

11. **Matt Molloy** (flute in E-flat)—Jig: *The Humours of Drinagh*. From his 1976 debut solo release, *Matt Molloy*, Mulligan LUN 004, Green Linnet GLCD 3008. It is the first in a medley of two jigs, the second one being *The Mist on the Mountain*. Mode: E-flat Ionian (major), transposed here to D Ionian to reflect how the tune would be played on a D instrument.

Many consider Matt Molloy to be the greatest Irish flute player of our time. There is no doubt that his genius has had a tremendous influence on nearly all players since the 1970s. His brilliant music is highly florid, energetic, and dynamic. He and whistle player Mary Bergin were my two biggest inspirations in my early years as a player.

Matt Molloy was born in 1947 in Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon. His family is deeply rooted in the North Roscommon–South Sligo region, which is renowned for its flute and fiddle playing legacy. Molloy’s father, uncle, and grandfather were all flute players and opportunities to learn from them, as well as neighbors and nearby musicians, such as the whistle player Jim Donoghue, abounded in his early years. His solo recordings and his work with the Bothy Band, Planxty, and the Chieftains, among other collaborations, have had a huge influence on Irish traditional musicians, much as Michael Coleman’s recordings did decades earlier.

Molloy plays this jig on an E-flat flute. In a 1997 interview he talked about his use of that instrument:<sup>xvi</sup>

It became quite the fashion ... for people to play in E-flat, but I think I was one of the first people to do that. I was playing around with Tommy Peoples, the fiddle player. He looked to crank up, he looked to play sharp. But it was quite by accident. A friend of mine introduced me to a friend of his who had had an accident with his hand. He used to play flute in a brass and reed band; they played in E flat. I didn’t know anything about that, but he wanted to sell me the flute, which he did. There was great tone off it, great bang off it. So I was thrilled with this thing. But I had nowhere to go with it. All the sessions were in D. But Tommy heard me play this. He used to love to crank the strings up into E-flat and play, so that’s how we got the whole thing started. And I made the first solo album with that flute.

In this tune, Molloy uses many condensed and highly condensed ornaments, including some that are rarely heard, such as the double-condensed long rolls in m. 9, 11, 22, and 30, the condensed short rolls in m. 1, 7, 15, 18, 23, 26, and 31, and the condensed short cranns in m. 2, 4, and 10. Also he creates sequences or strings of ornaments such as the long roll and condensed short roll combination in m. 7, 15, 23, and 31.

The mid-note “cut” on D in m. 12 is an unusual one. He is fingering D with T1 off of its hole and probably creates the cut, as one would in a crann, by quickly lifting and replacing B2 or B3. This produces a quick C below the parent note of D, not a note above the parent note as is usual with cuts.

Molloy makes beautiful use of rising slides leading into rolls in m. 19, 20, 23, 25, and 27. He also uses the more unusual falling slide in m. 21 and 29.

Though his approach to ornamentation here is very dense and dramatic, it is also judicious, perfectly complimenting his long, smooth phrasing and his intense forward motion. He seems to use no tonguing in this tune, using throating and gentle breath pulses instead, as most traditional flute players do. His occasional use of staccato notes, on the middle note in groups of three eighth notes, adds spark to the powerful glide of the music. Unlike most traditional flute players, Molloy makes bold use of dynamics in shaping his phrases, heightening the drama of the music and forging a very personal interpretation.

His variations in this tune are subtle but powerful. He does not stretch beyond the melody itself but remains within it, using ornamentation, phrasing, dynamics, and pacing to develop and heighten its intrinsic energy.