

SECTION 8: GREAT PERFORMANCES TRANSCRIBED

TRANSCRIPTIONS OF COMMERCIAL RECORDINGS FROM IMPORTANT FLUTE AND TIN WHISTLE PLAYERS, 1925—2001.

In this section, I present my transcriptions of 27 flute and tin whistle performances of traditional Irish tunes which have been released on commercial recordings dating from 1925 to 2001. Twenty-two players are included here, representing a wide variety of playing styles. Using my notation innovations, these very detailed transcriptions give us a new way to look deeply into such performances. While transcribing, I have used digital technology to slow the recordings down so that I could more easily discern the details of the music.

The transcriptions are presented in chronological order according to the year of recording. I have departed from this scheme in order to group pairs of transcriptions together when they are by the same player, and in one case to present side by side two different players' versions of the same tune.

This collection is not meant to be an exhaustive survey, but instead a representative sampling of a wide variety of flute and whistle players and their music. There are so many fine players to choose from that, by necessity, many of them are not represented here. Some are not included because it was not possible to obtain the necessary permissions. It has been difficult to narrow the choice of players down to a number that is manageable for this book. I hope to issue more such collections in the future. (You may refer to my website, <www.greylarsen.com>, for information on such future projects.)

Introducing each transcription, I give some brief biographical information and make some comments and observations on the player's style as shown in that particular performance.

Remember that there are many important aspects of performance that are not possible to notate, such as the various elements that make up *swing* or *lilt* (for more on this see Chapter 1). There are other aspects of playing that I have chosen not to notate, such as multiple tonguing and tonguing vs. throating (some players use one, some use both). In a few cases, I will indicate the use of finger vibrato and breath vibrato. Since transcriptions can never show everything, listening to the recordings of these performances while referring to the transcriptions will give you the fullest possible understanding. It is my hope that in the future I can facilitate the issuing of a CD compilation of the recordings transcribed here. As of this writing, however, it is proving very difficult to obtain the necessary permissions. (Check my website for updates.) For now, I strongly encourage you to seek out each artist's recording of these performances. (You will find the needed information in the Discography.)

It is important to realize that I use slurs in a very specific way in these transcriptions. A slurred group of notes is played using an uninterrupted, continuous stream of air. Only the first note of a slurred group is articulated by the use of tonguing or throating. All notes that are *not* under a slur *are* articulated with tonguing or throating.

Some flute players, such as Josie McDermott, use a relatively gentle breath pulsing technique to play repeated notes on one pitch which are nevertheless connected in one continuous breath. In such cases, these repeated notes appear under a slur to show that the notes are separate but that the airstream is not interrupted. (For an example of this, see the transcription of Josie McDermott's rendition of *The Pigeon on the Gate* on pp. 390-391.) One could also describe this technique as a type of very rhythmic, distinct, breath vibrato. When listening to recordings, it is sometimes difficult or impossible to tell whether a player is using this kind of breath pulsing or a subtle kind of throating.

In addition to the ornamentation symbols explained in earlier chapters, I use the commonly used sign for staccato, or very short notes (a dot above a notehead), and the breath sign (a comma) above rests to show where the player takes a breath.

A number of the players in this section make occasional use of a C note that in pitch is in between the equal-tempered C and C-sharp. This is often called a "neutral C," or a "piping C" as Breandán Breathnach refers to it in his book, *Folk Music & Dances of Ireland*.¹ The pitch may be altered with embouchure and/or by fingering, for example

by covering only the T2 hole. In these transcriptions the use of the “piping C” is indicated with an asterisk. For more on this see “Outside the Modal Boundaries” on p. 27 of Chapter 1.

In these transcriptions, the various repetitions of the tune are presented as separate staves in a score format. The first time through the tune is shown on the top staff, the second time through on the staff below that, etc. This allows for easy comparisons of any given passage for each time the tune is played.

I hope these transcriptions will provide valuable insight into the music of many of the important players whose performances have been preserved since the dawn of the recording age. While it can be very instructive to play through these renditions, I do not encourage you to do so with the goal of “taking on” the style of any of these players. First of all, this is not really possible, and second of all, it is best to develop your own style that reflects who you are.

For detailed information on the recordings transcribed here, see the Discography.

