

World Tour: Folk music from Europe

KS3

Simon Rushby

Introduction

Our musical World Tour has lasted nearly two years, during a time when in reality most of us have been unable to travel very far. Our virtual trip has taken us westwards, via the Caribbean (January 2020), South America (September 2020), China (December 2020), the Middle East (March 2021) and West Africa (August 2021), and now we head into mainland Europe for a look at some of the traditional music from this extremely diverse continent.

We'll save the UK and Ireland for the final resource in this series. Here, we'll look at two of the many folk music traditions found across Europe, from its Eastern to its Western reaches. Though this means missing out on a huge range of fantastic traditional music from places like Greece, Bulgaria, the Alps, Scandinavia and Brittany, hopefully I've picked two examples that will inspire students to look further into the rich musical heritage of our own continent and make links with music they know.

What defines European folk music?

Generally speaking, we use the term **folk** to describe music that's passed down through families, communities and social groups, as an **oral tradition**, learnt through hearing and copying. Usually it is rural in origin, and it tends to be associated with other social activities such as dancing, celebration, eating and drinking together, and telling stories. It's a very loose term, though, and broadly we can think of it as music associated with people getting together informally rather than in schools, churches or concert halls. Also, and perhaps most importantly, it's music for people to participate in rather than have played to them.

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Spanish flamenco dancer and guitarist

Where in Europe?

A useful starting point is a listening quiz, getting students to suggest where in Europe each of the six examples below comes from, and giving a musical feature they can hear, one that perhaps helps them locate the region. If you want, they can use this outline map, which has the correct areas labelled, though not in the correct order! I've supplied some brief notes to help you lead discussions about each piece.

- ▶ The song *Black Diamond* played by **flamenco** guitarist Antonio Muñoz (www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9NCvSakgR8), who hails from Murcia in Spain. Flamenco developed mainly in Andalusia in southern Spain and represents (like most traditional music) a **fusion** of styles that reflects the diversity of Andalusia's population – Spanish, Jewish, Byzantine, Moorish and Romany. **(F)**



- ▶ *Tzivaeri*, a traditional Greek song (www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uyXjNGXoNM). Make sure you play enough of the clip to include Dolleesi's haunting vocals, which are accompanied here by a qanun and a Cretan lyre, a three-stringed bowed instrument. This is a beautiful and famous Greek song, telling the story of loss and sorrow caused by people leaving their loved ones to settle in other countries. The music sounds very similar to Arabic music, and there is more about the qanun in the World Tour resource on the Middle East (*Music Teacher*, March 2021). **(E)**
- ▶ The *Alaska Waltz* performed by Vierkleee (www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Po-i4SWcbU&list=PLxmKl1V-EoM3uhDiOysPboJeL1Uh-ThPn), a group from the Austrian Tyrol who play violin, dulcimer, harp and double bass. Music from the Alps (which includes parts of Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Slovenia too) includes **ländler** and **schuhplattler** (which involves stamping, clapping and slapping knees and shoes) as well as the more familiar **polkas** and **waltzes** often found in Vienna. **(C)**
- ▶ Stunning playing by Romanian band Taraful Haiducilor (or Taraf de Haidouks) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=pT4lufMeyYA), a modern band at the forefront of preserving and performing traditional Romany music from Romania and the wider Balkan area. Their complex, **polyphonic** sound features violin, accordion, cimbalom and double bass. **(D)**
- ▶ One of Poland and Ukraine's best-known folk songs, *Hej Sokoly* ('Hey falcons') (www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZzZ1qmXZBuY) was popular among Polish soldiers in World War Two and other conflicts and tells the story of separation between a soldier and his Ukrainian girlfriend. There are Polish dances too, particularly the **mazurka** and the **polonaise**, made popular by Chopin in his piano music. **(A)**
- ▶ Students might not expect folk music from France to sound like this, but in Brittany there is a diverse mix of styles, including Celtic, which is the standout sound of this dance, known as *An dro* (Breton for 'The Turn') (www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhMRL6RoAD4). It's a bit like a Scottish or Irish **reel**, and features instruments like the Celtic harp, clarinet, guitar and bagpipes. This arrangement is by Arany Zoltán, who is actually a Hungarian musician. **(B)**

