

# SAMPLE

## *Table of Contents*

Foreword.....	v
Section 1: Authentic Musical Experiences.....	1
Authenticity, tradition, and evolution.....	3
Section 2: Philosophy	
Why teach folk & ethnic music in the public schools?.....	7
Section 3: The background of Irish traditional music.....	13
The Irish music <i>seisiún</i> and <i>seisiún</i> etiquette.....	13
Teaching and transmission.....	15
A snapshot of Ireland's political history.....	16
Section 4: Instruction	
The importance of listening.....	19
Ornaments & technique.....	20
Tunes with suggestions for performance.....	24
Section 5: Types of Tunes.....	29
Section 6: Instruments used in Irish traditional music	
Melody.....	37
Accompaniment/plucked strings.....	43
Section 7: Resources.....	49
Section 8: Tunes (organized by type, mode, and key).....	61
Section 9: Credits and thanks.....	89



## Background of Irish Music

Irish traditional music is comprised of forms of instrumental music, *sean nós* singing, and dance that are closely interwoven with Ireland's rich cultural history. Instrumental music is the focus of this book.

### The Seisiún

The *seisiún*, or session, has become the cornerstone of the Irish music tradition. Quite simply, it is a group of Irish musicians who come together to make music. Although solo



playing was once the central characteristic of the tradition, the camaraderie and large group unison playing of the *seisiún* have become essential. This group dynamic can be contrary to the traditional practices of ornamentation and variation, and there are still a few isolated older musicians who view the *seisiún* as an affront to the tradition. The *seisiún* can take several forms: it may be a private event for a select group of musicians in a home or pub; it may be public, with announced times and

an open invitation; or it may be accidental, when a few musicians happen upon each other and decide to play some tunes. Most sessions have a *de facto* leader—the Alpha Musician,

## ***Guidelines for Playing at Seisiúns***

While there is no written list of established rules for joining in, a few guidelines are listed on the next page to help you enjoy your experience, and to help other musicians enjoy you. These rules apply to a traditional seisiún, not to a beginner's seisiún that may be held at a local pub or offered by a chapter of *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann* (see page 53).

***Don't bring your instrument the first time.*** Or the second, or maybe for a while. Just listen to what is going on. Hear the music, listen to what types of tunes are being played and how they are being played. Listen to the style being played—there are different regional styles and you want to fit in. Are the reels played straight or with a slight swing?

***Understand the difference between a seisiún and a "jam".***

***Don't bring sheet music or a music stand.***

***Decipher the politics of the seisiún.*** Who is the Alpha Musician and what are that

if you will—who is usually the strongest and often the oldest player. This musician will start many of the tunes, encourage others to start them, and set the tempo for the music, often bending the other musicians to his will if a tune is started too quickly or too slowly. Many public modern sessions are professional sessions in which the Alpha Musician is a well-known, talented player who is paid to come to a pub that does not have an existing seisiún. Other players are drawn by the reputation and musicianship of the leader, and the pub then proudly hosts a regular music night. The players in a seisiún provide “neither a performance in the conventional sense nor background music. Instead, they are a complete unit within themselves—playing for each other and immensely enjoying each others company... Their own self-involvement makes no demands on the patrons, but their presence and music enliven and enrich the whole atmosphere of the pub.”

The repertoire of tunes that comprise Irish traditional music were originally played solo as an accompaniment for dancing. Accompaniment on piano and plucked strings was added in the early 20th century. The “group aesthetic” became popular in the first half of the 20th century

through the rise of the *ceili* bands, and was reinforced by recordings of the Chieftains and other groups in the 1960's. Each *seisiún* is different and each has its own internal logic. This accepted, unspoken set of rules governs all aspects of the event: the speed of the music; the number of repetitions of each tune; what tunes are played in medley; whether solo performance and singing is acceptable; who can start a tune; who can call out a tune change; and many other points. There is also an underlying culture at each *seisiún* that is both separate from and intertwined with the music, affecting the social interactions and more (see section 2 for more on folk music experiences).

## ***Transmission... Teaching and Learning***

The traditional setting for instruction is the master-student model, not large-group instruction. Aural learning is emphasized over mastery of written notation as tunes, technique, and the subtleties of the music are learned via repetition of the master's model. In this way,

person's favorite tunes? How do people join in once a song starts? Where should you sit when you start playing?

### ***Be friendly and introduce yourself.***

People will be very welcoming when you start playing if they already know you. (And also if they don't know you.)

### ***Yes, you are an amazingly talented classical musician; but nobody at the seisiún cares.***

They are there to hear Irish music played well, not another classical musician who has come to show them how "real" musicians play. Likewise, don't go there to play solos—it's a group event.

### ***Here are some instruments you might be tempted to bring but probably shouldn't:***

Any reed instrument; any brass instrument; anything electronic; large string instruments; recorders; mountain dulcimers; djembes, donnos, tubanos, bongos, shakers, spoons, triangles, rainsticks or any other random percussion instrument or noisemaker.

For great insight on the *seisiún*, read *Field Guide to the Irish Music Session* by Barry Foy.