The transcriptions are:

1. **John McKenna** (flute)—Reel: *The Corry Boys*..... p. 364
From his 1925 78-rpm US release for the O’Byrne De Witt label.
2. **Tom Morrison** (flute)—Schottische: *Sweet Flowers of Milltown* p. 368
From his 1927 recording, reissued on *Fluters of Old Erin*.
3. **William Cummins** (flute)—Hornpipe: *Dwyer’s Hornpipe*..... p. 372
From his 1930 recording on the Parlophone label, reissued on *Fluters of Old Erin*.
4. **Séamus Ennis** (tin whistle)—Jig: *The Thrush in the Straw* p. 375
From his 1959 release, *The Bonny Bunch of Roses*.
5. **Willie Clancy** (tin whistle)—Reel: *Woman of the House* p. 377
From a 1967 field recording, reissued on *The Breeze from Erin*.
6. **Paddy Taylor** (Radcliff-system flute)—Reel: *The Boy in the Gap* p. 380
From his 1970 release, *The Boy in the Gap*.
7. **Paddy Carty** (Radcliff-system flute)—Reel: *The Jug of Punch* p. 384
From his 1974 release, *Traditional Irish Music*.
8. **Grey Larsen** (flute)—Reel: *The Jug of Punch*..... p. 386
From his 1987 release with the group Metamora, *The Great Road*.
9. **Josie McDermott** (flute)—Reel: *The Pigeon on the Gate*..... p. 389
From his 1976 release, *Darby’s Farewell*.
10. **Josie McDermott** (tin whistle)—Polka: *The Keadue Polka* p. 392
From his 1976 release, *Darby’s Farewell*.
11. **Matt Molloy** (flute)—Double Jig: *The Humours of Drinagh* p. 395
From his 1976 release, *Matt Molloy*.
12. **Matt Molloy** (flute)—Reel: *Griffin from the Bridge* p. 398
From his 1987 release, *Stony Steps*.
13. **Cathal McConnell** (flute)—Reel: *Peter Flanagan’s* p. 400
From his 1977 release, *On Loch Erne’s Shore*.
14. **Cathal McConnell** (tin whistle)—Reel: *The Long Slender Sally* p. 403
From his 1977 release, *On Loch Erne’s Shore*.
15. **Mary Bergin** (tin whistle) - Reel: *Bean Uí Chroidheáin (Mrs. Crehan’s Reel)* p. 405
From her 1979 release, *Feadóga Stáin*.
16. **Mary Bergin** (tin whistle)—Hornpipe: *Father Dollard’s Hornpipe* p. 407
From her 1993 release, *Feadóga Stáin 2*.

17. **Donncha Ó Briain** (tin whistle)—Reel: *The Flogging Reel* p. 409
 From his 1979 release, *Donncha Ó Briain*.
18. **Desi Wilkinson** (flute)—Highland: *Bidh Eoin (Eoin's Boat)* p. 411
 From his 1987 release, *Three-Piece Flute*.
19. **Breda Smyth** (tin whistle)—Reel: *O'Mahony's* p. 413
 From the 1989 release *Ceol Tigh Neachtain (Music from Galway)*
20. **Seán Ryan** (tin whistle)—Double Jig: *The Frost is All Over* p. 416
 From his 1989 release, *Síúil Uait (Take the Air)*
21. **Conal Ó Gráda** (fife, or flute in F) Slip Jig: *Ride a Mile*..... p. 420
 From his 1990 release, *The Top of Coom*.
22. **Mícho Russell** (tin whistle)—Reel: *Cloichíní Beaga na Farraige*
(The Small Stones of the Sea) p. 423
 From a 1993 recording included in his 1995 release, *Ireland's Whistling Ambassador*.
23. **Joanie Madden** (Boehm-system flute)—Reel: *Dogs Among the Bushes*..... p. 426
 From her 1994 release, *A Whistle on the Wind*.
24. **Kevin Crawford** (flute)—Reel: *Maids in the Meadow* p. 428
 From his 1995 release, *d' flute album*.
25. **Catherine McEvoy** (flute)—Fling: *Mrs. Galvin's Fling* p. 430
 From her 1996 release, *Traditional Flute Music in the Sligo–Roscommon Style*.
26. **Seamus Egan** (flute)—Reel: *The Yellow Tinker* p. 433
 From Solas' 1996 release, *Solas*.
27. **Grey Larsen** (tin whistle)—Hornpipe: *The Cuckoo's Nest* p. 436
 From his 2001 release with Paddy League, *The Green House*.



