

# SARASPONDA



**Instrumentation /Voicing :** Piano and Voice

**Source :** Wee Sing Sing-Alongs ISBN: 9780843113617  
By Pamela Conn Beall and Susan Hagen Nipp  
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Also in The Music Book, Grade 3  
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**This unit was designed for Grade 3**

## **Analysis**

**Broad Description** – Traditional

**Type Genre** – Dutch Folk Song

### **Background Information**

Sarasponda is a Dutch folk song that Mothers used to sing while their daughters spun their first thread or yarn, and made their first cloth or knitted item by themselves. The song is supposed to imitate the sound of the spinning wheel as the girl spun her thread. It was to ensure that the girl would become skilled in weaving and spinning.

The spinning wheel was probably invented in India, although its origins are unclear. This wheel was invented after hundreds of years of hand spinning. The spinning wheel was introduced in Europe from India between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was a great improvement over the hand spinning method. The spindle was set horizontally in a wheel turned by a foot pedal and produced a single thread. In 1533, a citizen of Brunswick was said to have added a treadle so that the spinner could have both hands free to spin.

There are several types of spinning wheels. The tabletop or floor charjha is probably the oldest and comes from India. There are also versions from China dating from 900 AD. There is the great wheel that used a wheel that was 5 foot tall. There are also the treadle wheel, the double drive, the single drive, and the castle style. All of these types of spinning wheels are depicted in artwork dating from 900 AD to 1900 AD. The type that was normally associated with this song is the type that used a treadle as seen in the picture below from 1900.



In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Industrial Revolution had a big effect on the spinning industry. It brought the making of thread and yarn out of the home and into the factory. Lewis Paul and John Wyatt patented the Roller Spinning Machine in 1738. Another inventor, Thomas Highs invented the spinning jenny. These improvements provided the machinery to begin the open end spinning mills in the United States in the 1780's and 1790's.

Because this is a folk song, there is no composer. The song has been passed down for centuries. It is normally attributed to the Dutch but there are indications that possibly it was also sung in France. This would be logical because at the time of the early spinning wheels medieval European countries had very different borders and many of the cultures mixed together. The song was brought to the United States via the immigrants from those countries.

This song is a favorite among young children and has been sung for generations by Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and other youth groups.

## ELEMENTS OF MUSIC

**Form:** "Sarasponda" has two distinct parts that create an AB form often times with an accompanying ostinato.

**Rhythm:** This arrangement is in 4/4. The song begins with a two eighth note pickup. The two main rhythmic patterns are a steady eighth note pattern in the A section and a dotted quarter- eighth note- quarter note pattern in the B section.

**Melody:** This arrangement has a major tonality and is in the key of C. It begins with a tonic pattern of do-mi-sol (C, E, G). After the tonic pattern, first phrase has repeated notes and simple step patterns for easy reading of the scale. The phrase concludes with a descending sol-fa-mi-re-do (G,F,E,D,C) pattern. The second phrase is an exact duplication of the first phrase. Phrase 3 in the B section begins with an octave leap from low do to high do (C, C). This melody pattern is then repeated with a rhythmic variation. Phrase 4 then has a step pattern and ends with a final pattern of re-fa-mi-re-do (D, F, E, D, C) to mark the resting tone at the end.

Featured patterns are:

- Do – mi –sol
- Low do – High do – La – sol
- Sol – Fa – Mi – Re – Do
- Re – Fa – Mi – Re – Do

**Harmony:** This song will be sung in the key of C. Tonic, Subdominant, and Dominant 7 chords are used. The A section features a traditional I-V-I chord progression. The B section begins with I- IV-I – IV- I in phrase 3 and ends with the I-V-I pattern that was used in the A section.

The students will use a vocal ostinato to create a harmony part and use two part singing. This ostinato is a repeated do pattern that imitates the rhythm of the spinning wheel as it turns.

**Timbre:** voice and piano. Autoharp or guitar could be used to accompany. The students will add xylophones and other classroom rhythm instruments to create a background.