Romania



Romanian folk accordion

There are many styles within the centuries-old musical tradition of Romania, featuring a range of instruments and dances. Some Romanian musicians, such as panpipes player Gheorghe Zamfir and violinist Efta Botoca, have become famous throughout their country and beyond for their work in preserving and popularising traditional music.

Transylvania, a province in central Romania famous for its beautiful scenery and as the setting for Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, is a hotbed of traditional music, much of which was collected in the early 20th century by Hungarian composers Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály and featured in their compositions. A lot of Hungarians live in the province, and much of the music from here and the neighbouring, more southerly province of Wallachia features violin, double bass and cimbalom in bands called **tarafs**, as in the example by Taraful Haiducilor above.

Another popular traditional style discovered by Bartók in Romania is the **doina**, a melodic style with Middle Eastern and Jewish **klezmer** links found in many parts of southern Romania and neighbouring Moldova (which was part of first Romania and then the Soviet Union before achieving independence in 1994).

The doina is a mostly **improvised, melismatic** and highly **decorated** singing or instrumental style, using **modal** patterns very similar to the Turkish and Arabic **makam** that we discovered on our Middle Eastern part of the World Tour (March 2021). It is expressive and emotional, performed with or without accompaniment, and for a long time was associated with Romania's peasant population.

The **hora**, a simple, popular circle dance found all over the Balkans and also in Israel, originated in Romania and is sometimes associated with the doina.

In this example (www.youtube.com/watch?v=eINOidSV8Mc), performed in Israel, begins with a Romanian hora, followed by a doina originally found in Poland, before finishing with an eastern Romanian folk tune called *Din Dobrogea*. Let's look at it in more detail.

Analysis

First, watch the video here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=eIN0idSV8Mc

Get your students to discuss and note down some of the features of these three tunes, led by any of the following questions.

Hora: 0:00-1:47

- ▶ What instruments can you see performing this music? What are their roles?
- ▶ Is the hora in duple, triple or quadruple time? How would you describe its tempo?
- ▶ The hora has sections in the minor key and its relative major. How are these sections arranged? What similarities and differences do they have?

This hora is for violin (most of the melodic material), accordion (doubles or responds to the violins, occasionally provides harmony), double bass (bassline) and drums (keeping a simple beat on snare drum). It's in triple time, quite upbeat but also rigid-sounding with silent second beats much of the time, to match the steps in the dance. It is arranged in an ABA-B'B'A format, with the A and B sections in E minor and G major respectively. A and B sections are similar in shape, with the B' section developing the melody of the B section.

Doina: 1:48-4:05

- ▶ What are the main differences between this and the previous hora? Think about tempo, melody, rhythm, harmony and the role of the accompanying instruments. What makes it sound like a lament?

The doina is a free, improvisatory, highly decorated and virtuosic display by the violin, while the accordion and double bass hold a drone (or tonic pedal) in the key of G minor. There is frequent double-stopping, fast runs and slides (known as portamentos) which add to the melancholy sound. It is in free rhythm, with a slow overall tempo and little sense of regular metre.

Din Dobrogea: 4:06-8:57

- ▶ What can you say about the rhythm and metre of this exciting tune?
- ▶ When the accordion and double bass have the melody, what does the violin do?
- ▶ What else makes this section exciting?

