

SUBTLE BREATH PULSE OR WEIGHT

The flow of air that you blow is much like the 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, weight, or impulse, you can give such life to your music with changes in the qualities of your breath. Just as a fiddler can "lean into" the bow, you can "lean into" the breath. I elaborate upon this in Chapter 10, in the sections *Rhythmic Emphasis Within the Long Roll* and *It's Alive—It Has a Pulse*, which appear on pp. 173-174.

HEAVY BREATH PULSING

This is a technique that I have not incorporated into my own playing, but it is one that I admire nonetheless. You will hear it in the recordings of such flute players as Tom Morrison, John McKenna, Tom Byrne, Eddie Cahill, Conal Ó Gráda, Kevin Henry, Catherine McEvoy, and Lawrence Nugent.

You rarely hear whistle players using heavy breath pulsing because the technique makes it difficult to control the whistle's pitch and register. The flute, on the other hand, offers the player ways to manage the strong bursts of air that result. The heavy pulses seem to be produced by the glottis and diaphragm and seem to be closely tied to the preference for throating over tonguing among many flute players.

Heavy breath pulsing appears to come from a relatively old style of loud playing that emphasizes forceful and driving rhythm over smooth lyricism. It is a style that is great for dancing, and makes one think of the days before amplification when flute players had to work hard to be heard alongside fiddles, accordions, pipes, banjos, drums, and other louder instruments. S. C. Hamilton, in describing Conal Ó Gráda's flute sound, writes that it has ". . . an earthy, raucous tone reminiscent of the saxophone . . .",ⁱ an instrument that did find its way into some céilí bands. It's interesting to speculate whether this hard-driving, "huffy-puffy" flute style existed before such bands began to appear.

In its extreme, the breath pulses have a strong pronounced attack. Players such as Eddie Cahill and Kevin Henry, who use breath pulses almost continuously and rarely slur notes together, make little use of fingered articulations and ornaments.

TUNE COLLECTIONS WITH MY BREATHING SUGGESTIONS

My two tunebook and CD packages are collections of traditional Irish tunes which are tailored to the needs of flute and tin whistle players. One of the ways I address their needs is by showing the locations of good breathing options for each tune. There are very often more of them than you might suspect.

More tunes, in transcription and audio form, with breathing suggestions, are available at my website, <www.greylarsen.com>.



ⁱ S. C. (Hammy) Hamilton, in the liner notes to Conal Ó Gráda's recording *The Top of Croom*, Claddagh Records CCF27CD, 1990.