

SECTION 8: GREAT PERFORMANCES TRANSCRIBED

TRANSCRIPTIONS OF COMMERCIAL RECORDINGS FROM IMPORTANT FLUTE AND TIN WHISTLE PLAYERS, 1925—2001.

In this section, I present my transcriptions of 27 flute and tin whistle performances of traditional Irish tunes which have been released on commercial recordings dating from 1925 to 2001. Twenty-two players are included here, representing a wide variety of playing styles. Using my notation innovations, these very detailed transcriptions give us a new way to look deeply into such performances. While transcribing, I have used digital technology to slow the recordings down so that I could more easily discern the details of the music.

The transcriptions are presented in chronological order according to the year of recording. I have departed from this scheme in order to group pairs of transcriptions together when they are by the same player, and in one case to present side by side two different players' versions of the same tune.

This collection is not meant to be an exhaustive survey, but instead a representative sampling of a wide variety of flute and whistle players and their music. There are so many fine players to choose from that, by necessity, many of them are not represented here. Some are not included because it was not possible to obtain the necessary permissions. It has been difficult to narrow the choice of players down to a number that is manageable for this book. I hope to issue more such collections in the future. (You may refer to my website, <www.greylarsen.com>, for information on such future projects.)

Introducing each transcription, I give some brief biographical information and make some comments and observations on the player's style as shown in that particular performance.

Remember that there are many important aspects of performance that are not possible to notate, such as the various elements that make up *swing* or *lilt* (for more on this see Chapter 1). There are other aspects of playing that I have chosen not to notate, such as multiple tonguing and tonguing vs. throating (some players use one, some use both). In a few cases, I will indicate the use of finger vibrato and breath vibrato. Since transcriptions can never show everything, listening to the recordings of these performances while referring to the transcriptions will give you the fullest possible understanding. It is my hope that in the future I can facilitate the issuing of a CD compilation of the recordings transcribed here. As of this writing, however, it is proving very difficult to obtain the necessary permissions. (Check my website for updates.) For now, I strongly encourage you to seek out each artist's recording of these performances. (You will find the needed information in the Discography.)

It is important to realize that I use slurs in a very specific way in these transcriptions. A slurred group of notes is played using an uninterrupted, continuous stream of air. Only the first note of a slurred group is articulated by the use of tonguing or throating. All notes that are *not* under a slur *are* articulated with tonguing or throating.

Some flute players, such as Josie McDermott, use a relatively gentle breath pulsing technique to play repeated notes on one pitch which are nevertheless connected in one continuous breath. In such cases, these repeated notes appear under a slur to show that the notes are separate but that the airstream is not interrupted. (For an example of this, see the transcription of Josie McDermott's rendition of *The Pigeon on the Gate* on pp. 390-391.) One could also describe this technique as a type of very rhythmic, distinct, breath vibrato. When listening to recordings, it is sometimes difficult or impossible to tell whether a player is using this kind of breath pulsing or a subtle kind of throating.

In addition to the ornamentation symbols explained in earlier chapters, I use the commonly used sign for staccato, or very short notes (a dot above a notehead), and the breath sign (a comma) above rests to show where the player takes a breath.

A number of the players in this section make occasional use of a C note that in pitch is in between the equal-tempered C and C-sharp. This is often called a "neutral C," or a "piping C" as Breandán Breathnach refers to it in his book, *Folk Music & Dances of Ireland*.¹ The pitch may be altered with embouchure and/or by fingering, for example

by covering only the T2 hole. In these transcriptions the use of the “piping C” is indicated with an asterisk. For more on this see “Outside the Modal Boundaries” on p. 27 of Chapter 1.

In these transcriptions, the various repetitions of the tune are presented as separate staves in a score format. The first time through the tune is shown on the top staff, the second time through on the staff below that, etc. This allows for easy comparisons of any given passage for each time the tune is played.

I hope these transcriptions will provide valuable insight into the music of many of the important players whose performances have been preserved since the dawn of the recording age. While it can be very instructive to play through these renditions, I do not encourage you to do so with the goal of “taking on” the style of any of these players. First of all, this is not really possible, and second of all, it is best to develop your own style that reflects who you are.