1. **John McKenna** (flute)—Reel: *The Corry Boys*. This is transcribed from John McKenna's 78-rpm release, which was issued in America in 1925 on the O'Byrne DeWitt Label, and reissued by the John McKenna Traditional Society on their compilation cassette *John McKenna, His Original Recordings*. This tune is the second in a medley of two reels, the first one being *The Sailor on the Rock*. Mode: G Ionian (major).

John McKenna was one of the most influential flute players of the 20th century. He was born in 1880 near the village of Tarmon in Co. Leitrim and died in 1947 in New York.ⁱⁱ After working for some years in the Arigna coal mines, in 1911 he emigrated to New York City and worked at first as a fireman. His first records, recorded in 1921, list him in fact as "Fire Patrolman McKenna." Through the thirty 78-rpm recordings that he made between 1921 and 1936, McKenna had a great deal to do with establishing the flute as a prominent instrument in Irish music. These recordings also brought a number of Leitrim tunes into the common repertoire. His duet recordings with fiddler James Morrison are especially cherished by traditional musicians.

This Leitrim single reel is fascinating in itself because of its irregular phrase length in the A part, which I have notated using measures in 3/2 time. Such "crooked" tunes are rarely heard in Irish music today, though I think this way of playing must have been much more common in older times. Another crooked tune can be seen in the transcription of my whistle performance of Michael J. Kennedy's setting of the hornpipe, "The Cuckoo's Nest" (see transcription #27 later in this section). Perhaps the crooked phrasing of some of these older Irish tunes has been preserved and integrated into local musical traditions in places such as Québec and America.

In this tune, McKenna seems to use no tonguing and very little in the way of throating articulation. Some exceptions can be found, but only on repeated notes, as seen in m. 1, fourth time; m. 5, first, second, third, and fifth times; and m. 9, fourth time. However, he does make frequent use of breath pulsing to add to the rhythmic drive to the music.

McKenna's ornamentation is fairly spare. In other recordings he can be heard using a wider variety of ornaments, such as condensed rolls. As mentioned in Chapter 16, his recording of *The Five Mile Chase* is the earliest recording I have found of cranning on the flute or whistle.

Even though he plays this tune six times through, you can see that he introduces very little in the way of variation. As Jackie Small writes in the liner notes to *John McKenna, His Original Recordings*,ⁱⁱⁱ McKenna's music was ". . . primarily for dancing, hearty music with a fine 'lift' imparted by his rhythmic, breathy style." But the variations he does employ are very interesting. Perhaps the most adventurous one comes in the very first measure of the first time through the tune. Another similar melodic variation occurs in m. 6 of the first time through. The alternative to the long G roll that he uses in m. 1, fourth time, and m. 5, first, second, and third times, is reminiscent of the bow treble of the fiddle, or the staccato "triplet" of the pipes, though McKenna does not play them staccato. The use of the single trill in m. 5, fifth time, is a slight variation on this. This particular kind of ornamentation is rarely heard in the music of more modern flute and whistle players.



John McKenna and John Gaffney

The Corry Boys

traditional Irish reel
as played by John McKenna, Irish flute,
on his 1925 recording on the O'Byrne DeWitt Label,
reissued by the John McKenna Traditional Society
on *John McKenna, His Original Recordings*.

$\text{♩} = \text{approx. } 120$

1st Time
2nd Time
3rd Time
4th Time
5th Time
6th Time

1 2 3 4

Detailed description: This system of the musical score contains six staves, labeled '1st Time' through '6th Time' on the left. The music is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/2 time signature. The piece is divided into four measures, numbered 1 through 4 at the top. Each measure contains a melodic line with various rhythmic values and rests, and a bass line with chords and single notes. The notation includes slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

5 6 7 8

Detailed description: This system of the musical score contains six staves, numbered 1 through 6 on the left. The music continues from the previous system, divided into four measures numbered 5 through 8 at the top. The notation is consistent with the first system, featuring treble clef, one sharp key signature, and 2/2 time signature. It includes melodic lines, bass lines, and various musical notations such as slurs and accents.

