

3. **William Cummins** (flute)—Hornpipe: *Dwyer's Hornpipe*. This is from his 1930 Dublin recording on the Parlophone label, reissued on *Fluters of Old Erin*, Viva Voce 002. Mode: G Ionian (major).

William (Billy) Cummins (1894-1966) lived his entire life in Roscrea, Co. Tipperary. He worked in the local bacon factory while leading a very active musical life. Cummins led a popular dance band, one of the first to broadcast over *Radio Éireann*, in which he played flute for traditional music and saxophone for the popular music of the time. In the 1940s he injured two fingers in a factory accident. A local craftsman, Joe Dooley, made a “step up,” as he called it, for the flute (shown in the photo) and Cummins was able to continue playing. In the early 1960s, he joined Davy Collins’ Mountain Road Ceili Band, and, as a founding member of the Roscrea Comhaltas Branch, became a beloved teacher of traditional music for the children and youth of his community.

This one Parlophone side was his only commercial recording, and it may have been the first commercial recording of a solo flute player made in Ireland.<sup>VI</sup>

Though he is a little-known player, I am glad to be able to include the playing of William Cummins in this collection because it gives a rare glimpse into an older virtuoso style of playing which is very rarely heard today. Cummins’ playing helps us realize how very diverse traditional Irish flute styles have actually been.

He plays this rollicking four-part hornpipe at a very fast clip indeed. One can only imagine that this was one of Billy Cummins’ favorite show pieces. On the recording, he plays the tune twice through in its full form (AABBCCDD) and then plays the first two parts again (AABB) to close. Here I am presenting only the first time through his performance of the tune, in part to save space but also because, in his second and third rounds, he plays the tune almost identically to the first. His rendition of this tune has very little in the way of variation, so it would be of little use to show more than this.

For ornamentation, he makes no use of rolls, using only cuts and a remarkable, very rapid multiple-throating technique that calls to mind bow trebles on the fiddle or the plectrum work of a fine tenor-banjo player. Some modern players, such as Catherine McEvoy, have taken notice of this remarkable technique and have incorporated it into their own styles. No doubt Cummins’ early experience playing in a local flute band, with its staccato style of fluting and fifing, made a deep impression on him. It sounds to me like he used no tonguing at all in this tune. And apart from his amazing rapid, staccato, throated triplets, he plays with a completely legato approach throughout, only articulating the first note after taking a breath. I have placed breath marks over every rest but, in fact, due to the low fidelity of the original recording, it is impossible to tell whether or not he actually took a breath in all of these places. Notice that many of his cuts are mid-note cuts.

Like many other players of his time, he liked to kick lower register notes up into the high register. In this tune, he does this only with his throated triplets and within the four-note groups formed by such triplets and the notes that follow them. In these cases, the four-note group begins in the low register but ends up high. The register change often takes place over the space of the four notes so that, on many occasions, the second and/or third notes are actually in both octaves at once. When this occurs, I have notated the first three notes low and the fourth note high, such as in m. 6, 8, etc. This same kind of register shifting effect can be seen in the preceding transcription, Tom Morrison’s recording of the schottische *Sweet Flowers of Milltown*, though Morrison, being a bold improviser, used it in a much more adventuresome way.



*William (Billy) Cummins. The photo was probably taken in the 1940s outside the back of his home, perhaps by his son, Billy Cummins, Jr.*