



Building a Traditional Tune Repertoire

by Wendy Anthony

Turkey In The Straw

(Key of G)

The Tune:

In honour of a bird often associated with Autumn & Thanksgiving feasts in North American (October in Canada, November in USA), I present ***Turkey In The Straw***, a very popular & well known American fiddle tune. Some will also remember this as a familiar schoolyard song, with silly lyrics. This tune is distantly related & has some similar melody sections to both Old Zip Coon (An early American Minstrel song, published with lyrics in 1834) & Natchez Under The Hill (a fiddle tune in Key of A, first published in 1839).

Turkey In The Straw
Traditional Reel / Breakdown

Arranged by Wendy Anthony

Part A

G D

Part B

2. D G C

Listen to the Midi: [120 bpm](#) & [160 bpm](#)

Techniques:

- Overview of Tune:** Though the main melody in Part A is played with straight 1/8 & 1/4 notes, the rhythm becomes syncopated in the last part of Part A & the first part of Part B. Part A's 2-measure theme is repeated a few measures later, while Part B's 2-note theme is repeated, with an echoing call & response, within & between 2 measures each. Try changing the tune dynamics by varying the volume of the response/repetition. Both parts end with the same 2 measure turnaround.

- **Chords:** In Part A, the main chord is G (I), with a D (V) in the 4th measure & a quick D/G (V/I) turnaround in the 8th measure. In Part B, the C (IV) chord is added, & then you can either split the 14th measure between the G/D (I/V) chords, or simply play G all the way through to the end, finishing with the same D/G (V/I) turnaround as Part A.

Part A: ||: G | G | G | D | G | G | G | D/G :||

Part B: ||: G | G | C | C | G | G/D | G | D/G :||

- **Pick Strokes:** Pick all 1/4 notes with Downstrokes & all paired 1/8 notes with Down/Upstrokes. A syncopated pick stroke rhythm (emphasis placed on the off-beat notes) occurs in measures 7 of Part A & measures 9, 10, 11, 12 & 15 of Part B. In these measures, pick the first two 1/8 notes with a Down/Upstroke, then either hold the fretted finger for a tied 1/8 note, or release the fretted finger for a 1/8 rest (you can mime the action of a Downstroke, without actually picking the strings, if that helps you keep a steady Down/Upstroke), then pick the next 1/8 note with another Upstroke, followed by a 1/4 note played with the usual Downstroke.

Variations:

1. **Replace or Substitute Notes:** Replace or Substitute 1/4 notes with 1/8 notes; add open strings or additional chord notes for a full sound.

Turkey In The Straw - variations

2. **Lyrics:** Many different folk versions of lyrics have been set to this tune & been documented over the years, including a variety of schoolyard rhymes. Dan Bryant published these lyrics in 1861:

Turkey in de straw, turkey in de hay,
 Turkey in de straw, turkey in de hay,
 Roll 'em up, an' twist 'em up, a high tuc-ka-haw,
 An' twist 'em up a tune called, Turkey in the Straw.

Comments or Suggestions?

Keepin' tuned ...
 Wendy Anthony

o2b.pickin@gmail.com