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# Treantmonk's Guide to Bards: Pathfinder Core Rules



The Bard is often a class with misunderstood abilities. He is not a martial class, not a cannon, not a primary caster, not a primary healer. However, too often is the term "JoAT" used (Jack of All Trades), when in truth, the Bard's ability to do "fill any role required" in a party is also often overstated. If your Bard's job is to fill in for a missing party fighter, I recommend having your replacement character ready (probably a fighter type?). So exactly what is the Bard supposed to be doing? How is the Bard going to be a class that fills a meaningful role in the party? What role do you fill?

I hear the following comments often: "The Bard is good at what he does.", or "The Bard is an excellent 5th party member". The first comment of course leads to the question "Exactly what does he do? Are you suggesting he's good at sucking?", while the second comment is pure code for, "The Bard cannot fill a role in a four person party". If you

want an effective Bard, it needs to be a Bard that is an effective party member in a 4 person party. We need to see and explore exactly what the Bard is good at, and how that fits into a four person party.

That is the purpose of this Handbook. Most class handbooks take a pretty standard approach, discuss race options, attribute priorities, feat choices, prestige class choices, then offer you some builds.

However, the difficulty with that for Bards is depending on your build, your race options, feat choices, and even attribute priority will change significantly. Therefore, this handbook will be a compilation of a few smaller handbooks, discussing the builds of each separately. The spell section and Bardic Music section will then be at the end, which will be advice for all builds.

### **Backwards Compatibility Note**

OK, so Pathfinder has been officially declared backwards compatible. Personally, I've already had some issues with backwards compatibility, so our group plays core only (until Pathfinder specific support is published). I'm guessing there are many others in the same boat...this handbook is for them. If 3.5 material is allowed in your campaign, read no further, there is nothing I can offer in core Pathfinder that can compare with the various options in 3.5 splatbooks that allow casting comparable with wizards or pump your inspire courage to ungodly levels. This handbook is to help core Pathfinder players make an effective core Pathfinder Bard. My quick suggestion for players who have 3.5 options is I can't help think what excellent synergy there would be between the new Bardic Knowledge mechanics and Knowledge Devotion (Complete Champion)...

### **Types of Bard:**

Really with a Bard, you have to accept that you are a secondary caster, you can't cast as often, know less spells, and are less specialized towards casting than any full caster. That said, spells are still your best ability, however, you need to spread your wings, because if you focus completely on spell casting, you will find yourself a pretty lousy sorcerer. So each Bard build I recommend will be showing one other combat viable option you can build your Bard towards to fill the gap that weaker spell casting represents. These options are the Archer Bard, the Melee Bard, and the Controller Bard. You can mix and match the ideas within these builds to create a bit of a hybrid if you like, but some specialization will ensure that you can fulfill the role. Even with specialization to their specialty, expect to find each of these styles to be fairly flexible.

Before getting into specifics for each type though, we all know that there is one skill that every Bard must have (probably multiple times), and that is Perform. In the case of the Bard, Perform not only is a requirement for your Bardic Music, but Versatile Performer allows you to use Perform to cover other skills. Every 4 levels you will be able to cover 2 more skills with one more perform type. This is a good deal, and every Bard should take advantage of it.

**Perform styles that use instruments:** These perform choices carry the obvious disadvantage that you need to use an instrument. This requires that a) you actually have the instrument available, and b) that you use your hands to play the instrument. These are some pretty significant disadvantages, so in general, I don't recommend this as your primary perform type. However, the advantage of this style of perform is that you can get a masterwork instrument, which gives a very nice +2 bonus that stacks with pretty much anything.

**Perform styles that don't use instruments:** These perform choices won't require an instrument, which provides the obvious benefit of using the perform skill whenever, even if you are using a sword and wearing a shield. Also, based on whether your perform skill is Oral (like Sing or Oratory), or Visual (Like Dance) will potentially allow you to use your perform without sound, or without being seen. I recommend your first perform skill be one that doesn't use an instrument, either visual or one that uses sound, and you will use this for both your first versatile performance and for Bardic Music. The last thing you want in the middle of combat is needing to draw or conjure and instrument, using up valuable actions.

**Versatile Performance:** This ability must be considered before choosing your skills. It allows you at 2nd level to use your perform bonus in place of skill bonuses for other skills. The wording is a bit vague, fortunately it has been officially clarified, specifically:

- 1) You are not actually performing, just substituting the skill
- 2) You use your total bonus, including CHA, Class Skill, Skill focus etc.
- 3) You do not use situational modifiers or equipment modifiers to perform, since you aren't actually using them (So masterwork instruments give no bonus)
- 4) You do use situational or equipment modifiers to the original skill, they still apply (Such as Armor Check Penalties, if Applicable)

So you are really benefiting if you can use Versatile Performance to cover Non-class skills, or skills based on weak Ability scores.

In general I think 2 perform skills is appropriate for a 1st level Bard. This will cover versatile performance for your first 9 levels. Around level 6 you need to start increasing a 3rd perform to prepare for your 3rd versatile performance at level 10. Naturally, you are best to plan ahead, and not waste skill ranks on skills which will eventually be replaced by perform. The Bard has no shortage of excellent skills to choose from, so this will not be difficult. Either leave these skills at 0 ranks, or, if you really want to use them in the first few levels, take 1 rank to activate your class skill bonus and you should be OK.

Also you need to avoid redundancy. Taking Acting and Comedy as your first 2 performances will give you Versatile Performances that each provide bluff. If the second perform skill is only covering one skill, it really isn't much of an advantage over just taking that skill instead.

My personal recommendation? I recommend Oratory as your first Performance skill, than either Act or Dance as your second, depending on your Bard's style. If my Bard is especially espionage centred, I would take Act first.

**Act:** Bluff and Disguise. Gives two skills that are both fairly useful. This will work best for the espionage style of character

**Comedy:** Bluff and Intimidate. Half Orcs should take note that they may be better off with their base Intimidate than through this ability

**Dance:** Acrobatics and Fly. Especially good for Bards that perhaps aren't Dex based, since you will still be using your (Cha) with versatile performance

**Keyboards:** Diplomacy and Intimidate. Two good skills, certainly useful, once again, maybe not the best selection for Half-Orcs since you don't apply your Intimidate bonus

**Oratory:** Diplomacy and Sense Motive: Sense motive is based of Wisdom, which makes using CHA for it especially sweet, and you get to be a storyteller!

**Percussion:** Handle animal and Intimidate: Handle Animal offers some skill versatility, Instrument based

**Sing:** Bluff and Sense Motive (errata'd): Both strong skills, Sense Motive is Wisdom based, so nice substitution there, a good first choice

**Wind:** Diplomacy and Handle animal: Again, the Handle Animal is nice for versatility, and diplomacy is always a good option

**Bardic Knowledge:** Now adds 1/2 your level to your Knowledge checks and lets you use Knowledges untrained. Past low levels, untrained really doesn't do you much good, as your bonus will be too low. Investing one skill rank activates the Class Skill bonus, so every knowledge is probably worth one skill rank at some point. After that, raising your primary knowledges every other level should keep them at totals that will work nicely for you. Maxing out is not really required, unless you want to be "super" at one particular knowledge - certainly not something you can afford for more than one or two knowledges.

**Lore Master:** Once you are level 5, you can take 10 on knowledge rolls if you like, and as a standard action you can take 20 on one knowledge roll per day, and you can do it more often as you increase levels. This is really nice, because it means even knowledges that you aren't really great with, you can take 20, and with your Bardic Knowledge added in, a lot of ranks in the skill will likely not be required. This ability truly turns all Bards into "Lore Masters"

**Jack of all trades:** Not something you should put too much thought into at character creation. This ability will let him use skills untrained at level 10 (an overrated ability), then at level 16 you consider all skills to be class skills, but unless pretrained in that skill (which you probably won't be) it's a bit late to get it up to par; Finally, at level 19, you can always take 10. An OK ability, but at that level, not a big deal.

### **The rest of your skill points:**

If you are taking 2 kinds of perform right at level 1, then we usually will have 4 to 6 more skill points to spend. Here's some of the Bard Class skills that you likely won't cover with versatile performance, that you should consider:

**Use Magic Device:** You have a good CHA, and this is a great skill. There really is no excuse not to take this

**Stealth:** A very useful skill that is based on Dex, which you likely have a level from decent to good

**Knowledge (any):** Loremaster and Bardic Knowledge aren't going to do you much good without at least one rank in each of these to activate your class skill bonus. Putting one rank every other level will give you the same bonus as another class that maxed it out.

**Spellcraft:** How sad would it be to have a Bard that couldn't identify magic items? Pretty sad. Spellcraft is a good option.

**Perception:** It's wisdom based which hurts, but it is also the most used skill in the game by far, I would recommend taking this.

**Acrobatics:** If you are a halfling, you probably want to take advantage of your skill bonus, in addition, tumbling is very good for skirmishers, which you are

You are more than out of skill points now. I know, 6 per level sounds like a lot doesn't it? The 2 perform skills, use magic device and perception would be my first priorities - then go from there. One rank in each knowledge can make quite a difference as well, even if you can't afford to keep them up.

## **The Archer Bard**



The Archer Bard uses arrows to pound away at enemies between spellcasting. The problem with a core archer build in 3.5 is the ability to do damage. It is one thing to put a bunch of arrows in the air that all hit, but if you are rolling d6 damage for those arrows, you are really not contributing much. An Archer Bard needs to contribute significant damage with his arrows, and although you cannot hope to compare with a Rogue or even a Fighter in this regard, Pathfinder creates some options that will make your arrows sting far worse than they did in core 3.5. Check the Feats section to see what options I'm talking about.

Of the three builds suggested, this is probably mechanically the strongest. An Bard who specializes in archery is actually very close in archery ability to a non-casting archery build. given that you get lots of skills, casting ability, and special abilities is all icing on the cake. A really nice build for your Bard.

### **Attributes:**

The Archer Bard is relatively balanced on attribute requirements. Any Bard eventually requires a 16 CHA eventually (so they can use their highest level spells), but beyond a 16 is not really required. You can use Stat Increase items to get that 16 eventually, so 13, 14 or 15 are all viable. Beyond that, you want a good Str (for damage), Dex (to hit and feat requirements), and you don't want to dump either Con or Int, but a 10-12 range is acceptable for either. Wisdom is truly a dump stat, so dump away.