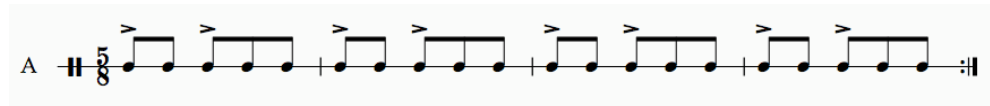
Moving into the key of A minor, with contrasting sections in D minor, this exciting, virtuosic section is in 9/8 time, arranged into three twos and a three (1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2-3) and played very quickly. This compelling beat is kept by the drums and any instruments not playing the melody, including the violin when other instruments get solos. Excitement is further added by dynamic changes, sudden rests and breaks, doubling of melodies between violin and accordion and very complex rhythmic playing.

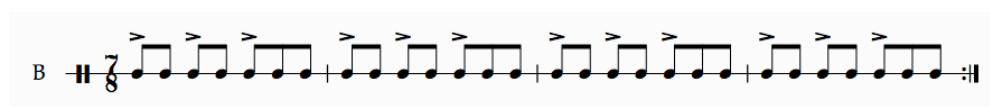
The rhythms of *Din Dobrogea*

Dobrogea is the name given to the Romanian part of Dobruja province, which straddles the Romanian/Bulgarian border in the east of the country, on the Black Sea.

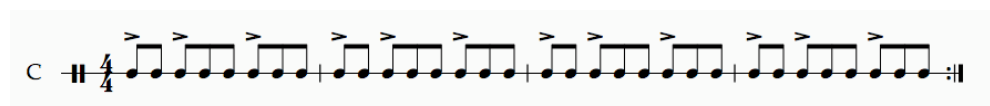
Din Dobrogea follows an irregular 2+2+2+3 rhythmic pattern known in Romania and Turkey as **aksak**, which means ‘stumbling’. Aksak rhythms are played quickly and are made up of repeating patterns of twos and threes, with a regular note value like a quaver underpinning the whole thing.

Here are three examples of aksak rhythm for you to try with the class, first slowly and then increasingly more quickly! Get some to play/clap the accented beats only, and others to play/clap/tap all the quavers.

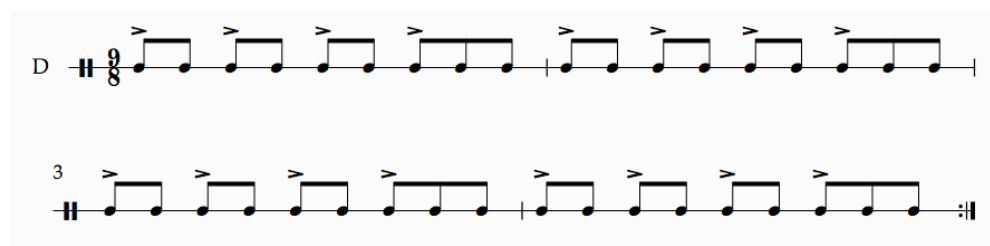
A 

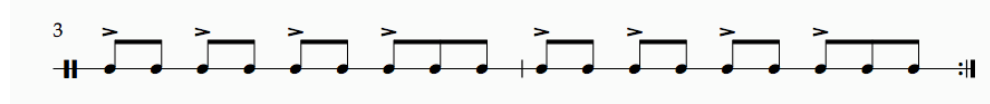
B 

You can find rhythm B in the song ‘And the Money Kept Rolling In’ from Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical *Evita* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSMuaZXe-44).

C 

This is a great one to experiment with – try it with a four-on-the-floor beat for more rhythmic fireworks!

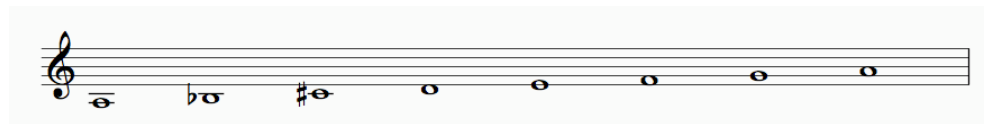
D 



Rhythm D is the one found in *Din Dobrogea*. You can also check it out in Dave Brubeck’s jazz classic *Blue Rondo à la Turk* – no doubt inspired by Mozart’s famous rondo but clearly showing Brubeck’s knowledge of aksak rhythms. This performance is by Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra (www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxlI63lubrE). See if the students can spot when the metre changes from 9/8 to 4/4 and back again!

