



## Resource Guide for Educators and Students Grades 4–12

What is traditional music? It's music that's passed on from one person to another, music that arises from one or more cultures, from their history and geography. It's music that can tell a story or evoke emotions ranging from celebratory joy to quiet reflection. Traditional music is usually played live in community settings such as dances, people's houses and small halls.

In each 30-minute episode of Carry On™, musical explorer and TikTok sensation Hal Walker interviews a musician who plays traditional music. Episodes air live, allowing students to pose questions. Programs are then archived so you can listen to them any time from your classroom or home. Visit Carry On's [YouTube channel](#) for live shows and archived episodes.

### [Episode 16, Alexander Fedoriouk](#)

**Alexander Fedoriouk** began playing the cimbalom at age 7 in his hometown of Kolomyia, Ukraine, in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. Alex describes the cimbalom—a type of hammered dulcimer—as "part of the fabric of the culture of Ukraine." As a child, he became fascinated with the instrument, studying it in school and eventually in college. Alex earned a bachelor's degree in music from Kiev State Conservatory in Ukraine and later studied ethnomusicology at Cleveland State University in the US.

Because it has strings, the cimbalom is considered a chordophone (stringed instrument) as well as a percussion instrument (because the strings are struck with hammers). The cimbalom Alex plays is large; like a piano, it's heavy and has a strong, iron-cast frame to support the tension of its 125 strings (which are fully chromatic). Like a piano, it has dampers to stop the strings from ringing when desired, and the bass range has thick, copper-wound strings. The modern cimbalom was invented in Hungary by instrument maker Josef Schunda. He modified the folk dulcimer, which is much lighter and portable, and has shorter strings and a more limited range.

Eastern European players often strap folk dulcimers across their shoulders and play standing up. The cimbalom and the folk dulcimer are probably descended from much older dulcimers in the Middle East; [Alex's website](#) lists and names dulcimers from different parts of the world.

Alex honed his skills and knowledge of traditional music while playing for weddings and parties in the mountain villages of Ukraine and nearby regions. He has performed as a soloist with the New York Philharmonic, the Cleveland Orchestra and the Pittsburgh Symphony; the large

cimbalom is often used in concerts and for festivals. He has also played in numerous folk ensembles. Alex currently tours and plays with his band Harmonia.

On our episode, Alex demonstrates and discusses several aspects of the cimbalom and eastern European folk music:

- [A traditional song from Slovakia](#) – Alex does his own improvisation on this tune. Note his use of rubato (see Vocabulary).
- "[Cânta Cucul Primavara](#)" – A traditional song that illustrates the versatile nature of the cimbalom; listen as Alex trades roles with the other band members, sometimes playing accompaniment, sometimes melody. (For better sound, [try this version](#).)
- Instrumentation – Where Alex grew up, the tsymbaly (Ukrainian folk dulcimer) often played in ensembles such as the *troïstî muzyki*—"trio" music. The "trio" had a drum plus three other instruments—tsymbaly, violin and flute. [Alex describes different instrumentation](#) in different parts of the Carpathian region, but the cimbalom is usually the centerpiece of any band.

Alex also [discusses differences](#) in how the cimbalom is played in various regions and cultures:

- [Hutsul-style Ukrainian playing](#), also heard [here in a Hutsul band](#) playing outdoors.
- [Hungarian style](#), which uses softer sticks to accompany the violin. This style might also serve as the introduction to the *csárdás*.
- [The csárdás](#), a traditional dance tune in two parts: slower (*lassú*) and faster (*friss*). The Cleveland Hungarian Scouts Folk Ensemble [demonstrates the dance here](#).
- [Gypsy \(or Roma\) music](#) – Roma musicians have their own style in every country. Alex demonstrates the style as a Gypsy band might play in Romania for a fast *hora*. For contrast, listen to an example of a [Bulgarian hora](#) and a "[gypsy hora](#)" played by German Goldenshteyn, a Romanian-born klezmer musician. Klezmer is a musical tradition of Jews of Central and Eastern Europe; this is klezmer music in the "style" of Gypsy music.

## Vocabulary

**Accompany** – Play a support role for a solo or lead musician. Musicians may play in the background to accompany lead instruments or singers, and singers may accompany a lead singer with harmony behind the lead's melody.

**Bass** – Low notes, in terms of pitch. Also the name of an instrument that plays the bass line in a group.

**Chordophone** – Any instrument that produces sound with strings, whether they are struck, plucked or played with a bow. The cimbalom shares qualities with its fellow chordophone the piano—it is able to play melody, accompaniment and/or bass, sometimes all at once.

**Chromatic** – A scale (group of notes) consisting of the 12 pitches in an octave. Pitches are a half-step apart. You can easily [see and hear the chromatic scale on a piano](#)—all the keys, black and white, within one octave (from C to C, for example).

**Genre** – A particular style of music. Jazz, country, classical, hip hop and traditional are all different genres of music.

**Gypsies** – Nomads from northern India who entered Europe between 700 and 900 C.E. They were called "Gypsies" because people thought they were from Egypt. The word Gypsy is considered derogatory by some who prefer to be called Roma. Their language—Romani—is based on Sanskrit, an ancient language of India.