So for example, if I was playing a Human Bard with a 15 point stat buy my stats would look something like this:

Str: 14 (5)

Dex (+2 racial): 17 (7)

Con: 10

Int: 12 (2)

Wis: 7 (-4)

Cha: 14 (5)

So, by priority your requirements would be Dex, Cha, Str, Int, Con, Wis

## **Race:**

Obviously, for this build a good Dex is key. Feats like Manyshot have Dex requirements that should be planned to meet at character creation, and Dex is directly affecting "To Hit" as well. Therefore, Dex bonuses are key in racial choices. The following races all serve the build well:

**Elf:** The Int and Con modifiers will cancel out equally in point buy, leaving you with a +2 Dexterity mod. Elves are proficient with Longbow, which is a slightly preferable weapon than the shortbow other Archer Bards will be using (expect +1 damage on average - the range won't come in to play often, but is a nice to have). Elves also get a +2 to perception roles (which will offset the Wisdom dump), and a +2 on defeating SR (mechanically the same as taking the spell penetration feat - not a huge priority for Bards, but for free we'll take it gladly). Also, if you want to go down the Arcane Archer route, Elf is a better option than Half Elf)

**Halfling:** The Cha and Dex bonuses are excellent. The strength minus hurts, and I recommend spending a bit extra to make sure that Strength is a 12 or 13 starting at least (if you go 13, use a stat increase to get to 14). Halflings small size gives a +1 to hit as well (and +1 AC). Stealth bonuses for size are also very nice. There are a few skill bonuses that are helpful (Stealth, Perception, Acrobatics, and perhaps Climb), and +1 to all saves is a welcome bonus. The big disadvantage of the Halfling is the 20 feet movement rate. Tactically this can really hurt, especially at lower levels when other movement options aren't really available (phantom steed will eventually end this problem for you). Overall, the Halfling is my favorite choice for the Archer Bard.

**Human:** The flexible stat bonus will hit Dex. The main purpose of taking a human is for the bonus feat. This will allow your character to make rapid shots right at level 1, and make no mistake, the Bard remains feat hungry even in Pathfinder, so a bonus feat is a good bonus. The extra skill point is also nice, as you will find your 6 skill points per level run out really fast (even with the concentration feat gone).

**Half-Elf, Half-Orc, Gnome:** These all make decent Archer Bards, but I would consider them secondary choices. The Dwarf is probably your weakest choice.

**Favored Class Bonus:** So, you can choose between the extra HP or Skill Point. I'm not going to suggest which is better for a Bard, because I think it really depends how your Con turned out (a lower Con will benefit from the extra HP, while a lower Int benefits more from the extra Skill Point). Nothing is wrong with switching off these bonuses each level either.

## **Feats:**

I recommend you take these feats in approximate order (alter for personal preference), starting at level 1. If you are a human, maybe switch Far Shot for Mounted Combat/ Mounted Archery for your level 17 and 19 feat.

Naturally, if you need to qualify for a Prestige Class, consider your requirements. For Example, if you want to be an Arcane Archer, you need weapon focus.

**Point Blank Shot:** +1 to hit and damage within 30'. You aren't a long ranged archer, so this is workable. More importantly, Point Blank shot is a prerequisite for most of the archery feats. Take this at level 1

**Rapid Shot:** Fire an extra arrow with every full attack. The -2 to hit is well worth it. The 13 Dex requirement is no problem.

**Precise Shot:** Eliminate penalties to fire into melee. Hint: You will be firing into melee most of the time, so this is a good pick, since -4 to hit is pretty painful.

**Arcane Strike:** Use a swift action at the beginning of the round to add +1 damage to your attack and make your attack magical for the purpose of defeating DR. The +1 increases with level. This is just a really great ability for Bard's in general, but specifically for archers, note that the bonus is not restricted to "melee only" which makes it good for the Archer Bard. If you've played an archer before, you know how easy it is to run out of magical ammunition. This bonus isn't typed, so it's stackable with enhancement bonuses.

**Deadly Aim:** -1 to hit for +2 damage. Then -2/+4 etc as you level up. This feat alone makes archery a viable option in Pathfinder. Well done Paizo!

**Manyshot:** You need a 17 Dex, which you probably should be able to do. This makes your first arrow attack doubled on a full attack option. It seems you can use both Manyshot and Rapid shot on the same attack, which is pretty cool. Furthermore, your damage bonuses aren't precision based, so you'll be adding everything except critical bonus damage to both arrows.

**Mounted Combat:** Is a requirement for Mounted Archery

**Mounted Archery:** Halves the penalties for firing while mounted. Useful when firing from a Phantom Steed - which you definitely want moving around...

**Far Shot:** Not a huge priority, but can allow some very long range shots, especially with a longbow. Makes any range pain you are having with shortbow go away.

### **Prestige Class suggestion:**

I'm not a big fan of prestige classes for the Bard. The reason is because Bardic Music isn't going to be advanced by any prestige class. However, there is one prestige class that meshes pretty good with this build if you want to focus more on archery than other aspects of your build, and that's the Arcane Archer. Elven Bards can qualify quite easily by level 8. Don't consider this a necessary PrC for your Archer Bard - but it's certainly a viable option, just remember that your focus moves more heavily to archery when you take this option, while spellcasting weakens, and Bardic Music doesn't progress at all. Also, you will be more skill hungry than ever.

**Arcane Archer:** If you haven't seen what Pathfinder did to this Prestige Class take a look. The Arcane Archer is a beast. Instead of the flat enhancement bonuses added to arrows, Arcane Archers are now enhancing with Flaming, Icy burst, Holy, etc with every arrow. This will not only vastly increase damage, it will also make almost any DR passable. In addition the Arcane Archer is now providing 7 levels of spellcasting progression. The "Special arrow" options are familiar from the 3.5 versions.

## **The Melee Bard**



Don't make the mistake of thinking I'm suggesting turning your Bard into a front line fighter. That simply cannot be done effectively, Instead, the melee bard will skirmish, closer to the style of a Ranger. Does that mean I'm recommending TWF for a Bard? As a matter of fact...no. I wish I could, because I think the Melee Bard would be very effective with TWF, unfortunately, try as I might, the attribute requirements are too intensive as are the feat requirements. Instead, the Melee Bard is a bruiser, using Strength as it's primary tool to add melee support to the front liners.

Melee Bards that take the Combat Expertise chain want to carry a whip, in addition, a two handed weapon will make for a quick switch when tripping or disarming isn't your best choice. Longspear is a nice choice for most Bards giving you two handed damage with reach. Half Orcs may want to go with a Greataxe or Falchion instead.

Melee Bards that skip Combat Expertise (the main reason would be to avoid the Int requirement) then wearing a shield becomes a very real possibility. Classic Sword and Board works OK, though, I would recommend either rapier and shield or Falchion (if you are Half Orc) to get the most out of critical feats.

### **Attributes:**

Any Bard eventually requires a 16 CHA (so they can use their highest level spells), but beyond a 16 is not really required (and stat increase items can get you your 16). A 13, 14, or 15 starting CHA is viable. Beyond that, you want a good Str (for damage), Dex (AC and initiative), Your Int should be 13 for feat requirements (alternatively, if you want to give up on tripping, you can take a 10), whatever you got left can go to Con. Wisdom is truly a dump stat, so dump away.

So for example, if I was playing a Human Bard with a 15 point stat buy my stats would look something like this:

Str (+2 racial): 17 (7)

Dex: 13 (3)

Con: 12 (2)

Int: 13 (3)

Wis: 7 (-4)

Cha: 14 (5)

(Use level 4 stat increase on STR, then your level 8 on CHA, then your level 12 on Dex)



So, by priority your requirements would be Str, Cha, Dex, Int, Con, Wis

### **Race:**

Obviously, for this build a good Str is key. Your to-hit and damage will each rely on having a good Strength score. No race has a set Strength bonus, but 3 races have flexible stat bonuses. Small size is bad for Melee Bards, so Halflings and Gnomes along with their Str penalties aren't great choices.

**Half-Elf:** The flexible stat modifier can go into STR. Bonus skill focus naturally is a very nice bonus for Bards as they can put it into their primary perform skill at they are really getting skill focus for 3 skills. The bonus to perception helps cover the low Wisdom score. Unfortunately, the extra "favored class" ability is wasted since the best Bards don't multiclass with other base classes.

**Half-Orc:** The flexible stat modifier can go into STR (making you more traditional as a half orc as well). Personally, I enjoy having darkvision, and the intimidate bonus works nicely with a CHA strong class. Half Orcs start with a proficiency in Falchions and Greataxes, each an excellent choice for a melee Bard. Orc Ferocity may be very useful since you may find yourself in need of healing, and that standard action can allow you to get off that important healing spell. Yes, half orc is probably the best choice for the Melee Bard.

**Human:** The flexible stat bonus will hit Str. The main purpose of taking a human is for the bonus feat. Combat Expertise/Improved Trip are good options. Alternatively, Arcane Strike and Toughness are also good starting choices.

**Elf, Gnome, Halfling and Dwarf:** None make very good melee Bards.

**Favored Class Bonus:** With this build I would pretty much take the extra HP exclusively.

### **Feats:**

These feats are not listed in order they should be taken, since it really depends how you want to focus. If your character is going to be more of a tripper, start with the combat expertise chain. If you are going to be more of a hitter, then Start with Arcane Strike then enter the Power Attack chain.

**Arcane Strike:** Provides +1 damage and magic weapon for the purposes of defeating DR. The +1 increases with level. It's stackable damage as well. Makes up for a slightly lower Str score than a dedicated melee would have.

### **The Power Attack Chain:**

**Power Attack:** -1 to hit and +2 damage. +3 if the weapon is a two-hander. This penalty and bonus increase with level.

**Cleave:** For a -2 to AC, get an additional attack with a **standard action attack** against another adjacent enemy, who thought of Cleave as a skirmishers feat?

**Improved Sunder:** Help out the fighter by destroying his enemies weapon. Also good for enemy casters spell component pouches or spell focuses

### **The Combat Expertise Chain:**

**Combat Expertise:** Trade to hit for AC. Try to avoid needing this, but it's a prerequisite, and there are times you may need an AC boost

**Improved Trip:** You are proficient with the whip, this gives a 15' reach trip weapon you are proficient in, and you are STR based build.

**Greater Improved Trip:** Have your trip of the enemy provoke attacks of opportunity. This means you trip the guy in melee with your party brute. (The disarm and improved disarm feats are also options, though personally, I think trip is more often useful)

### The Critical Chain:

**Improved Critical:** Double your threat range. This works best with 18-20 base crit ranges, like the rapier or the falchion

**Critical Focus:** +4 to confirm criticals, and more importantly, the prerequisite for some really sick feats

**Sickening Critical:** Available at level 15, causes sickened effect on victim

### The Dodge Chain:

**Dodge:** +1 AC. Nothing great, but OK

**Mobility:** Skirmish more effectively with a +4 AC when your movement provokes attacks of opportunity

**Spring Attack:** Skirmish in and out of melee with this.

**Toughness:** Probably a good consideration for a meeleer. Essentially the same as a +2 Con in regards to HP

### Prestige Class suggestion:

I'm not a big fan of prestige classes for the Bard. The reason is because Bardic Music isn't going to be advanced by any prestige class. However, there is one prestige class that meshes pretty good with this build if you want to focus more on your melee attacks than other aspects of your build, and that's the Dragon Disciple. Any Melee Bard can qualify in his sleep. I think for a Bard Meeleer, this is a better choice than Eldritch Knight.

**Dragon Disciple:** Much improved from 3.5. 10 levels gets you 7 spellcasting levels, continues your moderate BAB and gives 2 fast save progressions. A nice HP boost is coming with a d12 per level. You get the Sorcerer "Draconic" bloodline powers at level 1 (not great, but OK), your natural armor will begin to improve from level 1, you get some nice ability boosts to Str, Con and Int - very nice. 3 bonus feats over the first 8 levels, a bite attack (which is pretty decent with a good str), a breath weapon at level 3, blindsense at level 5 (a very nice power), form of the dragon as a spell like ability, and eventually wings. Strongly consider breaking out at level 8, as the last 2 levels offer less than the first 8, and it will save you a caster level loss at level 9.

