

# introduction

## WHAT IS THIS BOOK?

First and foremost, this is a book on how to play traditional Irish music on the Irish flute and the tin whistle, and on how to adapt that knowledge to the modern, or Boehm-system flute. A great deal of the information I present applies to all three of these instruments. As far as I know, this is the first book to address all three as a group, and the first to closely examine the similarities and differences in their techniques, capabilities, limitations, and their places in traditional Irish music. I also explore the history and development of these instruments in the Irish tradition, provide an orientation to traditional instrumental Irish music, and examine closely the personal styles of 22 masterful flute and whistle players who recorded between 1925 and 2001. This book does not cover the rudiments of music notation or ear training. There are many other good books that do.

This is the most comprehensive book yet written on Irish flute or tin whistle playing. Much of its information has not been explored in print before. It may be used as a thorough and systematic reference book. However, the material of later chapters is, to a great extent, built upon the foundation laid in earlier ones, so it is wise to progress through the book sequentially.

Section 1 features an orientation to traditional Irish music. Section 2 delves into the history and development of flutes and whistles in Ireland and the techniques of holding and sounding the instruments.

In Section 3, the largest section of the book, I share my thoughts on ornamentation. I have invented some new ways to notate ornamentation which I hope are much more simple and clear than the approaches I have seen in other publications. As of this writing, there is no consensus on how to notate or explain Irish flute and whistle ornamentation. I believe that no book before this one has examined the full range of sophistication that exists in the ornamentation of this music. My methods have made it possible for me to probe much deeper. In doing so, I have encountered and given names to a number of ornamentation techniques which, while being widely used by traditional musicians, to the best of my knowledge have not been clearly described or notated before.

My notation techniques can be applied, with some adaptation, to other Irish instrumental traditions, such as those of the uilleann pipes, fiddle, accordion, and concertina. Using my approach, very accurate and detailed transcriptions of Irish traditional tunes and performances are now possible. I hope that others will come to understand and use these new tools, and that this will help to create a deeper appreciation for this highly developed music.

Section 4 addresses phrasing, articulation, and breathing. In Section 5, I sum things up and delve into the areas of practicing and the playing of slow airs. Section 6 consists of 49 studies for practicing the physical skills needed in ornamentation.

The book contains numerous musical examples and exercises. Many of them are excerpts from traditional Irish tunes. Complete settings of these tunes are provided in Section 7.

In Section 8, I have transcribed, in great detail, 27 tunes as performed and recorded by 22 masters of the Irish flute and tin whistle. These performances are available on the artists' published recordings and I encourage you to seek them out. I hope to coordinate the issuing of a CD compilation of these performances in the future. You can check on the progress of this endeavor through Mel Bay Publications or my website, <[www.greylarsen.com](http://www.greylarsen.com)>.

## THE COMPANION CDS

The two companion CDs contain my renditions of the studies in Section 6, the tune settings in Section 7, and many of the figures and exercises that appear throughout the book. A CD symbol (note the number 1 or 2 in the center of the symbol) paired with a track number shows where to find the recording.