

TRADITIONAL  
IRISH MUSIC

# TOPICS COVERED:

1. TRADITIONAL IRISH MUSIC

INSTRUMENTS

2. TRADITIONAL IRISH TUNES

3. MUSIC NOTATION & THEORY

RELATED TO TRADITIONAL IRISH MUSIC

# TRAD IRISH INSTRUMENTS

- Fiddle
- Irish Flute
- Tin/Penny Whistle
- Uilleann Pipes
- Harp
- Bodhrán
- Button Accordion
- Guitar
- Mandolin
- Bouzouki

# Fiddle

- A fiddle is the same as a violin. For Irish music, it is tuned the same, low to high string: G, D, A, E.
- The term “fiddle” is used when referring to traditional or folk music.
- The fiddle is one of the primarily used instruments for traditional Irish music and has been used for over 200 years in Ireland.



- The medieval fiddle originated in Europe in the 10th century, which was relatively square shaped and held in the arms.



# Fiddle (cont.)

- The violin in its current form was first created in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century (early 1500s) in Northern Italy.
- When fiddlers play traditional Irish music, they ornament the music with slides, cuts (upper grace note), taps (lower grace note), rolls, drones (also known as a double stop), accents, staccato and sometimes trills.
- Irish fiddlers tend to make little use of vibrato, except for slow airs and waltzes, which is also used sparingly.



# Irish flute

- Flutes have been played in Ireland for over a thousand years.
- There are two types of flutes: Irish flute and classical flute.
- Irish flute is typically used when playing Irish music.
- Irish flutes are made of wood and have a conical bore, giving it an airy tone that is softer than classical flute and tin whistle.



- This flute originated in England by flautist Charles Nicholson for concert players, but was adapted by Irish flautists as simple flutes.

# Tin Whistle



- AKA: Penny Whistle.
- A similar instrument was found in Slovenia, dating to the Neanderthal era from 81,000-53,000 BCE, made from a bone.
- 12<sup>th</sup> century Norman bone whistles have been found in Ireland.
- The modern tin whistle was created in England, made of metal.
- The penny whistle was considered a toy.
- The term “penny whistle” came from those who busked. People who heard them would give them a penny.
- Tin whistles are now made of metal, plastic or carbon fiber.
- The standard tin whistle is in the key of D and there are also Low D whistles (tenor whistles).
- There are also whistle makers who make a whistle in each key – A, B, C, D, E, F, G, etc..

# Uilleann Pipes

- Pronounced ILL-un
- Uilleann means “elbow” in Irish.
- The pipe bag, which is under the player's left elbow/arm, is fed air through bellows that are squeezed with the player's right arm/elbow.
- The benefits of the elbow bellows are: Much less likely to have algae/fungus in the bag or pipes (no moisture); Musician can focus on the chanter, drones and regulators.





# Uilleann Pipes (cont.)

- Uilleann pipes were created toward the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (early 1700s).
- Uilleann pipes are chromatic (include all the sharps and flats) and span two octaves.
- Most Uilleann pipes are made to be tuned to the key of D. There are pipe makers who also create Uilleann pipes in the keys of C sharp, C, B and B flat.
- They play at an appropriate volume indoors, unlike the Great Highland Pipes, which are loud.



# harp



- The Harp came to Europe from Egypt thousands of years ago.
- As early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century, harpists would travel throughout Ireland playing for patrons of all types.
- The Harp has been the national symbol of Ireland since Medieval Times.
- When England took control over Ireland, the Harp represented Irish Nationalism. The harp was banned, many harps were burned and some harpists were executed. Although, Turlough O'Carolan was a successful harpist.
- It wasn't until 1792 that the harp was revived at the Belfast Festival.

# harp

(cont.)



- Irish Harp (Gaelic Harp, Celtic Harp, Clàrsach) is played more frequently in traditional Irish music than classical harp. Irish Harp is smaller and easier to carry.
- Strings are made of brass, played with fingernails and produce a brilliant ringing sound.
- Throughout the Middle Ages, the Irish Harp was the highest status instrument for playing Irish music. Harpers were among the prestigious cultural figures for royalty and clan chiefs.
- Harps are used to play melody and rhythmic chords.
- Irish Harp is Ireland's national symbol.

# Bodhrán

- Pronounced BOW-rawn.
- This is a drum with a diameter of 10"-26", depth of 3.5"-8", usually covered with goat skin, frame made of wood and one or two wood crossbars in the back.
- Drummer's dominant hand plays the rhythm with the cipin (tipper). The other hand presses the back of the goat skin to control the pitch.
- The origin of this drum is unclear, but thought to be native to the Celts predating Christianity.



# BUTTON ACCORDION

- The original button accordion had a single row of ten buttons in a major key on the right hand keyboard.
- To ornament Irish tunes, another row of ten buttons were added that were in a major key a half step up or down from the other key.
- The instruments were made with rows of these keys: C & C#, C# & D, D & D# or D# & C, which made the accordion chromatic.
- By the early 1950s, the B & C keys became most popular because it allowed for a smoother and quicker style of playing.



# GUITAR

- The standard tuning of guitar strings in the US from low to high is EADGBE. In Ireland, DADGAD is most common because DADGAD tuning fits in better with fiddles and pipes.
- Guitars are usually used for chord accompaniment and rhythm, although they are occasionally used for melody.
- The first six string guitar evolved from a similar instrument in the 1800s.



# Mandolin

- The mandolin evolved from the lute in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It originally had 8 pairs of strings.
- The modern version originated in Naples in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with four pairs of strings. Each pair has the same tuning.
- The mandolin is tuned like the violin. From low to high: G, D, A, E.
- The mandolin is used for rhythm and melody.
- Mandolins have frets (raised lines on the finger board), which makes it easier to get the notes in tune than on a fiddle.
- The mandolin became popular in playing Irish music in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



# Bouzouki

- The bouzouki originated in Greece – originally with three sets of two strings and a deep round bowl-like back.
- The Irish bouzouki is a unique version of the Greek bouzouki, adapted to play traditional Irish music in the 1960s. The Irish bouzouki has four sets of two strings and a flat narrow back.
- The most common tuning for the Irish bouzouki is G, D, A, D (from low to high).
- Dónal Lunny got the first Irish bouzouki created by an English instrument builder, Peter Abnett. Dónal Lunny is well known as an iconic Irish bouzouki player.