**Texture:** Melody with accompaniment

**Expression:** “Sarasponda” should be performed in a lively manner. The A section should have a clear rhythmic pulse to reflect the sounds that the spinning wheel makes as it is operated. The B section should be a little louder with the emphasis on the octave leap and the descending pattern to the home tone at the end. Dynamics could be added with the A section being at mezzo forte and the B section being at forte.

**Additional Considerations:** The text of this song is believed to be just nonsense syllables that were created to imitate the sounds of the spinning wheel rotating, the spindle collecting the thread or yarn and the person who is spinning pulling and twisting the yarn as it is created in their hand. The last phrase is believed to be an expression of having the yarn completed.

**Reasons to Perform This Song:**

- to sing songs which expand their range. This song spans an octave.
- to move to songs. Movement can represent the beat, rhythms, the melodic phrasing, the expression etc.
- to identify an AB form
- to play accompaniments on classroom percussion instruments
- to perform an ostinato
- to know the historic background and connection to other cultures as well as our own.
- To compose an original piece based on the experience that this song provides.

**The Heart**

**What attracted you to this piece?** I sang this song as a child. Each year that I teach it to my students, I have watched the excitement and enthusiasm that students feel when they perform this song. The song has been handed down for hundreds of years and has an appeal that is ageless.

**What maintains my interest now?** Even though this is a simple piece it has so much to experience and to teach in it.

**What gives the music its distinctive qualities?** Certainly, the nonsense syllables and its connection to the spinning wheel make it interesting. Also the pulsing rhythm and the dominance of a resting tone makes the song fun to sing.

**What do you learn about yourself through the eyes of the music?** Many songs can connect young and old with their playful spirit and emphasis on work. It reminded me that work songs even in the present era can make the work easier and make the time pass quickly.

**How has the composer created your response through compositional devices?** The composer uses repetitive pitches and a pulsing rhythm to create a feeling of a machine working. Also, the octave leap helps to give the sense of accomplishment. The nonsense syllables in the text add to the sheer fun of the song.

### **The Heart Statement:**

The heart of “Sarasponda” lies in the musical expression of the sheer joy of useful work and accomplishment. The A section reflects the pulsing rhythm of the spinning wheel as the spinner works continuously to create thread or yarn. The B section with its octave leap leads us to the joy of accomplishment as the spinner pulls the length of thread or yarn that has been completed more tightly on the spindle. The use of a resting tone adds to the feeling of being finished with a project. The use of nonsense syllables adds the feeling of excitement and joy. This song reminds us that hard work is often rewarded by the feeling of accomplishment.

**Introducing the piece:** see lesson plan 1

### **Knowledge Outcomes:**

- **Students will independently analyze a simple AB form.**
- **Students will label rhythmic patterns using rhythm words.**

### **Skill Outcomes:**

- **Students will sing expressively with appropriate interpretation**
- **Students will perform more difficult rhythm patterns which include dotted quarter notes.**

### **Affective Outcomes:**

- **Students will relate their own feelings about the satisfaction of accomplishment and the joy of useful work to “Sarasponda”.**

**Music Selection:**

“Sarasponda” has stood the test of time. It has been sung by generations as they worked on spinning, knitting, sewing and many other work projects. The nonsense syllables are fun and often make the work go faster. Music has been used for hundreds of years to ease the boredom of work and to make the time go faster. This song is a perfect example of a “work” song. It can be used to start a unit on work songs and field hollers of the South during the Civil War, or the great American classics of working on the railroad. Because it is a Dutch song it can be used as part of a study of work songs from many other cultures as well. The range is perfect for young children with its repeated melody patterns and octave leap. The pulsing rhythm and easy ostinato harmony part are easily accessible by young children. It is loaded with elements to teach. It is truly a children’s classic.

## Strategies

### Teaching Plan 1

**Materials:** Sarasponda melodic/rhythmic icon transparency, yarn and knitting needles, picture of a spinning wheel,

**Introduce the song:** Bring a skein of yarn and some knitting needles. Pretend to knit something and hum the song as you are working. During the A section pretend to keep the knitting needles going evenly and quickly. Be sure to use your facial expression to reflect the routine of the work. During the B part (ah, do ray oh!) pull the yarn out in an arching motion. Then on the last part (A say pa say oh!) use a motion to admire the completed project. Be sure to have your facial expression reflect the satisfaction of completing some stitches.

