

2 Paddy on the Railway

RESOURCES

■ You need to know

At the start of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, most of the canals and railways were built by migrant labourers, in particular by the Irish. This song, albeit humorously, tells something of the hardships of their lives. There are several versions; in 1952, Ewan McColl discovered five variants alone after circulating a questionnaire around the locomotive sheds of northern England. As Irish workers travelled to America looking for work in the mid-19th century, the song went with them, changing yet again to fit local circumstances.

■ Warming up

- Walk on the spot and clap or bang fists on knees to a steady 6/8 pulse.
- Breathe in slowly for four counts; hold for four, breathe out for eight, rest for four; repeat.
- Chant the words 'Tigg-er-y oo-ree oo-ree ay' in the notated rhythm.
- Sing the phrase 'working on the railway' at a comfortable pitch.
- Chant three 'Tigg-er-y oo-ree oo-ree ay's and follow them with the sung phrase.

■ Learning

- Sing the chorus and invite everyone to join in with the last phrase. Make sure it is energetic and accurately pitched.
- Get everyone to sing the whole chorus and then sing verse 1, inviting everyone to join in with the chorus.
- Try adding some simple actions or movement to the chorus to keep up the energy.
- Practise singing verses 2–6 until everyone is confident with the rhythmic changes of the words and they feel natural. The CD will help with this.
- When everyone is confident and the melody line is secure throughout, try adding harmony 1 on alternate choruses.

■ Listen out

- Speed is crucial for this song. Too fast and it gabbles and sounds breathless; too slow and it becomes lifeless and pedestrian. Experiment until everyone is comfortable.
- It's easy to miss the upbeat at the start, so breathe in good time. Practise this by speaking the first few words a few times.
- Energy and enthusiasm are important, but not at the expense of accuracy and tuning, so try some verses quietly, and possibly slower, to allow for better listening and engagement with the notes.
- Check that diction is clear in the verses so that the story is heard; likewise in the chorus, to give vitality to the rhythm.

■ Creating a performance

- The song works well unaccompanied but, if using the optional piano accompaniment, include the introduction and two-bar link.
- Alternatively, try a very simple two-chord guitar accompaniment using the tonic minor and the major chord a tone below (in the notated key, G minor and F major).
- Try varying the texture by using soloists or small groups for some of the verses.
- A simple additional harmony suggestion from Sandra Kerr is that some voices sustain the note on 'oo' of 'Tigg-er-y oo-ree oo-ree ay' each time as everyone else sings what's written (harmony 2). Everyone joins back together for the last line of the chorus.
- Try adding some simple percussion or train-related sounds, or even a spoken vocal ostinato, e.g. 'working on the railway'.
- There is plenty of scope here for singers to make up their own verses to be included in performance; the song can go on for as long as everyone likes!
- Create a modern version with different dates and events or commentary personal to you.

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English/Irish

Moderate pace

Voices

Piano

Gm Eb F Gm

1. In eight-teen hun-dred and

6 F Gm

for - ty one, my cord-u-roy brit-ches I put on, my cord-u-roy brit-ches I put on, to

11 Eb F Gm Chorus F

work up-on the rail-way. Tigg-er-y oo-ree oo-ree ay, tigg-er-y oo-ree oo-ree ay,

17 Gm Eb F Gm

tigg-er-y oo-ree oo-ree ay, work-ing on the rail-way. (2.-8.) In