# TRADITIONAL IRISH TUNES

• REELS

• WALTZES

• JIGS

• AIRS

• HORNPIPES

• BARNDANCES

• POLKAS

• MAZURKAS

# Reels

- Reels are the most commonly played tunes in Ireland.
- They are thought to have arrived in Ireland from Scotland toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (late 1700s).
- These tunes are in 4/4 time and are often played in sets (2 or more reels in a set). Rather than counting four beats per measure, Irish musicians typically count two beats per measure, on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> beat in the measure because these tunes are often played in a medium to fast tempo.
- A Reel has two or more sections. Each section has eight measures that are repeated, unless there is a modified version of playing it the second time. If there is a modified second version, there will be 16 measures in the section that is not repeated.

# FATHER KELLY'S REEL

Violin

1st ending 2nd ending

1st ending and ending for repeating this tune Final ending of the tune

The image displays a musical score for the violin part of 'Father Kelly's Reel'. It consists of five staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The first staff begins with a double bar line and repeat sign. The second staff continues the melody. The third staff is divided into two sections: the '1st ending' and the '2nd ending', both marked with repeat signs. The fourth staff continues the melody. The fifth staff is also divided into two sections: the '1st ending and ending for repeating this tune' and the 'Final ending of the tune', both marked with repeat signs.

# O'CAROLAN'S DRAUGHT



# JIGS

- Jigs are the second most commonly played tunes in Ireland.
- Jigs have been around since the 17<sup>th</sup> century.
- There are four different types of jigs: Double Jig, Single Jig, Slip Jig and Slide
- The Double Jig is the most commonly played jig in Ireland.
- Jigs are often played in sets (2 or more jigs per set) and are played in medium to fast tempos.

# Double Jig

- A double jig is in 6/8 time.
- Jigs have two or more sections that consist of eight measures. Each section is repeated if the repeat isn't modified. If it is modified, the section will have 16 measures without a repeat.
- Double Jigs have mostly eighth notes throughout the tune.
- Rather than counting each measure in six beats, those who play Irish music count them in two beats.

# The Blarney Pilgram

The image displays a musical score for the piece "The Blarney Pilgram". The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 6/8 time. It consists of six staves of music, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff begins with a repeat sign and a double bar line. Above the staves, the following chords are indicated: D, A, G, G, D, A, D, A, G, D, G, D, G, A, G, D, G, A, G. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some measures containing rests. The score concludes with a repeat sign and a double bar line.

# BANISH MISFORTUNE

## Banish Misfortune





# Single Jig

- A Single Jig is written in 6/8 time. They have two or more sections and each section has eight measures. Each section is repeated unless the second time through the section is modified. If it is modified, the section will have 16 measures without a repeat.
- A Single Jig has lots of measures with quarter notes followed by eighth notes. Single jigs don't have the eighth note as their primary note. In a Single Jig, each section typically ends with two dotted quarter notes, or a dotted quarter note and a quarter note, or a dotted quarter note and an eighth note.

# Behind the Bush in the Garden

## Behind the Bush in the Garden

A musical score for the song "Behind the Bush in the Garden". The score is written on six staves of music, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 8/8. The melody is written on the top line of each staff, and the chords are indicated by letters above the notes. The chords are: Am, G, Am, F, G, Am, C, Am, Em, C, Am, G, Am, C, Am, Em, C, Am, G, Am.

Am G

Am F G Am

C Am Em

C Am G Am

C Am Em

C Am G Am

# Slip Jig

- A Slip Jig is in 9/8 time. Instead of counting nine beats per measure, those who play Traditional Irish music, count three beats per measure.
- There are four measures per section, unless one of the sections has a modified repeat the second time you play the section. If there is a modified repeat, there will be eight measures with no repeat.

# The Butterfly

## The Butterfly

*(Ireland)*

The image displays a musical score for the Irish folk song "The Butterfly". The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 3/8 time. It consists of three staves of music. Above each staff are chord annotations: Em, C, D, Em, D, Em, C, D, G, D for the first staff; Em, C, G, Em, C, D, Em, C, G, G, D for the second staff; and Em, C, Em, D, Em, C, G, D, G, D, Em, C, D for the third staff. The third staff includes first and second endings, indicated by "1" and "2" above the final measures. The melody is primarily composed of eighth and quarter notes, with some beamed eighth notes and a final cadence on each staff.



# Slide

- Slides are written in 12/8 time and have two or more sections.
- Instead of counting twelve beats per measure, those who play Traditional Irish music count four beats per measure.
- There are four measures per section unless the playing of the section the second time is modified. If it is modified, the section has eight measures.

# STAR ABOVE THE GARTER

Star above the Garter



# The Road to Lisdoonvarna

## The Road To Lisdoonvarna

The image displays a musical score for the piece "The Road To Lisdoonvarna". The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 12/8 time. It consists of two staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a time signature of 12/8. The melody starts with a repeat sign. The second staff continues the melody, also starting with a repeat sign. Chords are indicated above the notes on both staves.

Chords for the first staff: Em, D, Em, D, Em.

