

FOLK AND ETHNIC MUSIC

Before TV, records, radio or cinema existed, people created their own entertainment. They did this by getting together and dancing or singing. The music they played is called folk or ethnic music. It is a country's traditional music. Each generation teaches the songs and dances to the next.



Folk dancing

Folk dancers usually perform certain sequences of movements. These may once have had a religious meaning. In some parts of the world, such as Bali, dancers re-enact legends and stories of gods and goddesses.

Folk song

The original purpose of a folk song may be forgotten but it may still be sung for fun. Here are the roots of some types of song.

Work songs

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THE DRUNKEN SAILOR- EARLY IN THE MORNING?



Work songs helped people keep going during hard labour. The rhythms helped them work as a team. Sailors had sea shanties for hauling the anchor, raising sails and so on.

Blues

The blues were sung by black people in the southern USA in the 19th century. Many were about the misery of their lives.



BLACK MOUNTAIN PEOPLE ARE BAD AS THEY CAN BE, BLACK MOUNTAIN PEOPLE ARE BAD AS THEY CAN BE, THEY USES GUNPOWDER JUST TO SWEETEN THEIR TEA.

Children's play songs

Children sing songs to go with dances or games. Though cheerful, many were originally about politics or disasters. The song below is about the symptoms of the plague in England in 1665.

RING-A-RING-A-ROSES A POCKETFUL OF POSIES ATISHOO ATISHOO WE ALL FALL DOWN



Spirituals

White slave owners in the southern USA made their slaves become Christians. The slaves re-worked hymns into spirituals. These echoed the rhythm and song styles of West African music.

SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT COMING FOR TO CARRY ME HOME



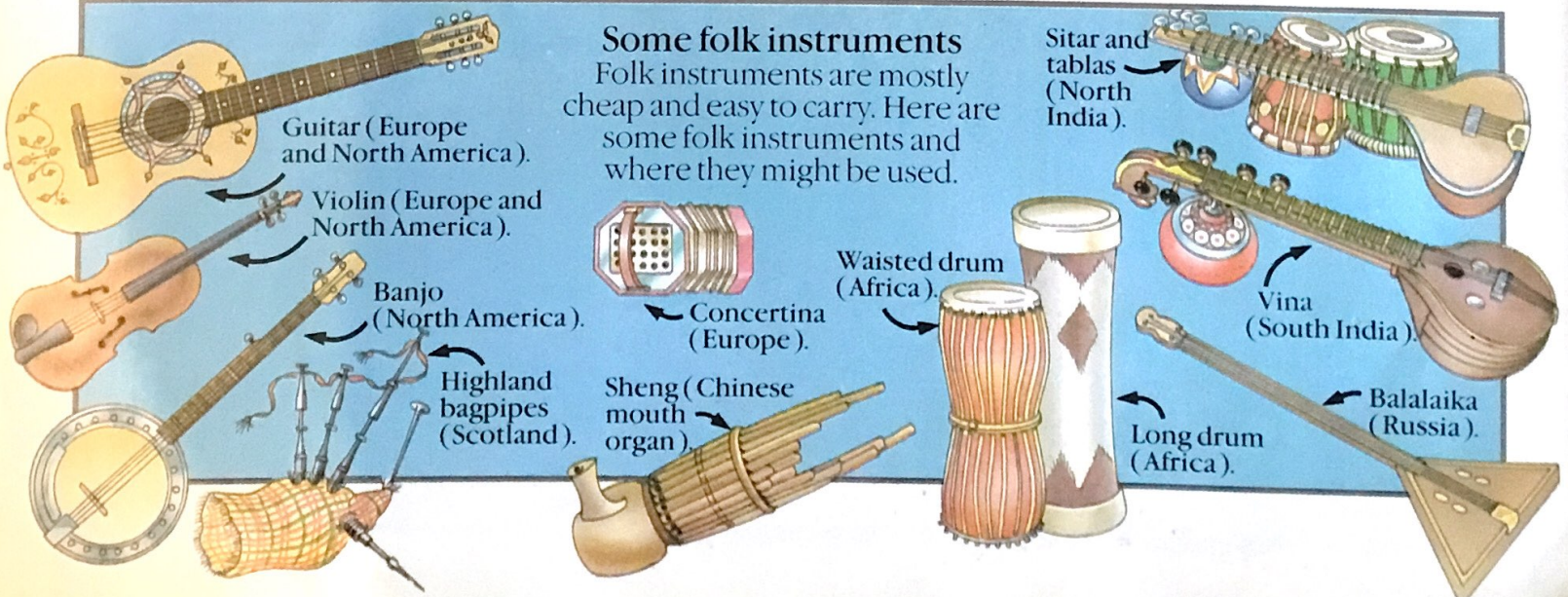
This spiritual has a call and response pattern: everyone joins in on alternate lines.

