

# Folk Song: Sumer is icumen in

One of the most famous pieces of medieval English music is Sumer is Icumen In, a lively musical round that celebrates the arrival of summer. Written in the mid-13th century, the song is a key milestone in Western music history. It's one of the earliest known examples of English secular "polyphony," a type of music where two or more melodies are sung together in harmony.

Preserved in a manuscript from Reading Abbey and written in Middle English, the song describes nature coming to life: cuckoos call, lambs leap, and fields bloom under the sun. Its repetitive, catchy tune suggests it was popular at village gatherings and festivals.

What makes this song especially impressive is its six-part canon structure, allowing voices to layer in a way that was groundbreaking at the time. This highlights the skill of medieval composers and the importance of music in daily life.

Even today, Sumer Is Icumen In is enjoyed by musicians and historians alike, offering a glimpse into the joyful, communal spirit of the Middle Ages. Whether sung in its original language or a modern version, its melody continues to celebrate the arrival of summer across the centuries.

## ***Middle English Lyrics:***

Sumer is icumen in,  
Lhude sing cuccu!  
Groweþ sed and bloweþ med  
And springþ þe wde nu,  
Sing cuccu!  
Awe bleteþ after lomb,  
Lhouþ after calue cu.  
Bulluc sterteþ, bucke uerteþ,  
Murie sing cuccu!  
Cuccu, cuccu, wel singes þu cuccu;  
Ne swik þu nauer nu.  
Sing cuccu nu. Sing cuccu.  
Sing cuccu. Sing cuccu nu!

## ***Modern English Lyrics:***

Summer is a coming in,  
Loudly sing, Cuckoo!  
Groweth seed and bloweth mead,  
And springeth wood anew,  
Sing, Cuckoo!  
Ewe bleateth after lamb  
The cow lows after the calf.  
Bullock starteth buck, too, verteth,  
Merrily sing, Cuckoo!  
Cuckoo, cuckoo, well you sing, cuckoo;  
Of cease thee never now,  
Sing cuckoo now. Sing, Cuckoo.  
Sing Cuckoo. Sing cuckoo now!

# Sumer Is Icumen In

(Arranged for Piano)

Traditional  
arranged Jim Paterson

Musical notation for measures 1-3. The piece is in 12/8 time and B-flat major. The first measure starts with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The right hand features a melodic line with eighth notes and quarter notes, while the left hand provides a bass line with dotted half notes and quarter notes. Phrasing slurs are used to group notes across measures.

Musical notation for measures 4-6. The right hand continues the melodic line with eighth notes and quarter notes. The left hand maintains the bass line with dotted half notes and quarter notes. Phrasing slurs are used to group notes across measures.

Musical notation for measures 7-9. The right hand continues the melodic line with eighth notes and quarter notes. The left hand maintains the bass line with dotted half notes and quarter notes. Phrasing slurs are used to group notes across measures.

Musical notation for measures 10-12. The right hand continues the melodic line with eighth notes and quarter notes. The left hand maintains the bass line with dotted half notes and quarter notes. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots in both staves.