## The Controller Bard



The Controller Bard refuses to be forced into the role of damage support. When it comes to melee, the Controller Bard is really a pretender. He lashes about a whip like an expert, but is all tricks and no bite. When the whip isn't out, then its other control options rather than damaging weapons. When the Bard doesn't have the right spell at hand, he debuffs and controls the battlefield in more contemporary ways. In my personal opinion, the Archer Bard is probably the most effective Bard build, but I have a special affection for this build, that is completely tactical.

This build is very much a brainstorm by me. I must make it clear that I haven't actually played this build, and since it is a new idea, I haven't received feedback from those who have. If anyone plays this build, I would love to get your feedback, ideas and suggestions!

#### **Attributes:**

The Controller Build needs some Str for combat maneuvers and net tug-of-wars, but it's more of a CHA intensive build than the others.

So for example, if I was playing a Human Bard with a 15 point stat buy my stats would look something like this:

Str: 14 (5)

Dex: 12 (2)

Con: 12 (2)

Int: 13 (3)

Wis: 7 (-4)

Cha (+2 Racial Mod): 17 (7)

So, by priority your requirements would be Cha, Str, Dex, Con, Int, Wis

#### **Race:**

Small Size is not good with this build either. Combat Maneuvers will be at least part of your bag of tricks, and strength is a higher requirement, so really, the racial choices are pretty similar to the melee build.

**Half-Elf:** The flexible stat modifier can go into CHA. Bonus skill focus naturally is a very nice bonus for Bards as they can put it into their primary perform skill at they are really getting skill focus for 3 skills, this is especially useful when applied to Intimidate so you

might want Comedy as your primary performance type. The bonus to perception helps cover the low Wisdom score. Unfortunately, the extra "favored class" ability is wasted since the best Bards don't multiclass with other base classes.

**Half-Orc:** The flexible stat modifier can go into CHA (I know - weird). Personally, I enjoy having darkvision, and the intimidate bonus works nicely with a CHA strong class, especially with this build. Orc Ferocity is OK, but not huge, and the weapon proficiencies really won't be in play.

**Human:** The flexible stat bonus will hit CHA. The main purpose of taking a human is for the bonus feat. You'll see in the Feat section that you have lots of options.

**Others:** Size is going to be an issue for Combat Maneuvers, and Elves are gaining stats in the wrong places, but nothing is off limits.

## Feats:

First off, you don't need to worry about qualifying for a prestige class with this build (the prestige class section is missing for a reason - just don't do it). Secondly, these feats don't need to be taken in any particular order, though I recommend exotic weapon proficiency at level 1.

**Exotic Weapon Proficiency:** Net. Interesting idea? I think so. With a touch attack (easy) you are entangling enemies which means -2 on attack rolls and -4 to Dexterity. Furthermore, movement is halved, charging is impossible, and movement beyond the net's reach require an opposed STR check (and your STR isn't bad). Casters need to make concentration checks when entangled as well. You'll never need a magical Net (unless you want to entangle incorporeal creatures - then you need ghost touch), but masterwork will be handy. Also, don't restrict yourself to one. Carry a couple folded nets handy at need.

**Weapon Focus (Whip or net):** +1 to hit with the whip. Doesn't sound like a very good feat, but with it you can then get...

**Dazzling Display (whip or net):** 30' radius intimidate effect. You rock at this, it is made for Bards. Also, lets face it, the flavor is great (The bard being more style than substance using his weapon...come on, perfect.) The Shaken effect is pretty much -2 on everything. The Bard can make this effect last multiple rounds with a good intimidate check, and it is going to ignore SR, and then you don't need to worry about things like hitting in combat, instead just use one of your best skills. This works especially well if other meleers in your party take shatter defenses and deadly strike. You shake the battlefield, they take advantage of it.

**Skill Focus (Perform or Intimidate):** Make your dazzling display more dazzling. Half Orcs will put this in intimidate, Humans will put it into perform (comedy), half-elves took it already.

**Intimidating Prowess:** Add your STR and CHA to intimidate rolls. Take this with your half orc

**Combat Expertise:** Sacrifice to hit for AC. Since your attacks will be touch attacks, I think this is a good deal.

**Improved Trip:** Put that whip to use. You don't have full BAB, but you've got a decent STR and a pretty good BAB

**Greater Improved Trip:** Another +2, and their fall provokes attacks of opportunity

Can you see how this works? If you aren't casting, then you are throwing a net, tripping or using dazzling display to debuff the enemy. Should keep you busy. Also, get wands. Wand of Silent Image very early, then some more impressive Battlefield Controls later. Staves are for higher levels (when you can use magic device more effectively). Black Tentacles, Glitterdust, Fogs are all terrific.

### **ALL BARDS:**

So now you have an idea of 3 different ways you can create your Bard to fill the holes when you aren't casting spells. All should work reasonably well, though they all do it in different ways.

So how does this fit into a 4 person party? Generally you mix between skirmisher and caster. Consider yourself similar to a Ranger for the niche you fill, except you can take some weight off the caster's shoulders as well. The exception is the Controller Bard who will be replacing the primary caster. With a controller bard, you really need 3 other party members who can do damage in combat. With any of these builds, the Bard is NOT the "best 5th party member", instead he becomes a viable and vibrant member of a 4 person party, leaving no notable holes in the role he fills.

**Well Versed:** A very minor ability all Bards get at level 2. You get a +4 (untyped) bonus to save vs. Bardic Performance, Sonic, and Language Dependant effects. Pretty circumstantial stuff, but, hey, I'll take it.

### **Bardic Performance:**



All Bards will be using Bardic Music increasingly as you increase levels. Generally, for a first level Bard, Bardic Music is circumstantial (you are basically losing a full round of spellcasting or attacking to activate it, which hurts). The key is 7th level, when you can start Bardic Performance as a move action, and then 13th level, when you can engage it as a swift action.

**Duration:** Duration is very short, measured in rounds/day. This pretty much kills any attempt to add it to a skill where 20 is being taken. Also, it means if you are spending a standard action to activate it, it's often not going to be worth it (unless you can prepare for a combat beforehand), unless you have nothing better to do with your round. The Extra Performance Feat adds 6 rounds duration, honestly, for the feat starved Bard, this will seldom be worth it.

**Hint:** Be a bit of a miser with your Bardic Performance, remember it is tracked in rounds/day, so don't blow them all in the first combat. Use them as required, and don't be afraid to drop it if the need for it passes (once the battle is well in hand). My recommendation: try not to use more than 1/4 of your rounds of Bardic Performance on any one battle, unless you are fairly certain that your day is just about over.

**Countersong:** Unless you KNOW that a language or sonic dependant attack is coming the way of you or your allies, I just can't see ever having this up. It's way too circumstantial for an ability with a rounds/day duration.

**Distraction:** If you read my reason why Countersong isn't great, you will see how it also relates to this ability, that requires you to KNOW that a vision dependant spell effect is coming. If you do know, then it's useful, but that is going to be a rare circumstance, potentially never through an entire campaign.

**Fascinate:** The DC is no longer based on your perform check, but a more standardized  $1/2 \text{ level} + \text{CHA} + 10$ , which should be a bit better than your spell save DC's. This makes this ability less optimal, but still quite useful as the save is anything but a sure bet. As you gain levels the DC increases as does the number of targets, meaning this ability will remain useful as you increase levels. The main purpose of this ability will be to distract an opponent while your allies do something you don't want him to see, like sneaking up behind him, or buffing themselves like crazy...these penalties should stack with the lullaby cantrip as well.

**Inspire Courage:** The Iconic Bard ability. This will be a common use of Bardic Performance after level 7, though before it could be helpful if you have a chance to prepare before combat, using it in combat at this time requires some careful consideration. This ability improves with level. The bonuses are never huge, but they are significant, and will aid you as well. Being that the bonus affects attacks, and Combat Maneuvers are a "special attack", then I think the bonus will help you with your combat maneuvers as well, eliminating the penalty a non-full BAB gives you.

**Inspire Competence:** Available at 3rd level, this no longer is useful when your ally is taking 20 (because of your duration limits), but for skill checks where taking 20 isn't an option, it can be handy. Use Magic Device seems to be the most obvious, or other skill checks where Taking 20 isn't an option.

**Suggestion:** Available at 6th level, this simulates a 2nd level Bard spell (or 3rd level Wiz/Sor), which alone makes it good for a 6th level ability. The target must first be fascinated for this ability to work. The DC will be higher than if you actually take the suggestion spell (which would be pretty redundant honestly).

**Dirge of Doom:** An 8th level ability. This creates the Shaken effect (with no save) for all opponents within 30 feet. If you are a controller bard, you can do this already with Dazzling Display - but it requires a standard action. For the other bards, this is a nice

little debuff (-2 on pretty much everything). It can be used to soften up saving throws, which offers your spellcasting effectively a 2 higher DC (as well as those of other casters in the party). At 7th level, use a move action to start the Dirge of Doom, then a standard action to cast.

Hint: When you get a Rod of Quicken Metamagic, Lesser, you can actually use your move action to perform the Dirge of Doom, then use your Swift for a quickened spell (like Slow) and cast regularly (perhaps Glitterdust?) - all with -2 to save DC's, all for one round of Bardic Perform. (Thanks to **Zark** for tactical tip)

**Inspire Greatness:** Available at 9th level. A bonus of 2 HD and a Fort save bonus to an ally (more allies with more levels). In the end, it's a few extra HP, nothing too special.

**Soothing Performance:** A 12th level ability. Creates a Mass Cure Serious Wounds effect, in addition it removes the conditions fatigued, shaken, and sickened. The problem (and it's a doozy) is that you need 4 rounds to complete this. That pretty much prevents it from being a reactive ability. Instead began 4 rounds ahead in a battle you might think you may need it 4 rounds later. Nah...you are probably better using inspire courage...now out of combat, if the party is low on healing, this may be a somewhat useful ability then.

**Frightening Tune:** 14th level ability. Much like Dirge of Doom except instead you are creating the frightened effect in your enemies. The Frightened effect is a battle ender, so this really is an amazing ability. It's like the Fear spell with a better AoE and no HD limits and an ever increasing DC. Nice.

**Inspire Heroics:** A 15th level ability. Gives a +4 to saves and AC (morale and dodge respectively). Considering the level that this becomes available, and that a single ally is affected (2 at level 18), I think this is a bit underwhelming.

**Mass Suggestion:** Available at 18th level. Really, Mass Suggestion doesn't do much for me when I'm 18th level. The spell was available 5 levels earlier. It's OK at best.

**Deadly Performance:** The 20th level ability. Basically a single target save or die. One nice aspect is a creature that saves is still staggered. Also, this is a supernatural ability, so SR doesn't help. Overall, a pretty decent ability, but you have to be level 20 before you get it, so I would hope so...

## Spellcasting:

Whether you are an Archer, a Meleer or a Controller Bard, your spellcasting plays an important part of your character's role. Bards may not be on par with Sorcerers when it comes to casting, but it is important to remember that this isn't a minor ability for Bards. They get their full level as their caster level, as well they get early access to some very potent enchantment spells. Furthermore, their spell list is an extremely versatile list, containing Battlefield Control, Enchantment, Debuffing, Buffing, Illusion, Utility, and Healing.