The melodies of *Din Dobrogea*

The melodies played by Daniel Hoffman in *Din Dobrogea* are based on a maqam (a Turkish/Arabic mode) called **hijaz**, which we met specifically in the World Tour resource on Middle Eastern music (March 2021). Though in Arabic music this maqam uses half flats, as explained in that resource, here Hoffman uses a flat second degree and a sharp third degree to alter what is otherwise a natural A minor scale. Here is the mode used in the performance:



In the exciting, fast-paced introduction, which emphasises the aksak rhythm D above, Hoffman plays the characteristic first three notes of this mode, adding the lower seventh degree (G) from time to time. Get your students to listen (it starts at 4:05 in the video), follow and then learn to play this introduction, starting slowly and gradually building up tempo, perhaps with some percussion to keep everyone together.



This four-phrase pattern is followed by improvisations, mainly in quaver rhythm but with the aksak metre emphasised through accents and rhythms played by the accompanying instruments. Hoffman and the other solo players base the A sections on the hijaz maqam written above, and the B sections on the same notes but with the note D as the tonal centre, making it a simple D harmonic minor scale.

***Din Dobrogea*: suggested activities**

As a **composition** exercise, students could put together their own improvised or composed performance using the mode and rhythmic plan shown above, or perhaps by designing their own mode (which could contain fewer notes) and a simpler plan, such as a 2+3 or 3+2 pattern, and contrasting A and B ideas.

For some **further listening**, you could play the class parts of Bartók's famous *Romanian Folk Dances*, here in his 1917 arrangement for string orchestra (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5oOoqv1GFg) though they were originally written in 1915 for piano. The third and fourth dances have the wistful, decorative melodies of the doina, while the fifth and sixth have all the excitement of *Din Dobrogea*, if not its complex metre! All the melodies come from music Bartók heard in Transylvania.

Spain



In Romanian folk music, and in the music of large parts of the Eastern and South Eastern parts of Europe such as Bulgaria, Moldova, Albania, Macedonia and Greece, we've seen evidence of a strong influence from Middle Eastern musical culture, and a great many links with Arabic and Turkish modes and rhythms. This is hardly surprising: the Ottoman Empire, for example, controlled much of that area for six centuries, and there are ancient Muslim societies all over the Balkans and further south and east.

As we move to Spain, we see similar influences, again not surprisingly given the nearness of North Africa to Spain's southern coastline. Spain provides a kind of bridge between some of the earliest Moorish, Christian and Jewish music we know about and the exciting, colourful music of Latin America. The role of Spanish music in the history of the music of the world is significant and its styles are diverse, but we're going to devote the remainder of this resource to perhaps the most famous, **flamenco**.

Flamenco

Start by asking your class what their first thoughts are when you say 'flamenco'. After mentioning Spain, they may come up with things like dancing, guitars, castanets or gypsies, all of which are synonymous with the name. Flamenco is indeed mostly guitar-based music, specifically from the southern Spanish region of Andalusia.

This region, often known in Arabic as Al-Andalus, is called home by a diverse range of peoples, including Muslims (the **Moors** controlled vast areas of southern Spain and Portugal from the eighth to the 11th centuries), Jews (those from Spain were known as **Sephardic Jews**), European **Christians** and **Roma Gypsies** (who migrated from areas including Northern India, Iran and Egypt between the ninth and 15th centuries and are known in Spain as **Gitanos**). Flamenco music is a rich combination of the music of all these cultures.

Flamenco songs are called **cante** and dances are called **baile**. They can range from deeply emotional to light and humorous, and there is a huge range of differing styles. We're going to focus on just one, with a name that might be familiar to your students: the **fandango**.