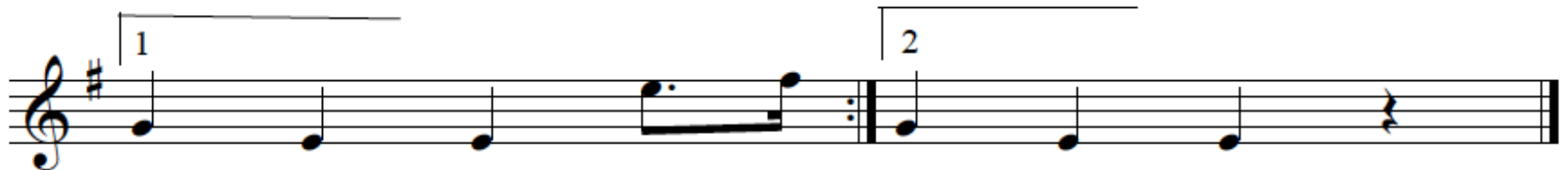
Chords for the second staff: Em, G, A, Em, Em, G, A, Bm, Em.



# hornpipes

- Hornpipes are in 4/4 time and began around 16<sup>th</sup> Century (1500s) on English Sailing vessels. The sailors would dance to the hornpipes while they were out to sea. Instead of counting four beats per measure, those who play hornpipes count two beats per measure.
- Hornpipes have two or more sections. Each section has eight measures unless the repeat is modified. If it's modified, the section has 16 measures.
- Each hornpipe section has a unique ending... they end with three quarter notes.
- Each of the hornpipes that are played truly give you a sense of being out on the ocean.
- Hornpipes are played at a similar tempo as Reels – a medium to fast tempo.

# The Boys of Ballycastle



# Jacky Tar

## Jacky Tar

hornpipe

The musical score for 'Jacky Tar' is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The piece consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a repeat sign and a fermata over the first measure, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. Chords Em and D are indicated above the staff. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' at the end of the first staff. The second staff starts at measure 5 and includes chords Em, G, and D. It features a first ending bracket over measures 8-9 and a second ending bracket over measures 10-11. The third staff starts at measure 10 and includes chords Em and D. The fourth staff starts at measure 14 and includes chords Em, G, and D, with first and second ending brackets over measures 17-18 and 19-20 respectively.

# polkas

- Polkas originated in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1800s) in Bohemia and is still a popular genre of tunes throughout Europe. Outside of Ireland, polkas typically are in 3/4 time.
- In Ireland, Polkas are written in 2/4 time or 2/2 time, with two beats per measure. There are eight measures per section.
- One of the areas in Ireland that plays lots of polkas is the Sliabh Luachra area, which are the mountains between Killarney and Cork.
- Polkas are played at a medium to fast tempo.

# SEAN RYAN'S polka

The image displays a musical score for "Sean Ryan's Polka" in D major (two sharps) and 2/4 time. The score is written on four staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a 2/4 time signature. It features a repeat sign followed by a melodic line. The second staff continues the melody and includes a first ending bracket labeled "1" and a second ending bracket labeled "2". The third staff continues the melodic line with a repeat sign at the beginning. The fourth staff concludes the piece with a final melodic line and a repeat sign. The notation includes various note values such as quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes, along with rests and repeat signs.

# BRITCHES full of STITCHES

## Britches Full of Stitches

polka

The musical score is written on three staves in treble clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes. Chord symbols are placed above the notes: A, D, A, E, A, D, A, E.

Staff 1: A, D, A

Staff 2: E, A

Staff 3: A, D, A, E

# WALTZES

- Waltzes are written in 3/4 time.
- Waltzes are usually with either 8 or 16 measures per section.
- The Waltz originated in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (1500s) in Europe.
- Waltzes are played at a slow, melodic tempo.

# SI BHEAG SI MHOR





# MUNSTER CLOAK



# AIRS OR AIRES

- Airs can be in any time signature.
- An Air is a slowly played, melodic tune.

## ARRAN BOAT SONG



The image displays a musical score for the piece "Arran Boat Song". The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 6/8. The melody is presented across five staves. The first staff begins with an Em chord and a D chord. The second staff includes first and second endings, with A chords. The third staff features Em, G, and D chords. The fourth staff shows first and second endings with Em, G, and A chords. The fifth staff concludes with Em, D, and A (Em) chords. The notation includes various note values such as quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, along with rests and bar lines.

# BARNDANCES

- Barndances are tunes that are used for social dancing at a céili (Irish social dance). Social dances also include Scottish social dancing, English country dancing, Morris dancing, Contra dancing and Square Dancing.
- Barn Dances can be in any time signature. They can be jigs, reels, hornpipes, etc.