1. 9 10 11 12

Musical score for measures 9-12. The score consists of six staves, numbered 1 to 6 on the left. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is written in a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with some measures containing sixteenth notes. Measures 9, 10, 11, and 12 are indicated by numbers above the staves. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings such as accents and slurs.

1. 13 14 15 16 to 2nd time

2. to 3rd time

3. to 4th time

4. to 5th time

5. to 6th time

6.

Musical score for measures 13-16. The score consists of six staves, numbered 1 to 6 on the left. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is written in a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with some measures containing sixteenth notes. Measures 13, 14, 15, and 16 are indicated by numbers above the staves. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings such as accents and slurs. The final measure of each staff is marked with a repeat sign and a specific instruction: 'to 2nd time', 'to 3rd time', 'to 4th time', 'to 5th time', and 'to 6th time' respectively.

2. **Tom Morrison** (flute)—Schottische: *Sweet Flowers of Milltown*. This is a transcription from Tom Morrison's 1927 New York recording for the Columbia label, reissued on *Fluters of Old Erin*, Viva Voce 002. *Sweet Flowers of Milltown* is the first in a medley of two schottisches, the second one being *The Boys from Knock*. On this recording, Morrison was accompanied by tambourine and bodhrán player John Reynolds from Drumsna, Co. Leitrim. Mode: G Ionian (major).

According to Harry Bradshaw,

Tom Morrison (1889-1958) was ... born in Whitepark, near Glenamaddy, Co. Galway. As a young man, Tom worked in the north of England and began playing music on the whistle, later taking up the flute and accordion. In 1909 Tom left for New York and settled on Carlton Avenue in Brooklyn, an area renowned for its immigrant musicians. His recording career began in 1924 when he teamed up with accordion player P. J. Conlon to record for the Gennett Company. On his records, Morrison's flute playing has echoes of old fifeing style about it with great drive and a compelling rhythm. Tom Morrison (no relation to James Morrison) recorded 27 sides by 1929 and became a respected figure on the New York music scene, and an uilleann piper later in life.^{IV}

Since older styles of playing such as Morrison's are rarely heard these days, and since they are so important to the evolution of this music, I will go into some depth in analyzing and describing his playing of this tune.

Here, Tom Morrison shows himself to be a brilliant improviser. In playful and highly imaginative fashion he varies his articulations, phrasing, ornamentation, and the octave register of the music. But perhaps the most remarkable of his variations comes from his overt manipulation of the lilt or swing of the music. His predominant lilt is one typical of schottische playing, a highly uneven subdivision of the pulse in which the on-pulse or odd-numbered eighth notes (i.e. the first, third, fifth, and so on) get greater weight and duration than the off-pulse or even-numbered eighth notes. (For more on this subject see Chapter 1, the section called "Lilt, or Swing" on pp. 40-42 and the sections that follow it, as well as Chapter 14.) This heavy lilt allows for true triplets, as are commonly heard in hornpipes. (See "The Fallacy of the 'Triplet'" on pp. 254-255 in Chapter 18.)

In numerous phrases, which are enclosed in the following transcription by dotted line brackets, Morrison dramatically evens out the notes, playing them with *equal* duration and weight, that is with little or no lilt at all. When he does so, he also plays most, and sometimes all, of the notes staccato, with uniform, choppy single-tongue or throat articulations. Sometimes he easily, quickly, and subtly moves in and out of this pointed, even style, as in the second time through the tune, m. 1-2. At other times he uses this change to make a bold statement, as in the second time through, m. 4-6. One needs to listen to this recording to truly appreciate Morrison's masterful use of this technique. When you do, you will hear that the tambourine player tends to play quite evenly throughout, so when Morrison adopts the even style of playing, he suddenly comes into sync with the tambourine on every note, not just the on-pulse notes.

As for his articulations, from careful listening to the recording at reduced speed, I am nearly certain that he uses single and multiple tonguing as well as throating. Sometimes it is impossible to tell whether he is throating or tonguing, but at other times it does seem clear. The beginning pickup measure, which established the beat, tempo, and lilt for his accompanist (and would do the same for dancers when they were present), consists of seven eighth notes that I am fairly sure are played with a rhythmically definite and clear, yet smoothly connected double tonguing pattern. In m. 4 of the second time through, the first four notes are double tongued whereas the notes of m. 5 and 6 are played with choppy, uniform, single tonguing. In many other places he is clearly using throat articulation, such as on the repeated Gs at the ends of every A part. (Note that these Gs are slurred and not tied.)