Fandango

This dance, often for couples, is in slowish triple time, accompanied by guitars with percussion from castanets or hand claps. Though the metre feels slow, the dance itself is lively, packed with exciting, intricate rhythms. It dates back to the 18th century and developed in major Andalusian cities such as Cadiz and Huelva.

There's a fantastic resource on Huelvan fandango here (www.studioflamenco.com/fandangos), and you can start by showing students part of the example under the heading 'Fandangos Form', called *La primavera*. Get them to focus on the key ingredients. What instruments are playing? Can you tap/clap the slow triple time? Can you hear any repeating ideas?

The samples below the video allow you to dissect some of the component parts of the fandango. Its refrain, called an **estribillo**, is based on a simple tonic-dominant pattern in a minor key. The descent from tonic to dominant uses the flattened 7th and 6th degrees of the minor scale, shown below:

I/Cm bVII/Bb bVI/Ab V/G

The rhythmic unit, known as the **compás** (literally 'compass') is best shown in 6/8 time, with accents on the third and fifth quavers bringing the triple time feel:

Cm Bb Ab G

Soundbites of both of these can be found on the above website.

Can you do the fandango?

In small groups, students can practise their own estribillo refrain, using the examples above and copying the soundbites on the website. Get them to copy the decorations as well, if possible, placing little flourishes on some of the chords or adding in claps or hand drums.

There's much more detail about flamenco rhythms in general on this website (www.compas-flamenco.com/en/palos.html). This page in particular explains in detail how the complex handclaps are derived, with some excellent opportunities for clapping exercises in pairs, all based around 12-beat compás.

There's also much more on the fandango website about the structure of this evocative dance, with videos and walk-throughs explaining the different sections of a fandango and the dance steps performed in the baile.

Comparison: from North Africa to the USA, via France and Spain

The four pieces listed below provide us with little snapshots of the musical journey of which Spain formed such an important part, and hopefully it will help your students find some interesting context for music that is more familiar to them.

- ▶ Meaning ‘I’m in love’, *Ana Fil Houb* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgKDI7-ZkgU) is a love song by Algerian singer Lili Boniche, who died in 2008. It combines Arabic and Jewish musical flavours, with violin, clarinet, guitar or mandola (a larger type of mandolin) and piano the prominent instruments.
- ▶ *Noches en Andalucía* by El tano Gabarri (www.youtube.com/watch?v=D74-4dN5lag&list=RDQMET_I9oI_69E&start_radio=1), recorded in 2019, is a modern take on the ancient Andalusian Flamenco style.
- ▶ ‘Feria’ from Maurice Ravel’s *Rapsodie espagnole* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-OFw9nhr4o) describes the music and dancing at one of Seville’s legendary festivals. Though Ravel was French, he had Spanish heritage and wrote many works influenced by the music of Spain, as did fellow French composers including Bizet (in his opera *Carmen*) and Debussy (in his piano piece *La soirée dans Grenade*, which is worth hearing for its imitations of flamenco guitars). *Rapsodie espagnole* was one of Ravel’s first orchestral successes, completed in 1908.
- ▶ *Maria Maria* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPLV7lGbmT4) was released by Mexican-American guitar legend Carlos Santana in 1999, in collaboration with American R&B duo The Product G&B and produced by R&B legend Wyclef Jean. Combining Spanish and Latin-American rhythms and melodies with an R&B groove, the song uses the same falling chord progression outlined in our look at fandango earlier. It was a worldwide smash hit and won a Grammy award in 2000.

As students listen, get them to fill out a table like the one below, perhaps through discussions with a partner and as a class. Of course, feel free to adapt the headings to suit.

Name	What instrumental sounds can you hear?	How would you describe the melodies?	How would you describe the rhythms?	How would you describe the character or style of the music?
Ana Fil Houb (Algeria)				
Noches en Andalucía (Spain)				
Feria (France)				
Maria Maria (Mexico/USA)				