# PARSON'S FAREWELL



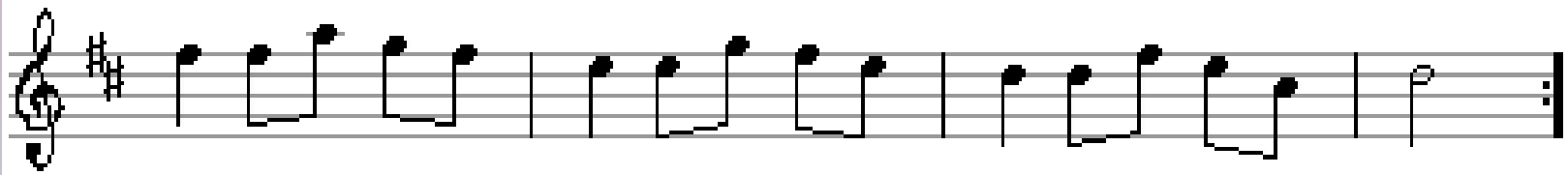
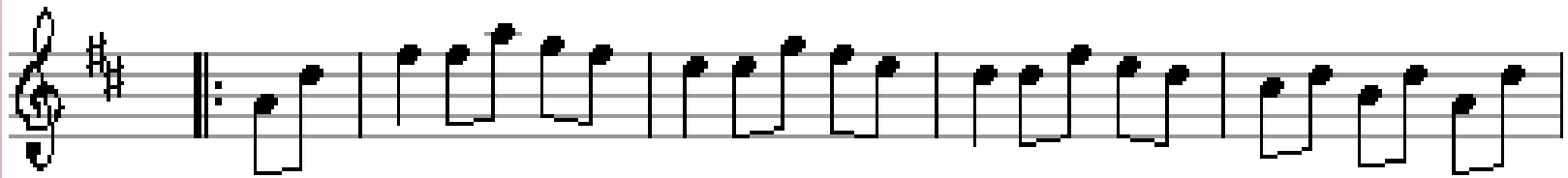
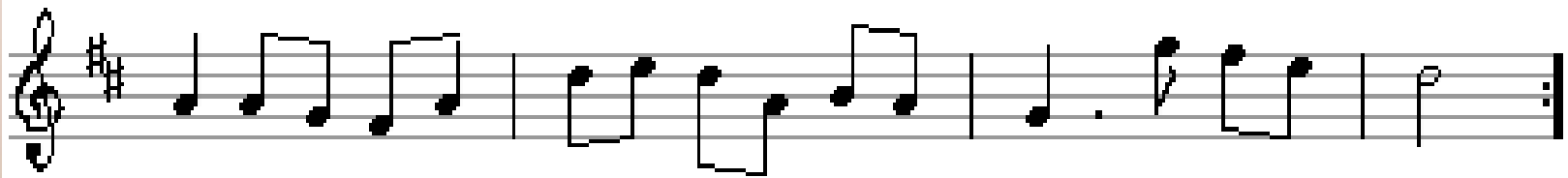
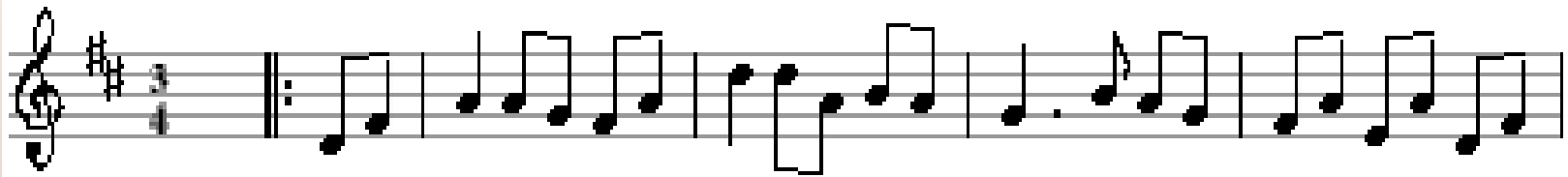
# CHILD GROVE



# Mazurkas

- Mazurkas originated in Poland. In Polish it is called Mazurek.
- A Mazurka is in 3/4 time and Mazurkas are usually played at a lively tempo.
- In Ireland, Mazurkas are played most frequently in County Donegal. Mazurkas are very popular in that county.
- Mazurkas have eight measures per section.

# Sonny's Mazurka



# MUSIC NOTATION & THEORY

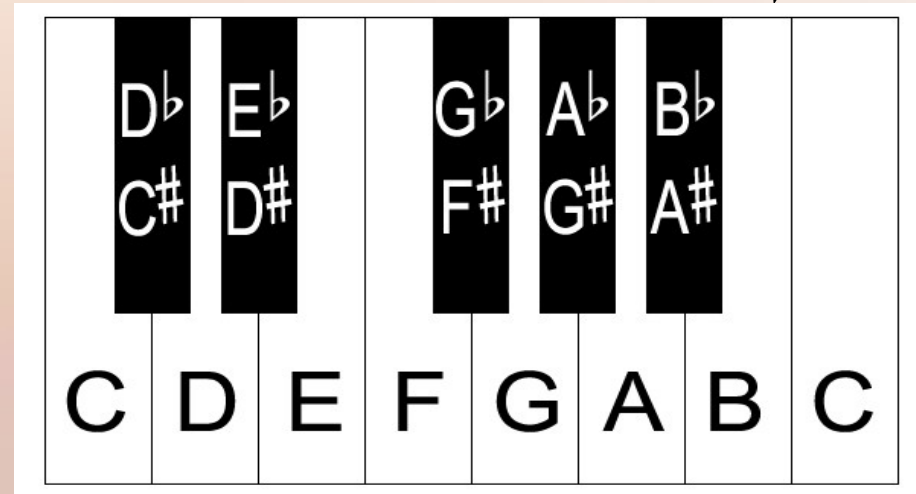
- Treble Clef
- Sharps & Flats
- Major Keys
- Minor Keys
- Modal Keys
- Key Signatures
- Notes and Rests
- Time Signatures
- **Other Notations:**
- Section Repeat
- Measure Repeat
- Slurs & Ties
- Up Bow & Down Bow
- Triplets
- Grace Notes
- Double Stop
- Accents
- Slide
- Turn
- Trill
- Staccato



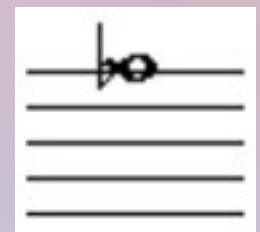
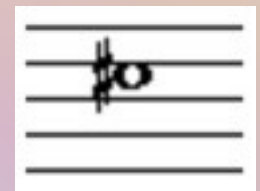
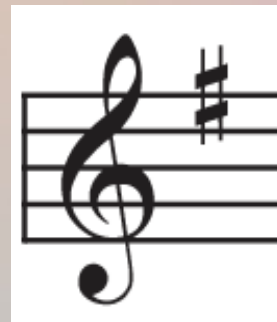


# Sharps (#) & flats (b)

- There are also **sharp** and **flat** notes. The easiest way to understand these notes is to view a set of piano keys. From C to C# is a half step. C# = D flat. From C to D is a whole step. From E to F is a half step. E# = F and F flat = E.