Ballads

Ballads tell stories. They began as unaccompanied solos. Today, they are often sung by groups with instruments. Common themes for ballads are heroic acts, tragedies and love stories.

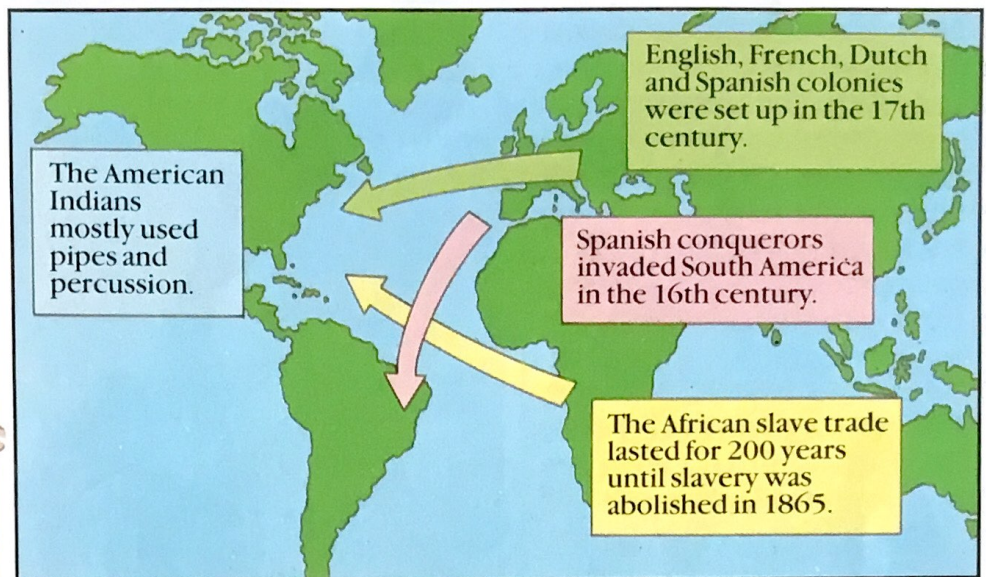
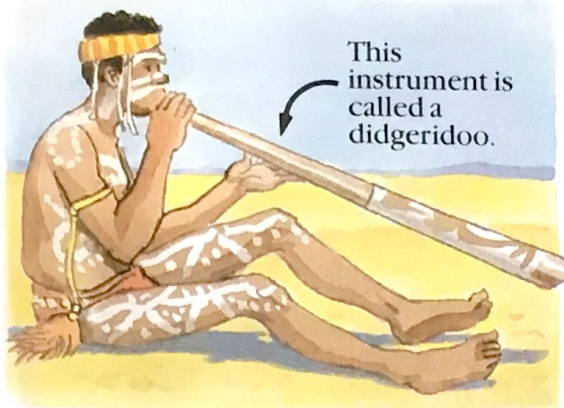
Some folk instruments

Folk instruments are mostly cheap and easy to carry. Here are some folk instruments and where they might be used.



How folk music develops

In the past, people travelled less than nowadays. Styles of folk music developed separately in different places.



For thousands of years, the only inhabitants of Australia were the Aborigines. Their music was untouched by other styles until European settlers arrived 200 years ago.

When people did travel, for instance as explorers, convicts or slaves, they took their music with them. American folk music is a mixture of styles brought by settlers and invaders.

African slaves brought their rhythms and use of percussion. European settlers brought tunes and dances. They introduced the violin, guitar, harp and brass military band instruments.

Folk now

Folk music is "do-it-yourself music", so it is cheap. This is why it is still a living style in many poor countries. Richer countries have access to all sorts of music

through records and radio. In these countries, folk has mostly been replaced though it is kept alive by fans at folk clubs and folk festivals.



The folk group on the left, Steeleye Span, were in the British charts in the 1970s. They used electric instruments. Some fans think that folk is a traditional style and musicians should not use modern instruments. Others accept that folk changes with the times: modern instruments bring it up to date.

Folk and nationality

Folk music is often used as a tourist attraction. It provides a foreign flavour. It also gives people on vacation an experience which they will not find back home.

Folk music to listen to

You could see if your local record library has any records by these musicians in stock. If not, the library might order some for you.

Egypt: Soliman Gamil.
 Gambia (West Africa): Dembo Konte or Toumani Diabate.
 Britain: Martin Carthy.
 Ireland: The Chieftains.
 Spain: Mocedades.
 Greece: Nana Mouskouri.
 France: Alan Itwell.
 South America: Inti Illimani.
 Blues (USA): Big Bill Broonzy.
 Bluegrass (a white American folk style): Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs.

Folk-influenced music

Bhangra is a type of Indian folk music, jazzed up. It consists of traditional tunes and words, with disco rhythms. Two groups that play bhangra are Heera and Holle Holle.

