

introduction

WHAT IS THIS BOOK?

First and foremost, this is a book on how to play traditional Irish music on the Irish flute and the tin whistle, and on how to adapt that knowledge to the modern, or Boehm-system flute. A great deal of the information I present applies to all three of these instruments. As far as I know, this is the first book to address all three as a group, and the first to closely examine the similarities and differences in their techniques, capabilities, limitations, and their places in traditional Irish music. I also explore the history and development of these instruments in the Irish tradition, provide an orientation to traditional instrumental Irish music, and examine closely the personal styles of 22 masterful flute and whistle players who recorded between 1925 and 2001. This book does not cover the rudiments of music notation or ear training. There are many other good books that do.

This is the most comprehensive book yet written on Irish flute or tin whistle playing. Much of its information has not been explored in print before. It may be used as a thorough and systematic reference book. However, the material of later chapters is, to a great extent, built upon the foundation laid in earlier ones, so it is wise to progress through the book sequentially.

Section 1 features an orientation to traditional Irish music. Section 2 delves into the history and development of flutes and whistles in Ireland and the techniques of holding and sounding the instruments.

In Section 3, the largest section of the book, I share my thoughts on ornamentation. I have invented some new ways to notate ornamentation which I hope are much more simple and clear than the approaches I have seen in other publications. As of this writing, there is no consensus on how to notate or explain Irish flute and whistle ornamentation. I believe that no book before this one has examined the full range of sophistication that exists in the ornamentation of this music. My methods have made it possible for me to probe much deeper. In doing so, I have encountered and given names to a number of ornamentation techniques which, while being widely used by traditional musicians, to the best of my knowledge have not been clearly described or notated before.

My notation techniques can be applied, with some adaptation, to other Irish instrumental traditions, such as those of the uilleann pipes, fiddle, accordion, and concertina. Using my approach, very accurate and detailed transcriptions of Irish traditional tunes and performances are now possible. I hope that others will come to understand and use these new tools, and that this will help to create a deeper appreciation for this highly developed music.

Section 4 addresses phrasing, articulation, and breathing. In Section 5, I sum things up and delve into the areas of practicing and the playing of slow airs. Section 6 consists of 49 studies for practicing the physical skills needed in ornamentation.

The book contains numerous musical examples and exercises. Many of them are excerpts from traditional Irish tunes. Complete settings of these tunes are provided in Section 7.

In Section 8, I have transcribed, in great detail, 27 tunes as performed and recorded by 22 masters of the Irish flute and tin whistle. These performances are available on the artists' published recordings and I encourage you to seek them out. I hope to coordinate the issuing of a CD compilation of these performances in the future. You can check on the progress of this endeavor through Mel Bay Publications or my website, <www.greylarsen.com>.

THE COMPANION CDS

The two companion CDs contain my renditions of the studies in Section 6, the tune settings in Section 7, and many of the figures and exercises that appear throughout the book. A CD symbol (note the number 1 or 2 in the center of the symbol) paired with a track number shows where to find the recording.

These recordings are provided for the benefit of every reader, not just those who do not read music. Even though the figures and exercises are notated in a detailed fashion, there are many elements of traditional Irish music that cannot be written down. Having both the notated and recorded representations will help all readers to better understand the music.

Those figures that have indications for phrasing tend to be notated in a phrasing style that is more typical of the tin whistle than the flute. Whistle players tend to use somewhat more tonguing and less slurring than flute players do. (If you are unsure of the meanings of *tonguing* and *slurring*, you will find these terms defined at the beginning of Chapter 20.) The CDs feature both tin whistle and flute performances. The phrasing in the recordings at times differs somewhat from what is notated.

These CDs also contain a browser file with internet links. Access the file by placing either disc in your computer's CD-ROM drive.

COMPLEMENTARY TUNE COLLECTIONS

This book is complemented by my two tunebook and CD packages. These works, which present traditional Irish tunes that are particularly well suited to the whistle and flute, respectively, contain the first large collections of transcriptions that make use of my notation techniques. For information on these see <www.greylarsen.com> or Mel Bay Publications <www.melbay.com>.

MORE TUNES AT <WWW.GREYLARSEN.COM>

There are more tunes, in both audio and transcription form, at <www.greylarsen.com>. Please visit the site for more information on this and other items related to my Mel Bay books, as well as information on my recordings, workshops, and performances.

WHY IS THIS BOOK NEEDED?

There are numerous other books about Irish tin whistle playing, and fewer on Irish flute playing. While some are excellent in certain areas, none currently in print approach this book in depth and scope. Furthermore, many are at times superficial, confusing, and lacking in clear and complete explanation. Many musicians play both flute and whistle, yet as far as I know no previous book addresses in any depth the similarities and differences between them.