Morrison's use of two opposite patterns of alternating between staccato and legato eighth notes further illuminates the fascinating subtlety of his articulation variations. In the first time through, in m. 1 and m. 19-20, he alternates between playing legato on-pulse eighth notes and staccato off-pulse eighth notes. Then he uses just the opposite pattern, i.e. staccato on the pulse and legato off the pulse, in the third time through, m. 3, 11, and 27-28.

Another important aspect of Morrison's bold style of improvisation is his free-form approach to frequent changes of octave register. He varies the speed and force of his airstream often, taking notes that would ordinarily be played in the low register up high. (It is interesting to note that, in this tune at least, he never does the opposite, i.e. bringing high notes down into the low register.) To see an example, look at m. 2. In the second time through, he plays in a normal fashion, whereas in the first time through he takes five notes up into the high octave. As you look and listen, you find many more instances of this register jumping, a natural result of this loud and punchy style of dance playing from the days before amplification.

Sometimes the change in the airstream is gradual enough, especially in a fast tune like this, that certain notes actually sound in both registers at once, something that is possible on the flute, whistle, fife, and piccolo but not, I believe, on any other of the instruments of traditional Irish music. For example, in the first time through, m. 32, there are three G eighth notes in succession. When you listen to the recording, you will hear that the first G is firmly planted in the low register and the third in the high register. But the second, though it is notated here in the low register, is actually in both registers at once. In this recording, there are numerous other notes like this that are not totally in one register or the other.

Tom Morrison, like most of the players of this period, uses ornamentation fairly sparingly. While many of his cuts fall right on the beat, many others do not, coming instead somewhat after the attack of the note. This delaying of cuts appears to be a common trait of this period. There are mid-note cuts too, such as the cut on B in m. 31, first time through. Sometimes a cut comes so late and is so elongated that it sounds like a note unto itself, as is the case in the second time through, m. 10. Here I notate the first three notes of the measure as a sixteenth-note triplet, three notes, instead of two Gs with the second one cut. The boundaries blur in such cases. You can make up your own mind about this and other cuts that I have notated here. The music is what it is and ultimately it doesn't matter how we analyze it and identify its tiny parts.

Rolls appear only in three places: first time through, m. 17 and 25 and third time through, m. 29. It is interesting that in m. 21, all three times through, Morrison does not use a roll to ornament the three eighth-note beats of A in the second half of the measure. Instead he plays three staccato A notes that sound like they are single tongued. This is similar to older styles of ornamentation among players of other instruments such as the melodeon and concertina.

In m. 10, second time through, Morrison plays a crann on middle D. He plays this with the T1 hole uncovered so that the cuts sound lower than the parent note of D. It is quite hard to hear this crann unless you slow down the recording. So far, this is the second earliest recorded example I have come across of cranning on the flute, the first being in John McKenna's 1925 recording of the reel *The Five Mile Chase*.^v

Morrison also makes numerous lovely small melodic variations, such as those found in m. 19, the second time through, in which he changes an E to a B, and the falling chain of cuts found the second time through in m. 28. The high C-sharp he plays the third time through in m. 11 was probably not intentional. Notice also the rhythm reminiscent of Scottish music (a sixteenth note followed by a dotted eighth note) in the first time through, m. 13 and 29.



Tom Morrison

Sweet Flowers of Milltown

$\text{♩} = \text{approx. } 100$

traditional Irish schottische
as played by Tom Morrison, Irish flute,
on his 1927 recording on the Columbia label,
reissued on *Fluters of Old Erin, Viva Voce 002*

1st A-Part

1st Time

2nd Time

3rd Time

1.

2.

3.

2nd A-Part

9.

10.

11.

12.

13.

14.

15.

16.

Ist B-Part

1. 17 18 19 20

1. 21 22 23 24

2nd B-Part

1. 25 26 27 28

1. 29 30 31 32

to 2nd time

to 3rd time