

With regard to triplets we need to take a special look again at hornpipes, mazurkas, schottisches, and other tunes that are commonly played with an overt, intentional unevenness of rhythm.

In Chapter 14, I explained my reasons for advocating the even-note style of notation for these unevenly played tunes. With that kind of notation I feel that the use of triplet notation is appropriate. When such tunes are played with a true triple subdivision, that is, one in which the on-beat notes are played twice as long as the off-beat notes, triplet notation accurately conveys what is happening.

Experienced players more often feel the lilt of such tunes to be somewhere in between the two extremes of a one to one ratio (even notes, as notated in Figure 14-1 on p. 210) and a two to one ratio (triple subdivision, as notated in Figure 14-2 on p. 211). In those cases the notated triplets are played according to the underlying “feel” of the subdivision, not as true triplets, but the triplet notation is still appropriate.

TIGHT TRIPLETS

There is a lovely ornamental technique that some players call a **tight triplet**. As you might guess, its rhythm is not that of a true triplet. Instead it uses the rhythm shown in the upper staff of Figure 18-16.

The tight triplet makes use of a phenomenon called *crossing notes* or *crossing noises*. Though I do not believe it is an ornament or technique used in uilleann piping, its “bubbly” or “poppy” sound is suggestive of the tight or staccato fingering technique that is often used in uilleann piping, and also of some of the ornamental techniques of Scottish highland piping.

Pat Mitchell uses the term *tight triplets* in his book *The Dance Music of Willie Clancy*^{viii} to describe a quick staccato three-note pattern. In playing this, pipers use *tight* fingerings in which only one or two holes are open for each note of the triplet. In between these notes, no sound is produced because the finger holes are all momentarily closed, as is the end of the chanter.

Crossing notes often occur accidentally as a result of sloppy fingering. For example, let’s say you are playing a low-octave B and then move up a step to a C-natural. To play the B, only T1 covers its hole. To move to C, you simultaneously lift T1 and put down T2 and T3. If, however, you are late in lifting T1 you will get a momentary crossing note. A brief G will be heard in the moment that all three fingers, T1, T2, and T3, are covering their holes; while you are “crossing” from one note to the other.

Tight triplets make intentional use of these crossing notes. In all tight triplets, slur all the notes together and make the crossing notes as brief as possible so that they sound like “pops” or “bubbles.” The slurring together of these notes makes this sound quite different from the tight triplet of uilleann piping with its separated, or staccato notes.

The tight triplet seems to be most commonly applied to the sequence low B–C-natural–D, as shown in Figure 18-17 (below).

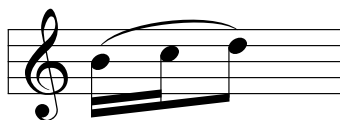


Figure 18-17. The most common notes for a tight triplet.