It is impossible to be good at playing Irish flute or tin whistle without basing one's learning on a groundwork of extensive and continual listening. This book is intended to encourage and be a companion to such listening. But it also provides a wealth of information that for many is very difficult to obtain through listening alone without regular, personal contact with experienced players.

This book provides teachers of Irish flute and tin whistle with a solid pedagogical basis for their work.

Furthermore, it presents the first deep, analytical, and comparative look into the playing styles of past and present masters of Irish flute and tin whistle.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR AND HOW SHOULD YOU USE IT?

This book is for flute and whistle players at all levels, from the novice to the highly advanced.

I delve most deeply into intermediate and advanced areas, but I also provide a solid foundation for beginners. For instance, I give detailed and thorough instruction on holding and blowing the flute and the whistle, starting with the

first encounter with the instrument. The novice would be wise to take plenty of time to work on these and other rudiments of playing before venturing too deeply into the rest of the book.

Throughout the book I describe techniques and fingerings in terms of how they are played on the Irish, or simple-system flute and the tin whistle, which share the same basic fingerings. Most of what I present can be applied directly to the modern flute, but some techniques require different fingerings or other special adaptations. As they work their way through the book, Boehm-system flute players may wish to refer to Appendix B, which gives information on such fingerings and adaptations. Whenever I use the word *flute* by itself, I am referring to the Irish or simple-system flute. (For clarification on these terms, see Chapter 3.)

Take your time with this book. It will serve as a thorough reference, regardless of your current level of playing ability.

CONCISE VERSION OF THIS BOOK FOR TIN WHISTLE ONLY: *THE ESSENTIAL TIN WHISTLE TOOLBOX*

I have written a shorter, more concise version of this book specifically for beginning and intermediate players of the tin whistle. It is entitled *The Essential Tin Whistle Toolbox* and it is also published by Mel Bay Publications.

READING MUSIC

There is a great deal of music notation in this book. As mentioned above, if you do not read music you can still use the book quite well because I play most of the notated exercises and figures on the companion CDs.

I encourage everyone to learn to read music. It is an extremely useful skill, even for the traditional musician. However, it is very important to avoid becoming dependent upon written music. If you already are, then you need to begin to wean yourself from the notation. As you learn tunes, you should immediately start to internalize them. For much more on this subject, see Chapter 1.

The companion CDs can be very useful in that regard. You can learn to play a musical example or a complete tune solely by listening to it over and over on the CD. Once you have learned it, you may check yourself with the music notation in the book.

ANALYTICAL LEARNING AND IMMERSION LEARNING

You certainly do not need to use this or any book in order to learn to play Irish flute or tin whistle. These traditions have thrived and evolved for centuries with very little help from books. In Ireland, and in Irish communities outside Ireland, many musicians learn their music largely by immersion, the way that we all master our native languages. Most musicians who learn this way are not very self-examining about how they do what they do.

Analytical resources like this book can and should never supplant aural learning, but they can supplement it in important ways. This book supplies much-needed information for people who live far away from a thriving Irish music community. Even those who live in such communities will find plenty of new ideas, insights, and opinions here. I believe it is a very good thing for a musician to become aware of aspects of her playing that she may have been unconscious of for years. So I hope this will be a valuable reference book for all players, regardless of their background and learning experiences.

Although traditional musicians, on the whole, tend to learn intuitively, it is interesting to note that music reading is more prevalent in the Irish music tradition than it is in many others. Instruction books and tune collections have played a part in the propagation of traditional Irish music since the 18th century. The tune collections of Captain Francis O'Neillⁱ and Breandán Breathnachⁱⁱ can be found on the bookshelves of many traditional Irish musicians.

This book represents my own perceptions, opinions, and experience regarding traditional Irish music. As with any art form, there is room for a wide variety of viewpoints. Each one provides yet another way to illuminate a shared treasure, which, though firmly rooted in many generations of Irish culture, is alive and constantly evolving.

GENDER CONVENTION

In this book I have decided to avoid the cumbersome use of both genders for the personal pronoun. Instead of writing *he or she, his or her*, etc., I use the feminine gender. This way I can do my small part in helping to even out the imbalance caused by centuries of books that have used only masculine forms.



ⁱ Two of the tune collections of Capt. Francis O'Neill are particularly widespread. *O'Neill's Music of Ireland* was originally published in 1903 and contains 1850 tunes. *1001 Gems, The Dance Music of Ireland* followed in 1907. Both were published in Chicago where O'Neill served as Chief of Police. Both books have gone through several editions and are now published by Mel Bay Publications. See Bibliography.

ⁱⁱ Breandán Breathnach, *Ceol Rince na hÉireann*, 5 vols. (Dublin: An Gúm). Years of first publication: vol. 1: 1963, vol. 2: 1976, vol. 3: 1985, vol. 4: 1996, vol. 5: 1999.