
Reviewed by Michael Stoner

The Irish are justifiably proud of the uillean pipes and many traditional musicians regard them as the national instrument of Ireland. But it's more likely that this honor can be claimed by the humble six-holed flute known as the tin whistle (penny whistle).

The tin whistle, an end-blown flute related to the recorder, belongs to the species of wind instruments known as flageolets. There are two types of whistle commonly seen at concerts or sessions where Irish music is played—the conical Clarke, pitched a whole tone below concert pitch (the bottom note on the whistle yields middle C) and the cylindrical Generation, with a plastic mouthpiece, available in a variety of keys—Bb, C, D, Eb, F and C-.

At one time, the whistle was considered a "primer" instrument, and was used to teach technique and repertoire to those who wanted to play the wooden concert flute or the uillean pipes, which both require similar fingering techniques. Although still used for this purpose, it is just recently that the whistle has begun to acquire status as a solo instrument in its own right—a result of the increasing number of good Irish musicians who are beginning to realize and exploit the potentials of this deceptively simple instrument. Their recordings have inspired widespread interest in the tin whistle in Ireland. The whistle has also become popular among young Americans who aspire to play traditional Irish music and seek an "easy" and available instrument (although it may be easy to play melodies on the tin whistle, there is far more to good whistle playing than this).

Because of the growing popularity of the instrument, a number of tutors for the tin whistle have appeared, ranging from collections of tunes with a few remarks on playing the whistle, to more detailed instructions on the how-to of playing. McCullough's book is decidedly the best of the lot, and not only on a practical, how-to level. It has certain advantages for the scholar who wants to understand how Irish music is performed.

McCullough is an ethnomusicologist from Pittsburgh who has done some significant work on traditional Irish music and has published a number of papers on the subject in scholarly journals. He is also an accomplished whistle player, a fact that will not escape anyone who listens to the tape that accompanies this booklet. The value of his tutor lies in the admirable fusion of scholarship and practical advice that McCullough presents in its pages, making it at once an excellent volume for the beginning whistle player and at the same time a unique introduction to the performance and techniques of traditional Irish music.

The tutor evidences the careful attentions of a scholar throughout without being pedantic or presumptuous; McCullough never lectures, he informs. The book opens with some remarks about Irish traditional music and how the musical tradition came to be what it is today. Though concise and informative, these comments are necessarily general, covering the various kinds of dance music and airs played by traditional Irish musicians, the instruments used, and the ways in which the traditional music is usually performed. A short bibliography directs interested readers to additional sources. A second section, "Historical Notes on the Tinwhistle," briefly discusses the role the instrument has played in Irish music and is, though not detailed, a thorough assessment.

Scholars as well as musicians will delight in the tunes that McCullough presents later in the book, offering new settings and unusual tunes that have not previously been printed.
in the standard reference collections (e.g., Capt. Francis O'Neill's *Music of Ireland: 1850 Selections* and Breandán Breathnach's *Ceol Rince na hÉireann*), or issued as readily available recordings. Many of these tunes derive from McCullough's copious fieldwork both in the United States and in Ireland. Others have been transcribed from old 78 rpm recordings which captured many outstanding exponents of traditional Irish music in the United States and serve as a vital link to the golden era of traditional Irish music in America. The tunes and airs are accompanied by notes and discography, when available.

One of the most interesting and valuable parts of the tutor is its coverage of the ornaments used in playing the tin whistle. These are not only useful to an erstwhile whistle player, but to the scholar as well, as this discussion is a good and readily available analysis of these distinctive musical features. The way McCullough approaches learning a tune is particularly informative; he covers examples of four different kinds of tune in depth (a jig, Kerry polka, hornpipe, and reel) before presenting other tunes.

A good example of this technique is his presentation of "The Kesh Jig," a double jig recently popularized by the Bothy Band (Mulligan LUN 002). The treatment McCullough gives these pieces underscores the various stages that such tunes undergo in the process by which at least some traditional Irish musicians have learned to play their music. Although McCullough presents his music via the printed page and cassette tape, the actual process of first learning a skeletal melody and then fleshing it out with various ornaments closely corresponds to descriptions I have obtained from several traditional Irish musicians about the way they learned music. For example, one County Clare fiddler-now a resident of Rochester, New York-vividly described for me how he visited an older, more experienced musician and underwent the sometimes laborious process of learning to play the fiddle. He was shown how to play a tune bar-by-bar, sometimes learning only half a tune an evening, and then practicing the tune until he could play it well enough to go back and learn the rest. Once he knew the basic melody, he learned how to "perfect" it by adding ornamentation to the basic melody line, thereby creating a richer and more complete setting for the tune.

McCullough illustrates a similar process in his treatment of the first four bars of "The Kesh Jig" (pp. 26-28). The basic melody as given is:

When grace notes are added, it begins to look like this:

With rolls, which can accentuate "and completely change the cast of a tune":

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And, finally, a full setting that combines these ornaments with variations in melody and rhythm:

The latter, a fusion of melody and the various kinds of ornaments is version that might be played by a skilled Irish musician. Thus, although The Complete Tinwhistle Tutor is not a conventional scholarly treatment of its subject, McCullough's careful approach, thoroughly grounded in a knowledge of how the musical tradition and traditional Irish music function, can be used by the scholar to achieve a deeper understanding of what traditional Irish music is all about.