

Section Three: Tunes for Non-D Whistles

One can play most traditional Irish tunes on a tin whistle in D. But many tunes are quite difficult to play well on a D whistle. These are tunes that make prominent use of one or more of the four notes that are best played by half-holing: Eb, F \sharp , G \sharp and Bb. Half-holing these notes is certainly possible, and sometimes desirable. But when playing dance tunes at normal speeds (or faster), it can be very difficult to half-hole with dependable accuracy. And it can be quite challenging to use ornamentation techniques, as you might wish to, with half-holed notes.

However, there is good news regarding such tunes: we *can* play them on the whistle – with agility, with a full range of ornamentation options, and without needing to half-hole. We do this by using whistles that are not in D.

Tin whistles are made in all twelve keys. For traditional Irish music, I find the most useful ones (after the D whistle) to be those in C, A and G. Beyond these, whistles in E and F are the next most useful. With whistles in these six keys, you can play in just about every modal scale encountered in traditional Irish music.

WHISTLE KEY	ACCESSIBLE MODAL SCALES (NO HALF-HOLING REQUIRED)	
E	A Ionian (major) <i>3 sharps</i> E Mixolydian B Dorian F-sharp Aeolian (natural minor)	E Ionian (major) <i>4 sharps</i> B Mixolydian F-sharp Dorian C-sharp Aeolian (natural minor)
A	D Ionian (major) <i>2 sharps</i> A Mixolydian E Dorian B Aeolian (natural minor)	A Ionian (major) <i>3 sharps</i> E Mixolydian B Dorian F-sharp Aeolian (natural minor)
D	G Ionian (major) <i>1 sharp</i> D Mixolydian A Dorian E Aeolian (natural minor)	D Ionian (major) <i>2 sharps</i> A Mixolydian E Dorian B Aeolian (natural minor)
G	C Ionian (major) <i>no sharps or flats</i> G Mixolydian D Dorian A Aeolian (natural minor)	G Ionian (major) <i>1 sharp</i> D Mixolydian A Dorian E Aeolian (natural minor)
C	F Ionian (major) <i>1 flat</i> C Mixolydian G Dorian D Aeolian (natural minor)	C Ionian (major) <i>no sharps or flats</i> G Mixolydian D Dorian A Aeolian (natural minor)
F	B-flat Ionian (major) <i>2 flats</i> F Mixolydian C Dorian G Aeolian (natural minor)	F Ionian (major) <i>1 flat</i> C Mixolydian G Dorian D Aeolian (natural minor)

This table represents whistles in six different keys and the eight modal scales that are easily playable on each whistle.

- The inner four rows of the table show the whistles that are most useful for Irish music (A, D, G and C).
- Note that the left (unshaded) group of scales in each row is identical to the right (shaded) group of scales in the row below it. This shows that each modal scale can be played on two different whistles.
- Each group of four scales shares a single mode signature. The number of sharps or flats in that mode signature is shown in the upper right corner of the cell.
- The order of the rows in the table follows the circle of fifths.

Then there are tunes that you can play quite well on a D whistle, but which can also be played on a non-D whistle to very good effect. Choosing the non-D option often allows you to play one or more parts, or the entire tune, an octave lower than you would play it on a high D whistle – down in the register used by most other melody instruments, down from what can be a rather shrill range on the high D into a more mellow, blending range on a low A, G or F whistle. For examples, see tunes 127, 130, 131, 135-140, 146, 148 and 149.

With each of the 28 tunes in this Section, you will see:

- A sentence specifying which non-D whistle to use (in italics, just below the tune title).
- The notes to play on that non-D whistle, fingered *as if* you were playing them on a D whistle.
- Below that (in a box) the notes that are actually produced by using these fingerings on the specified non-D whistle. As you will see, the tune comes out at the correct pitch level.
- Some thoughts on why you might want to use a non-D whistle for that particular tune.

Section Three contains 9 jigs, 12 reels, 4 hornpipes, 2 slip jigs and 1 polka.