



learn  
to  
play

the

tin whistle

With  
ARMAGH PIPERS CLUB

Part 2



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## INTRODUCTION

### The Oral Tradition

The transmission of the oral tradition (i.e. traditional Irish music) in Ireland has been a matter of chance for far too long. It still is a subject largely ignored by schools, with their inferiority-orientated reliance on obscure music written for recorder and piano. Even the ballad revival of the last decade has left our schools' syllabus unscathed. When we come to the traditional music itself, we find total ignorance of even the instruments used to produce that music. It is possible to go through school without ever seeing a set of Uilleann Pipes never mind hearing them.

Yet despite this 'ban' on our traditional music, (what else can you call a state-subsidized policy of ignoring its existence?) the musical tradition has survived over a wide area of the country - survived, where the very language of the people died, - survived even mass emigration, because the countries to which the people went recognised their talents, and their music came back on records. It still comes back - the only L.P. of Willie Clancy's music ever produced was by an English company - Topic Records Ltd.

### A Great Loss.

This explains one aspect of what we mean by our opening remark that the survival of the music has largely been a matter of chance. Death can end the strongest source of traditional lore, and in the last year we have lost Felix Doran and Willie Clancy, two of the greatest pipers of our time. Not so long ago, Leo Rowsome died.

### Opportunists.

However much they may shun it socially, traditional Irish music has often been used as a source by 'trained' musicians in search of a catchy melody to play around with, and very often, a plundered and emasculated version does find its way into the school syllabus. This being the case, why not the superior original?

### The Pipers' Club.

The Pipers' Club has attempted in Armagh to remove the chance element and provide the means by which the music will survive. Our basic instrument is the tin whistle, economically within everyone's range.

### Ornamentation.

Book 1 was mainly concerned with the mechanics of finding the notes and producing a simple tune. With this second book we are beyond the stage where the main concern is to mechanically produce a tune. We are at the stage where our ear tells us that there is something else in a tune as played by a traditional player, and where we are technically capable of reproducing that 'something else'.

The 'something else' is of course ornamentation. It is this ornamentation that gives the flavour to traditional music and distinguishes it from all other.

In the introduction to Book 1, we mentioned the sort of involuntary ornamentation that comes naturally. The instinctive ornamentation referred to comes when one rapidly alternates a given note with the note above. In traditional ornamentation one adds to this by playing the note below. The scheme laid out overleaf shows how this is done in theory. In practise, it will only work when made an integral part of a given tune.

We have selected tunes that feature ornamentation on various notes and our method is to learn the ornamentation in the context of the tune. Listen to a good player; identify the main ornamented notes; study the ornamentation chart, and then, using both sources, it will only be a matter of time and practise till a smooth natural performance is achieved.

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