For detailed information on the recordings transcribed here, see the Discography.

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1. **John McKenna** (flute)—Reel: *The Corry Boys*. This is transcribed from John McKenna's 78-rpm release, which was issued in America in 1925 on the O'Byrne DeWitt Label, and reissued by the John McKenna Traditional Society on their compilation cassette *John McKenna, His Original Recordings*. This tune is the second in a medley of two reels, the first one being *The Sailor on the Rock*. Mode: G Ionian (major).

John McKenna was one of the most influential flute players of the 20th century. He was born in 1880 near the village of Tarmon in Co. Leitrim and died in 1947 in New York.ⁱⁱ After working for some years in the Arigna coal mines, in 1911 he emigrated to New York City and worked at first as a fireman. His first records, recorded in 1921, list him in fact as "Fire Patrolman McKenna." Through the thirty 78-rpm recordings that he made between 1921 and 1936, McKenna had a great deal to do with establishing the flute as a prominent instrument in Irish music. These recordings also brought a number of Leitrim tunes into the common repertoire. His duet recordings with fiddler James Morrison are especially cherished by traditional musicians.

This Leitrim single reel is fascinating in itself because of its irregular phrase length in the A part, which I have notated using measures in 3/2 time. Such "crooked" tunes are rarely heard in Irish music today, though I think this way of playing must have been much more common in older times. Another crooked tune can be seen in the transcription of my whistle performance of Michael J. Kennedy's setting of the hornpipe, "The Cuckoo's Nest" (see transcription #27 later in this section). Perhaps the crooked phrasing of some of these older Irish tunes has been preserved and integrated into local musical traditions in places such as Québec and America.

In this tune, McKenna seems to use no tonguing and very little in the way of throating articulation. Some exceptions can be found, but only on repeated notes, as seen in m. 1, fourth time; m. 5, first, second, third, and fifth times; and m. 9, fourth time. However, he does make frequent use of breath pulsing to add to the rhythmic drive to the music.

McKenna's ornamentation is fairly spare. In other recordings he can be heard using a wider variety of ornaments, such as condensed rolls. As mentioned in Chapter 16, his recording of *The Five Mile Chase* is the earliest recording I have found of cranning on the flute or whistle.

Even though he plays this tune six times through, you can see that he introduces very little in the way of variation. As Jackie Small writes in the liner notes to *John McKenna, His Original Recordings*,ⁱⁱⁱ McKenna's music was ". . . primarily for dancing, hearty music with a fine 'lift' imparted by his rhythmic, breathy style." But the variations he does employ are very interesting. Perhaps the most adventurous one comes in the very first measure of the first time through the tune. Another similar melodic variation occurs in m. 6 of the first time through. The alternative to the long G roll that he uses in m. 1, fourth time, and m. 5, first, second, and third times, is reminiscent of the bow treble of the fiddle, or the staccato "triplet" of the pipes, though McKenna does not play them staccato. The use of the single trill in m. 5, fifth time, is a slight variation on this. This particular kind of ornamentation is rarely heard in the music of more modern flute and whistle players.



John McKenna and John Gaffney

The Corry Boys

traditional Irish reel

as played by John McKenna, Irish flute,
on his 1925 recording on the O'Byrne DeWitt Label,
reissued by the John McKenna Traditional Society
on *John McKenna, His Original Recordings*.

$\text{♩} = \text{approx. } 120$

1st Time
2nd Time
3rd Time
4th Time
5th Time
6th Time

1 2 3 4

Detailed description: This system of the musical score contains six staves, labeled '1st Time' through '6th Time'. The music is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/2 time signature. The piece is divided into four measures, numbered 1 through 4. Measure 1 contains a half note G4, a quarter note A4, and a dotted quarter note B4. Measure 2 contains a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a dotted quarter note G4. Measure 3 contains a half note G4, a quarter note A4, and a dotted quarter note B4. Measure 4 contains a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a dotted quarter note G4. The notation includes various ornaments and phrasing slurs.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

5 6 7 8

Detailed description: This system of the musical score contains six staves, labeled '1.' through '6.'. The music continues from the first system, divided into four measures numbered 5 through 8. Measure 5 contains a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a dotted quarter note C5. Measure 6 contains a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a dotted quarter note F#4. Measure 7 contains a half note G4, a quarter note A4, and a dotted quarter note B4. Measure 8 contains a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a dotted quarter note G4. The notation includes various ornaments and phrasing slurs.

