

1.12 Rhythm & structure in Irish traditional dance music – Part 1.

The double jig as played on the Irish pipes.

Pat Mitchell.

Prologue.

This article is written by a piper for pipers, in particular, those pipers who would like to extend their skills or knowledge by exploring the range of rhythm possibilities on the chanter. It is intended as a practical exercise. It assumes some level of experience with the formal system of music notation. To aid in this respect, future parts of the article will include sound clips.

The introduction will give readers an insight into my approach to music and piping leading them, hopefully, to an understanding of where I believe the more specific information presented later fits into the larger context of Irish traditional dance music.

Introduction.

What is piping?

What is piping? I have been asking myself and others' versions of this same question for some years now. The question, when put to others, elicited some strange responses typically ranging from instantly-induced catatonia to answers like "It is impossible to describe" from those who retained the faculty of speech!

I think part of the problem was the version of the question I was using, along with a virtuoso-focused assumption of piping. We have all heard performances which may have been on the 'acceptable' rather than 'inspirational' end of the music spectrum (and yes, I know, the question "what is music?" opens up major areas of study which I will deal with briefly in the text), yet which caused us to say "There's some nice piping there". Usually we are referring to some virtuoso-ish piping 'movements' as Andy Conroy called them. My own playing having given much bad example of this type in my youth, I now believe that *music* is paramount and must always be served by *technique*, not vice versa. Which brings us back to the version of the 'question'. This might have been along the lines of "What are the minimum number, range, whatever of piping techniques a person would need to have to be regarded as a piper?"

Does this mild enquiry have the feel of a hot potato about it? If we add in the virtuoso dimension the question really is a hard one. Should crans be a minimum requirement? If one person puts in fewer notes in a cran than another, have they lost their piping mantle? What triplets are *de rigueur*? Is catatonia the only possible response to the stress induced? Probably!

What has all this got to do with Jig rhythm and phrasing? Lots – read on!

I have to admit to having major difficulties with this version of the 'question', mainly because I myself was taking a virtuoso focus for the most part. But then again I always did. My initial attraction to the pipes were the lovely 'dik-it-y' sounds being made by the young Finbar Furey, by Séamus Ennis and by Willie Clancy. In between self induced bouts of breakdown / babbling – whatever – I kept coming back to a shining example of the answer I was looking for – the playing of Matt Kiernan the pipemaker. Even though besotted with music at the virtuoso end of the spectrum, at the time I felt there was something special about his playing, that it was good solid piping. I still feel that way about it. The problem was – I only heard Matt play one piping movement – the ACA triplet – so how could he possibly be a piper?

Early in my piping career John Kelly, the fiddle player, drew my attention to Jim Brophy's good piping. Not hearing showers of piping movements I glossed over Jim's playing at the time. Many years later, with a little less arrogance and a little more music in my soul, I once again listened to Jim's playing, and fell in love with it. Jim has a much wider range of piping 'movements' than did Matt - so what is it that links them in my mind?

If we shift the focus from virtuosity to music, and specifically to Irish traditional dance music, then some points emerge (most of them subjective, but I'll try to expand on them later):

- There was conviction in the playing of both pipers mentioned – you sensed that they 'meant what they were saying' and most definitely were not just going through the motions.
- Their playing gave a 'lift to the heart' – one felt a distinct sense of elation while listening to their playing.
- The pace was slow and steady. They played with a regular beat – did not waver all over the place.
- The rhythm was marked – a strong pulse ran through their jig and reel playing.
- The phrasing was strong – phrase 'statement and response' (details later in text) were clearly articulated.

None of the subjective or objective items listed above happened by chance. To produce the effects described demands superb control of the instrument, combined with a total and comprehensive grasp of Irish traditional dance music.

I believe in the examples cited above we can find a model which gives us a broad definition of 'piping' and which relates learning and performance on the pipes to learning and performance on standard orchestral instruments.

Background.

The pipes is a musical instrument. Like any other instrument, achieving a high standard of musicianship on the pipes demands a rigorous approach to teaching and learning.

When a person begins to learn to play western European art music ('classical' music) they get a thorough grounding on their chosen instrument in scales, rhythms, phrasing, legato, staccato, etc. – the basics. There is generally a list of pieces recommended for listening to, to help beginners interpret the written music and to give example and inspiration. Then they move on to more complex items – ornaments, arpeggios, the more difficult scales – until finally they are in a position where they can concentrate on expression and communicate their own interpretation of the music written down by the composer. They have completely mastered their instrument. Their focus at this stage is on *music*, not on the technicalities of the performance – though by the way, they will still need to spend much time practising to facilitate this focus.

While it might not be desirable to follow this process step-for-step I believe we can draw useful parallels in the progression from mechanics to expression and in the focus on *listening*.

