

TONGUING

In speech, we use our tongue to produce a vast spectrum of consonant sounds and to color and shape our vowel sounds. The tongue is capable of amazingly fine nuance. In playing the flute and whistle we can use our tongues to produce a similarly wide array of articulations and tone colors with seemingly endless gradations of quality. We will explore this subject in depth in Chapter 20, *Tonguing, Multiple Tonguing, and Throating*.

A SINGLE, LINEAR VOICE

When we speak, we have only one voice. We cannot speak in “harmony” with ourselves, expressing several different ideas at the same time, the way a pianist can harmonize her own melodies. The same is true of flute and whistle playing. We play one note at a time. We have a single voice. This is also the intrinsic nature of traditional Irish music. A tune is complete in itself as a single, unaccompanied melody.

A COMMON VOCABULARY

Music and language share a common vocabulary. Think of how the following words have meaning in describing both speech and music: intonation, inflection, delivery, attack, rhythm, tone, nuance, phrasing, accent, cadence, expression, lilt; eloquent, articulate, melodious, singsong, muted, brash. The personality of a speaker, and a musician, are revealed as much through these aspects of speaking and playing as through verbal or musical content.

CROSS-FERTILIZATION AND INSPIRATION

Instrumentalists the world over draw inspiration from the expressiveness of singers, who use the most natural of all instruments, the human voice. In Irish instrumental music this emulation finds its highest form in the playing of slow airs (see Chapter 22, *On Playing Slow Airs*). When playing slow airs, instrumentalists ideally know the lyrics of the air intimately and are guided by them in their musical expression.

Singers also are inspired to imitate instruments. In Irish vocal music this finds its highest form in the art of *lilting*, the singing of instrumental tunes using the texture of nonsense syllables to evoke the articulations, ornamentation, and rhythms of instruments. Traditionally, singers lilt tunes for dancing when instrumentalists cannot be present.