



## 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 21](#), Mark Schatz

Mark Schatz is a preeminent bass player, banjo player, and Appalachian flatfoot dancer who has recorded and toured with such well-known artists as Béla Fleck, Tony Rice, Nickel Creek, Claire Lynch, and Tim O'Brien. The International Bluegrass Music Association has twice named him Bass Player of the Year. Mark moves easily between a number of genres and traditions, including bluegrass, swing, country, folk, old-time, hambone and traditional dance.

Mark is a master of the standup bass. As he points out, its formal name is "bass viol" because it is part of the violin family. It's the largest member of the family, which also includes violin, viola and cello. It also has the longest strings, which means it can play the lowest notes. In traditional music the bass has colorful names like bull fiddle and doghouse bass (because the body of the bass could accommodate a sleeping dog). Other names include upright bass, double bass, contrabass, bass fiddle and string bass.

In traditional music, Mark usually plays *pizzicato*—plucking the strings. This produces a full, round sound. Mark also demonstrates slapping the strings to add a percussive element and playing *arco*—with a bow. In a traditional-music group, the bass is the foundation. It often plays the root of the chord, while others play the harmony (the other notes of the chord). The bass also provides a clear, guiding rhythm for the music. We can better feel the vibration of low notes, which means we can better feel the rhythm and tempo of the music through the bass.

Mark's musical journey began at home. His parents owned a piano, and he heard music around the house, including recordings of folk musicians. In fourth grade, Mark started playing the cello

at school, "graduating" to the bass in high school when he found one in an instrument closet. He played in school orchestras and later got a degree in music theory and composition from Haverford College in Pennsylvania. He also attended Berklee College of Music in Boston, where he heard street performers playing the traditional music that caught his ear and imagination.

In several songs, Mark demonstrates some of the styles he's mastered:

["Ain't Nobody Here but Us Chickens."](#) Recorded and made popular by African American singer and bandleader Louis Jordan, "Chickens" is in boogie-woogie style, which developed out of the blues in African American communities. The style became very popular in the 1920s. Boogie-woogie uses blues chords, but it features a rhythmic, recognizable bass line. Boogie-woogie's fast tempo and lively rhythm was intended for dancing, whereas blues was made for listening.

A medley of two tunes:

- ["Papirosen"](#) is an Eastern European Jewish folk song about a boy who sells cigarettes (*papiros*) on the street to survive. It was written during or shortly after WWI, but WWII made it relevant again. [Listen HERE](#) to a version with a singer and accordion; the song's translation from Yiddish is provided. Mark plays with a bow on this song, using classical technique; note his use of vibrato (with his left hand) and his bow hold (with his right).
- ["Maiden's Prayer"](#) was written by a Polish songwriter in the 1850s. It "immigrated" to America, where Bob Wills wrote lyrics for it, arranged it and recorded it in Western swing style. This Texas style began as dance music that incorporated use of the violin and elements of jazz. Western swing later influenced country music. Listen [HERE](#) to a version of "Maiden's Prayer" recorded by country music star Willie Nelson, and [HERE](#) to an instrumental version from 1935 by the Texas Playboys with Bob Wills, the "King of Western Swing."

["Italy"](#) is a song Mark plays with guitarist Bryan McDowell on their new CD, *Grit & Polish*. It was popularized by Bascom Lamar Lunsford of Western North Carolina. Mark and Bryan learned it from a mutual friend, Laura Boosinger, which demonstrates the folk process of passing songs and tunes on from generation to generation, and from one friend to another.

["Calgary"](#) is a tune Mark wrote in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, while performing there with the dance troupe Footworks Percussive Dance Ensemble. He plays it on the banjo using clawhammer style that he demonstrates [HERE](#). Mark incorporates elements of traditional fiddle music often used for dance then adds some contemporary syncopations, mixing the old with the new, which helps keep the traditions fresh and alive!

See Resources (below) for videos of Mark's collaborations with other performers in multiple genres. He is still performing with others but has recently developed a solo show that showcases his talents in bass, guitar, banjo, dance and storytelling.

## Vocabulary

**Banjo** – [A stringed instrument](#) with a drumhead and a long neck. Modern American banjos usually have five strings; the top-most string is a drone string that plays just one note. Enslaved Africans invented and made early banjos to mimic instruments from home.

**Bass** – Low notes, in terms of pitch. Also the name of the largest member of the violin family.

**Bluegrass music** – A fast-tempo style meant to be performed on stage for an audience. A bluegrass band often consists of fiddle, banjo, mandolin, guitar, dobro (resophonic guitar) and upright bass, or some combination of these. The instrumentalists often double as singers; vocals and harmony singing are vital elements of this genre.

**Blues music** – The blues originated in the South; its roots are in African American musical traditions such as work songs, spirituals and ballads. The blues are usually in slow, steady 4/4 time with "blue" (flatted) notes. They often have three chords in regular 8- or 12-bar patterns.

**Chord** – A group of three or more notes played together. In a C major chord, the "root" is C.

**Clam** – A missed note in music, or a mistake.

**Country music** – A genre of American music with roots in blues, old-time and other traditions including Southern and Western musical styles like Cajun, cowboy and Mexican music.

