

13. **Cathal McConnell** (flute)—Reel: *Peter Flanagan's*. This is from his 1977 recording, *On Loch Erne's Shore*, Topic 12TS377. It is the third tune in a medley, the first being the slow air *The Wedding of Molly* and the second being the jig *The Three-Hand Jig*. Mode: A Dorian Pentatonic. Note that there is an F-sharp in the mode signature, even though there are no F-sharps in the melody. The Dorian Pentatonic mode on A does not include the 3rd or 6th degree, i.e. C or F-sharp. (For more on the pentatonic modes found in Irish music see “Pentatonic Modes” in Chapter 1, p. 26.)

McConnell (born 1944), from Ballinaleck in Co. Fermanagh in the north of Ireland, represents the fourth generation of flute players in his very musical family. He is also a great tin whistle player (see the next transcription, *The Long Slender Sally*) and an outstanding *sean nós* singer. His playing style is deeply rooted in the Fermanagh traditions of his family and the many great musicians who surrounded him in his youth. Among those musicians was his neighbor Peter Flanagan who played the whistle and fiddle and instructed McConnell on the former. McConnell learned this reel from Flanagan and names it for him, though it seems to be a version of the reel *Down the Broom*. While deeply rooted in Fermanagh music, McConnell is also a very broad-ranging musician, being a founding member of the pan-Celtic traditional band, The Boys of the Lough.^{xvii} He is a left-handed player.

McConnell's Fermanagh style is quite unique among the players presented in this book and he is one of the few well-known exponents of this beautiful dialect of music. As in much of the music of northern Ireland, the influence of Scotland is clear. The lilt in McConnell's playing is quite special, and immediately recognizable as his own. Very often throughout this performance, the eighth notes which fall on the primary and secondary pulses of the reel's rhythmic pattern (i.e. the first, third, fifth, and seventh), are played with a *shorter* duration than the off-pulse eighth notes (the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth). This is just the opposite of what is normally heard among Irish players from most regions of the country. You can even hear this short-long lilt in the internal rhythms of the long rolls in m. 17–19, the first time through the tune. These rolls begin on weak, off-pulse notes. The second, cut note is the strongest. This and the third, struck notes of these rolls, are played with the short-long lilt.

When you exaggerate this short-long pattern beyond the subtleties of lilt, you finally arrive at the characteristic Scottish rhythm of a sixteenth note followed by a dotted eighth note. You will hear this rhythm quite a few times in McConnell's playing of this tune (see m. 1, 5, 9, 13, 27, and the ending of nearly every A and B part). But you also hear him at times slip effortlessly into the reverse, the more common long-short, long-short lilt, in certain phrases. His lilt is in fact completely fluid, changing and shifting as if the tune were a ballad and McConnell were singing it in his mind, allowing the natural rhythms of lyrics to dictate the rhythms of his playing. I have no doubt that his expertise as a *sean nós* singer informs the phrasing of his flute playing.

Another aspect of his playing which seems to set him apart from the other players presented in this book, except perhaps his fellow Ulsterman Desi Wilkinson (see the transcription of Wilkinson's playing on pp. 411–412), is his special use of strikes. Few players make extensive use of the strike outside of its common function as one of the articulations contained in the various rolls. But McConnell does, using the strike as a primary articulation in its own right. You can see and hear how he uses the strike to articulate the second note of the sixteenth-note–dotted-eight-note combination that ends nearly every A and B part of the tune. But he uses it elsewhere too, sometimes playing a very soft and subtle strike which is quite different in character from the decisive, more percussive one we are more used to. Listen to the strikes the second time through the tune in m. 5, 13, 14, 25, and 27. These are very soft strikes indeed. When you carry this softening of the strike still further you come to a motion that becomes a finger vibrato, as you can hear him do in m. 15, the second time (indicated in the transcription by the letters *fi*). So, in McConnell's playing we find a variety and refinement in the use of strikes that is rarely heard elsewhere, and that seems to evoke a musical gift that the Scots must have brought to Fermanagh.

The single trill is also in the strike family, and McConnell uses it in the A part of the tune in m. 3, 4, 7, 11, 12, and 15.

You can hear both throat and tongue articulations in McConnell's playing and some instances of double tonguing in the first time through the tune, m. 7, 8, 16, and 24. His playing is very legato throughout, so the occasional use of tongued staccato notes is very effective.

This is a fairly steady and even style of playing, not densely ornate, which is somehow related to the music of such players such as Paddy Carty and entirely different from the punchy music of the likes of Tom Morrison.