

# Hot Cross Buns

## A six-step progression to basic (rhythmic) music literacy

an illustration of Kodaly teaching by Len Tyler  
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The image shows two staves of musical notation for the song 'Hot Cross Buns'. The first staff contains two measures of music. The first measure has three notes (m, r, d) followed by a rest. The second measure has three notes (m, r, d) followed by a rest. Below the notes are the letters 'm r d' and the lyrics 'Hot cross buns.' repeated. The second staff contains a sequence of notes: four 'd' notes, four 'r' notes, and one 'm r d' note. Below these notes are the lyrics 'One a pen-ny two a pen-ny. Hot cross buns.'

Hot Cross Buns is a traditional children's song that is ideal for introducing children to the basics of music reading. There are two versions of this song. The technical content of this three-note version is quite simple and as a result this song lends itself well to teaching basic musical elements to children. Before any musical element can be extracted at a conscious level the song needs to be learned thoroughly first ensuring that the unconscious performance of the various elements is done accurately and with good quality. With this in mind the following activities can be used to help establish this song.

1.	<b>Sing the song for its own sake.</b> <i>Possibly the most important activity of all. A good song will always do well with the children if it has quality and depth.</i>
2.	<b>Sing the song while the children pat the crotchet (Ta) pulse on their laps (or clap their hands).</b> <i>The children can be told that this is the pulse of the song and can be linked to the heartbeat. In people (or animals) the heartbeat can be fast or slow but is usually constant. The same goes for the heartbeat of a song. Sometimes fast, sometimes slow, but it usually remains constant.</i>
3.	<b>Sing the song and blow in the rests.</b> <i>Children can be told to "blow" on the buns to cool them down before eating them.</i>

4.	<b>Children walk round the room to a Ta pulse while singing the song.</b> <i>It is not so easy for very young children to keep their feet in time with the music initially.</i>
5.	<b>Sing the song while clapping the rhythm (words) of the song.</b> <i>Make sure that there is a clap for every syllable in the song, and no clap in the rest. The rest (sh) can be represented by an outwards movement of the hands.</i>
6.	<b>Sing the song while walking the pulse and clapping the rhythm.</b> <i>Care must be taken here to ensure that the different elements are performed accurately.</i>
7.	<b>Sing the song while half of the children pat te pulse (Ta) and half clap the rhythm.</b> <i>This activity is good for two-part hearing and general ensemble work. There can be many variations on this idea.</i>
8.	Repeat item 7 and change roles at a given signal
9.	<b>Clap the rhythm of the song while silently mouthing the words.</b> <i>This activity helps to develop the internal hearing and musical imagination of the children. They should be hearing the song in their minds during this activity.</i>
10.	<b>Sing the song in canon.</b> <i>This works at virtually any interval but works well at two beats interval. This is not so easy for younger children.</i>
	<b>Be imaginative and creative. There are lots of other activities that can be done with this or any other good song. Don't be afraid to experiment or ask the children for ideas.</b>

The basic technical content of the song is as follows:

Rhythmic	Ta, Te-te, Sh (crotchet, paired quavers and rest)
Pitch	3 <sup>rd</sup> 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 1 <sup>st</sup> degree of the major scale (mi, re and do). This is an easy tone set for children to sing.
Format	AABA – lines 1,2 & 4 are the same, line 3 is different

Once the song is well established and solidly known the technical elements can be extracted and brought to consciousness leading to music reading with understanding. The accompanying flash cards are intended to support a six-step progression leading to basic music reading as follows.

Step 1. **Heart cards** – the song is sung while the teacher (or a child) taps on the card indicating the pulse. A series of four x four-beat heart cards can be laid out thereby showing the underlying structure of the song – four lines of four beats each.

Step 2. **The Bun Cards** – the song is sung while the teacher (or a child) taps on the pans. Again a series of four cards can be laid out thereby showing the format of the song. It can now be seen that lines 1, 2 & 4 are the same giving an AABA form. Notice the empty space where there is a silence (rest) in the song. Heart and Bun cards can be placed next to each other to illustrate the difference between pulse and rhythm. It can take young children longer to learn this difference than many teachers realise.

Step 3. The **Buns on Heart** cards – the song can be sung and the teacher (or a child) can tap on either the heart or the buns. This makes the link between pulse and rhythm more obvious.

Step 4. The **rhythm notes on hearts** – the song can be sung and the children read the notes as Ta, Te-te, or Sh. They are now reading music.

Step 5. The **rhythm notes with small hearts** are used as a natural progression. The children should now be able to read these rhythm notes using rhythm solfa (Ta Te-te Sh etc.). The hearts remind the children where the pulse takes place.

Step 6. The final **rhythm cards** are provided without hearts. Once the children are able to read these with a good level of rhythmic accuracy and with a steady pulse then the children will have been given a solid introduction to basic music reading.

N.B. The above sequence is intended to take many weeks if not months to achieve properly. Only move to the next step when the previous step is solid. **“Anything not taught properly first time round is likely to take its revenge later!”**

Further elements can be extracted (e.g. pitch content). Please note that the pitch solfa is shown immediately below the staff for this song. Just the initials are used (m = Mi, r = Re, d = Do etc.)























