

Most traditional Irish musicians prefer the subtle intonation personality that the simple-system instruments share. It takes time and experience to learn how to play the simple-system flute and tin whistle “in tune,” but the kind of “in tuneness” that most Irish musicians strive for, consciously or not, is not the same as the equal-tempered ideal that Boehm worked so hard to achieve in his new flute.

THE F-NATURAL AND C-NATURAL KEYS CAN HELP INTONATION

As mentioned above, F-sharp and C-sharp tend to be a bit flat on many simple-system flutes. Depressing the F-natural key while playing F-sharp will raise its pitch a bit. This can be very useful when tempo and fingering sequence allow for it. Depressing the C-natural key while playing C-sharp will raise that note’s pitch somewhat as well.

THE CHALLENGE OF EVALUATING THE INTONATION OF A FLUTE

If you are a beginner it will be hard for you to judge the intonation of a flute, and hard to know how well it fits your own emerging aesthetic. Try out flutes by different makers and ask more experienced players to try them for you and give you their feedback. Unfortunately, there are lots of poorly made flutes out there, waiting to fall into the hands of the unaware.

If you are lucky you may find a good antique flute that you can afford. Hopefully it will be in good enough repair for you to judge its qualities. S. C. Hamilton offers excellent, comprehensive guidelines on how to evaluate and buy an antique flute in his book *The Irish Flute Players Handbook*.^{xi}

Antique flutes do not improve with age as old violins do. You really should give equal consideration to new flutes. Some of the new builders that are making flutes specifically for Irish music are optimizing their instruments for two-octave playing, which simplifies some of the design challenges.

ULTIMATELY, GOOD INTONATION IS UP TO YOU

This whole discussion boils down to the fact that you yourself must make your flute play in tune, to your own standards, by controlling it with your embouchure. Such embouchure adjustments are made by exceedingly subtle and quick changes in your throat, mouth, lips, and jaw. If you are listening well and care about intonation, you will eventually learn to make these adjustments unconsciously, especially as you get to know your own flute and its intonation profile intimately. As always, listening is the key to success.

TONE COLORS

Along with subtle changes in embouchure, you can experiment with the shaping of the mouth, tongue and throat. By forming different vowel sounds (but of course not voicing those sounds while playing) you can achieve a variety of tone colors. Though many Irish flute players do not use a wide palette of tone color and dynamics, others do, and many more could if they let their imaginations go a bit farther and gained some more understanding of these techniques. I find that forming the mouth as you would when saying “ooo” helps to produce a rich, full, open tone. Forming the mouth as if saying “eee” produces something quite different, a harder, edgier, more penetrating tone. Of course, when playing and forming the “eee” shape inside the mouth, your lips remained fairly closed to form the embouchure. If you were to voice the sound when shaping your mouth and lips this way, i.e. saying “eee” with the lips shaped as if you were saying “ooo,” you would hear a sound something similar to the German “ü” or “ö.”

SUBTLE BREATH PULSE OR WEIGHT

The flow of air that you blow is much like the horse hair of the fiddler’s bow as it travels across the string. Just as a fiddler can change the pressure and speed of her bowstrokes to emphasize certain notes and to impart rhythmic stress,