

6 The Barley Mow

RESOURCES ▶ ▶

■ You need to know

This song is a celebration of conviviality and good cheer, listing various measures or containers of beer from the tiny ‘nipperkin’ (originally just under half a pint) to the full barrel. A stack of barley is known as a ‘barley mow’ and, like ‘The Wheatsheaf’, it is a fairly common pub name. The song is believed to have originated in Devon and Cornwall and is great fun to perform, presenting many opportunities to show off and have challenging competitions (in some versions) about who can drink the most, from ‘the jolly brown bowl’ to ‘the ocean’. David can’t remember where he first came across this song, but he is grateful to Kathryn Davidson for reminding him he knew it!

■ Warming up

- Gently massage the lower jaw from where it hinges under the ears to the chin.
- Chew some imaginary toffee or big sticky cakes to mobilize the mouth and loosen the jaw.
- Wiggle and loosen the tongue, and shout ‘rrring, rrring’ several times to warm it up.
- Chant some tongue-twisters, e.g. ‘Red lorry, yellow lorry’, ‘Rub-a-dub-dub, three men in a tub’, ‘Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers’, etc.
- Repeat the following words in the rhythm of the song, getting gradually faster: ‘quart pot, pint pot, half-a-pint, gill pot’ and ‘half-a-gill, quarter-gill, nipperkin’.

■ Learning

- Learn the melody slowly at first and gradually increase the tempo, making sure it remains comfortable.
- A new line is added each verse, introduced in bar 2 and then starting the list which begins in bar 9 (26). Note that from verse 2 onwards, bar 9 (26) is in 9/8.
- To begin with, have the words clearly visible for groups so that they can sing them without worrying about remembering them. Over the course of several rehearsals, gradually remove the words until they are committed to memory.

- There are two harmony parts for this song, for high and low voices. Learn them slowly, and make sure everyone is really confident and the notes are secure so that the singers can concentrate on the words. Ensure the melody remains dominant.
- A few suggestions for melodic variation are given in cue-sized notes. Try these when the main tune is really secure.

■ Listen out

- The words must be crystal clear. If they’re not, slow down and practise the articulation by speaking and overdoing the consonants, then relax back to normal speech, keeping mouths mobile.
- In the later verses, don’t lose the energy as the phrases get longer; take good deep breaths and control the airflow. Do some deep breathing and hissing out exercises if necessary.

■ Creating a performance

- There are several ways to perform this song, e.g. as a duo tour de force with two singers standing face-to-face, staring each other out—the first to laugh or stop is the loser, provided the other finishes the song. Also try it in a group, alternating solos/unison and harmony.
- However it is performed, it must have huge energy and sound cheerful.
- In concert, this song would pair up nicely with ‘John Barleycorn’ (p. 26), which is a very different song, but also about beer.

6 The Barley Mow

South-west English
Harmonized by David Oliver

With a light bounce

Verse 1

Melody

Here's good luck to the quart pot, good luck to the Bar - ley

Mow. — Jol - ly good luck to the quart pot, good luck to the Bar - ley

Mow, to the quart pot, pint pot, half - a - pint, gill pot,

half - a - gill, quar - ter - gill, nip - per - kin, and a brown bowl, here's good

luck, good luck, good luck to the Bar - ley Mow! —

Verse 2 onwards

M. G D G

Here's good luck to the half - gal-lon, good luck to the Bar - ley Mow.____

H. Here's good luck to the half - gal-lon, good luck to the Bar - ley Mow.____

L. Here's good luck to the half - gal-lon, good luck to the Bar - ley Mow.____

22 D G

Jol - ly good luck to the half - gal - lon, good luck to the Bar - ley

Jol - ly good luck to the half - gal - lon, good luck to the Bar - ley

Jol - ly good luck to the half - gal - lon, good luck to the Bar - ley

25 D G

Mow, to the half - gal - lon, quart pot, pint pot, half - a - pint, gill pot,

Mow, to the half - gal - lon, quart pot, pint pot, half - a - pint, gill pot,

Mow, to the half - gal - lon, quart pot, pint pot, half - a - pint, gill pot,