However, a Bard will have less spells per day than a primary caster, significantly so. You simply will not be casting every round, you just don't have the staying power. In addition your spells known list is small, so its important to avoid redundancy or circumstantial spells and pick a list that serves your Bard type best. Spells that remain viable at higher levels need to be given preference. Spells like Sleep may be effective at low level, but at high level it is a wasted spell known. You can use "spell trading" to trade out these spells later, but never take them in the first place unless your trade out

plan is already set. If in doubt, just avoid these spells entirely and pick spells that improve with your caster level, this is always a strong option.

Also, keep in mind that the Bard isn't just a spellcaster, but also a martial class, so when you can have your spells fulfill a different function than your attacks (target a specific enemy offensively), they build your versatility. Therefore, more so than with a Wizard or Sorcerer, area of effect or multi target spells have great value for Bards.

So, when looking at my "ratings" below, avoid just picking the highest ratings. I'm forcing you to put some thought into this and pick spells that a) accomplish tasks with a high level of versatility b) Target different saving throws if they require a save c) Complement your other abilities and spells and avoid redundancy.

Cantrips are now a "cast as often as you please" effect, so pick carefully keeping this in mind. For other spells, realize beforehand that your castings are quite limited.

**Hint:** Note that many creatures are immune to Mind-Affecting spells, and the Bard list is filled with these spells. Not a bad idea to make sure you have some options that aren't mind affecting to get around this. Also, look for spells that avoid spell resistance, you have a few, and they can be handy vs. certain opponents.

**Ratings:** I've rated all the spells, but please consider first of all, these are only recommendations, and secondly, these are based on my opinion only, by no means is this any form of official rating system. If you disagree with my rating, by all means let me know in the replies, but also, let me know why you disagree. Be aware that I don't make any guarantees that I will change my rating, but if you change my opinion, then I will.

**One Star** \* This spell is probably one you shouldn't even consider

**Two Stars** \*\* On the weaker side, or is replaceable by a superior spell

**Three Stars** \*\*\* A strong option, worthy of consideration

**Four Stars** \*\*\*\* A very strong option. Don't wonder if you should take this, instead wonder if there is any reason not to.

## 0-Level Bard Spells

**Dancing Lights:** \*\*\* Can make the illusion of will-o-wisps or torches (the latter to be used in conjunction with "Ghost Sound" However, this isn't a very flexible illusion - we've all used this one right?), it also can replace a "Light" spell, except you can move it, like to make out that movement on the high ceiling (though maybe later you'll wished you hadn't!!!). The 1 min duration is the limitation, but after all, you can cast it over and over again.

**Daze:** \*\*\* Daze is a really just "lose a turn" for Pathfinder. The HD limit makes this a candidate for a swap-out later, but at low levels this is a decent spell, especially since you can use it as often as you like.

**Detect Magic:** \*\*\*\* Once upon a time this was a 1st level spell. Detect magic is super useful and will remain super useful forever. It is a "must have".

**Flare:** \* Dazzled is pretty much the least impressive status you can give anyone. A -1 to hit to one person won't make a bit of difference in most combats, and that's only if they don't make their save. Throw a rock, intimidate, make a distraction, these are probably more useful things to do with your action than "Flare"

**Ghost Sound:** \*\*\*\* Used with Silent Image, you essentially make it "Minor Image", Ghost sound is a highly useful little illusion that is free to use.



**Know Direction:** \*\* This cantrip is your own personal compass. It will help you from wandering in circles in the wilderness, circumstantial, and probably pretty useless if you have a Ranger or Druid in the group.

**Light:** \*\* The standard spell to replace torchlight. The duration is pretty good. The standard strategy is to cast it on something light and small, like the feather in your cap, so you can move it around with Mage Hand or Prestidigitation at need, since it illuminates a relatively small area. Since You can only have one active at a time, light isn't entirely redundant with dancing lights - though in general you are probably better off picking one or the other.

**Lullaby:** \* Creates a burst area where victims must make a will save or feel drowsy, giving a -5 perception penalty and a -2 save vs. sleep. I get the idea, but I'm not sure of the practical application, since Bards can't cast silently, making me think the victims are likely to figure out that they've been victimized, which I can't think works with any intention of this spell. Maybe someone else can think of a way this spell might be good.

**Mage Hand:** \*\*\* Like a minor Unseen Servant. Picking up and moving things at a distance can be very useful, and frankly, other than very heavy doors and chests, this spell can make the Open/Close spell kind of worthless.

**Mending:** \*\*\* Repair broken or sundered items to working condition. Surely its clear how this can be handy?

**Message:** \*\*\* Like a nerfed telepathy ability. The check to "listen in" is pretty difficult (DC 25), so most of the time this should allow at least semi-private conversations with your party members. Also useful if you are being sneaky and need to communicate with the other sneaky party members.

**Open/Close:** \*\* The purpose of this spell is to be able to open and close at a distance, thus to avoid poison gas traps, or ambushes on the other side, or those pesky mimics. Somewhat useful, though it can often be duplicated with the more versatile Mage Hand (though Open/Close can move up to 30 lbs)

**Prestidigitation:** \*\*\* I like Prestidigitation, not because anything it does is overly powerful, but because it can do so many things. It is a lightly powered mage hand (1 lb), it can clean you and your clothes (you are a Bard - no excuse being dirty or stinky), it can create small items (not useful as tools or weapons, but still there are various circumstantial uses). The duration is good, and I see no limitation on doing only one thing at a time with it.

**Read Magic:** \*\*\*\* Not 100% necessary, but if you want to use magical scrolls, you'll need this. (Unless you use the less reliable Use Magic Device)

**Resistance:** \* +1 Resistance bonus for 1 minute. Of very moderate use at very low levels, then entirely useless once everyone has permanent resistance bonuses to saves.

**Summon Instrument:** \*\* One might call this a "must have" for Bards, but the more I think about it, the less certain I am that its necessary at all. If I'm playing a Bard with a performance that requires an instrument, then yes, by all means take this (but use your masterwork instrument instead whenever possible), and if Keyboards are your performance of choice, then you absolutely should take this. Singing, Dancing, Acting, Comedic, Oration Bards don't need this spell.

## 1st-Level Bard Spells

**Alarm:** \*\* A "camping" spell. Be aware that DM's know all kinds of ways to attack you without setting off the alarm spell. Bards really aren't going to be the best class for spells to keep your campsite safe. Even after the nerfing - Rope trick is really the best camping spell for its level in the game. That said, an alarm spell on the rope itself is probably a good tactic, but can't the wizard do that for you?

**Animate Rope:** \* A so-so spell that really doesn't do much more for you than an unseen servant could do with the same rope.

**Cause Fear:** \*\* A decent spell at low level, but a 5HD limit means that this spell won't serve you for more than a few levels. Unless you have plans to swap it, skip it.

**Charm Person:** \*\*\* Only usable on Humanoids, which makes it circumstantial, but if they fail their save, you win. Often the strategy is to Charm the person to make them friendly, then use diplomacy to make them helpful.

**Comprehend Languages:** \*\* Circumstantial in use, though certainly appropriate for most Bard characters. Remember that the spell doesn't let you speak the language.

**Confusion, Lesser:** \* Confuse 1 creature for 1 round. Even if they fail their save, there is a decent possibility that they will act normally for that one round. For this spell to be decent, it needed multiple round duration.

**Cure Light Wounds:** \*\*\* The standard base healing spell. The wand is cheap and WAY cheaper than potions. Having the spell does improve the amount healed somewhat since the spell improves up to caster level 5.

**Detect Secret Doors:** \* Unfortunate truth #1: Bards will never replace the party rogue as a skill monkey. You don't have the castings to be casting spells like this.

**Disguise Self:** \*\* Creates a nice bonus to your disguise roll, and lets you disguise yourself instantly. The use of this spell really depends on the style of Bard you are playing. If you are playing a Bard who is going to be using disguise regularly, then this is a must.

**Erase:** \* Erase magical writings, including the kind that blow up. However, extremely circumstantial, and if you are aware of the bad thing, then there are other ways to deal with it that don't require you to have a whole spell ready for it.

**Expeditious Retreat:** \*\*\* I do like this spell, despite the fact it is poorly named (since if you need to retreat, you usually don't want to spend a standard action casting a spell)

**Feather Fall:** \*\* Circumstantially extremely useful spell. The lower rating is because of how circumstantial it is. However, this is a good option for a swap-in later on, once you are flying around on phantom steeds and the like.

**Grease:** \*\*\*\* One of my favorite first level spells in the game. Targets Reflex which is a bonus, and gives you a chance to control the battlefield right from level one. Why trip someone when you can trip everyone? Also note that anyone who moves within a Grease spell (like those that get back onto their feet for example) is flat-footed, and therefore sneak attack bait. There is a save to avoid falling, but saving doesn't save you from the other controlling effects of grease. You can also cast this on a single item (if the one use wasn't enough) so that it is dropped...like someones weapon, or the Cleric's holy symbol. You can also cast this on your armor (or an ally's) to help them escape a grapple or ensure they don't get grappled in the first place. Sold yet?

**Hideous Laughter:** \*\*\* A reasonably effective spell that actually kind of reminds me of Hold Person. The victim of this spell is, and I quote, "can take no actions while laughing,

but is not considered helpless", OK, so like daze. Good enough for me. There isn't a HD limit either, though animal Int or less won't be affected, and creatures of a different type get a considerable bonus to save. Nevertheless, potentially a combat ender.

**Hypnotism:** \* Redundancy, your name is "Hypnotism". Very similar effect to your "Fascinate" ability (but the save doesn't go up). Not a carbon copy - but close enough that you are hindering your versatility if you take this.

**Identify:** \*\* Less important than in previous editions because you don't necessarily need the spell to identify items, but it helps.

**Magic Aura:** \* Once again, a super circumstantial spell that I can't see using once in most campaigns.

**Magic Mouth:** \* "Hey, don't steal me!!!" any other great uses for this spell? I can't think of any off the top of my head.

**Obscure Object:** \* I have yet to successfully avoid being scryed by guessing what the target will be. In any case, this is going to be extremely circumstantial unless your campaign is based around one really important item in possession of the party (in which case, you still might want a wand instead because this spell would need cast 3 times every day).

**Remove Fear:** \*\* Usable as both a proactive (to grant +4 to fear saves) and reactive (to remove fear). A useful spell when you need it, though fairly circumstantial. The wand version is dirt cheap and provides nearly as good an effect (increased caster levels will eventually allow more than one target being the primary difference between taking this spell and using a wand)

**Silent Image:** \*\*\*\* One of the most versatile spells in the game. Silent Image gives NO save until you "test" it, which means a silent image wall for example, must be touched, or in some other way tested, to grant a saving throw at all. Mix with Ghost Sound as required. However, one thing I should mention before giving it "must have" status is to point out that a Silent Image wand is dirt cheap, and the duration is not level dependant, and if you avoid a saving throw then pretty much every disadvantage of using a wand is gone. Maybe instead Silent Image is the "must have" wand instead of the "must have" spell...

