

# Folk Song Analysis

by Darren Wicks



## Why Analyse?

Since the Kodály approach teaches musical concepts through the singing of songs and speech rhymes, choosing appropriate repertoire is an important task. Successful implementation of the Kodály concept requires the teacher to gather and analyse repertoire that might be appropriate for the teaching.

## Analysis Steps

The analysis of folk songs involves 7 steps. Each song is analysed separately on the blank analysis sheets that are supplied with your course notes.

### Step 1 - Collect preliminary details

Title: Full title of song

Origins: Original (primary) source if known both ethnic region and geographic area

Source: Recording, songbook or text (secondary source) from which song is retrieved.

### Step 2 – Notation

Notate song on the staff using black pen or print a copy of the notation onto the analysis sheet using a notation program (such as Sibelius). Notate one musical phrase per staff line. Include game directions and the words to extra verses as appropriate. Remember your song collection is going to form part of your professional library so aim for accuracy and legibility.

### Step 3 – Musical Analysis

The musical analysis asks you to examine prominent musical features of the song including:

- **Toneset:** Determine the song's tone set by listing all sol-fa from lowest to highest (see separate section for detailed information on this step).
- **Finalis:** circle the tonic or home pitch in the tone set
- **Scale:** name the scale type (as determined by the tone-set and finalis) and the position of that scale (plagal position if there are tones above and below the *finalis*, authentic if there are only tones above the *finalis*).
- **C.S.P:** Suggest a comfortable starting pitch for classroom singing. This may differ from class to class, with various age groups and depending on the range (tessitura) of the song. Often it is best to give one pitch and a range of possible.
- **Range:** Give the lowest pitch below the finalis in roman numerals and the highest pitch above the finalis in Arabic numerals and use this to calculate the range of the song as an interval (e.g. vi – 3 Perfect-5<sup>th</sup>)

- Metre: describe the metre as duple, triple, quadruple or mixed and the time as simple or compound
- Anacrusis: tick “initial” if the song begins with an anacrusis and tick “interior” if each phrase begins with an anacrusis
- Form: Determine the form of the song. Look at the rhythmic and melodic contour of the phrases (phrases can be the same, similar, or different). Using letters or another appropriate descriptive, outline the form of the song (e.g. AABA, binary, AAAB).
- Rhythm Set: list the set of distinct rhythmic elements used and compare the rhythm per phrase. SAME rhythm = **iso-rhythmic** and DIFFERENT = **hetero-rhythmic**
- Cadence: The cadence is the **last note in each line** (use the same system as you used to describe range). Remember that the last note of the song, the finalis, is **1**. Indicate the musical **first half** of the song by circling the cadence number that closes it, e.g., 1 5. When short notes occur on the last beat of a phrase, use the last accented beat.
- Harmony: use Roman numerals to record any significant harmonic movement

## Step 4 – Pedagogical Analysis

The Pedagogical analysis deals with the teaching implications of the information discovered during the musical analysis.

- Melodic: Indicates the combinations of intervals or short melodic motives which are in prominent positions and thus good for extraction and conscious knowledge work. This type of analysis is very helpful in locating several songs with the same motives, which is often needed in lesson planning.
- Rhythmic: as for melodic.
- Appropriate age level: For what age group is the song suitable? Often it will be appropriate to specify an age range such as P-3 or Upper Primary.
- Theme: WHAT is the subject of the song: animals, food, love, war, flowers, death, transportation, counting, occupations, weather, historical events, holidays, etc.
- Game/Movement: Does this song fit any particular category? E.g. circle dances, chase games, partner, pat-a-cake, acting out, improvisation, lullaby, line dance, 'drop the hanky', etc. Indicate whether it is large or small motor movement, how many people may be involved and in what form (circle, square, line, etc.), other requirements.
- Teaching purpose: List the pedagogical uses for this song, i.e. what will you use this song to teach in the classroom? (E.g. make conscious *la*; practice for keeping steady beat; encourages singing in the *head voice*). Many songs can be used to teach a variety of skills but discernment is required to decide those skills that are best taught by a particular song. For example, all songs contain the element of beat yet not all songs are equally the best choices for teaching beat. Also, songs that contain crotchets and quavers may not always be good choices for teaching these rhythmical elements.

# Finding a Song's Tone Set

The term *tone set* refers to the series of distinct tones (pitch sounds) that are used to make up a folk song's melody. Follow these steps to determine a song's tone set.



- Take a piece of manuscript paper. Look at your song and write all the pitches used in the song on your staff from lowest to highest.
- Circle the pitch that is the 'home' or 'finalis' (usually the final pitch) in the song.
- Examine the tone set and try to determine the sol-fa name of each pitch.

If the toneset has at least 4 or more notes, generally the tonic note will be *do* (the tonic in major) or *la* (the tonic in minor). If the song has a very small tone-set, this may not be the case. In this case, look at the intervals in the toneset. In particular, look for skips, minor 3rds and semitones. When there is one minor third, the upper pitch will be a *so* and the lower, a *mi*.

- Write the sol-fa names of the tone set from lowest to highest in the space provided on your sheet.

Mer - ril - y we roll a - long, roll a - long, roll a - long

Mer - ril - y - we - roll a - long on the deep blue sea.

do re mi so  
= tetra-tonic

## Determining the Scale type

A scale type is named by the number of tones in the scale and the intervals between each tone. To determine a scale type, follow the two steps below:

- Look at how many different pitch sounds (notes) in the song?  
2=bi, 3= tri, 4=tetra, 5=penta, 6=hexa
- Decide whether the tone set is
  - Chordal: any set of 2 – 6 consecutive tones
  - Tonic: a set of tones with at least one leap often a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> and no semitones).
  - Diatonic: a set of 7 consecutive tones (major, harmonic minor, natural minor, etc.)

If a scale is **incomplete**, indicate "incomplete ..." e.g., "incomplete major scale".

If there is a chromatic inflection, indicate "with chromatic inflections."

## Common Scale Types

Bi-tonic any 2 notes not in succession e.g. *mi so*

Tri-tonic notes with one interval larger than a 2<sup>nd</sup> eg. *mi-so-la*

Tetra-tonic *do re mi so*

Pentatonic *do re mi so la do'* (do pentatonic)

Bi-chordal any 2 notes in succession ie. no gaps eg. *do re*

Tri-chordal *do-re-mi*

Tetra-chordal *so la ti do*




Penta-chordal *do re mi fa do*

Hexatonic 6 notes with 1 interval larger than a 2<sup>nd</sup> eg. *drmfst*; *drm slt* etc

Hexachordal 6 notes in succession

# Putting it All Together

A hypothetical song analysis:

Musical Analysis				Pedagogical Analysis	
Tone set:	so, la, do re mi			Rhythmic patterns:	
Scale:	Pentatonic (plagal pos.)			Melodic patterns:	Do-la.-do, mi-re-do
CSP:	Eb - G			Appropriate age level:	Years 5 – 8
Range:	V – 3			Theme:	Christmas, Holidays
Form:	A Av B A			Game/Movement:	Circle dance
Metre:	Duple (simple)			Prepare:	-
Anacrusis:	Initial:		Interior:	Present:	-
Rhythm				Practise:	 (mid)
Cadences:	1 3 5 1			Other:	Strong I, V harmony for pillar tone work
Harmony:	I, V				

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Scale:				Melodic patterns:	
CSP:				Appropriate age level:	
Range:				Theme:	
Form:				Game/Movement:	
Metre:				Prepare:	
Anacrusis:	Initial:		Interior:	Present:	
Rhythm Set:				Practise:	
Cadences:				Other:	
Harmony:					