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

**Hambone** – Originally an African American tradition, the hambone artist makes music using hands against the body and face to create sound and rhythm.

**Jazz** – A type of music originating in African American communities of the US. It developed from ragtime and blues music, absorbing influences from African rhythms and rich European harmonic structures.

**Off-beat** – Also known as the "upbeat" or "backbeat." In 4/4 time, the off-beat occurs on beats 2 and 4, which are normally weaker beats. But in certain styles of music, off-beats are emphasized, giving the music bounce and energy.

**Old-time music** – A traditional string band music style, most often associated with the Southeastern United States, that comes from music and cultures of indigenous peoples, African Americans, and settlers from the British Isles (Ireland, Scotland and England) as well as other European regions. Old-time music is sung or played live on acoustic instruments, the fiddle and banjo being a favored combination, often accompanied by guitar and string bass.

**Time signature** (or meter) – The division of music into patterns of repeated rhythm, or beats. A 4/4 meter indicates four beats repeated over and over in units called measures, or bars. The bottom number (4) means that the quarter note gets one beat.

**Traditional dance** – Clogging and flatfoot are percussive dances of the Appalachian Mountains. Their roots are in dances from Ireland, Scotland and England, but they also include steps from African and native American traditions.

**Vibrato** – A fast, slight variation in pitch. The word *vibrato* in Italian means "to vibrate." On stringed instruments, vibrato is produced by rhythmically "wiggling" the left-hand fingers on the strings.

## Activities and Questions for Students

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

Regions: Eastern Europe, western Africa (home of enslaved Africans brought to the US).

Countries: Poland, Italy, Canada (find Calgary, Alberta), Ireland, Scotland, England.

US: Boston, Massachusetts; Pennsylvania; Texas; Appalachian Mountains.

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

1. How would you describe the sound of the bass in adjectives only? Now in nouns only!
2. Compare the sound of the bass when it's played [pizzicato](#) to when it's played [arco](#). How would you describe the difference? What do you like about each way of playing?
3. Mark has played the bass since he was in fourth grade. Does anyone you know play an instrument? When did they start? How much and how often do they practice?
4. Mark plays in several different genres of music. What kinds of music do you enjoy playing or listening to?
5. Of the genres or songs that Mark plays on our episode, which did you like the best? Which would you like to learn more about, or hear more of?
6. Mark [demonstrates hambone in this video](#). Read the definition of hambone above (see Vocabulary). Imitate the moves Mark does, or make up your own, keeping time with the music. (You can see more hambone performed by Steve Hickman in Episode 11.)
7. Choose something from this episode that made an impression on you and write a poem about it, whether it's the way the bass or banjo looked, the rhythms, or what you learned about the musical traditions and the people who played them.
8. If you play a stringed instrument, did you learn anything new from Mark's bass playing? (Also [check out this video](#) of Mark and another bassist playing one bass together.) Have you seen or heard anything you'd like to incorporate into your own playing?
9. You are a reporter for your school's newspaper. Write and illustrate a review of Mark, 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!
10. Mark says you naturally tap on the off-beat of a song like "Ain't Nobody Here but Us Chickens." [Clap along with the song](#). (This is a performance by Louis Jordan, who made the song famous.) Are you clapping on the off-beat or the downbeat? Can you tell? Try switching between clapping on the off-beat and the downbeat. Which is easier?
11. Compare Mark's version of "[Papirosen](#)" to a [sung version](#). How does Mark make his version "sing"?

12. Our host Hal tells you to listen to the roll that the bass plays in the tune "[Italy](#)." What would the song be like without the bass? What would be missing, musically speaking?
13. Listen to the tune "[Calgary](#)," which Mark wrote when he was staying in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. What meter (time signature) is the tune in?
14. Why might the song "[Papirosen](#)" have been written during war time? Why would it be relevant to WWII?
15. Mark is playing on a borrowed bass that he's unfamiliar with. When he plays "[Papirosen](#)," he laughs at himself as he tries to get the feel for this particular bass. How would you cope with playing a borrowed instrument that you've never played before—for an audience, on the spot?
16. Name one musical characteristic of at least two different genres that Mark plays. No research required—just what do you notice about that genre, musically speaking? Rhythm, tonal organization, form?

### Additional Resources

#### Mark Schatz

[Mark's website](#).

[Mark's Facebook page](#).

#### Musical Collaborations

[Grit & Polish](#). Mark's newest album with Bryan McDowell on Bandcamp.

[Mark playing and dancing](#) with [Footworks Percussive Dance Ensemble](#). He starts out on the banjo and then does some clogging with the troupe.

Mark and Béla Fleck, GRAMMY-winning banjo virtuoso, playing "[All the Things You Are](#)," a jazz-flavored Broadway tune. Listen to Mark's solo starting [HERE](#).

Mark [performing hambone](#) (see Vocabulary above) with Claire Lynch and her band to the tune of "Buttermilk Road." Mark also does some [clogging](#), and then [plays banjo](#) on the bluegrass tune "Stay All Night."

Mark playing bass with the band [Nickel Creek](#) on NPR Music Tiny Desk Concert.

Mark in a goofy, virtuosic, acrobatic collaboration with classical bassist Edgar Meyer. They play "[The Double Bass Blues](#)" together—on one bass!

### 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!

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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