

It seems to me that the traditional Irish musician has a much greater variety of articulation available to her than the modern classical wind player has. In classical wind playing, notes are *either* articulated *or* slurred. In Irish traditional music, notes can be articulated *and* slurred, because of its fingered articulations, the cut and strike. Classical wind players do not have a common practice of fingered articulations.

THE SUBTLE USE OF TONGUING

Much of the tonguing and throating used in Irish flute and tin whistle playing goes unnoticed because it does not take the music away from its fundamentally legato nature. This assertion will become more clear shortly, when we look at some musical examples.

SINGLE TONGUING DEFINED

The tonguing techniques we have looked at so far fall into the category of **single tonguing**. In single tonguing, one repeatedly uses only one tongue action, represented by a single consonant sound such as “t” or “d”. Though we can be quite agile with single tonguing, it is ultimately limited, especially at fast tempos.

Though this is an imperfect analogy, it is instructive to compare the movement of the tongue with the movement of a plectrum by players of the tenor banjo, guitar, or other flatpicked string instruments. If a tenor banjo player could only use the downward stroke of her pick, and never the upstroke, she would soon tire from the repetitive and excessive movement that is required. Using both downstrokes and upstrokes is physically much more efficient and relaxing and it allows for more agility and fluidity, especially in rapid passages.

We have a similar situation with repetitive single tonguing. Though it may not be as physically tiring as using only downstrokes on the plectrum banjo, there is a uniformity of sound that comes from using only one tongue action over and over. Double or triple tonguing yields a variety of articulations that give the music a much more interesting sound.

MULTIPLE TONGUING DEFINED

Multiple tonguing is a pattern of tonguing that makes use of a sequence of differing tongue articulations. Let’s look first at double tonguing.

DOUBLE TONGUING

Double tonguing is a pattern of tonguing that makes use of two alternating tongue articulations.

To experience double tonguing, try whispering, “doo-goo, doo-goo, doo-goo . . .”. Then try “too-koo, too-koo, too-koo”. When you apply these patterns to playing the flute or whistle, the latter gives you hard articulations while the former is softer.

Notice that you form “d” and “t” with the tip of the tongue. You form “g” and “k” further back on the tongue. So the two double tonguing patterns given above make use of an alternation between the tip of the tongue and a place further back.

There are other ways to double tongue. By using a sound like “did-dle, did-dle . . .” you can double tongue using a back and forth motion of just the tip of your tongue. This pattern fits the plectrum banjo analogy a little better than the others do. I find that I prefer to use the “doo-goo” or “too-koo” patterns most of the time, but this is a personal choice. Experimentation will yield still more variations on these double tonguing patterns.