Ask the following questions:

Do you know what I am doing?

How do you think I feel about doing this work?

How do you think I will feel about finishing a big knitting project?

Do you think that singing helps me work on this project?

**Skill outcome: Students will sing expressively with appropriate interpretation**

#### A. Strategies

1. Students will listen, trace and echo the melodic patterns of an iconic representation of the song (aural, kinesthetic and visual)
2. Students will sing with a frustrated feeling (aural)
3. Students will sing with a joyful feeling (aural)
4. Students will sing using motions to enhance the feeling (kinesthetic)

Sing the song again and add the words. Tell the students that they are nonsense words.

Tell the class that this is a Dutch folk song from long ago that is sung when someone is using a spinning wheel. Show the picture of the spinning wheel and explain the parts and how it works. Tell them that we are going to sing the song and discover which parts of the spinning wheel go with the words.

Solfeggio warmups: Do – Mi – Sol – Sol – Mi – Do  
Sol – Fa- Mi – Re – Do  
Mi – Re – Do  
Sol – La – Sol

Echo sing the song.

Add motions to the song.

Sarasponda, sarasponda – roll hands like the wheel  
Ret- set- set – tap fingers in palm as the clicking of the yarn goes on the spindle  
Ah- doo ray – oh – arch hand from low to high to imitate pulling the yarn  
Ah - doo ray boom da oh! – arch hand from low to high to imitate pulling the yarn  
Ah – doo ray boom da – arch hand from low to high  
Ret – set – set – tap fingers in palm as the clicking of the yarn goes on the spindle  
Ah- say – pa – say – oh – shrug shoulders and have one hand move down

Sing the song again using the motions and add facial expressions to the A section and the B section. Talk once again about the difference between hard work and the satisfaction of being done. Use the example of riding a bike!

Show transparency of iconic melody and rhythm patterns. Sing again while student follow with arched hands that follow the melody line. Are any of these motions close to the motions that we made up for the song? (Hopefully, the a-do-ra-oh section is similar and follows the phrase.)

Discuss rhythm and melody patterns.

- Do you notice anything about the first two phrases? (same)
- Do you notice anything about the second two phrases? (different)
- Do you think the first two phrases are mostly steps or skips? (steps)
- Do you think the second two phrases are mostly steps or skips? (skips)
- Can you point out any long notes in the song?

Sing again emphasizing the melody and rhythms that you have learned.

### **B. Assessment**

1. Observe students actions, facial expressions and sound. Check on a seating chart assessment form those who do not have appropriate expression either thru their facial expressions, actions or their vocal sounds.
2. When students perform the song the next class period, do they remember to perform it with expression? Check on seating chart assessment form to see if the same children are having trouble.



## Teaching Plan 2

Materials: Percussion score, assessment worksheet, assessment check off sheet, tap blocks, woodblocks, rhythm sticks, triangles, finger cymbals, tambourines, xylophones, drums.

### **Skill Outcome:**

Students will perform more difficult rhythm patterns which include dotted quarter notes.

### **Knowledge Outcome:**

Students will label rhythmic patterns using rhythm words.

#### **A. Strategies:**

1. Students will perform a rhythmic percussion score from iconic and notational representations
2. Students will complete a rhythm assessment worksheet.

Start with a review of the song and have the students pat-clap the beat and chant rhythm words while the teacher sings.

Divide the class into two parts and have half the class sing the song and half the class sing the vocal ostinato (Boom – da)

Show the notation of the vocal ostinato and identify as eighth notes and use rhythm words. Practice this with the class.

Add the drums to the vocal ostinato. Mention that this part could be the foot pedal part.

Show percussion score using words and rhythm patterns. Read using rhythm words. Use dotted quarter insert chart to explain the dotted rhythm. Assign groups and perform. Trade groups so that all students get a chance to play all of the parts.

Students complete a worksheet on rhythms.

