
Welcome!

Whether you're in the first decade of your life or the tenth, you can learn to make beautiful music on the tin whistle. You can do this even if you don't read music, and even if you've never played a musical instrument.

The whistle has an alluring voice — yearning, melancholy, joyous, playful — both youthful and ancient. It can sound like wind, birdsong, flowing water. When we hear these evocative sounds, many of us long to create them ourselves.

I have played the whistle since the early 1970s and have many nuggets of knowledge to share with you — insights and techniques that will smooth your way, help you avoid bad habits, and steer you clear of the pitfalls and stumbling blocks beginners often encounter.

When you watch a fine player making music on the tin whistle, it may look easy. But if you've tried it yourself you've probably found that it's not as simple as it appears. For most of us, it's not at all clear how best to hold the whistle in a relaxed way, how best to cover and seal its finger holes, and how to blow air through it with just the right speed and pressure. I'll teach you these things and much more. Soon you'll be on your way to making music with ease, agility, and, if you wish, speed.

The whistle is also appealing because it's low-tech, affordable, small and light, and easy to stow and carry with you. But a word of caution is in order: some of the most inexpensive whistles are the hardest ones to play.

Better-made whistles are much easier to control. If you are able to, it pays to get a well-made whistle. (See “Acquiring a Tin Whistle” on pp. 4–5.)

This book is packed with detailed information and guidance, much of which you won't find elsewhere. I hope its methodical and carefully sequenced approach will provide a sure path to confident and joyful whistle playing. If you've tried to learn the whistle before and have been frustrated, this book could well help you succeed this time around. I invite you to travel with me, page by page.

The tunes in this book come from Ireland, Scotland, Northumbria, England, Wales, Brittany, the United States, and from classical composers Beethoven and Dvorák. Tunes 4 through 8 are my own compositions. While the tin whistle is strongly associated with Celtic traditions, you can use it to play music from all over the world, including *kwela*, a southern African tin whistle-based street music. I encourage you to try the whistle with any music that you love.



Making the Best Use of This Book

You'll see quite a bit of text before we get to our first tune. These initial pages offer vital nuts-and-bolts information as well as hands-on exploration of the anatomy of the whistle, the best ways to hold and blow the instrument, and the full range of air speeds and pressures we use when playing it. You may find other whistle books that will have you playing sooner, but most of them offer much less instruction and insight. If you feel ready to skip ahead to the tunes, of course go right ahead, but I recommend you return to the earlier pages. If you proceed with me step by step, I think your patience will be richly rewarded.

Notation. Starting with Tune 8, this book uses standard western music notation. However, you do *not* need to know how to read music to learn the tunes in this book or to become a good whistle player. As you'll soon see, I also provide two simpler forms of notation. When you see a tune notated in more than one way, feel free to use only the form, or forms, that best suit your needs.

Audio, Video and Additional Material. Please use the URLs on the title page to access a variety of supporting materials, including audio and video files. Using this audio and video you can listen to me play this book's tunes and exercises and view demonstrations of several techniques. Most of the audio files feature an optional metronome click to help you stay in good rhythm.

This headphone icon —  — indicates an audio file. It first appears on p. 12.

Even if you know how to read music, I encourage you to learn the rhythms of tunes 1 through 7 by listening to the audio files. With this audio and video, plus the graphic representations of the tunes, you'll have all the learning materials you'll need.

Some of the tunes in this book are given in excerpted form. Complete versions are available for download, as well as documents that elaborate upon various subjects, as noted in the following pages.

Small D Whistle. Ideally, you'll want to use a small whistle in the key of D. The small D whistle, which is about 11 or 12 inches long (or about 29 centimeters), is widely considered to be the standard whistle. It's certainly the most useful one for playing traditional Irish, Scottish and other Celtic music.