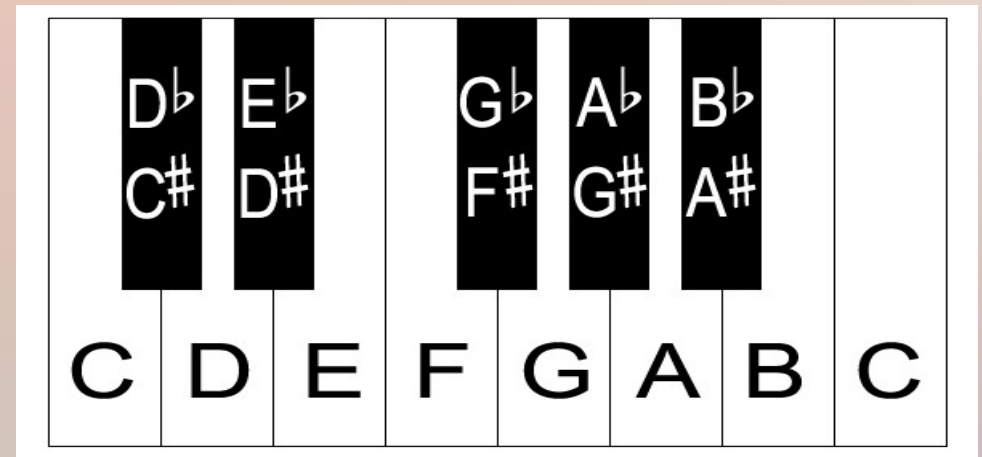


- Sharps and flats are shown in two ways in sheet music: To the right of the clef, which partially defines the key of the tune, or as accidentals to the left of notes.
- The reason there are sharps and flats is because there are many different keys in which tunes are composed that include sharps or flats.



# MAJOR Keys

- Every major key has the same pattern of steps between the notes and the key starts with the note that names the key: C Major starts with a C. The notes in the C Major key are C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C.
- **Major key pattern:** Start with the note of the key name and take these steps: **whole, whole, half, whole, whole, whole, half.**
- For **G Major**, start at G and do the same steps: G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G. For **D Major**: D, E, F#, G, A, B, C#, D. For **F Major**: F, G, A, B $\flat$ , C, D, E, F
- What are the notes in the **A Major** Scale?



# ANSWER

A B C<sup>#</sup> D E F<sup>#</sup> G<sup>#</sup> A

# IRISH TRAD MAJOR keys.

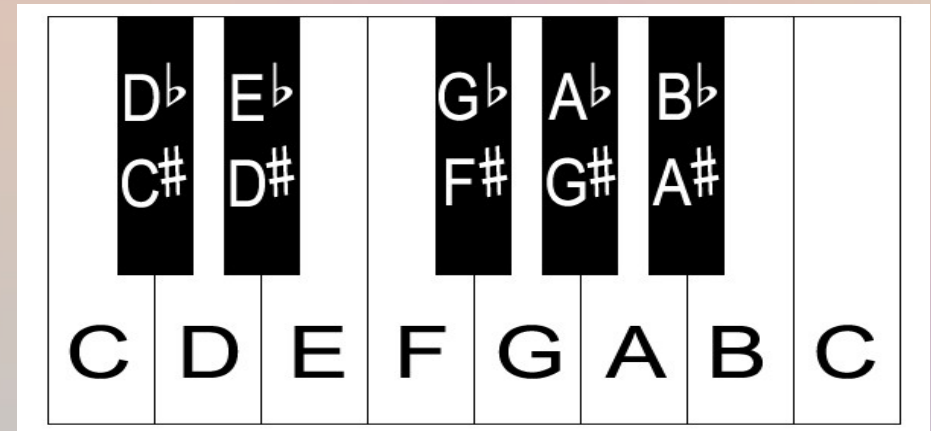
This data was collected on the [www.session.org](http://www.session.org) web site.

The keys are listed with the Irish Trad tunes with the highest number of Major keys to the lowest.

- G Major
- D Major
- A Major
- C Major
- F Major
- E Major

# Minor Keys

- Every minor key has the same step pattern, but not the same step pattern as the Major keys. Minor keys have the same notes as the Major key that is three half steps above the minor key. The A note is three half steps below the C, so A minor has the same notes as the key of C Major, but a different step pattern (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A).
- **Minor step pattern:** Start with the note of the key name and take these steps: **whole, half, whole, whole, half, whole, whole.**
- For **E Minor**, start at E and do the same steps: E, F#, G, A, B, C, D, E. For **B Minor**: B, C#, D, E, F#, G, A, B.
- What are the notes in the **D Minor** Scale?



ANSWER:

D E F G A B<sup>b</sup> C D

# IRISH TRAD MINOR KEYS.

This data was collected on the [www.session.org](http://www.session.org) web site.  
The keys are listed with the Irish Trad tunes with the highest number of minor keys to the lowest.

- E Minor
- B Minor
- A Minor
- D Minor
- G Minor

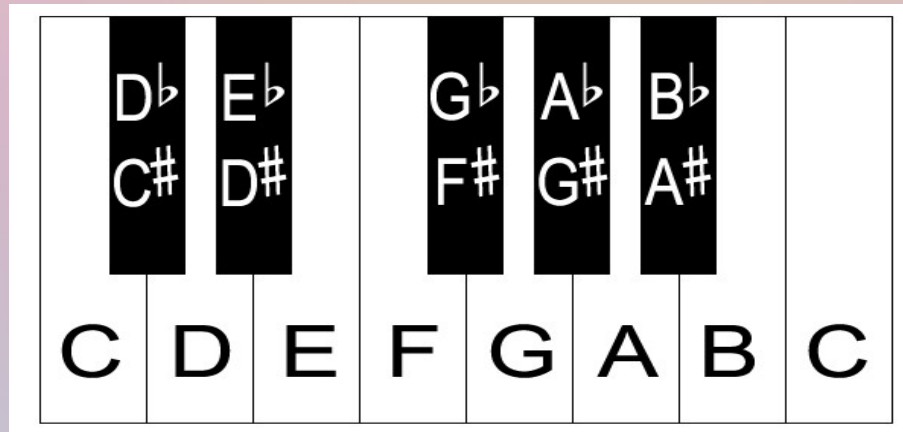


# Modal Keys

- Modal keys are keys that are modified by one note. There are several types of modal keys, but the most commonly used modal keys in Traditional Irish Music are **Dorian** and **Mixolydian**.
- We will only discuss the Dorian and Mixolydian modal keys.

