Chapter Two: Modes and Other Notation Matters

In addition to ornamentation symbols, there are other notation practices used in the tune transcriptions which may be unfamiliar to some readers.

The Breath Mark

The breath mark – 𝄾 – is a symbol widely used in classical music to indicate when a wind player may take a breath. In that tradition, it is placed slightly above the top line of the staff and in between two notes, or above a rest. This conveys to the wind player that she may take a breath between the two notes, taking a bit of time away from the end of the first of those notes to do so, or simply that the rest provides a good place to breathe.

For the non-wind player, the breath mark indicates a place to create a brief space in the music.

Repeat Signs

I use some common-practice repetition indications in the tune transcriptions. In case you are unfamiliar with them:

- "D.C." stands for *da capo*, an Italian phrase meaning "from the beginning," or literally "from the head." This tells you to repeat from the beginning of the tune.
- "D.S." stands for *dal segno*, an Italian phrase meaning "from the sign." This tells you to repeat not from the beginning, but from a different location marked by a *segno* (i.e., "sign"). The *segno* looks like this: 𝄋.
- A thin-thick double barline preceded by two dots (:‖) is a left-facing repeat sign. It tells you to go back to an earlier right-facing repeat sign (‖:), or, if there is none, back to the beginning of the tune.

Notes that Fall Below the Range of the Tin Whistle

Many of the tunes in Sections Two and Three include notes that fall below the whistle's low D. When whistle players come across such notes, we usually transpose them up an octave.

In this book I suggest ways to change the tune when encountering notes that are too low for the whistle. The original too-low note (or notes) are still represented though, shown as open diamond-shaped noteheads without stems. Here is an example:

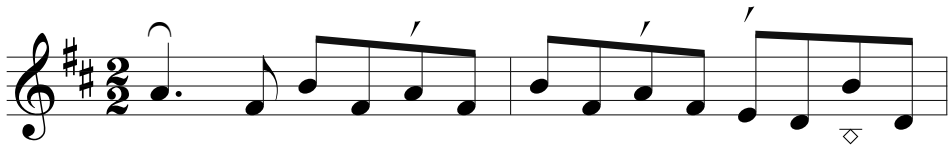

Figure 32. The first two measures of tune 107, Jim Donoghue's. *The tune has a low B in the second measure, shown here as an open diamond notehead, which is too low for the D whistle. The normal notation shows that the player can play this note an octave higher.* ***CD #2, track 68.*** *You will find the complete tune on p. 89.*

Raising by an octave only the notes that must be raised can result in sudden leaps, up or down, by large intervals such as minor sevenths and major sixths. In some tunes this can be striking, intriguing and lovely, while in others it may feel jarring or arbitrary.

An alternative is to raise not only the notes that must be raised, but also other notes that come before and/or after. This incorporates the below-range note (or notes) into an entire phrase which is then elevated into a higher register. Such new phrases can lend cohesion and bring a fresh and surprising character to a tune.

When I demonstrate the approach I have just described, you'll see open diamond noteheads for notes that fall both below and *within* the range of the whistle. An example appears on the next page.

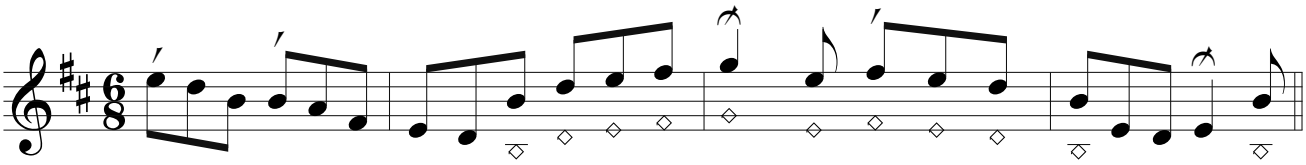

Figure 33. The last four measures of the B-part of tune 101, Pull the Knife and Stick It Again.
Ten consecutive notes are transposed up an octave, but only the first and last of them (Bs) are too low for the whistle.
CD #2, track 69. *You will find the complete tune on p. 86.*

There are several examples of this approach to register shifting in tune 104, *The Silver Spire*. (See p. 88 and CD #2, track 10.)

Since it is so easy to change the register of notes on the whistle (most fingerings are the same in both octaves), one can transpose notes with spontaneity. Or you can take a more studied approach, as I did with *The Silver Spire*.

You can, of course, also transpose high notes down into the low register at will.

I find that some tunes with register-shifted notes sound best when they are played along with an instrument that can play the notes in their original register. Others stand well even when a whistle is the only melody instrument.

The High D Whistle Sounds an Octave Higher than Written

The Irish flute in D, the chanter of the uilleann pipes in D and the low D whistle all have air columns that are twice as long as that of the high D whistle. Consequently, a high D whistle plays an octave higher than those instruments.

When you play tunes from this book (or from other sources) on a high D whistle, you produce music that is one octave higher than what is shown on the page, and one octave higher than what almost all other instruments play.

Mode Signatures Instead of Key Signatures

Throughout this book I use "mode signatures" instead of key signatures. The two look the same, but have somewhat different meanings. I hope the following information on modes will help make the distinction clear.