**Sleep:** \*\*\* At level 1 this spell is super awesome. At level 5 it's pretty much useless. If you are going to take this spell, take it at LEVEL 1, and at level 5 - swap it out. No playing around, after level 4 this spell is purely a one star.

**Summon Monster I:** \*\*\* I've always been a fan of summoning for the sheer versatility of the spell. The lists in Pathfinder aren't quite as large, but one thing I can say, is if you are going to be a summoner, be neutral - it improves your versatility greatly. (then you can choose the celestial or fiendish template) Also a disappointment is the loss of my personal favorite trap detector...the celestial monkey.

**Undetectable Alignment:** \*\* Definitely not as useful as, say, disguise self. However, if that is your type of character, you may want this as well. Infiltrating the big bad guy's fortress is always easier if you aren't leaking good intentions out your ears.

**Unseen Servant:** \*\* Telekinesis minor. Definitely more useful than mage hand, but in the end, often mage hand will do the job, which would save you needing this spell at all. I like using an unseen servant to carry something heavy which I may need in haste

**Ventriloquism:** \* 3 out of 4 times you think you need this spell, you will find ghost sound or message fill the bill. That one out of four times, comes very rarely.

## 2nd-Level Bard Spells

**Alter Self:** \*\*\* Grant yourself a quick disguise, gain darkvision, low light vision, scent or swim, and a small bonus to Str or Dex. Certainly a mere shadow of the 3.5 version (which was broken), but not anywhere near useless. Note that the Str or Dex bonus is a "size" bonus, which will pretty much stack with all your other stat boosts, making this spell, in many cases, a better stat boost than Bull's Str or Cat's grace.

**Animal Messenger:** \* Use up a spell known and cast to operate a carrier pigeon. The advantage of this over an actual carrier pigeon would be that you can give directions. The use is very circumstantial, and in almost every case, Sending is just better.

**Animal Trance:** \*\* Like hypnotic pattern for animals. If you are in a campaign where you expect to fight lots of animals, this would be pretty good. If not, pretty circumstantial.

**Blindness/Deafness:** \*\*\* A bit redundant with Glitterdust (which you probably want instead), but the duration on this is permanent, which makes it superior against solo opponents. The save is a Fort save, which tends to be the easier save for most creatures. Since they target different saves, I can see the point to taking both, but be aware of some redundancy in effect.

**Blur:** \*\*\* Gives the subject concealment giving a 20% miss chance. Why so high a rating? It also makes you completely immune to sneak attacks (since you can't sneak attack a concealed target), which means your level of protection is better than it first appears. Also, having up Blur is like having Hide in Plain Sight, since concealment is required to use Stealth to hide, and a Blurred character is concealed.

**Calm Emotions:** \*\*\* Possibly better than you think. Calm emotions covers an area, and those affected cannot attack unless attacked first. This gives you a tactical advantage against enemies (getting in position, sneak attacking, buffing, etc). Also, it suppresses all kinds of buffs, but removes confusion, which is a condition that can otherwise destroy your party.

**Cat's Grace:** \*\* Grants a +4 enhancement bonus to Dex. The problem with this spell is it isn't going to stack with the primary attribute boosting magic items in the game. However, at lower levels it can be a nice little buff.

**Cure Moderate Wounds:** \*\* Bard's are useful as a secondary healer, but spells beyond cure light wounds really are more for "in combat" applications. My recommendation is to skip this and stick to out of combat healing with cure light wounds (By wand or spell)

**Darkness:** \*\* Reduces the level of light by one level. Nukes cantrips like light or dancing lights. Darkvision works in magical darkness now, so using this on creatures with darkvision is pretty useless. However, if you're party is the one with darkvision...potentially very useful.

**Daze Monster:** \* Like the cantrip Daze. You know, the one you can cast every round all day? Except this one increases the HD limit by...wait for it...2 HD. Yep, now you can have that cantrip work on 6HD creatures instead of the normal limit of 4. Wow...that's awful.

**Delay Poison:** \*\*\* Not as good as neutralize poison, but not bad. You delay the effects of poison until later, or can be used proactively if you know that poison is a threat. Eventually, this will be a near all day buff that makes you basically immune to poison. Not bad at all.

**Detect Thoughts:** \*\*\* Fairly useful divination spell that creates a pretty big cone effect (that you can move) to detect the presence of intelligent creatures (detect the presence of hidden or invisible). Also useful to detect surface thoughts, though this provides a Will save. Conversations can be led through roleplaying to bring particular surface thoughts to mind...a decent use of this spell I've seen used.

**Eagle's Splendor:** \*\* Again, not going to stack with your magical items. For low levels, it will give a +2 save DC to your spellcasting in addition to some key skill boosts. That it is an enhancement bonus is why this is not more valuable, and should be swapped out later if taken at lower levels.

**Enthrall:** \*\*\* Pumps up your fascinate ability so that the fascinated creatures are not noticing anything happening around them. Any form of attack ends this effect for all involved. There are a number of restrictions and caveats, and in many ways I think Calm Emotions can achieve similar effects in tactical situations more simply, but the duration of enthrall is far superior, providing perhaps a greater number of circumstances it could be used for.

**Fox's Cunning:** \*\* Like all the Stat bonus spells, Fox's Cunning isn't going to stack with intelligence boosting magic items, and INT is only going to be useful for a select few party members. You can use it for boosts to your knowledges, or for the party Wizard to boost his spell DC's, but not much else.

**Glitterdust:** \*\*\*\* Nerfed in Pathfinder to give a save every round, but still potentially the best 2nd level spell. Reveals invisible creatures to everyone (unlike see invis), but in addition it blinds over an area. Blinded creatures are really pretty screwed. You can't take your time afterwards, but this is a devastating debuff, especially when you hit multiple creatures.

**Heroism:** \*\*\* A small bonus buff (+2) to attacks, saves and skill checks, the selling features are the decent duration and the stackability. In fact, it even stacks with the attack bonus from Inspire Courage, or the skill bonus with Inspire Competence which are both competence bonuses strangely enough.

**Hold Person:** \*\* Paralyzation on one humanoid for up to 1 round/level. This ability offers a Will save every round, so don't count on a full duration effect. Paralyzation can completely end a combat (Paralyzed creatures are helpless - can we say coup de gras?) - but the drawbacks are the restriction to Humanoids and that it is single target.

**Hypnotic Pattern:** \* Two reasons I do not recommend this spell are 1) The ability is redundant with your Bardic Music fascinate ability, 2) There is a 10 HD limit - unlike your fascinate ability.

**Invisibility:** \*\*\*\* For anyone who has played this game, you surely already know that Invisibility is a very useful spell. The commonly held belief that it is only usable out of combat is often true, but not completely true. Try casting this on the party Druid while he summons up an army for example, or yourself while you buff up your party members. The point is, only direct attacks break the invisibility, and there are lots of combat actions that can be taken that are not attacks.

**Locate Object:** \*\* This is a fairly circumstantial divination spell. However, if you are looking for a specific item, the area it covers is very large which should help. Also, you can use it to detect general items, like gold for example.

**Minor Image:** \*\* I do think this is a good spell, but many times you might need an illusion, Silent Image will do the job just as well as this one (add Ghost Sound for audio if required). There is some undeniable added utility to this spell, and if for some weird

reason you can't cast Silent Image, then this spell becomes a must have. I'm just reminding you to avoid redundancy.

**Mirror Image:** \*\*\*\* A fantastic self buff for defense. When this spell is first cast, the miss chance it provides dwarfs blur. Of course, as the mirror images get picked off, eventually this spell wears off entirely. However, during that time, you will have avoided several attacks directed at you.

**Misdirection:** \*\* Defeat scry spells that reveal auras (like detect good) by having you "take on" the aura of another creature or object (So you can not only mask being a goody-goody - you can even make your aura an evil one). Be aware that lots of divinations are not fooled by this spell (like detect thoughts), making it a spell that can't be entirely relied upon. Overall, OK but not great.

**Pyrotechnics:** \*\*\*\* Awesome, awesome, awesome. Disappointed that Glitterdust offers a save vs. blindness every round? Allow me to introduce Pyrotechnics that still offers a will save vs. blindness (in the "fireworks" application - the area on this is huge - so have your allies divert their eyes if possible if they are in range), but does not give any additional saves if the original is missed. Or perhaps you want the "Smoke cloud" effect that completely obscures vision (more effectively than fog cloud) and causes a -4 to Str and Dex to all within (Fort to negate), an effect that lasts 1d4+1 rounds after they leave the area. The range? Long. The lone downside to this spell is the requirement of a source of fire to originate the effect. This requires either lucky circumstance, or some pre-planning on your part. Flaming arrows or alchemist fire are some quick and dirty options.

**Rage:** \* In general, an inferior buff to Heroism. It can affect more than one creature, though in honesty, you will probably be better off with Inspire Courage. This affect does not stack with a Barbarians Rage bonuses (and provides smaller bonuses). All affected also get a -2 AC penalty as well as all the other disadvantages of a Barbarian's rage (like the inability to use most skills for example).

**Scare:** \* Like cause fear with a 2 HD boost to the limit. I don't like this spell for the same reason I don't like Daze Monster, though in fairness, at least this is a 2HD boost to a first level spell, instead of a boost to a cantrip.

**Shatter:** \*\* A fairly effective spell that shatters an object. Generally, the most effective application is the "single target" use, which can target any nonmagical object. A wizard's spell component pouch or a Cleric's holy symbol are examples of "non magical" objects to get your mind rolling. However, the item gets a save, and it is a single target effect, so I can't put a high recommendation on this spell.

**Silence:** \*\*\* If you've played this game for any period of time, you've had your party caster be a victim of this spell. If you target that caster, they get a save, so that's no good. If you target a point in space near the caster, it will work, but the caster can move out of the area, so, again not terrific. If you target a member of your party who is going to ensure to stay near the caster...now that works quite nicely. Hooray teamwork!

**Sound Burst:** \*\*\* A staple spell, and a decent one. Sound burst is an area of affect spell (10 ft radius) that stuns all within who fail a Fort save for one round. This can be a pretty effective, if not devastating debuff. Stunned creatures can't do much other than defend themselves (and casters can't do that very well either). Oh yeah, it does a d8 damage as well - not much, but I'll take it.

**Suggestion:** \*\*\* You know what I'm going to say about redundancy right? Suggestion however will be available as a spell before you get it with your Bardic Music, and doesn't require a fascinate beforehand. Lots of good suggestions can be made in and out of combat. Here's an example suggested by Crosswind, "The people you are fighting are

wealthy and capable. Switching sides will not only spare your life, but net you a decent paycheck!!!"

**Summon Monster II:** \*\* I really like summoning, mainly because it is so flexible and versatile. However, Bard's aren't great summoners, and if you took Spell Focus: Conjunction and Augment Summoning - shame on you! Therefore, although there are still some flexible uses for this spell, I can't recommend it.

**Summon Swarm:** \*\* Just not tough enough IMO. If you want to obscure vision, the Bat Swarm is going to be useful, but beyond that, the combat applications for this spell are pretty small. Mix invisibility and this spell if you want to get the most out of it, but don't expect massive success.