## Instruction

### The Importance of Listening

More than any technique, skill, or performance trick, the single most important piece of advice is: *Listen*. The written page can point you in the right direction, and can open your eyes to some technique you didn't know existed. It can inform you as to when and why to play a certain way; the written page, however, can never truly show you *how* to play. You need your ears for that. Irish music does have a much different feel than classical music, but with careful listening and practice, it is a style that is not difficult to convert to. The most important thing any Irish musician can do is listen: Listen to recordings of authentic playing, listen to live players at sessions, and listen to him- or herself. When notated, most Irish tunes are written with just the notes, and no, articulations, ornaments, etc. Irish music is typically played in a smoother style than classical music, and the first step to mastering the Irish style should be to get rid of the habits of tonguing or single-bowing every note. On wind instruments such as flutes, whistles, and pipes, notes are separated not with the tongue, but through the addition of quick ornamenting notes. String instruments and even vocalists also play in a more flowing style and add these notes, and it is this flow and these ornaments that most define the Irish style.



*Please note: In the Irish music tradition, there is no real method book that corresponds to a technique book in the classical tradition. The tunes are the training repertoire. The exercises below are shown only to provide a very basic introduction to the technique.*

## Cuts

The most common type of ornament is the cut (chirp). A cut is similar to a grace note in that it is quick and attached to a “main” note, but it should not be thought of as a grace note. A cut is a sound, not a note, and it is played by very quickly inserting a higher note between two notes of the same pitch. When possible, the cut should be more than a step higher than the main pitch.

The cut is played on flutes, whistles and pipes by quickly raising and lowering a finger that is typically two holes higher than the first open hole. Many players of these instruments use the third finger of the left hand (“G”) to cut any note played below A. The finger must move very quickly, and should be slammed down to return to the main note. The actual pitch of the cutting note is not important; rather, the speed of the cut should be the focus. Wind players should be taught to think of the cut not as a note, but as the “tongue” for starting notes.

On fiddles and other string instruments, the cut may be played by very quickly tapping or lightly plucking the string.

*Flute/whistle/pipe cuts on E can be played with either the 3rd or 4th finger playing the cut. On fiddle they should be played with a very quick pluck, swipe, or tap of the string. Play also one octave lower.*



*Flute/whistle/pipe cuts on A have to be played with the first finger:*



Cuts are often inserted for ornamentation on the highest note within a measure or other group of beats.

## Dan O'Keefe's

a.k.a. Kerry Slide No. 2, Mount Collins (HJ Clarke, p. 70)



Musical notation for Dan O'Keefe's, featuring two staves of music in G major and 12/8 time. The first staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 12/8. The second staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 12/8. The melody is written in treble clef. Chords are indicated above the notes: am, G, am, em, am, G, am.

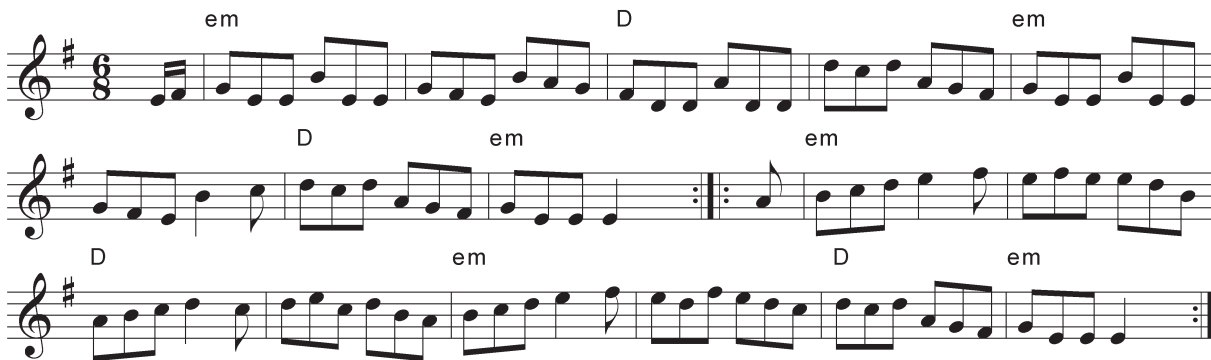
## Rocky Road to Dublin (Slip Jig)



Musical notation for Rocky Road to Dublin (Slip Jig), featuring three staves of music in G major and 9/8 time. The first staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 9/8. The second staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 9/8. The third staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 9/8. The melody is written in treble clef. Chords are indicated above the notes: am, G, am, am, G, am, G, am, G.

## Swallowtail Jig

a.k.a. The Dancing Master, The Swallow's Nest



Musical notation for Swallowtail Jig, featuring three staves of music in G major and 6/8 time. The first staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 6/8. The second staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 6/8. The third staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 6/8. The melody is written in treble clef. Chords are indicated above the notes: em, D, em.

## D Mixolydian

### *Banish Misfortune*

Musical score for "Banish Misfortune" in D Mixolydian mode. The score consists of four staves of music in 6/8 time. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The melody is written in treble clef. Chord symbols are placed above the notes: D, C, D, C, D, G, D, C, D, C, D, C, A, D, D, C, D, C, D, C, D, C, A, D.

## Hornpipes

### D Major

#### *Harvest Home*

*a.k.a. Cincinatti Hornpipe, Cork Hornpipe (The Cork)*

Musical score for "Harvest Home" in D Major mode. The score consists of three staves of music in common time (C). The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The melody is written in treble clef. The score features numerous triplet markings (indicated by the number 3 above or below groups of notes).