**Improvisation** – To perform dance or music without preparation, on the spur of the moment.

**Instrumentation** – The group of instruments used to play a particular piece or style of music.

**Melody** – The tune, the single most noticeable line, usually the one you end up singing with.

**Range** – The span of notes an instrument can play, or that a singer can sing, from the lowest possible notes to the highest.

**Rubato** – The term *rubato* is from an Italian word that means "to rob." The performer stretches, or slows down, certain beats, measures or phrases, and speeds up others, eventually returning to the original speed of the music.

### Activities and Questions for Students

**Before you watch the episode**—Locate the following places on [Google Maps](#) or a printed map.

Countries: Ukraine (find Kolomyia, Alex's hometown and Kiev, the capital of Ukraine), Slovakia, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary and Poland.

Region: The Carpathian Mountains of eastern Europe.

Cities: Cleveland, Ohio (Alex's home).

**After you watch the episode**—Complete assigned activities and questions from this list, which progresses from simpler to more complex.

1. Do you—or does anyone you know—play an instrument? Did any of your ancestors play an instrument? If they played in a musical tradition, what was it?
2. When you move to a new home, just like you take your clothes and books with you, you take your culture. If you were moving to a new country, what parts of your culture would you want to take? It could be food, music, traditions—whatever reminds you of your family or your place of origin.
3. Choose something from this episode that made an impression on you and write a poem about it, whether it's the way the cimbalom looks, the rhythms, what you learned about the people behind the musical traditions, whatever strikes you.
4. What language do people speak in Ukraine? How about in the other countries surrounding the Carpathian Mountains—Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Slovakia and Hungary? Google!
5. Alex tells us that in every octave, the strings of the cimbalom have a different layout. Do you think this would make it more or less difficult to play?

6. You are a reporter for your school's newspaper. Write and illustrate a review of Alex, what he talked about, and the music you heard. Describe the music, your favorite things about it, and what more you wish you could see or know about. Be sure to give your article a descriptive title!
7. The cimbalom is in the shape of a trapezoid. What's the definition of a trapezoid? Draw one—why do you think the cimbalom is in this shape?
8. Alex is an ethnomusicologist. Read about ethnomusicology on the [Society of Ethnomusicology's website](#). If your life's work was learning about traditional music, how would ethnomusicology help? What part of it would you enjoy the most? The least?
9. How do you think Alex's experiences in different regions of the Carpathian Mountains prepared him to study ethnomusicology later on?
10. Alex is fluent in Ukrainian, Russian, Slovak and Polish. Find these on [this language tree](#) or [this language map](#). Now find the languages of Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the other countries Alex mentions. Which of these languages are closely related? Which aren't?
11. Alex notes little differences in the music from region to region. What does this say to you about the way music evolves? About the way music is taught or learned? There are no wrong answers!
12. After you read the discussion of this episode, identify the culture or cultures involved in Alex's musical tradition. Are there more than one? More than two?
13. Why do you think a culture's music reveals so much about history? Your opinion, please! Is there something about your heritage or culture that you'd like to know more about?
14. Alex mentions regional variations in the same tune when it appears in different areas of the Carpathian Mountains. Think about the US (or your own country, if it isn't the US). What parts of culture vary from region to region? What examples of these regional differences can you name? For example, pizza is different in different parts of the US.
15. Name two musical characteristics of the music that Alex plays. No research required—just what do you notice about it, musically speaking? Rhythm, tonal organization, form?
16. The music that Alex plays arose in a crossroads of the world—what civilizations and parts of the world can you name that have intersected in the Carpathian region? What cultures and musical traditions do you hear in the music Alex plays? Or what cultures do they remind you of?

## Additional Resources

### Alexander Fedoriouk

Alex's [website](#) and [official bio](#).

Alex has lectured at universities and taught in many folk camps. He currently [teaches online](#). [Website for Harmonia](#), Alex's band.

[YouTube channel for Folk Sounds](#), Harmonia's record label, with a narrated introductory video on the group, its members and its music.

[Alex's playlist](#) on Folk Sounds' YouTube channel with several examples of his cimbalom playing with Harmonia.

## The Cimbalom

The cimbalom has been used in many different genres for different purposes:

Classical composers have written music for it in a concert setting. You can see and hear the cimbalom in Stravinsky's [Ragtime](#), Bartok's [Rhapsody No. 1 for Violin and Orchestra](#) and Kodály's [Háry János Suite](#).

Film composers have written the cimbalom into their music, for example, Hans Zimmer's score for the movie [Sherlock Holmes](#).

Musicians in various genres have used cimbalom to set a mood. In his ballet *Il Sogno (The Dream)*, songwriter Elvis Costello makes use of the cimbalom in several places: [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

**Tell us what you think!**

We want to make Carry On™ even more useful and enjoyable for students and educators across the country. [Send us your feedback!](#) Tell us what you liked and what we could do better. And please... tell other educators and schools about the show. Help us all carry on!

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With the help of generous donors, [Carry On](#)™ is produced by the nonprofit [Northeast Ohio Musical Heritage Association](#) (NEOMHA). The show is programmed by [Laura Lewis](#), artistic director of NEOMHA's [Lake Erie Folk Fest](#). Carry On's resource guides are the work of writer and musician [Rita Lewis](#).

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