

The following are a few helpful tips to consider when preparing for participation in a traditional music jam – from Pat Long, HTMA Member/Treasurer

Always know in what key you are playing a song or tune (a tune is an instrumental – no words). It's true that once you start playing most of the "good ears" in the group will figure out the key. However, if you want others to play along with you (most desirable – seems to release endorphins!) then you need to play the songs/tunes in familiar keys or at least keys that are reasonably easy to play in.

Melody players especially who would ordinarily be thrilled to accompany you do not enjoy playing in difficult keys much beyond key of F. The more difficult keys are Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb, and B. So those players, although somewhat accomplished, may most likely just put their instruments down and leave you playing solo!

Common and easily playable keys for both the **folk songs** and **fiddle tunes** are C, D, G, A, and occasionally F or E.

The other very important aspect, perhaps even more so than key, is **rhythm**. Rhythm is to be distinguished from tempo in that tempo is *how fast* you play a song or tune. That is usually dictated by the style of the song or your ability to play it. There's nothing wrong with playing anything slowly. What will hinder others from playing along with you, however, is if you do not maintain a steady rhythm and instead your tempo speeds up and slows down. Players in the circle are usually used to a steady rhythm and may become frustrated at the unpredictable changes when trying to play along.

Practice with a metronome or purchase some software that provides computer-generated accompaniment. Or, find a very patient guitar player!

Below is a short list of songs and "**fiddle tunes**" tunes commonly played at HTMA meetings. Most of the regular attendees will know these and play along with you.

SONGS:

Wildwood Flower
Will the Circle be Unbroken
Wayfaring Stranger
Down in the Valley



Pick a key you can sing these in and use capo on your guitar if necessary.

Common Instrumental Songs for melody instruments such as Fiddle, Mandolin, Banjo, Guitar flat-pick:

Soldier's Joy (key of D)
St. Anne's Reel (key of D)
Arkansas Traveler (key of D)
Red-haired Boy (key of A)
Wildwood Flower (key of D or G)

You can find a wealth of material on these songs and tunes on the Web but if you need further help with resources then just let me know.

Happy playing!
Pat Long