

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.



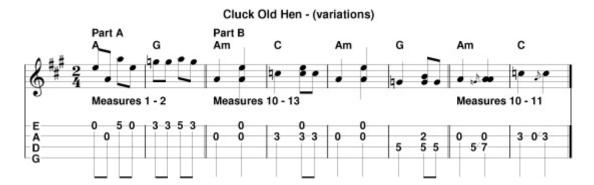
Techniques:

- 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.

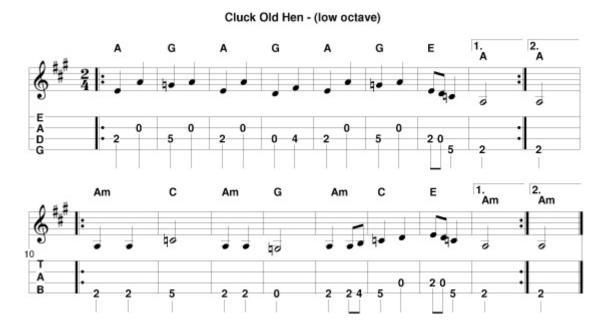
• Pick Strokes: Pick all 1/4 notes with Downstrokes & all paired 1/8 notes with Down/Upstrokes.

Variations:

 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!).



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.



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

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