# Modal Keys - DORIAN

- **Modern Dorian Step Pattern:** The Modern Dorian Key has a half step up on the 6<sup>th</sup> note on a minor key, which makes the step to the 7<sup>th</sup> note a half step up, but this only changes the 6<sup>th</sup> note in the minor key. Here is the step pattern: **whole, half, whole, whole, whole, half, whole.** **A Dorian:** A, B, C, D, E, F#, G, A



- What are the notes in the **Modern D Dorian** Scale?

ANSWER:

D E F G A B C D

# The Litching Banshee



# IRISH TRAD DORIAN Keys.

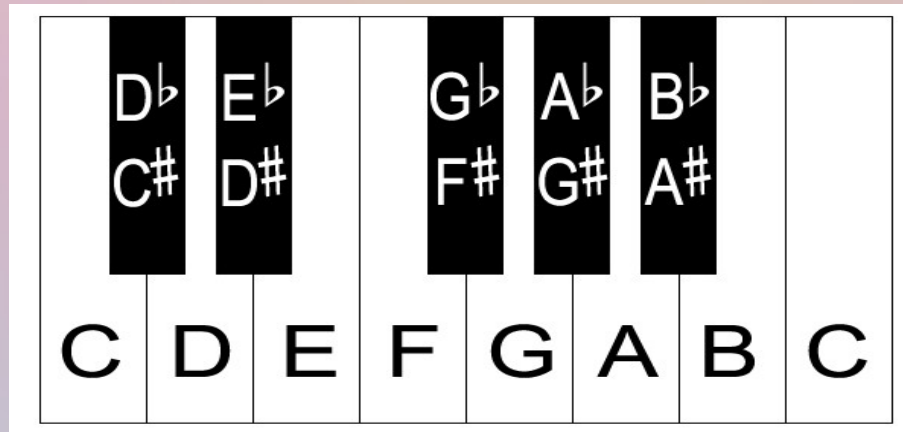
This data was collected on the [www.session.org](http://www.session.org) web site.

These keys are listed with the Irish Trad tunes with the highest number of Dorian keys to the lowest.

- A Dorian
- E Dorian
- D Dorian
- G Dorian
- B Dorian
- C Dorian
- F Dorian

# Modal Keys - Mixolydian

- **Modern Mixolydian Step Pattern:** The Modern Mixolydian Key has a half step down on the 7<sup>th</sup> note on a Major key, which makes the step to the 8<sup>th</sup> note a whole step up, but this only changes the 7<sup>th</sup> note in the major key. Here is the step pattern: **whole, whole, half, whole, whole, half, whole.** A **Mixolydian:** A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G, A



- What are the notes in the **Modern C Mixolydian Scale**?

ANSWER:

C D E F G A B<sup>b</sup> C





# IRISH TRAD MIX KEYS:

This data was collected on the [www.session.org](http://www.session.org) web site. These keys are listed with the Irish Trad tunes with the highest number of Mixolydian keys to the lowest.

- A Mixolydian
- D Mixolydian
- G Mixolydian
- E Mixolydian
- B Mixolydian

# Key SIGNATURES

- If the key in which you are playing has sharps or flats, they are noted to the right of the clef on each line of the sheet music.
- If you are playing a tune that has just one sharp (F#), this doesn't clearly define the key in which the tune was written. In the Major, Minor, Dorian and Mixolydian Keys, each of these categories has a key with with one sharp: G Major, E Minor, A Dorian, D Mixolydian.
- This is the case for every set of sharps and flats that appear to the right of the clef. All four of these key categories have the same sets of sharps and flats, but the keys are different.



# how to determine keys

- Look at the last note of a section or the tune. This note tells you the first note of the key, but you need to look at the number of sharps and flats to determine if this is a major, minor or modal key. What is the key of **Far From Home**?



ANSWER:

G Major




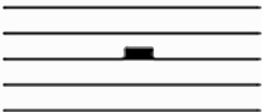






# In which key is Blarney Pilgram?

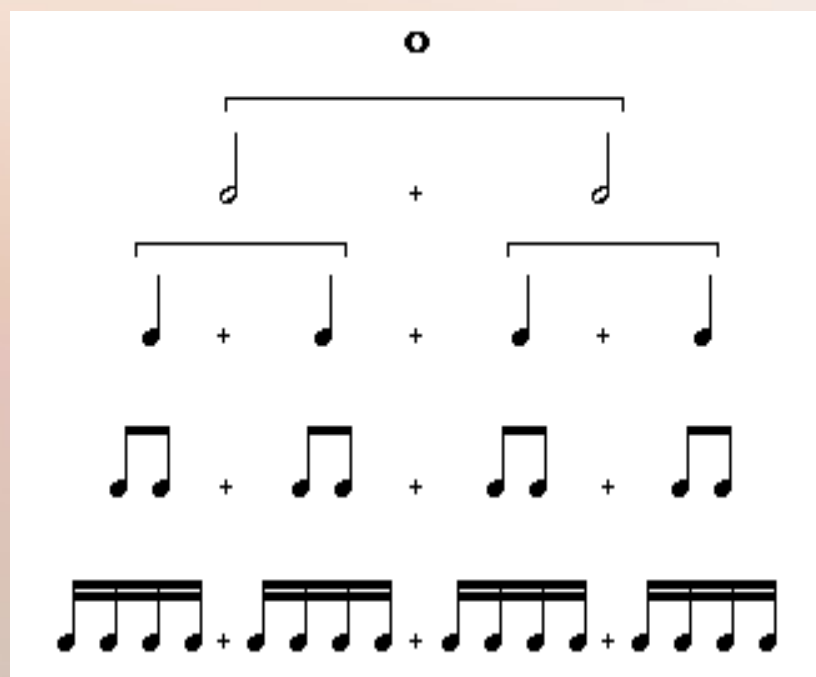


ANSWER:

D Mixolydian

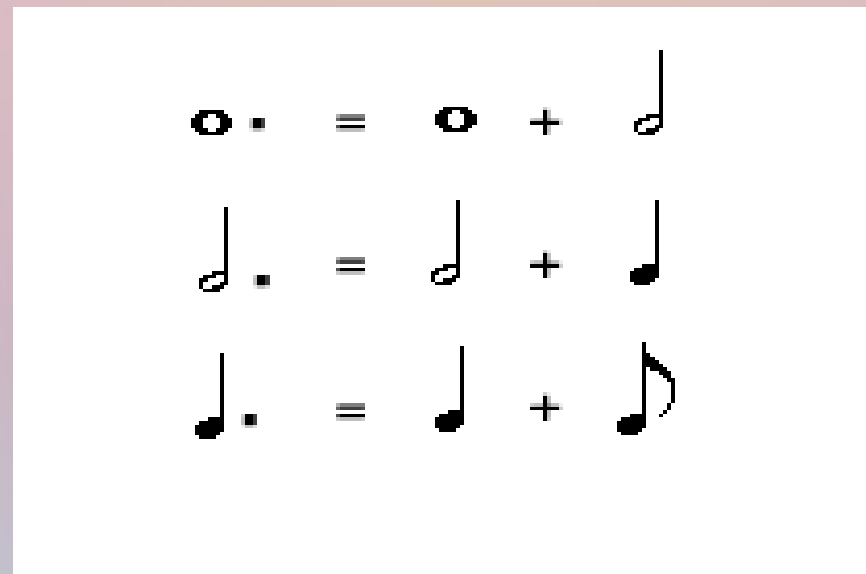
# MUSICAL NOTES AND RESTS

Name	Note	Rest
Whole Note		
Half Note		
Quarter Note		
Eighth Note		
Sixteenth Note		



# DOTTED NOTES AND RESTS

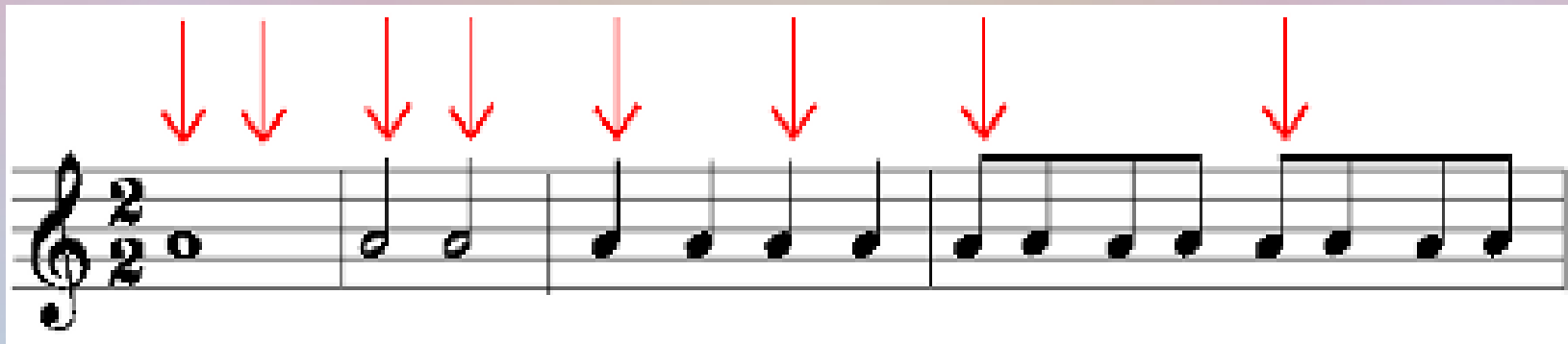
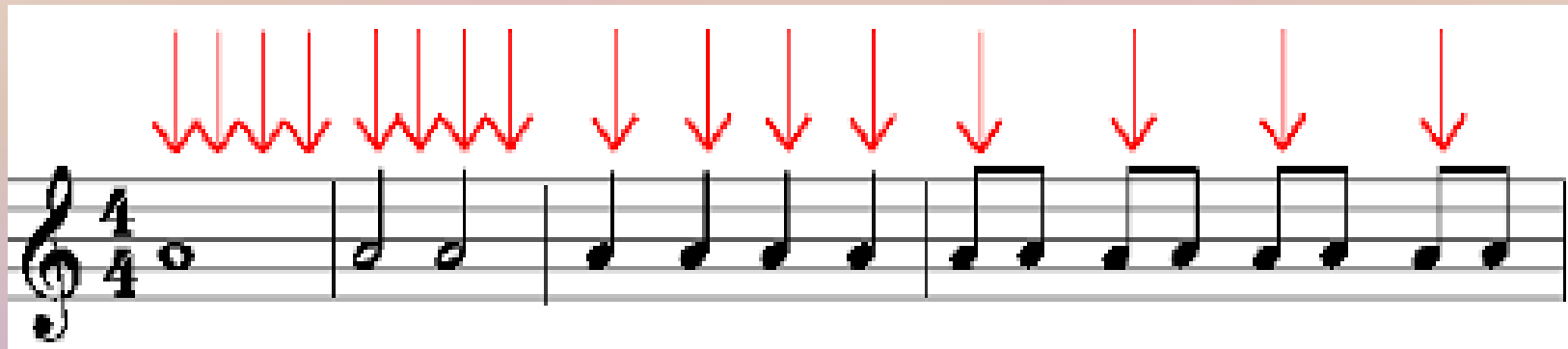
- A dotted note and rest is played for 1.5 times the length of the note and rest.





