

For many people Irish music was a relatively unknown type of music until 1981 when a musical called “Riverdance” became a phenomenon and brought new light to the style.

What makes Irish music so unique? The old world style instruments that are quick-paced and move so fast you can barely tell if there are two or ten playing.

Here are the instruments most commonly used by Irish musicians:

_____ Traditional, hand-held keyboard instrument that is played with the pressure of pushing keys while squeezing the bellows.

_____ This five, and sometimes four or six-string instrument has the signature flat, drum-like back and long neck, and is played using a pick and in a fast plucking style.

_____ Until the 1960s, this was uniquely a Greek instrument. However, when a newer version was developed with a flat back and wider body, a design that was unique to Irish music was born. Its strings are played in a fast motion but in the same way as a guitar or mandolin.



_____ This open, framed drum can be anywhere from 10” to 26” diameter and is held vertically in the players lap. Its surface is made of goatskin, which needs to be tuned as the weather changes. The player keeps her hand inside the back of it to control the drum’s pitch.

_____ A smaller version of the violin, this is s an instrument commonly used in Irish and European music. Usually played very fast, it requires intense concentration and coordination.



_____ Most Irish music includes this instrument, usually a smaller version that sits on the knee. Their frames are made of ash, cherry, mahogany, maple or walnut wood. Traditional ones used strings made of wires, which created a signature bell sound. Modern instruments usually use nylon or gut strings. Gut strings are made of the natural fibers that come from animal intestines.

_____ Much like the Scottish instrument, the Irish version uses bellows to pump air into the bag and has several more enhancements. The canter, a simple flute-like extension that has keys played by the musician; several drones which are pipes designed to output continuous low tones; and regulators - extra pipes that can play chords.

_____ are heard in almost all Irish tunes, but usually the old-style flute made of a single piece of wood with some holes is the preferred kind.

_____ are a very simple version of flutes and are made with a single tin pipe with six holes and a mouthpiece. The sound they make is a lot rougher than the sound made by a flute.

The acoustic _____ can be heard in a lot of Irish music but usually in the background filling out the chords with fast strumming patterns.