**Tongues:** \*\* Understand and speak any language. If you have Comprehend Languages, this spell becomes partially redundant. The need for this spell depends largely on your Bard's focus. If being a master of lore and knowledges is your primary concern, this spell is an obvious choice. For other Bards, probably too circumstantial to take up a precious "spells known" slot. Maybe a scroll tucked away though...

**Whispering Wind:** \*\* This is basically the message cantrip with extra range. The obvious purpose is to communicate at range with allies. The obvious drawback is you must select a location, not an ally, to send the message - so unless you know where the person is whom you wish to communicate, this spell does no good. In addition, the inability of your subject to communicate back is also a problem. Certainly a better spell than animal messenger, but not wildly so.

## 3rd-Level Bard Spells

**Blink:** \* Primarily a defensive spell that you will usually be casting in combat due to the short duration, Blink will offer you only slightly greater protection than Mirror Image against most attacks, and can mess up your own actions. It's self only, so can't be used to protect others. In general, I would suggest skipping this one.

**Charm Monster:** \*\*\* Like charm person without the type restrictions. Charm Monster is the spell that can instantly end the battle with one failed save. It's mind effecting, so some creatures remain immune, and note that a Charmed Creature isn't your slave, though with CHA tests you can command it. As with Charm Person, you can use diplomacy to move the creature from friendly status to helpful status.

**Clairaudience/Clairvoyance:** \*\* This is a scry spell that allows you to hear and see over a distance (Far range), you pick a single location within the range and a sensor allows you to either see or hear from that location (not both unless you cast twice). Note that you can use no special modes of sight through this spell. As far as scrying goes, this is the low end of the totem pole, but often it achieves what you need it for.

**Confusion:** \*\*\*\* I am a confusion convert. I used to think this was a pretty good spell, now I know it is a fantastic spell. The key is the part about how a confused creature who is attacked will immediately attack its attacker until the spell wears off. If you cast this into a group of enemies, some will attack each other - the one they attack will attack them back until the spell wears off, and vice-versa. Therefore, a good percentage of those affected will fight each other for the entire duration. Note that the Pathfinder list of what those affected will do is a smaller list.

**Crushing Despair:** \* A cone that delivers a minor debuff (-2 to attack rolls, damage, saves) to those that fail a saving throw. Really not worth the spell level here. A -2 (even over an 30' cone) that provides a save to avoid, is just not worth a 3rd level slot.

**Cure Serious Wounds:** \*\* Cure Serious Wounds can be a decent spell in the middle of combat if it is cast on an ally that without it may fall. However, Bard's get this spell a bit late in the game compared to other casters, and by the time the Bard can cast this, the Cleric should be getting fairly close to HEAL, the ultimate healing spell, making this seem pretty weak in comparison. In summary, the Bard is a passable healer outside of combat, but in combat he just doesn't hold up to the competition - besides, there are better things to be doing in combat anyways.

**Daylight:** \* Daylight is basically a more powerful light spell. It illuminates 60 feet of darkness, suppresses darkness spells of lower level, and causes "bright light" penalties for Drow and the like. Overall, I think 3rd level is a pretty high place to put a spell that is basically a pumped up cantrip. If you are in darkness, try using Alter Self to gain Darkvision, that will give you 60 feet of vision in darkness as well. The "bright light" penalties for underdark creatures aren't severe enough to justify a 3rd level spell to trigger them.

**Deep Slumber:** \* Deep slumber is a more powerful sleep spell. It's basically the same spell with a 10HD limit instead of 4HD. Right when it first becomes available, expect this spell to already be outliving its usefulness. Concentrate on spells that don't have that HD limit.

**Dispel Magic:** \*\* Much less useful in Pathfinder, Dispel Magic can only dispel one spell effect, and only when targeted. The Area spell application is gone entirely, leaving only the reduced affect targeted version and the counterspell application (counterspelling itself is difficult and unreliable - not recommended). Can't really recommend this anymore, though still not useless. Also, this spell no longer has the Caster Level 10 limit, so at higher levels it still has a chance to work.

**Displacement:** \* Like "blur" except the miss chance increases to 50% and the duration decreases by...wait for it...10 times. Yep - overall, can't say this spell is much better than Blur, which is a level lower. If you are worried about a lower miss chance, then use Mirror Image instead. Skip this one.

**Fear:** \*\*\* Ahhh...a fear affect without the HD limit. Finally something that I can recommend. Note that this spell's cone affect isn't that big (30 ft), and that causing fear doesn't necessarily win a battle for you, but it does give a significant tactical advantage most of the time.

**Gaseous Form:** \*\* Very circumstantial spell, but works as advertised. Fly, seep through the crack under the door, or under the floorboards, all while being extremely difficult to hurt. However, you move slowly, and can't do much while in this form, making it primarily a utility spell with few combat applications (except perhaps escape for you - but not your allies. Shame.)

**Geas, Lesser:** \*\* Commands subject of 7 HD or less. That creature has to perform one action, and if the save is failed, must attempt to complete the action up to a duration of 1 day/level. This is kind of like dominate, lesser. The primary concern is the HD limit, which is quite low. Probably best for securing a traitor in the employ of the enemy or those kinds of uses. (Like, "I command you not to raise the alarm as we go in and out of your master's lair for the next several days")

**Glibness:** \*\* Succeed on bluff checks pretty much automatically, even if you don't have the skill. In addition, make your lies hard to determine even by magical means. This is pretty circumstantial, as it's only really useful when your Bluff isn't likely to succeed (come on, you're a Bard!) and you need it to, or you are under magical scrutiny.



**Good Hope:** \*\*\* Intended to be the opposite of Crushing Despair, this is a mass buff that provides a +2 Morale bonus to saves, attacks, and damage. Here's a list of reasons why it is better: 1) you don't have to worry about aiming a cone - it's a targeted spell. 2) Since it's a buff, you don't need to worry about saving throws. 3) You have several times the range. This spell will stack with your Inspire Courage ability, but not with the Heroism spell, so...I know I'm a broken record...avoid redundancy and take this OR heroism (or neither, but not both). The duration is 1 min/level, so if you get a chance to prepare for battle, this can be used beforehand.

**Haste:** \*\*\*\* We all know this is a great spell right? Hasted creatures get all kinds of bonuses, the premiere of these is an extra attack (at full BAB) when making the full attack option. This is an "in-combat" buff because of the short duration, but it's a proven stellar buff.

**Illusory Script:** \* I just know there is some great application to this spell I'm missing...someone tell me please. You can cast this on a page or whatnot and write messages only those you select can read. Others who attempt to read it can become targets of a pre-planted suggestion spell if they fail a will save. I know there is some neat use for this I haven't figured out, but until I do, I can't recommend it.

**Invisibility Sphere:** \*\* Not exactly mass invisibility since there is a limited range around you which the targets of this spell must stay to gain the benefit. The main purpose is when you and your party decide to be sneaky. The combat applications of this are more difficult than the regular invisibility spell since everyone must huddle close together. That makes this spell more circumstantial than its predecessor and a higher level. Duration is unchanged.

**Major Image:** \*\* Now you are creating significantly more convincing illusions, including smell, taste, etc. You are starting to see enough options to reduce the redundancy with silent image - now it's a matter of personal taste and the style of your character. Illusions can be really good, or really useless depending on how creative you can be with them. NOTE: Thanks to Crosswind I've lowered the rating of this spell. Crosswind pointed out that soon as you add smell, sound etc. to an image (the whole point of using this instead of silent image), then, interaction becomes pretty much automatic, allowing everyone a saving throw. This actually means that adding smell, sound, etc. brings a major opportunity for those who witness the illusion to make a saving throw...not good.

**Phantom Steed:** \*\*\*\* Massively useful spell that benefits greatly from the Bard's full caster level. Phantom steeds are extremely fast, last a long time, and eventually can fly. I recommend having some method of Feather Fall if you use a phantom steed to fly, because although extremely quick and useful, the phantom steed isn't defensively strong, and if you fall - you fall hard. Also, Phantom steeds can be created for other party members as well. If you don't have teleport in the party, or don't know your destination, casting Phantom Steeds for the party can be extremely effective...I speak from experience.

**Remove Curse:** \* Fairly self explanatory, and just as circumstantial as it sounds. Furthermore, you can't even be guaranteed it will work. It's more like Dispel magic that only works on curses. Think about that.

**Scrying:** \*\*\* Allows you to look in at the subject of your choosing regardless of range, also allows you to use special forms of sight (such as darkvision, also, divinations like Detect Magic have a chance to work) on the area scryed. Allows both visual and audio observation. The primary disadvantages are that this spell takes 1 hour to cast and the target gets a will save (if not willing, you can also use this to check up on allies). Overall, I think it's a better spell than Clairvoyance/Clairaudience, though the latter is probably better in the field.

**Sculpt Sound:** \*\* Create/deaden or alter sounds. This can work like a silence spell to prevent spellcasting - but requires targeting, and thus a will save (which is always a good save for casters), instead, this will likely be used to create some forms of illusion or improve the party's stealth abilities (the second probably the more easily visualized circumstance). The duration is really good, but again, this is circumstantial (and the wording can make exactly what can be accomplished rather ambiguous, so I would talk with your DM before ever selecting this spell)

**Secret Page:** \* Lots of spells to prevent someone else from reading your stuff. Just what are you into anyways? Seriously, these spells seem extremely circumstantial, and for most campaigns, I can't see any practical use.

**See Invisibility:** \* Pretty self-explanatory. Circumstantial for sure, and far less versatile than Glitterdust which can often achieve the same ends (and is lower level), also note that this spell does not reveal hidden creatures. Not great.

**Sepia Snake Sigil:** \* OK We REALLY don't want people reading our stuff do we? The Sepia Snake Sigil makes a great tool for DM's who want you to stumble across the hapless adventurer suspended in time when they tried to read the forbidden tome. For PC's this, once again, is massively circumstantial. Potentially useful as a trap given some planning and time, but not the best trap I've ever seen either.

**Slow:** \*\*\*\* A wonderful mass debuff that staggers all the enemies (and provides other penalties as well). A staggered enemy gets only a standard action or a move action every round - this is crippling tactically in a combat. This spell is targeted, so your friends are not in any danger of being affected. The enemies get a Will save to avoid, so best to use on multiples to ensure some are affected. Great spell to start a combat with.

**Speak with Animals:** \*\* Only really of use if you have some way to make the animals friendly to you, even then, expect this to be circumstantial, and you'll get tired of the DM constantly asking you (in the voice of the squirrel), "Hey, do you have any nuts? Have you seen any nuts? Are you getting any nuts? Why should I help you when you come here without any nuts? Went and got some nuts? Do you have to keep asking questions, I'm eating nuts. Squeak." Of course, it is perfectly legal to strike your DM out of character when this occurs.

**Summon Monster III:** \*\* I'm not a fan of Bard's being dedicated summoners, or combat summoners, but SM III is worthy of special note because it allows you to summon a flying steed (Dire Bat, either fiendish or celestial), or Spell Like Ability using creatures, (Like a Dretch), and the ape is pretty darned tough for the level as well. I'm not going so far as to recommend this spell, but, it's worthy of consideration. I notice the Bison has been moved to SM IV but the ape has not, so now the ape is the best combat summon for this spell.