#### **B. Assessment:**

1. Observe groups of students performing rhythms. Assess the following using Beginning, Developing, or Secure.
  - a. Student performs eighth note ostinato accurately.
  - b. Student can perform the dotted quarter eighth note pattern accurately.
2. Rating Scale for Rhythm worksheet
  - a. 3 points: Student completes all three sections of the test correctly.
  - b. 2 points: Student completes 2 of the sections correctly.
  - c. 1 point: Student complete 1 or none of the sections correctly.

## Teaching Plan 3

Materials: Spinning wheel picture, composing pictures, classroom instruments, songsheet worksheet, pencils, markers, tagboard or roll paper for compositions

**Knowledge Outcome: Students will independently analyze a simple AB form.**

### A. Strategies

1. Students will create a group composition demonstrating understanding of form.
2. Students will label the A and B sections of the song and name for form.

Show picture of spinning wheel and review the song. Mention that the song was composed to reflect the sounds of the spinning wheel.

Listen to an excerpt of "An American in Paris" by George Gershwin. Show a picture of Gershwin. Explain that the composer wanted to use musical instruments to imitate the sounds of a busy street in Paris. Ask students to answer the following questions:

1. What machines do you hear?
2. What feeling words can you use to describe this music?

Listen to an excerpt of "Short Ride in a Fast Machine" by John Adams. Show a picture of Adams. Explain that the composer wanted the listener to imagine a machine. How words can you use to describe your machine?

Now it is your turn to be the composer. Show pictures of different machines that help us with our work (fire truck, school bus, lawn mower, sewing machine, tractor, etc.) Assign groups to each machine picture and ask them to compose a group composition using any classroom instruments. The criteria for the composition are that it should reflect the sounds that the machine makes and have an A B form. Assign a specific amount of time. Have students perform for each other.

Students will receive their own copy of "Sarasponda". Instruct the students to put an A at the beginning of the first section and a B at the beginning of the section.

### B. Assessment

1. Rating scale for composition.
  - 3 points = Composition reflects the sounds that the machine creates in real life and composition has two distinctly different sections.
  - 2 points = Composition does not reflect the sounds that machine creates in real life but has two distinctly different sections.
  - 1 point = Composition does not get finished or does not have two different sections.
2. Rating scale for "Sarasponda" form worksheet.
  - 3 points = Both A and B in the correct sections of the song.
  - 2 points = Either A or B in the correct section.
  - 1 point = Neither A or B correctly identified.

## Teaching Plan 4

Materials: Reflection page, pencils.

**Affective Outcome: Students will relate their own feelings about the satisfaction of accomplishment and the joy of useful work to “Sarasponda”.**

### A. Strategies

- a. Students will discuss and write about their own experiences of having to work hard on a project and then the satisfaction of completing it.
- b. Students will generate a list of music elements and compositional devices that we used for both sections of the piece.

Teacher asks the class the question again. “Have you ever had to work really hard at a skill or a project? How did you feel when you were just a beginner? How did you feel when you had practiced a lot and were getting really good at it? Turn to your neighbor and tell them about something that you had to practice a lot to get good at. Be sure to include how you felt about the work and how you felt about getting good at it.”

List musical characteristics of the A (work section).

- Repeated melodic shape
- Even eighth note patterns
- Nonsense words that fit the sounds of the machine
- Pulsing rhythm background
- Determined, concentrated, working hard expression
- Dynamic – Medium
- Nonsense syllables that sound like the spinning wheel working

List musical characteristics of the B (accomplishment section)

- Leaps in the melody
- Long dotted quarter note pattern
- Use of resting tone – going back to low do
- Different melodic shape
- Free and joyful expression
- Dynamic – slight crescendo on octave leap
- Nonsense syllables that sound like the yarn being finished.

Ask students to put down some of their thoughts on work and the joy of accomplishment and how it relates to Sarasponda on the Reflection Page.

### B. Assessment

- a. Students will write their answers to number 4 on the reflection page  
3 points = Students can connect the musical elements with an explanation of their experience. They use detail and it makes sense.  
2 point = Students connect the element with their experience but use little detail or explanation.  
1 point = Students tries but does not express a clear connection to their experience

