



Traditional Music and the People Who Make It

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 28, Yann Falquet & Pascal Gemme

Yann Falquet and Pascal Gemme started their musical journey together 20 years ago, busking on the streets of Montréal in Canada. Since then, they have played thousands of shows in more than 15 countries with the trio Genticorum. Pascal's fiddling, Yann's guitar accompaniment, and their vast repertoire of traditional songs are all presented with effortless musicianship.

Yann and Pascal are devoted to French Canadian musical traditions, which are rooted in the histories of Europe and Canada. Europeans who began arriving in 1497 encountered First Nations peoples who had been living in Canada for thousands of years. French and English settlers colonized Canada, followed by immigrants from Scotland, Ireland and other countries.

Canada has two official languages, French and English. Nearly a third of Canada's population can speak French; a fifth grew up with French as their first language. (That's one out of every five Canadians!) Yann and Pascal are from Québec, which is the only Canadian province with French as its sole official language. In Québec, almost 95% of the population can speak French.

Once established in Québec, some French settlers became traders who traveled west. So, French speakers live in provinces across Canada. The French and English struggled for dominance of Canada until 1763, when France ceded Canada to the English. However, the French maintained a strong cultural identity. They kept the right to speak their language, which has helped preserve French Canadian culture.

French Canadian music is meant to be played in social settings—house parties, kitchen parties, community gatherings and dances. As Yann and Pascal point out, it was entertainment before radio, TV and the Internet. French Canadian music has its beginnings in the music of northern and western France, where French settlers were from. People of the British Isles brought their music from England, Ireland and Scotland. French Canadian music absorbed these influences wherever cultures rubbed together. Besides music from the British Isles, French Canadian music was also influenced by First Nations music in central Canada; the intersection of those two cultures created [Métis music](#).

As Yann puts it, the fiddle is "king" of French Canadian music. Because it is small and light, settlers could take it with them as they moved to and across Canada. In the late 1800s, the accordion arrived from Germany. Pascal jokingly calls it the fiddle's nemesis, but the two instruments are partners in French Canadian music, along with the guitar and feet. Yes, feet! *Podorhytmie*—using feet as a percussion instrument—is a hallmark of French Canadian music. Other instruments used include harmonica, jaw harp, spoons and bones.

Tunes that Yann and Pascal perform on our episode showcase features of French Canadian music. All except the second tune—the call-and-response song—are rooted in dance tunes from the British Isles and France.

- The first group of tunes includes [a cotillon](#), [a jig](#) and [a reel](#). The cotillon was originally a French court dance, also popular in England. The jig and reel (see Vocabulary, below) were dances in Ireland and Scotland. This reel is an example of a "crooked" tune. In French, it's known as an *air tordu*, or "twisted tune." (See Vocabulary, below.)
- [The second tune](#) is a *chanson répondre* (call-and-response song), a tradition of western France. The leader sings a line, which is repeated by the other singers—a good song for a large group that may not know the words. Verses that tell the story of the song alternate with a "lilting" chorus repeated after every verse. Lilting exists in French, Scottish, Irish and Scandinavian traditions. [Pascal discusses and demonstrates](#) how he uses lilting (*turlutte* in French) to turn his voice into an instrument by singing nonsense syllables. (See Resources, below, for a video of a *chanson répondre* with a group, and for examples of lilting.)
- [The third tune](#) is a reel that Genticorum taught to a group at a summer music camp.
- Yann plays the accordion, or squeezebox, in [the fourth set of tunes](#). They begin with a waltz—a slower couples dance tune in 3/4. They follow this with a faster reel that could be used for a square dance (*danse carrée* in French) for four couples dancing in a square. See Vocabulary and Resources, below, for discussion of the accordion.

Vocabulary

Accordion – An instrument descended from Asian free-reed instruments brought to Europe by spice traders. Pushing and pulling on cardboard bellows [forces air across steel reeds](#), vibrating them to produce sound. Pressing buttons or keys opens air holes for the desired notes. The diatonic accordion plays in one scale (one key) only. (See Resources, below, for a video demonstration of a diatonic accordion.)

Busking – Playing music or performing on the street, sidewalk or other public place. Buskers place an open instrument case (or a hat) in front of them to collect donations from listeners.

Crooked tune, or *air tordu* – Music originally written for dancing has a uniform structure of AABB, with 8 or 16 beats per section (represented by the letters). These are "straight" or "square" tunes. Crooked tunes depart from this structure in some way. Musicians may change the order of the sections or the number of times a section is played, add sections, add extra beats, subtract beats, or hold or shorten notes. They can also break up the regular beat pattern—instead of the usual strong-weak-strong-weak pattern in 4/4 time, they may play strong-weak-weak-strong), effectively switching meters.

Diatonic scale – A scale of 7 notes that uses whole and half-steps (5 whole and 2 half-steps). A whole step involves skipping the half-step in between. [See and hear](#) a C major (diatonic) scale on the piano.