The Modal Nature of Irish Music

In today's common practice of western classical and popular music, almost all tonal music is considered to be in either a major or minor *key*, that is, based upon the central use of certain major or minor scales. The major and natural minor scales have early historical roots and are only two of seven modes that came to form the tonal basis for Gregorian chant and the rest of western medieval and renaissance music.

The word "mode" has a number of meanings, but in this case I use it to refer to "the selection of tones, arranged in a scale, which form the basic tonal substance of a composition."[1] There are many more than seven modes in world musical traditions, but for the moment we need only be concerned with the seven so-called "church modes" of western European music.

The vast majority of traditional Irish tunes make use of only four of these modes: the **Ionian** (which is commonly called the major scale), the **Dorian**, the **Mixolydian**, and the **Aeolian** (which is commonly called the natural minor scale).

Each of the seven modes contains a unique sequence of five whole steps (major seconds) and two half steps (minor seconds) that occur as you ascend through its scale.

In the following figures, the half steps are indicated by slurs.

One simple way to listen to and get to know these modes is to play ascending scales on a D whistle using only the notes of its natural scale: D, E, F♯, G, A, B and C♯. Starting on low D and playing in this manner, you hear

[1] Willi Apel, p. 452.

the notes and intervals of the D Ionian mode. Starting on E, you hear the E Dorian mode, and so on, as shown in Figure 34, below. Note well the locations of the half steps in each mode.

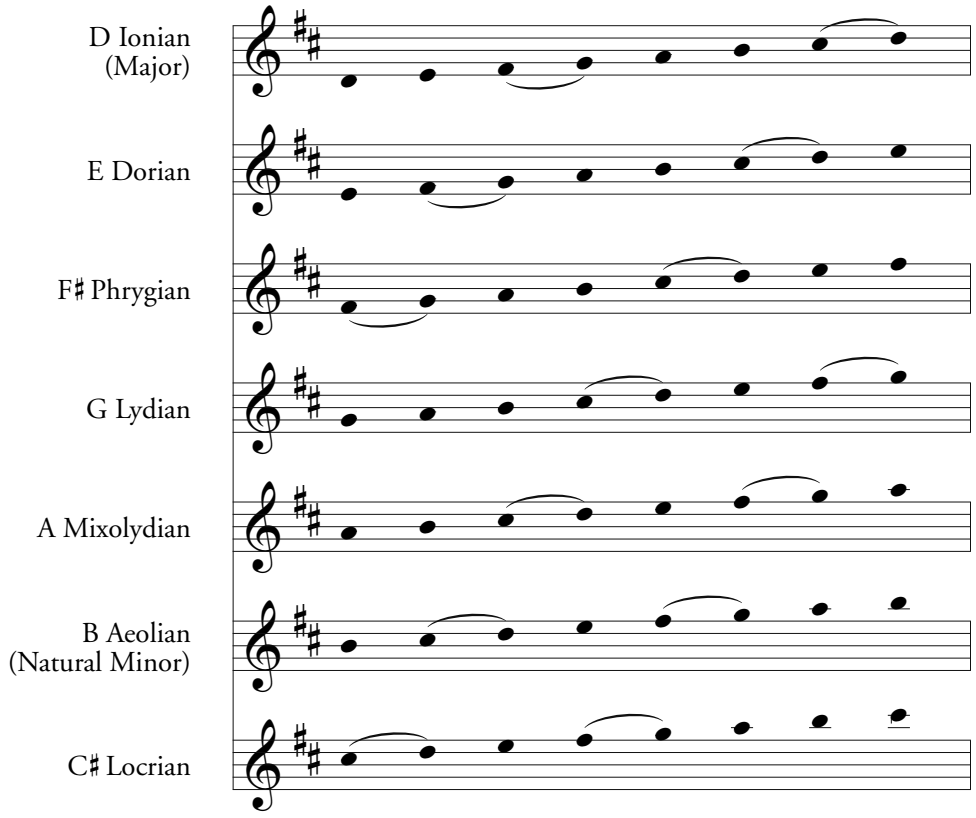

Figure 34: The seven so-called church modes, as played using the natural scale of a whistle in D. ***CD #2, track 70.***

Another way to explore these modes is to play ascending scales on only the white keys of a keyboard instrument. Starting on C, you hear the notes and intervals of the C Ionian mode. Starting on D, you hear the D Dorian mode, and so on.

The Tonal Center of the Mode

Each mode has a tonal center, which is the first, and lowest note of its scale. In Irish music, this tonal center can reside on any one of various pitches, most commonly D, E, G, A or B. We often say, for example, that a tune in the Mixolydian mode with a tonal center of D is in "D Mixolydian." Similarly, a tune in the Dorian mode that has a tonal center of E is in "E Dorian." The tune will usually come to rest on the pitch of its tonal center at various points, especially at the ends of some of its important phrases.

Those who are familiar with major and minor scales (i.e., the Ionian and Aeolian modes) may find it helpful to understand the Dorian and Mixolydian modes in terms of how they differ from the Ionian and Aeolian.

- The Mixolydian mode is like the Ionian (major scale) with a flatted or lowered seventh note.
- The Dorian mode is like the Aeolian (natural minor scale) with a raised or sharped sixth note.

These comparisons are shown on the next page in Figure 35. You might try playing through them or singing them. Note how only the position of the second half step differs in each comparison.