

Folk Music Starting Points



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Produced by the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), April 2021

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Photograph: National Youth Folk Ensemble workshop at Music for Youth Festival 2018, by Alick Cotterill

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Welcome!

Welcome to Folk Music Starting Points, a learning resource created as part of the National Youth Folk Ensemble programme. The resource is made up of films and audio recordings created by National Youth Folk Ensemble music leaders Miranda Rutter, Rob Harbron, Sam Partridge and Grace Smith.

The three films are for young musicians and they aim to demystify folk music by providing ways in to learning by ear, introducing folk specific techniques, and suggesting creative ideas for adding chords and harmony to folk tunes.

This accompanying text provides a summary of the learning points in each film for parents, music leaders and teachers, as well as notes and chords for players of transposing instruments.

Visit www.efdss.org/starting-points to access the films on the English Folk Dance and Song Society's award-winning Resource Bank.

About the National Youth Folk Ensemble

The National Youth Folk Ensemble brings together talented young musicians from across England to create inspiring new arrangements of folk music. Ensemble members experience intensive residential courses, receive expert tuition and guidance from leading folk musicians, and perform at arts venues and festivals.

Each May half-term the National Youth Folk Ensemble creative team delivers free Youth Folk Sampler Days for 12-18 year old instrumentalists. They are a chance for young musicians to play by ear, explore folk music and develop their creativity, and the route into the Ensemble for those (aged 14+) who wish to audition.

Our Youth Folk Engagement Programme aims to enable young people throughout England to discover, play and love folk music. We help foster the growth of local and regional opportunities to play folk music, particularly where there is currently little provision, and we support music educators to enable this to happen.

The National Youth Folk Ensemble is an English Folk Dance and Song Society programme funded by Arts Council England.

Find out more: www.efdss.org/youthfolk

Film 1: Learning a Tune by Ear

The first workshop is designed to help and encourage musicians to experience learning and playing music by ear. There are three learning steps in the film:

1. Listening: 'Geography'

The first step is to listen to the tune we are going to learn. We encourage 'active listening' by suggesting musicians listen out for specific fundamental elements in the music, such as tonality, time signature and structure.

2. Preparing: 'Scaffolding'

The next step is to explore some of these fundamental elements on our instruments to best prepare and equip us with what is needed to play the tune. These elements include:

- playing the scale (see notes for transposing instruments below)
- playing the range
- exploring the rhythm

3. Learning the tune: 'Tennis'

Once we have played through these ideas and become comfortable and confident in doing so, in effect putting up some 'scaffolding' that will help us work on our tune, we should be ready to start learning it. In this section, Sam and Grace demonstrate the 'tennis' method of learning a tune by ear, where the phrases are played and repeated while staying in time.

Am natural minor scale (concert pitch instruments)



Bm natural minor scale (Bb instruments)



F#m natural minor scale (Eb instruments)



Film 2: Bringing a Tune to Life

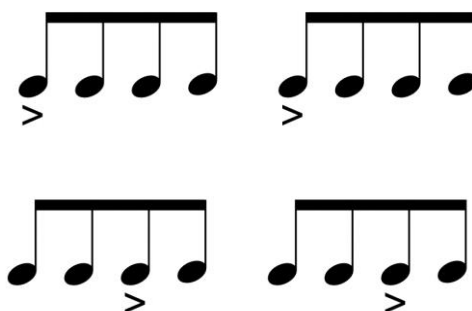
In this film we look at some tools or techniques to ‘bring the tune to life’ - to make it sound like a folk tune or to make it sound like a dance. Why? Most folk tunes have their roots in dance rhythms and, even if nobody’s dancing, it is these intrinsic dance grooves and rhythms that give these tunes their compelling appeal to players and listeners.

1. Pulse

We start by looking at ‘pulse’ – a way of giving life to or keeping momentum in longer notes within a tune. This technique helps players feel the pulse within longer notes, which helps to prevent rushing these notes and allows the tune to keep its groove.

2. Microbeats: Downbeats

Next we explore microbeats in the tune, firstly looking at downbeats (1s and 3s of groups of 4 quavers). This is partly a stepping-stone to finding upbeats but also enables the player to start to find rhythmic shape in the tune.



3. Microbeats: Upbeats

Thirdly we explore upbeats (2s and 4s of groups of 4 quavers) – these give lift to tunes, making them feel danceable.



Then we try a mixture of upbeats and downbeats to create a rhythmic pattern.



Finally, we recap by playing the tune 3 times, exploring each technique in turn.

Film 3: Going Beyond the Tune

In this film we look at some ways to start going beyond the basic tune - drones, chords, melodic harmony and variation.

1. Drones

We start off by playing the tune over different drones - first the key note, then all the notes from the natural minor scale.

2. Chords

Then we try out some different chords and put them together into a basic and alternate set of chords for The Drummer.

Chord	Am	G	Em	D
Concert pitch notes	A C E	G B D	E G B	D F# A
Bb notes	Bm - B D F#	A - A C# E	F#m - F# A C#	E - E G# B
Eb notes	F#m - F# A C#	E - E G# B	C#m - C# E G#	B - B D# F#

Basic chords (concert pitch instruments)

| Am | G | Am | Em Am :||
 | Am G | Am G | Am G | Em Am :||

Basic chords (Bb instruments)

| Bm | A | Bm | F#m Bm :||
 | Bm A | Bm A | Bm A | F#m Bm :||

Basic chords (Eb instruments)

| F#m | E | F#m | C#m F#m :||
 | F#m E | F#m E | F#m E | C#m F# :||

Alternate chords (concert pitch instruments)

| Am | G | Am | Em D :||
 | C G | C G | C D | Em Am :||

Alternate chords (Bb instruments)

| Bm | A | Bm | F#m D :||
 | D A | D A | D E | F#m Bm :||

Alternate chords (Eb instruments)

| F#m | E | F#m | C#m B :||
 | A E | A E | A B | C#m F#m :||

3. Harmony

Finally, we explore some ways in to melodic harmony, including harmonising in intervals (3rds and 6ths), and put it all together into a mini-arrangement.



At the English Folk Dance and Song Society, we champion the folk arts at the heart of England's rich and diverse cultural landscape.

Our award-winning Resource Bank contains over 100 resources – incorporating hundreds of audio files, videos and supporting documents, all free to download. They offer endless practical ways to use folk song, music, dance, drama and more in all sorts of community settings, as well as in formal education.

efdss.org/resourcebank

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