Fiddle and violin – Two names for the same instrument, a portable four-string instrument made of wood with pegs for tuning the strings. The main difference between fiddle and violin is the style of music played on the instrument—it's a fiddle if you play traditional or folk-based music; it's a violin if you play classical music on it.

First Nations – The University of British Columbia defines First Nations as "aboriginal peoples of Canada who are ethnically neither Métis nor Inuit." The Canadian government [lists more than 600 First Nation communities](#) that represent more than 50 larger Nations.

Jig and Reel – Dance tunes in duple meters. You can beat out a count of two as you listen or dance, but the difference is how many fast notes are in between each main beat. If you can tap out three quick notes between beats, it's a jig, which is often in a 6/8 meter. If you can tap out two quick notes between beats, it's a reel, often in 4/4.

Time signature, or meter – The division of music into patterns of repeated rhythm, or beats. A 2/4 meter indicates two beats repeated over and over in units called measures, or bars. The bottom number (4) means that the quarter note gets one beat. You can usually identify the meter by tapping along and noticing how often the strong beats occur. For example, "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" has two strong beats that repeat, so the meter is 2/4.

Activities and Questions for Students

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

Countries: Canada, France, Great Britain (England, Scotland and Ireland).

Canada: Find the province of Québec, and then find the cities of Montréal and Québec City, and the town of Waterville (where Yann and Pascal live).

Region: Scandinavia.

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

1. 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.
2. Yann reminds us that Canada has ten provinces and three territories. What are the three territories? Check Google Maps!
3. Yann and Pascal said they did some busking to earn money for ice cream. What does this tell you about the amount of money they might earn during an evening? And if you did some busking, what would you do? Play music, do magic tricks, tell stories? And what would you buy with the money?
4. Why do you think the accordion is called a squeezebox? For a hint, [watch Yann play](#).
5. Host Hal has some fun [in the last tune](#) playing with Yann and Pascal. Basically, they're making a "rhythm song." Find some instruments or objects around the house and make a rhythm song. You can use things like spoons, sticks, spatulas... whatever makes a noise but doesn't hurt anything, including your feet and hands.
6. What instruments do Yann and Pascal play in this episode? Describe them to a visitor from another planet—what would you say about the way they look and sound?
7. You are a reporter for your school's newspaper. Write and illustrate a review of Yann and Pascal, what they 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!
8. Pascal says it takes only a minute to learn to "play" your feet. [Watch him demonstrate](#). Now you! Try to tap along with Pascal [on this song](#).
9. French Canadian music absorbed musical influences from England, Scotland, Ireland and First Nations peoples. If you could create a new style of music from two existing traditions, what traditions would you choose to combine? And how would it sound? Describe it in musical or cultural terms.
10. Yann and Pascal had extensive musical training before they began playing traditional music together. Yann earned a degree in jazz, and Pascal earned a degree in music composition and band arrangements. What do you think their formal musical training brings to their playing and interpretations of traditional music? Your opinion, please!
11. Based on what you've read in the description above about the cotillon and [what you can hear](#) when Yann and Pascal play it, describe its musical characteristics. What is the meter? What is the character of the tune? What do you think the dance was like in the French court?
12. [Listen to Genticorum](#) perform their version of a song originally recorded in 1938. This has a different character from the fast, happy songs on our episode. Describe the differences in terms of the feeling or musical characteristics. What traditions do you hear in this song? Think about the musical influences French Canadian music absorbed.

13. [Listen to the cotillon](#) that Yann and Pascal play—what is its musical structure? Use letters (A, B, etc.) to represent different sections of the music. Warning: This tune is a little bit crooked!
14. Read the definition of crooked tunes (see Vocabulary, above). [Listen to the first reel](#) that Yann and Pascal play. What—to you—makes this tune crooked? Describe it in musical terms.

Additional Resources

Genticorum

[Genticorum's website](#) – Choose your language, French or English, to enter the site.
Genticorum's [Facebook Music page](#) with [videos](#), and their [YouTube channel](#).
[TradQuébecStudio](#) – Pascal's YouTube channel. Find tutorials and exploration of traditional music of Québec. In French with English subtitles.
[Pascal on Patreon](#) – Membership site where Pascal teaches traditional tunes.
[Yann's Instagram page](#) with music videos.
Genticorum on [Spotify](#) and [Bandcamp](#). All six of their albums are on Spotify.

French Canadian Music and Instruments

Turlutte – [The Acadienne Montréalaise performs](#) a piece composed for them; listen to the composer [discuss turlutte](#). And listen to [Irish lilting](#) with The Clancy Brothers!
[Diatonic accordion](#) – A three-minute demonstration of an accordion similar to Yann's.
[Jaw harp](#) – A beginner's lesson in playing the jaw harp, called a Jew's harp or mouth harp.
Spoons – A lesson in playing the spoons using [ordinary kitchen spoons](#) and [spoons made in Québec City](#).
Bones – The basics of playing [the bones](#).

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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