1. 9 10 11 12

Musical score for measures 9-12, six staves. The music is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. Measures 9-10 feature a melodic line with slurs and accents. Measure 11 has a 3/4 time signature change. Measure 12 continues the melodic line with slurs and accents.

1. 13 14 15 16 to 2nd time

2. to 3rd time

3. to 4th time

4. to 5th time

5. to 6th time

Musical score for measures 13-16, six staves. The music is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. Measures 13-15 feature a melodic line with slurs and accents. Measure 16 has a 3/4 time signature change and includes repeat markings for the 2nd through 6th times.

2. **Tom Morrison** (flute)—Schottische: *Sweet Flowers of Milltown*. This is a transcription from Tom Morrison's 1927 New York recording for the Columbia label, reissued on *Fluters of Old Erin*, Viva Voce 002. *Sweet Flowers of Milltown* is the first in a medley of two schottisches, the second one being *The Boys from Knock*. On this recording, Morrison was accompanied by tambourine and bodhrán player John Reynolds from Drumsna, Co. Leitrim. Mode: G Ionian (major).

According to Harry Bradshaw,

Tom Morrison (1889-1958) was ... born in Whitepark, near Glenamaddy, Co. Galway. As a young man, Tom worked in the north of England and began playing music on the whistle, later taking up the flute and accordion. In 1909 Tom left for New York and settled on Carlton Avenue in Brooklyn, an area renowned for its immigrant musicians. His recording career began in 1924 when he teamed up with accordion player P. J. Conlon to record for the Gennett Company. On his records, Morrison's flute playing has echoes of old fife style about it with great drive and a compelling rhythm. Tom Morrison (no relation to James Morrison) recorded 27 sides by 1929 and became a respected figure on the New York music scene, and an uilleann piper later in life.^{iv}

Since older styles of playing such as Morrison's are rarely heard these days, and since they are so important to the evolution of this music, I will go into some depth in analyzing and describing his playing of this tune.

Here, Tom Morrison shows himself to be a brilliant improviser. In playful and highly imaginative fashion he varies his articulations, phrasing, ornamentation, and the octave register of the music. But perhaps the most remarkable of his variations comes from his overt manipulation of the lilt or swing of the music. His predominant lilt is one typical of schottische playing, a highly uneven subdivision of the pulse in which the on-pulse or odd-numbered eighth notes (i.e. the first, third, fifth, and so on) get greater weight and duration than the off-pulse or even-numbered eighth notes. (For more on this subject see Chapter 1, the section called "Lilt, or Swing" on pp. 40-42 and the sections that follow it, as well as Chapter 14.) This heavy lilt allows for true triplets, as are commonly heard in hornpipes. (See "The Fallacy of the 'Triplet'" on pp. 254-255 in Chapter 18.)

In numerous phrases, which are enclosed in the following transcription by dotted line brackets, Morrison dramatically evens out the notes, playing them with *equal* duration and weight, that is with little or no lilt at all. When he does so, he also plays most, and sometimes all, of the notes staccato, with uniform, choppy single-tongue or throat articulations. Sometimes he easily, quickly, and subtly moves in and out of this pointed, even style, as in the second time through the tune, m. 1-2. At other times he uses this change to make a bold statement, as in the second time through, m. 4-6. One needs to listen to this recording to truly appreciate Morrison's masterful use of this technique. When you do, you will hear that the tambourine player tends to play quite evenly throughout, so when Morrison adopts the even style of playing, he suddenly comes into sync with the tambourine on every note, not just the on-pulse notes.

As for his articulations, from careful listening to the recording at reduced speed, I am nearly certain that he uses single and multiple tonguing as well as throating. Sometimes it is impossible to tell whether he is throating or tonguing, but at other times it does seem clear. The beginning pickup measure, which established the beat, tempo, and lilt for his accompanist (and would do the same for dancers when they were present), consists of seven eighth notes that I am fairly sure are played with a rhythmically definite and clear, yet smoothly connected double tonguing pattern. In m. 4 of the second time through, the first four notes are double tongued whereas the notes of m. 5 and 6 are played with choppy, uniform, single tonguing. In many other places he is clearly using throat articulation, such as on the repeated Gs at the ends of every A part. (Note that these Gs are slurred and not tied.)