**Tiny Hut:** \*\*\* Seems to be an obvious shelter spell, but instead it is a combat spell. Creatures inside gain total concealment from outside, while those within can see out, also, missiles, spells, and the like freely pass in or out. If you are playing an archer bard, surely you see how this could be useful? Oh yeah, it's useful for shelter in a harsh environment as well.

## 4th-Level Bard Spells

**Break Enchantment:** \* Basically a more powerful version of remove curse, though clearly an exclusively out of combat spell (1 min casting time). Remove curse is a pretty circumstantial spell, and so is this one. Really can't recommend.

**Cure Critical Wounds:** \*\* The most potent healing spell that a Bard gets.

Unfortunately, there is a big gap between this spell and the Heal spell (which a Bard will never get). If you pick up this spell, be aware that this is purely backup healing, if you really want to use a 4th level slot for that, just be aware of what you are getting, and what you aren't.

**Detect Scrying:** \*\* A 24 hour divination that alerts you to scrying (though it does not block the scrying). If being scryed is a significant worry in your campaign, by all means, this is an effective way to be aware of when you are being spied upon. However, in many campaigns, this won't see much use.

**Dimension Door:** \*\*\*\* A very useful spell that allows you and allies to make a little teleport (within "long" range). This is useful to get past obstacles, improve positioning in combat, beat a hasty retreat or regroup, etc. Whenever I have dimension door, I find it is one of the spells I can expect to use often.

**Dominate Person:** \*\*\* This is an early entry spell for Bards (wizards get it as a level 5 spell), so they end up having access to at the same level that a Sorcerer would (level 10). This spell has some fairly important limitations. First off, it can only be used on humanoids. It's mind-affecting, so any mind affecting immunities will foil it. Even low level spells like Protection from Evil grant immunity to this spell, or can be used to suppress it. With all those limitations in mind, if you get this spell off successfully, and they fail their save, they are your unthinking slave for 1 day/level. If enchantment is your thing, the dominate spells are the apex of enchantment.

**Freedom of Movement:** \*\*\* A fairly useful spell that grants immunity to all sorts of things that impede movement. What sorts of things? Well, unfortunately that was always a matter of debate in 3.5, and Pathfinder has not stated it any more clearly, so if you are wondering, for example, if a gust of wind spell can knock back someone with freedom of movement - ask your DM, because the rules will not tell you. That said, what the rules do say is you are immune to being grappled, slowed, webbed, caught in solid fog, or paralyzed...which in itself makes this a very handy spell to have. The duration is decent, so best to be used proactively, or in combat, given to an ally in need with a touch.

**Hallucinatory Terrain:** \* Another spell that is probably better than I give it credit for, but Hallucinatory terrain seems way to circumstantial to me. Make terrain appear like some other terrain, like a clear field to look like dense forest for example, with a will save to disbelieve (one of those interesting terms you never hear outside D&D - "I walk outside", "The door is locked", "I disbelieve", "OK, the door isn't locked." Crazy).

**Hold Monster:** \*\* Like Hold Person, but affects non-humanoids. The big drawback of this is the single target, but if you are fighting a single monster, this can create a significant advantage if it sticks (unfortunately, single opponent combats usually mean a tougher opponent, who will have better saves). Still a decent spell, but if the save is made, then you wasted your action.

**Invisibility, Greater:** \*\* Very short duration invisibility that allows you to attack while remaining invisible. The cut to duration is why I can't recommend this spell more highly, but a 1 round/level duration means it will almost exclusively need to be cast in combat, and if you can get your defenses set up before combat, then you can spend your combat doing more important things, like winning.

**Legend Lore:** \*\* Another early entry spell for Bards, Wizards/Sorcerers get this spell as a level 6 spell. It provides information about a person/place or thing of the Bards designation. The casting time is long, and becomes VERY long (weeks) if less is known about the subject. The wording of this spell is very unspecific, so how good it is will

really depend on your DM. It may be really good, or really useless. Nevertheless, if your Bard is big on the lore master thing, than this spell is the lord of lore spells...

**Locate Creature:** \*\* A handy divination that allows you to locate a specific creature. I've used this spell before to locate a creature that attempted to escape with a dimension door, and was then able to follow and prevent the escape. However, I can't say I've found lots of times that this spell has come in handy, as it remains circumstantial.

**Modify Memory:** \*\* The mileage you get from this spell will depend largely on the style of campaign in which you play. That said, in the right kind of campaign, this spell could have the Wizard drooling with envy, as you can implant false memories, delete actual memories, or modify memories as desired from the target. In addition, this spell can be used to give the target perfect memory of any event it experienced. For example, if he witnessed the evil wizard cast a spell, you could give him perfect memory of the verbal and somatic components of the spell, so you may be able to recognize it with Spellcraft. So either too circumstantial or awesome, depending upon your campaign. By the time you get to the level where this spell becomes available, there's a good chance you'll know how much mileage to expect.

**Neutralize Poison:** \* Makes subject immune to poison for the duration of the spell, also, removes any poison currently in the targets system (possibly, a caster level check needs to be made). For in combat use, I actually think Delay Poison is the better spell (and much lower level), outside of combat, then this is your choice, though a simple heal skill check from a party member with the skill may work just as well. In the end, I can't recommend this spell for a Bard.

**Rainbow Pattern:** \*\* So this spell contains many of the aspects I've been less than kind to for other similar spells. It fascinates creatures (like your fascinate ability) and it has a HD limit (like the other fascinate spells). So why the higher rating for this one? Two reasons. First, the HD limit is 24, which is a significant increase, and libel to still be fairly effective at higher levels. Secondly, you can move the effect and the fascinated creatures will follow. Thus you can captivate the audience, then move them away from whatever passage you wanted cleared for example. That makes this spell significantly more useful than the "hypnotic" spells. That said, I'm not a fan of HD limits, and fascinate is a redundant ability, so I can't give this a raving endorsement either.

**Repel Vermin:** \* So how many Vermin do you fight in your average adventure? Personally, I would have to say that on average, I fight less than one, therefore, this spell is going to be useless to me commonly through entire adventures. If you fight vermin all the time, then this is more useful, but not a HUGE amount more useful, as in the end, the vermin can still penetrate the barrier with a successful saving throw.

**Secure Shelter:** \* I prefer extradimensional pockets for safe resting locations, but Secure Shelter is still pretty darned safe and a great deal more comfortable. However, Secure Shelters are vulnerable to dimension doors, as well as straight out attack, so in the end, this will be a less safe resting location than a rope trick most of the time, and rope trick is a second level spell for wizards. Instead of this spell, if you don't have anyone who can cast rope trick in your party, pool your party funds and get a rope trick wand with an 8th level caster level, and use your Use Magic Device skill to use it rather than get this spell, and you will be safer.

**Shadow Conjuration:** \*\* Mimics Wizard/Sorcerer Conjuration (summoning) or Conjuration (Creation) spells of 3rd level or lower. Creatures summoned have 20% HP and do 20% damage, so using this for summoning monsters for combat is kind of pointless. The main reasons I can see using this spell are to mimic Phantom Steed or Sleet Storm. Not sure if that's worth the slot or not.

**Shout:** \* Does little damage (5d6) over a small area (30 feet cone), unless they save, in which case it does less. Creatures are also potentially deafened, which is by no means a debilitating effect. On the upside, few creatures are resistant to sonic damage, nevertheless, too little over too small an area, with too minor a debuff attached.

**Speak with Plants:** \* Very limited use divination spell. Speak to plants, who, by the way, strangely aren't that perceptive, as DM's are reminded in the spell description, so getting a lot of useful information out of them is pretty unlikely. That's if the plants even want to talk to you, which this spell does not guarantee.

**Summon Monster IV:** \*\* Some very nice combat critters at this level, unfortunately, again, you are not a summoner, as you get them too late in the game for them to be overly significant in combat (though expect Dire apes and Rhinos to have some significance - they are pretty tough for the level). The main reason I could see for taking this would be the summoning of mephits, that can have all kinds of different spell like abilities.

**Zone of Silence:** \*\*\* A pretty nice long duration spell that prevents anyone outside a 5' zone of silence around you from hearing what goes within. The reason this spell is so nice is that firstly, you aren't actually silenced, so you can still spellcast and communicate with those inside the cone, but otherwise it gives a perfect stealth option for you and your comrades. Even the clunky Full Plated melee can be sneaky as long as you keep them close. 1 hour/level is a terrific duration for this spell. It will however, foil your own Bardic Performance (unless your performance is purely visual - like dance), and many of your enchantment spells that require communication - So, just be aware and plan when this is needed and when it isn't.

## 5th-Level Bard Spells

**Cure Light Wounds, Mass:** \*\* You are not a dedicated healer, but I will point out that this spell IS better than most people think. The reason is that Cure Light Wounds heals 1d8 plus your caster level to a max of 5, while this spell heals 1d8 plus caster level to a max of 25. So you are healing a lot more than this than you are with cure light wounds. Still...

**Dispell Magic, Greater:** \*\*\* In Pathfinder, Dispell Magic, Greater is more significantly superior to Dispell Magic in that it allows dispelling over an area, allows multiple spells to be dispelled with a targeted dispell, and can dispell any spell that Remove Curse can dispell. Bard's get early entry for this spell as well, so overall, it's a strong option.

**Dream:** \*\* This is as close to "Sending" as a Bard can get. Deliver a message over any distance, but there are a few drawbacks. First, the recipient doesn't get the message until they fall asleep, and second, the communication is one way. On the up side, you can deliver longer messages. Overall, circumstantial and still inferior to a Cleric's Sending spell.

**False Vision:** \* Create an illusion specifically for those who scry upon you. Once again, a very circumstantial spell, in most campaigns, characters being scryed upon isn't a regular problem in my experience.

**Heroism, Greater:** \*\* Not superior to Heroism in every way. The Heroism bonus is increased to +4, and recipients get immunity to fear and some temporary HP as well (nice), however, the duration has been reduced by ten times (to 1 min/level instead of 10 min/level) which is a pretty drastic reduction. As such, for the level, I'm not impressed.

**Mind Fog:** \* or \*\*\*\* Note that you need to talk to your DM before taking this spell, because it is either 4 stars or 1. This creates an area of effect fog that causes all within to make a Will save or receive a -10 to future Will Saves and Wisdom Checks. With the enchantment heavy Bard spell list, the application of this is pretty obvious, use the fog to soften them up, then hit them with the big enchantment spell. However, what is unclear is whether the Bard knows if the Mind Fog has been successful (or if there were multiple targets, which have been affected). Since the chance to make the save on the mind fog is the same as the chance to make the save on the enchantment spell, unless you know who was affected, you aren't really making a huge difference with this spell. Talk to your DM, if they say you will know if the spell worked, then I highly recommend this. If not, then I say skip it.

**Mirage Arcana:** \* Like hallucinatory terrain except you can add or modify structures. Again, this spell seems way overly circumstantial, but if someone has a great non-circumstantial application for this spell (that can't be achieved with silent image), then let me know.

**Mislead:** \* Greater invisibility plus you get an illusionary double to distract your opponents. You need to concentrate on your illusionary double, which makes me wonder why you aren't just casting regular invisibility and minor image (I guess to get the same effect with one spell?), also, the duration on the greater invisibility is not improved, so you are stuck with one round per level. I just can't recommend this.

