

BarFly

This file is intended for new users - if you have used a previous version of BarFly and you just want to cut to the action, command-click on this link:

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BarFly is an integrated environment for working with abc music files. The abc music language is a way of writing music using ASCII text, invented by Chris Walshaw. While it was originally invented as a way to transcribe folk music, and became popular first in connection with that genre, it has now developed to such an extent that it can be used for many other musical purposes. As a computer file format it is extremely efficient (you can store thousands of tunes on a single floppy disk), but it is not just a computer file format; with a little practice it is quite easy to read, and if you need to write down some music and don't have any manuscript paper to hand, it's a very useful pencil-and-paper language too. For a full description of the language, pointers to other software and to sites with tunes in abc format, go to the abc home page:

<http://staffweb.cms.gre.ac.uk/~c.walshaw/abc>

A text copy of Chris Walshaw's description of abc version 1.6 is included in the Documents folder.

USING THE PROGRAM

At its heart, the program is a text editor. It works in exactly the way you expect Macintosh text editors to work. Under the Edit menu you will find all the standard commands, Cut, Copy, Paste, Clear and a single-level Undo. There are also Find and Replace commands. You can open multiple files in separate windows, and copy and paste text between them. The external clipboard is supported, so you can copy and paste between BarFly and other programs. (For instance, copy a tune from your NewsReader or EMail program to BarFly in order to play it.)

PLAYING ABC FILES

Here is a tune.:

```
X:1
T:Flogging Reel, The
R:reel
H:Originates from a Scottish reel called "The Flagon Reel"
D:Chieftains: Live. Oisín: Over the Moor to Maggie.
D:Mary Bergin: Feadoga Stain 2.
Z:id:hn-reel-1
Q:350
M:C|
K:G
BG~G2 BGdG | BG~G2 BddG | BG~G2 BdcB |1 ADFG ABcA :|
      [2 AGFG ABcA ||
~g3d BGBd | ~g2eg faaf | g2gd BddB | ADFG ABcA |
~g3d BGBd | ~g2eg fa~a2| bgaf gedB | AGFG ABcA ||
BddG BddG | BddG BG~G2| Ac=fc Acfc | Ac=fc BG~G2 |
BddG BddG | Bdef ~g3a | bgaf gedB | AGFG ABcA ||
```

To play this tune, place the insertion point in it by clicking anywhere after the X which starts the record, then choose Play this tune from the Play menu. You can stop a playing tune by holding down the command key and typing a period (standard Mac way of stopping anything). Playing takes place in the background, so you can continue to work while listening. You can even edit the tune which is actually playing, but changes which you make will not be audible until you play the tune again.

Other play commands (Play next tune, Play tunes from here) work in a similar way, taking their starting point from the position of the insertion point in the text. Play all starts at the first tune and plays through the whole file. Play selection and Play from insertion point are useful when you are working on a tune and only want to play only a part of the tune. Play Medley is only available when you are in split-screen mode (see below). In this mode the program displays an index of all the tunes in the file; you can make multiple selections by command-clicking on the index, then use Play Medley to play the selected tunes.

When playing multiple tunes, you can Skip the current tune using the menu command or its command-key equivalent (Command-K).

A BETTER SOUND

There are hundreds of musical instrument sounds available through Quicktime. Under the Play menu, go to the Instrument sub-menu and choose Add an Instrument. The Irish reel above was transcribed by Henrik Norbeck, who plays the flute, so let's install that instrument first. In the instrument picker dialog, choose Quicktime Music Synthesiser from the top popup menu, Pipe from the Category popup and Flute from the Instrument popup. You can try out the sound of the instrument on the keyboard at the bottom of the dialog. Hit OK. Look at the Instrument sub-menu again. It should now contain Flute, and that item should be checked. Now play the tune again. You can install as many instruments as you like on the menu, but if you add too many it gets a bit cumbersome. To remove an instrument hold down the option key while you choose its name from the menu. (You can't remove Acoustic Grand Piano, as you need at least one instrument on the menu.)

MAKE IT SWING

At the moment BarFly is playing the tune exactly as written; but that is not how it should be played. BarFly's player knows how to place the stresses on an Irish reel, lengthening or shortening notes and using different velocities to approximate the way in which a human player would play it. From the Edit menu choose Player Preferences, and in the resulting dialog check the Use Stress Programming checkbox. Now play the tune again. Feel like dancing? In a file named "Stress Programs", in the same folder as the program are a series of definitions for various folk dances. If you are interested in how this works, read the file, as it also contains instructions on how to write your own stress programs to suit your own music.

PLAY THE ORNAMENTS

The tilde character '~' in an abc tune implies an ornament of some kind. It's written in the music as a turn symbol, and it can imply a classical turn. In the present case, however, what is needed is an Irish roll. Even that is not a complete description, as rolls are played one way on the flute, another way on the banjo and several different ways on the fiddle (depending on which part of Ireland the fiddler comes from). BarFly supports a system of macros which define how this (and many other) symbols are to be dealt with. The program comes with several files of macros for you to choose from, and you can also write your own.

Use the Player Preferences dialog again, and this time check the Enable Macros checkbox. From the Edit menu, go to the Global Macro File sub-menu and choose Flute Rolls. Play the tune once more to hear it as it should be played. For more information on macros read the file "Using BarFly Macros" in the documentation folder.

SHOW ME THE MUSIC

To see the music displayed in staff notation you will need to switch to split-screen mode, but read the rest of this paragraph first, so you don't get lost! In split-screen mode the window is split into three panes. The top pane contains a picture of the music in staff notation, the bottom-left pane contains this text, and the bottom-right pane contains an index of titles of all the tunes in the file. You can click on the heavy lines which divide the panes and drag them vertically or horizontally to show more of one pane at the expense of the others. Since this file only contains one tune you will probably want to close the index pane down, and increase the size of the music pane to show the whole tune. When you switch to split-screen mode the current tune is scrolled to the top of the text pane. This text remains editable, and if you place the insertion point somewhere in the tune and type a few As you will see that the music is updated in real time to match the text. For the highest quality of display select Antialias Music in the View menu.

Antialiasing slows the program considerably, so unless you have a very fast machine you may want to keep it turned off except when printing or exporting pictures of the music. Now go to the View menu and select Split Screen Mode to see what I've been talking about.

WHERE NEXT?

There are many more abcs to look at and listen to in the documentation folder, including much more complex music. There you will also find lots of information about the program and how to get the best out of it. You will also find a file of links to sites where you can search for and download thousands of abc files, and a primer to teach you how to read and write abc.

To start reading the BarFly manual command-click on this link:

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PAYING FOR IT (please?)

BarFly has been free for the last five years, while under development. During that time it has grown from a small, limited abc player into the most comprehensive and powerful abc music program available on any platform, and it now has thousands of users. The demo version is not disabled, except that it will not print multiple tunes, and there is a wait of a few seconds at startup to remind you that you are using it for free. You can register the program for \$25 using the Register application supplied. If you really can't afford the \$25, then you are welcome to use it for free (but are you sure you are getting enough to eat?)