Morrison's use of two opposite patterns of alternating between staccato and legato eighth notes further illuminates the fascinating subtlety of his articulation variations. In the first time through, in m. 1 and m. 19-20, he alternates between playing legato on-pulse eighth notes and staccato off-pulse eighth notes. Then he uses just the opposite pattern, i.e. staccato on the pulse and legato off the pulse, in the third time through, m. 3, 11, and 27-28.

Another important aspect of Morrison's bold style of improvisation is his free-form approach to frequent changes of octave register. He varies the speed and force of his airstream often, taking notes that would ordinarily be played in the low register up high. (It is interesting to note that, in this tune at least, he never does the opposite, i.e. bringing high notes down into the low register.) To see an example, look at m. 2. In the second time through, he plays in a normal fashion, whereas in the first time through he takes five notes up into the high octave. As you look and listen, you find many more instances of this register jumping, a natural result of this loud and punchy style of dance playing from the days before amplification.

Sometimes the change in the airstream is gradual enough, especially in a fast tune like this, that certain notes actually sound in both registers at once, something that is possible on the flute, whistle, fife, and piccolo but not, I believe, on any other of the instruments of traditional Irish music. For example, in the first time through, m. 32, there are three G eighth notes in succession. When you listen to the recording, you will hear that the first G is firmly planted in the low register and the third in the high register. But the second, though it is notated here in the low register, is actually in both registers at once. In this recording, there are numerous other notes like this that are not totally in one register or the other.

Tom Morrison, like most of the players of this period, uses ornamentation fairly sparingly. While many of his cuts fall right on the beat, many others do not, coming instead somewhat after the attack of the note. This delaying of cuts appears to be a common trait of this period. There are mid-note cuts too, such as the cut on B in m. 31, first time through. Sometimes a cut comes so late and is so elongated that it sounds like a note unto itself, as is the case in the second time through, m. 10. Here I notate the first three notes of the measure as a sixteenth-note triplet, three notes, instead of two Gs with the second one cut. The boundaries blur in such cases. You can make up your own mind about this and other cuts that I have notated here. The music is what it is and ultimately it doesn't matter how we analyze it and identify its tiny parts.

Rolls appear only in three places: first time through, m. 17 and 25 and third time through, m. 29. It is interesting that in m. 21, all three times through, Morrison does not use a roll to ornament the three eighth-note beats of A in the second half of the measure. Instead he plays three staccato A notes that sound like they are single tongued. This is similar to older styles of ornamentation among players of other instruments such as the melodeon and concertina.

In m. 10, second time through, Morrison plays a crann on middle D. He plays this with the T1 hole uncovered so that the cuts sound lower than the parent note of D. It is quite hard to hear this crann unless you slow down the recording. So far, this is the second earliest recorded example I have come across of cranning on the flute, the first being in John McKenna's 1925 recording of the reel *The Five Mile Chase*.^v

Morrison also makes numerous lovely small melodic variations, such as those found in m. 19, the second time through, in which he changes an E to a B, and the falling chain of cuts found the second time through in m. 28. The high C-sharp he plays the third time through in m. 11 was probably not intentional. Notice also the rhythm reminiscent of Scottish music (a sixteenth note followed by a dotted eighth note) in the first time through, m. 13 and 29.



Tom Morrison

Sweet Flowers of Milltown

$\text{♩} = \text{approx. } 100$

traditional Irish schottische
as played by Tom Morrison, Irish flute,
on his 1927 recording on the Columbia label,
reissued on *Fluters of Old Erin*, Viva Voce 002

1st A-Part

1st Time

2nd Time

3rd Time

1.

2.

3.

2nd A-Part

1.

2.

3.

13.

14.

15.

16.

1st B-Part

1. 17 18 19 20

1. 21 22 23 24

2nd B-Part

1. 25 26 27 28

1. 29 30 31 32

to 2nd time

to 3rd time