
When the Train Comes Along
Shall We Gather at the River
I Ride an Old Paint

Songs using vi chord

There's a Hole in the Bucket
Michael, Row the Boat Ashore (uses ii as well)
Tafta Hindi
Away in a Manger
Reuben and Rachel (uses iii as well)

Popular songs with the vi chord

Baby (Justin Bieber)
Beautiful Girls (Sean Kingston)
Brown Eyed Girl (Van Morrison)
Candle in the Wind (Elton John)
Duke of Earl (Gene Chandler)
Hallelujah (Leonard Cohen)
Hey Soul Sister [verse] (Train)
Hit Me with Your Best Shot [intro riff] (Pat Benatar)
Let it Be (Beatles)
Please Mr. Postman (Marvelettes)
Stand By Me (Ben E. King)
Unchained Melody [verse] (The Righteous Brothers)
Under the Boardwalk (The Drifters)
With or Without You (U2)
You Raise Me Up (Josh Groban)
You're Gonna Miss Me (when I'm gone)

Songs using ii chord

Michael, Row the Boat Ashore (uses vi as well)
When Love is Kind
Bingo
Cockles and Mussels
Stairway to Heaven