**Nightmare:** \* A circumstantial spell that allows you to cause the target to not get a restful sleep (thus causing fatigue and a failure for arcane spellcasters to regain their spells). Of course, being mind-affecting, this affect can be foiled with a bit of preparation. In the exact right circumstance, this could be a handy spell (you can make the save vs. this spell very difficult with the right components), but that is a circumstance that isn't going to come up very often.

**Persistent Image:** \*\*\* A pretty good illusion spell which largely resembles Silent Image with sound, smell, etc. The main selling feature is you can pre-program this illusion so it doesn't require concentration, but simply performs its pre-set tasks. That provides a new and useful element that is worth taking another illusion spell.

**Seeming:** \*\* Could be called Disguise self, Mass...except the "self" would be out of place. If you have a decent disguise skill, then the main purpose of this spell will be to disguise a large number of people in a short amount of time. If that need comes up often in your campaign, this spell deserves a higher rating. Another possible use of this spell is to disguise the unwilling, so, off the top of my head, disguising the patrolling guards to look like the party, so the guards hunting for the party will engage them in combat. Note that using this spell on the unwilling provides a saving throw, and the target presumably will know that their appearance has been changed.

**Shadow Evocation:** \*\* Unfortunately, only some minor applications of this spell that I can see. Doing damage with a shadow evocation spell is like shooting arrows with Nerf arrowheads, but Walls of Ice, or Fire Shields still have some use (though they can be tested, and therefore circumvented, making them only slightly more valuable than a pure illusion of those effects). Do Fire Shields created with this spell still offer heat or cold protection? The spell doesn't say, better check with your DM.

**Shadow Walk:** \*\* If the Party Wizard has teleportation spells, they are simply more efficient. If the party Cleric has Wind Walk, this is going to not be significantly superior to that. However, should the party be low on casters, this gives your party a method of mass fast transport, which is painful for any higher level party to not have.

**Song of Discord:** \*\* This spell is probably inferior to confusion, since opponents who are attacked are not forced to attack their attacker (and thus remain only attacking their

ally only 1/2 the time). However, this spell could potentially be layered with Confusion for some real nasty effects. On it's own, so-so. Layered with Confusion, pretty devastating.

**Suggestion, Mass:** \*\*\* Good for the same reason as suggestion, but better because you are more likely to get a failed save in a group.

**Summon Monster V:** \* As I've said before, the Bard is no summoner. Furthermore, SM V is a less impressive spell for its level than SM IV or SM III. Therefore, if you are going to dip into summoning, I would recommend one of the earlier level summon spells rather than this one.

## 6th-Level Bard Spells

**Analyze Dweomer:** \*\*\* A pretty effective divination. Analyze Dweomer is the ultimate identify spell. One standard action later you know everything about what a magic item can do and how to activate it. In combat, you can not only determine what the magic items of the enemy are (there is a Will save to resist), you can also see who is buffed up with spells, so you know who to target with your Greater Dispel. Overall, a good spell.

**Animate Objects:** \*\* Turn a bunch of objects into your animated soldiers. Animated objects are not nearly as flexible in use as summoned creatures, but you have some size choices available (though you are ultimately restricted to what is at hand). You aren't going to get them to grapple or trip, but you may get them to draw some attacks, or block enemies, and those kinds of effects are always useful.

**Cat's Grace, Mass:** \* At this level most of your party already likely has enhancement bonuses to Dex, which this does not stack with. I just can't recommend a spell that will likely do nothing, nearly all of the time. All the "Mass" enhancement bonuses are in the same boat.

**Charm Monster, Mass:** \*\* Can charm multiple creatures that do not have HD to over twice your level, or Charm one creature regardless of HD. So you either suffer a HD limit, or you are basically casting Charm Monster. At least the HD limit increases with your level, so it's certainly better than a set limit. However, it's not as good as it sounds.

**Cure Moderate Wounds, Mass:** \* Compared to Cure Light Wounds, Mass, this spell heals one extra 1d8 damage, unless you are over level 25. As such, if you want a mass healing spell, take the lower level one, since the amount healed by this one won't be much more.

**Eagle's Splendor, Mass:** \* At this level most of your party already likely has enhancement bonuses to Dex, which this does not stack with. I just can't recommend a spell that will likely do nothing, nearly all of the time. All the "Mass" enhancement bonuses are in the same boat.

**Eyebite:** \* If you were able to get this spell at a low level, it would be pretty handy, but eyebite does not level well. Once your opponents are usually 10HD or more, then this spell potentially sickens one opponent per round, if they fail a saving throw. Unfortunately, sickened is a pretty minor debuff. If you are fighting low HD creatures, the effects are better, but do you really need to be using your highest level spell against creatures 9HD or less?

**Find the Path:** \* Find the route to anything. Before you complain about the one star rating, allow me to explain: My rating is a recommendation, not a power rating. Find the path is the DM's nightmare, it is one of those spells that basically can circumvent

entire adventures, since nothing can be hidden from you anywhere. This is simply a spell that should not exist, and smart DM's outlaw it. However, as one player to another, just give your DM a break and don't take it in the first place. You either don't need this spell, or it is the ultimate answer removing the challenge entirely, either way, it's just not fun. As such, I don't recommend it.

**Fox's Cunning, Mass:** \* At this level most of your party already likely has enhancement bonuses to Dex, which this does not stack with. I just can't recommend a spell that will likely do nothing, nearly all of the time. All the "Mass" enhancement bonuses are in the same boat.

**Geas/Quest:** \*\*\* So here's the changes from Lesser Geas to Geas. First, the HD limit is removed (hooray), second, the saving throw is removed, (Really? Double Hooray). This means you basically automatically Geas anyone who is not immune to mind-affecting spells. Very nice. It takes 10 minutes to cast, so note this is not an "in combat" spell.

**Heroes' Feast:** \*\* A very long duration mass buff that you can use to start your day everyday. Up to one/creature per level can partake this feast that buffs for 12 hours. +4 saves vs poison, Bonus to saves vs fear, temporary HP, bonus to attack rolls, bonus to will saves, all current poisons and diseases are cured. Nothing earth shattering here, but it is a long duration mass buff.

**Irresistible Dance:** \*\*\* Nerfed in Pathfinder, yes, now there is a saving throw to Irresistible Dance, however, note that making the save just reduces the duration to one round. This spell creates a huge disadvantage to anyone who falls victim, be aware though, that immunity to mind-affecting spells becomes more and more common as the levels increase. Don't get too caught up in enchantments. For example, take this or Geas, but not both. Note that this is early entry for Bards, Wizards get this spell as an 8th level spell.

**Permanent Image:** \* Like Persistent Image except: a) it is permanent, and b) it is static whenever you don't concentrate on it. Sorry, but 4 out of 5 times, Persistent image is actually a better spell despite being lower level.

**Programmed Image:** \*\* This operates like Persistent Image, except it is triggered by an event (of your choosing), and it doesn't last as long once triggered (one round per level). Therefore, in some ways this is superior to Persistent Image, in some ways not as good. Not sure it needs to be a higher level though.

**Project Image:** \*\*\*\* Project Image is a very nice spell. You create an illusionary double of yourself, and not only can you see and hear from the illusionary double, but you can cast spells from it to. Hide yourself to see what Misperceive could have been like. You must maintain line of effect with your double, but your double is great for looking around corners (and casting around corners - gaining line of effect to somewhere where you cannot), closing distances, delivering touch spells, etc. Essentially, consider the Projected Image like a maneuverable launch pad for your spells. Even better spell for a primary caster, but still great for Bards.

**Scrying, Greater:** \*\* Better than scry in every way. Faster to cast (1 standard action), lasts longer (1 hour), all kinds of detection spells function reliably. If you use scry a lot, this is a suitable upgrade, if you don't, then you probably won't use this much either.

**Shout, Greater:** \*\*\* Fixes a bunch of problems with Shout in order to make this a decent spell. The Damage of 10d6 sonic is OK, and the effect deafens which is so-so. The big improvements are the Range has been doubled (so a 60 foot cone, so way more than double the area), and a stun effect has been added. Only one round of stun, but



still, that's a significant improvement over no stun. Not an incredible spell, but if you want an area of effect damaging spell, as a Bard, this is as good as you are going to get.

**Summon Monster VI:** \*\*\* In Pathfinder, SM VI allows you to summon an Erinyes, Shadow Demon, Lillend or a Succubus, this grants you some new options. Erinyes Have true seeing at all times, and can cast Fear, Unholy Blight and Minor image at will then after that, just use it to entangle enemies. The Succubus can cast Charm Monster at will, Dominate Person 1/day and give you a "profane" gift. Shadow Demons can cast Telekinesis, Magic Jar, Shadow Evocation and Shadow Conjunction. Lillend Azata's are 7th level Bards and also have some Spell Like Abilities. None of these options were available in 3.5's SM VI. Fairly flexible use, use this for the SLA's, not for combat tanks.

**Sympathetic Vibration:** \*\* Its circumstantial, but very effective in the correct circumstance. This spell is Bard only, and allows you to destroy pretty much any object (that is not animated) given time. With a touch you do 2d10 damage per round for 1 round/level. That will destroy anything that isn't immense. Certainly, most walls can be breached, or bridges collapsed, etc.

**Veil:** \*\* Very similar to the "Seeming" spell, except you can now make your targets appear to be different creatures, or pretty much anything you wish. The limits on how many you can affect are all but gone. As many targets as you like within 30 feet of each other and within long range. Still very circumstantial I think.

## **Bard Tactics**

So how does it all fit together? You've made your Bard, whether he be an archer, or made for Melee, or for Controlling. You've used your spell selections to pick spells that avoid redundancy, improve versatility, and concentrated on multiple targeting spells. Your race, your attributes and your feats all support your chosen role. OK, so now you play. How do you make sure that your Bard doesn't end up a disappointment?

Well, naturally your tactics need to adapt to the situation, but that said, I can give you some general advice. First round is for casting. On round 1 throw a spell that affects the battlefield itself, or as many targets as possible. At low levels this might be a grease spell, at high levels it might be a Mind Fog or Greater Dispel magic, but your first round throw a spell one way or another. The purpose of this is that mass effect spells never get a better opportunity than on round 1, and you can rarely gain a better tactical advantage with a spell than when you cast on round 1. Round 1 is just that time when spells happen to be really good.

On round 2, you should have some idea just how difficult (or easy) this battle will be, you may potentially want to throw up a mass buff (like Haste), or follow up your original Mass effect spell, (Like throwing a Mass Charm after the Mind Fog on round 1). However, if the combat is going to be more routine, then make an attack. Move in and flank if you are a melee Bard, shoot some arrows if you are an archer, or make a Dazzling Display or Trip if you are a controller. Bards happen to be pretty good at their martial tasks (they can't be a front liner, but they can deliver steady and reliable damage to an enemy), so when it's just a matter of beating down your opponents, your Bard will fill a vital role well.

On round 3 and over you should evaluate the battlefield and provide what is needed. You are a capable combatant, but you are also flexible in your use, so when you see a need, you can often fill it. Does someone need some emergency healing? Or perhaps a defensive spell? Are you best served by continuing offensive martial attacks? As your turn on the round comes up, you will have a lot more options than most other classes. Play the striker role if everything is going fine, but be prepared to dip back into spellcasting as required.

