



Building a Traditional Tune Repertoire

by Wendy Anthony

Cluck Old Hen

(Key of A Dorian)

The Tune:

Found in the repertoires of both Old-Time & Bluegrass players, ***Cluck Old Hen*** is a relatively simple, repetitive melody, with the minor sound of the Dorian Mode. It can also be played as a song, with the addition of lyrics which come in many different, often amusing versions.

Cluck Old Hen
Traditional

Arranged by Wendy Anthony

Key of A-Dorian
Part A

A G A G A G

Part B
Am C Am

G Am C E 1. Am 2. Am

13 T A B

Listen to the Cluck Old Hen MIDI
[120](#) & [180](#) bpm

Techniques:

- Overview of Tune:** This tune is in the Dorian Mode, which has both a flatted seventh (bVII) & a flatted third (biii) note. The main chords in Part A are A major, & in Part B are A minor. Note that the time signature is 2/4 time, with two 1/4 notes per measure. Most of the notes are 1/4 notes, with very few 1/8 notes.
- Dorian Mode:** The Dorian Mode has a flatted seventh note (bVII), like the mixolydian mode, with the addition of the flatted third (biii), producing a minor sound. Thus, though the key signature is A, with 3 sharps (F#, G#, C#), both the G & C are actually played as natural notes, without being sharpened. In this version, the chords change at the beginning of each measure, returning to A major from the G (bVII) in Part A & to A minor from both the C (bIII) & the G (bVII) in Part B, with the addition of a final change from the E (V) in both parts.
- Time Signature:** The time signature is 2/4 time, which has only two 1/4 notes per measure (compared to 4/4 time, with four 1/4 notes per measure). This timing ensures that the tune follows the traditional pattern of: two (or more) parts, with each part consisting of 8 measures, which are repeated once, before going on to the next part.

- **Pick Strokes:** Pick all 1/4 notes with Downstrokes & all paired 1/8 notes with Down/Upstrokes.

Variations:

1. **Add Extra Notes:** Try adding paired 1/8 notes to replace single 1/4 notes; add chord notes to create a bigger sound; use a Bluesy Slide into the second 1/4 note of each measure at the beginning of Part B; you could also try to experiment with imitating chicken/clucking sounds, like some fiddlers do, by plucking, with your left finger, the first open A strings 1/4 notes (& picking the second) in Measures 10, 13 & 15 (though don't be disappointed if you can't get the same effect!).

Cluck Old Hen - (variations)

The image shows musical notation for 'Cluck Old Hen - (variations)' in 2/4 time, key of D major. It includes two parts: Part A (Measures 1-2) and Part B (Measures 10-13 and 10-11). Chord progressions are indicated above the staff: Part A (A, G), Part B (Am, C, Am, G, Am, C). Below the staff are guitar fretboard diagrams for the E, A, D, and G strings, showing fingerings (0, 5, 0, 3, 3, 5, 3, 0, 0, 3, 3, 3, 0, 0, 5, 5, 5, 0, 5, 7, 3, 0, 3).

2. **Low Octave Variation:** Try playing the whole tune one octave lower, or vary octaves with each part. Shown here is a simplified version of the tune.

Cluck Old Hen - (low octave)

The image shows musical notation for 'Cluck Old Hen - (low octave)' in 2/4 time, key of D major. It consists of two systems of simplified notation. The first system shows the melody on a single staff with notes A, G, A, G, A, G, E, and a first/second ending. The second system shows the accompaniment on a single staff with notes Am, C, Am, G, Am, C, E, and a first/second ending. Below each system are guitar fretboard diagrams for the E, A, D, and G strings, showing fingerings (2, 0, 5, 0, 2, 0, 0, 4, 2, 0, 5, 0, 2, 0, 5, 2, 2, 2, 5, 0, 2, 0, 5, 2, 2).

3. **Chord Variation:** Different chords progressions may be used for this tune, depending on the region, the player, or the mood. Be sure that you are all playing the same version.

- Some players will only change to the G chord once in Part A

Part A ||: A | A | A | G | A | A | E | A :||

Part B ||: Am| C | Am| G | Am| Am| E | Am :||

- Other players will play a minor version of Part A.

Part A ||: Am| Am| Am| G | Am| Am| E | Am :||

Part B ||: Am| C | Am| G | Am| Am| E | Am :||

4. **Lyrics:** The Verse is sung to Part A & the Chorus is sung to Part B. One Verse & one Chorus is usually followed by a few instrumental rounds, before once again singing one Verse & a Chorus. An internet search will reveal many alternative verses.

VERSE:

My old hen's a good old hen
She lays eggs for the railroad men.
Sometimes one, sometimes two
Sometimes enough for the whole damn crew.

CHORUS:

Cluck old hen, cluck and sing
Ain't laid an egg since 'way last spring.
Cluck old hen, cluck and squall
Ain't laid an egg since 'way last fall.

Comments or Suggestions?

Keepin' tuned ...
Wendy Anthony

o2b.pickin@gmail.com