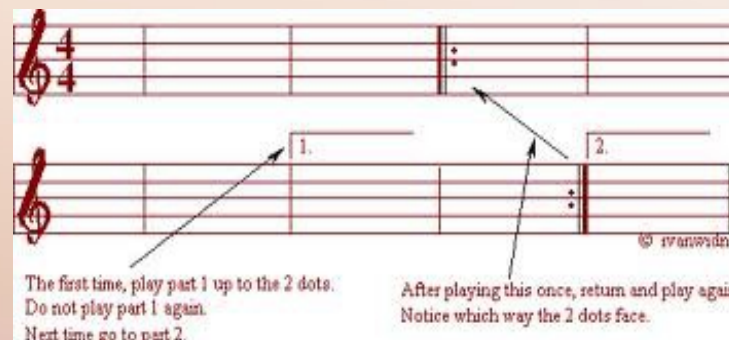
# TIME SIGNATURES

Time signatures include two numbers. The top number tells how many beats per measure. The bottom number tells which note gets the beat. If the bottom number is 8, the eighth note gets the beat. If it's 4, the quarter note gets the beat. If it's 2, half note gets the beat.

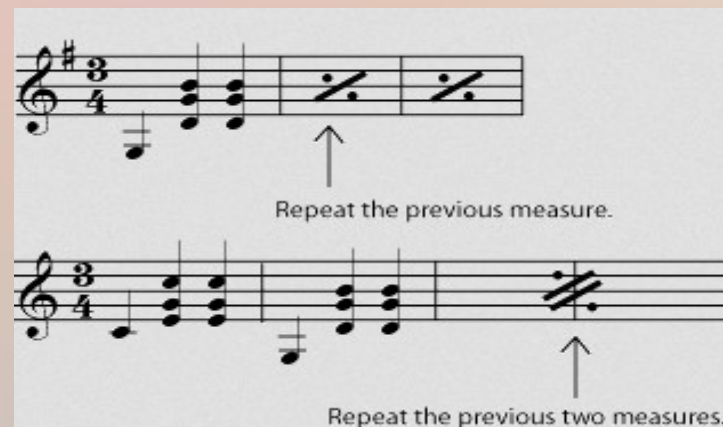


# Other Musical Notation

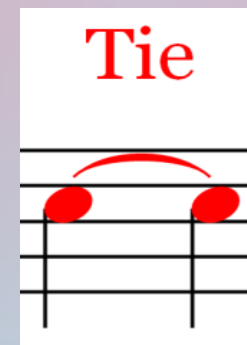
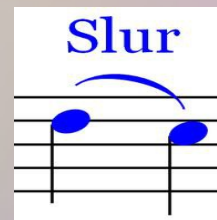
- Section repeat notation.



- Measure repeat notation.

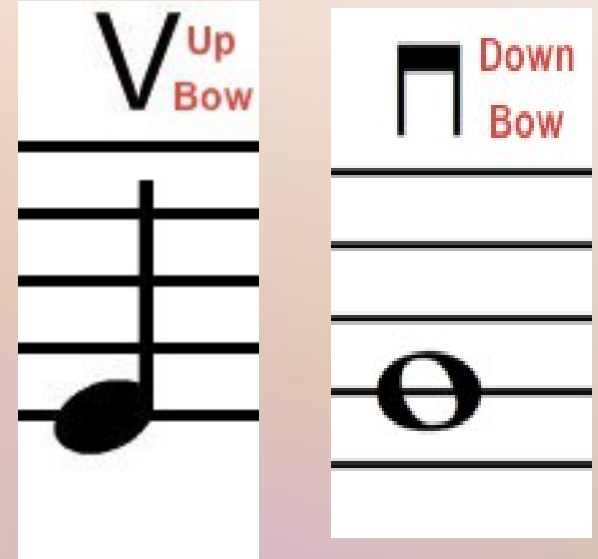


- A slur is when you go from one note to another without a gap. A tie is when you keep playing the same note without a gap.



# Other Musical Notation

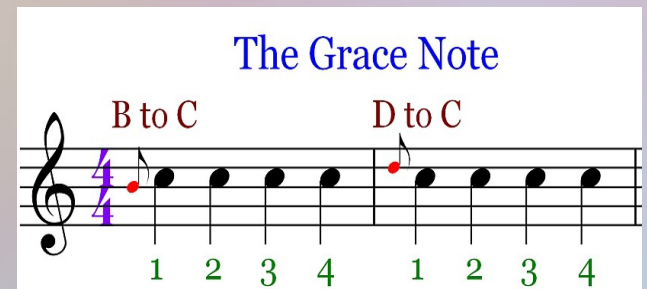
- Up bow and down bow notation when playing a string instrument.



- Triplet notation is a set of three notes that you play in one beat.

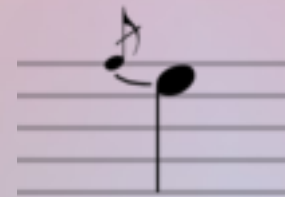
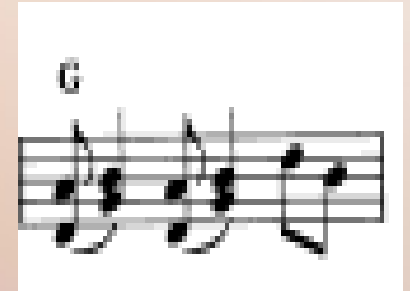


- Grace Notes are notes played quickly before standard note.



# OTHER MUSICAL NOTATION

- A double stop is an ornamentation when you play two notes at the same time.
- An accent is when you play the note with a lot of strength and volume.
- A slide is when you start on the first note and slide up or down to the second note without any gaps between the two notes.



# Other Musical Notation

- A turn is ornamentation where you quickly start on the written note, go up one, go back to the written note, go down one and return to the written note.



- A trill is ornamentation where you play back and forth very quickly between the written note and then note above.



- Staccato is when you play a note that is short and distinctly detached from the note after it.



- A fermata is a place where you hold the note or rest longer than is indicated.

