

Introduction

This is a collection of tunes for the uilleann pipes. It includes classics which have been popular with pipers for generations, as well as pipers' settings of many others.

As an instrument with its own strong personality and its own strengths and weaknesses, the uilleann pipes like some tunes better than others, and a few, such as the Bucks of Oranmore, the Gold Ring, and Colonel Fraser, are practically synonymous with the pipes. Pipers also tend to favor settings which suit the peculiarities of their instrument. A piper may alter a phrase in order to include, say, a hard bottom D, a cran, or a tasteful tight triplet, or to finesse an awkward note or octave jump ...or simply to make it sound more like a pipe tune.

While most settings included here are fairly standard and playable in sessions, occasionally I found such an original and striking version of a tune that I couldn't resist including it. In these cases, I also gave a vanilla setting of the tune for the sake of comparison.

A number of slow airs are included, though not as many as their importance merits. Slow airs are fundamental to piping; after the voice itself, the uilleann pipes are probably their best interpreters. Good pipers model their playing on the singing. However, slow airs are difficult to transcribe accurately, and the more accurate the transcription, the more difficult it is to read. Many come from the *sean nós* tradition, and have a free rhythm. Notes are often held longer than their written value, and grace notes may be stretched into melody notes. The versions here represent a compromise between the uselessly simple and the unreadably complex. The note durations are approximate, and bar markers are used mainly to indicate the heavy beats, while the phrasing is indicated by a liberal sprinkling of slurs. The notation shouldn't be taken too seriously. A better approach would be to listen to performances, and just use the dots as a guide to the playing. In fact, the best approach may be to follow Seamus Ennis' advice, and to learn the songs directly from singers, rather than from other pipers. Singers work with the words as well as the melody, and the meaning of the words is bound to affect the phrasing.

The material of this book is largely drawn from a collection of tunes I've been jotting down as I learned them over the years, from recordings, tapes of sessions, house concerts, the playing of friends, and who-knows-where else. If I learned a tune directly from a particular player or performance, I have noted its source. As for the rest, some are versions I play myself—or would *like* to play—and others are settings whose sources I long ago forgot. In any case, any errors of taste or transcription are mine, and shouldn't be blamed on the sources. While I've tried to stay reasonably close to the originals, I have re-arranged some non-piping settings to better fit the pipes, and have simplified most others for ease of reading.

Irish music maintains a delicate balance between repetition and variation. Players will often vary a phrase when it is repeated, and vary it more extensively the second time through. One wants to make the pattern of repetition clear without making the tune sound too...well, repetitive. Sometimes the variations are marked, but more often they are subtle: perhaps a gracing will be changed, a roll substituted for a held note, or a triplet for a roll. Much of this is improvised on the fly, and many players rarely play a tune note-for-note the same twice. In fact, one of the hallmarks of a great player is the ability to improvise variations.

In this spirit, I've suggested variations for a few tunes. None of this is sys-

tematic. The idea is rather, “Here are a couple of things to try. Experiment and enjoy.” The variations follow the tune, indicated by notation such as “Variations: I 2, 3”, which means that bars 2 and 3 of the first part can be replaced by the given two bars. (If only one bar is given, it can replace either or both of the indicated measures.) “II 3-5” would mean that bars 3, 4, and 5 of part II can be replaced by the three bars given. In a few cases, such as Tommy Reck’s version of *The Scholar*, the variations of a given performance were so extensive that I transcribed the tune twice through.

The tune names are those most commonly used today. When there are two common names, or when the tune is under a different name in a standard reference such as O’Neill’s, I listed one or more alternate titles.

The settings are fairly basic. For instance, individual grace notes are usually omitted, and we seldom give first and second endings. On the other hand, I have tried to keep track of important decorations such as staccato notes, rolls, crans, and triplets.

The most common ornaments, such as rolls, crans, slides, and pops into the second octave, have their own notation. Thus the little slur marks under or over notes indicate either a cran (if it’s on *D* or *E*) or roll (on anything higher, and sometimes on low *E* too—I didn’t distinguish between rolls and crans on the low *E*.) Notes which are popped are indicated by a wedge over them. The ghost *D* is written as an *E_b*.

For a number of reasons, fiddles greatly outnumber uilleann pipes in Irish music. As a result, most tune collections consist of settings biased towards the fiddle. This book is an attempt to redress that imbalance.

John B. Walsh
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1. Notation



*Let's count them out:
First came the talk,
Then came the grip,
And then came the truckly-how.
—Seamus Ennis*

Forward to the Second Edition

When the question of a new edition came up, I expected to simply correct a few typos and add some tunes which had been inadvertently omitted from the first edition. After some thought, I realized it was an opportunity to delve into the playing of some of the old-time pipers. This included a number of well-remembered pipers from around the turn of the century—the last century, that is—who left behind a small but important legacy of Edison cylinders, and those of more recent times—I'm not sure the word “old-timers” is strictly appropriate here—who passed the piping tradition to the present generation. This includes pipers such as Willie Clancy, Johnny Doran, Seamus Ennis and Leo Rowsome.

Pat Mitchell and Jackie Small have published careful transcriptions of the playing of Willie Clancy and Patsy Tuohy, and there seemed little point in duplicating these, so I concentrated mainly on Rowsome and Ennis. (I have only included a couple of examples of Johnny Doran's playing, although he deserves more, but in fact his music is well-represented here indirectly in a number of tunes taken from other travelling-style pipers.)

I want to thank Kevin Rietmann, who kindly sent me tapes of recordings of Patsy Tuohy, Bernard Delaney, Dinny Delaney, Michael Carney, R. L. O'Meally, Sgt. James Early, and other more recent pipers; and Wally Charm, who provided tapes of many others. I took many of the additional tunes from these, and then added a number from contemporary pipers too, trying for a cross-section of players and styles, enough to bring the total number up to the nice round number of 500. As often happens, one tune led to another, and I overshot the mark slightly, but I found I had no desire to add enough more to reach the next round number.

One reward from this project was the experience of listening carefully to Ennis' piping, particularly that of his early period. I had listened to his playing for years—indeed the first record of Irish piping I heard was his *Bonny Bunch of Roses*—but it wasn't until I started analyzing some of his settings in detail that I fully realized their importance. They are often different, always interesting, full of musical ideas, and I was surprised how frequently a striking performance on a recent recording was rooted in his playing. To listen to his playing of the *Boys of Bluehill* and the *Silver Spear*, for instance, is to hear new tunes emerge from the shells of old chestnuts.

I must admit, though, that one keenly anticipated section fizzled: I had hoped to collect popular fiddle and box tunes usually played in exotic keys (such as A...), and translate them to more piperly keys. The section was to be called “The Pipers Revenge.” In the end, it only contained two tunes, *The Mason's Apron*, (known to the British as “*My Son's a Prawn*”) and *Peter Street*. But perhaps that's enough: I invite you to slip them in along with other tunes from this book at your local session and enjoy the puzzled expressions around you.

I'd like to thank Dale Russ for some good advice and for calling a number of corrections to my attention, Bill Haneman for the art work that decorates this volume, and, especially, my wife Joke for not only putting up with me, but even encouraging me thru this project.

John B. Walsh
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