Aims.

In this article, I will pull together a number of strands which will hopefully be the basis for the examination, in this and future articles, of rhythm and structure in other dance forms along with the double jig.

The present article will cover:

1. Definitions – The music, styles, structure etc.
2. Some proposals on rhythm and structure in the jig.
3. Piping techniques to achieve the rhythms and structure outlined in 2 above.

The second part of the article will include:

4. Advanced rhythm and phrasing.
5. An analysis of the phrasing used by some noted pipers.

Definitions.

Irish Traditional Dance Music.

By definition, Irish traditional dance music is *music*, which prompts the question – what *is* music? Various definitions can be found, ranging from the mechanistic to the metaphysical. Variouslly:

- The sound produced and the art involved in organising a sequence of tones into a meaningful whole. It differs from visual arts in that it is perceived in time rather than in space.
- The expression of emotion through sound.

The performance of music has, perforce, to encompass both ends of the spectrum. To produce the notes the performer *must* go through some mechanical routine; in our case, pumping wind, controlling pressure, lifting appropriate fingers for the correct duration to play notes and ornaments. To my mind however, all this work should communicate subjective emotions and feelings to the listener and fails as music if it fails to achieve this.

The notion that Irish music should communicate emotions has a long and respectable history. Many of our oldest stories refer to the three divisions of music - *goltraí*, *geantraí* and *suantraí*. These might be translated as music to induce, respectively, sorrow, happiness or sleep. Breandán Breathnach deals briefly with the subject in '*Folk Music and Dances of Ireland*'.

As I understand it, Irish traditional dance music is a *single line music*. In other words, it consists only of structured melody as opposed to western European art music which is based on melody (the theme) plus harmonic textures and progressions. For many composers the theme plays quite a small role with the major focus being the harmonic content.

Single line music appears to have been the norm in Europe up to the Middle Ages. Apart from China, single line music prevailed in art and folk musics in many countries around the world. Since the beginning of the 19th century, there has been pressure on many cultures, including that of Ireland, to drop their native music or convert it to something resembling western art music. Much of this pressure may well have a social and economic rather than an artistic basis.

Western Europe has led the world since Renaissance times in education and economic development. (In the context of the discussion, I would regard North America as an offshoot of Europe.) It is easy to see how people playing 'other' music could perceive it as backward and embrace the more 'advanced' music. If the musicians had stopped to take note of the extent to which the exploitation of their country's people and resources played a major part in that perceived wealth and development, then maybe they would not have been so easily influenced. Daniel Corkery, in 'The Hidden Ireland', referring specifically to literature and decrying the way many Irish people looked down on their language and heritage, summed up the situation:

"The first article in an Ascendancy's creed is, and has always been, that the natives are a lesser breed, and that anything that is theirs (except their land and their gold!) is therefore of little value. If they have had a language and literature, it cannot have been a civilised language, cannot have been anything but a patois used by the hillmen among themselves; and as for their literature, the less said about it the better. In the course of time the natives become tainted with these doctrines; and cry approval when the untruths of the Ascendancy are echoed from some distant place, as if at last a fair judgement has been pronounced, not recollecting that the Ascendancy have had for hundreds of years possession of the ear of the world and have not failed to fill it with such opinions as were opportune."

Fortunately, single line music of great melodic and rhythmic subtlety and complexity is still played in India and Turkey.

While Irish traditional dance music may not have reached the level of development of Indian classical music, when played well it is a multi-layered music full of subtlety and variation. The scale of Irish traditional dance music is very different to that of western European art music or other harmony-based music such as jazz. Both of these musics tend to move in broad harmonic sweeps. By comparison, Irish traditional dance music changes on a microscopic scale with, for instance, small variations in the timing of a grace note played at or near the end of a note greatly altering the effect of the graced note for those who can perceive it. My own personal experience suggests that those brought up only on harmonic music cannot actually hear all that is going on in good Irish traditional dance music performance unless they spend a great deal of time educating their ear.

For me, the consummate performance will incorporate

- a strong rhythmic structure
- rhythmic variation
- legato and staccato playing
- changes in the pitch of certain notes
- slides up to notes
- ornamentation and changes in ornamentation on repeats
- variations in tone on some notes
- both small scale and large scale variations in the melody

On the pipes, I would also look for an accompaniment on the regulators which adds harmony to notes or passages in the melody and/or reinforces the rhythm or produces an interesting rhythmic texture by stressing the off beats.

I will look at some of the performance elements mentioned above in more detail, however I would first like to return to my original query “What is piping?” and expand the question to “What is Irish traditional dance music?” While I will not even attempt in this article to definitively answer the question, I will share some of my perceptions of what the music is all about.

I have described the music as ‘multi-layered’. The picture that comes to my mind is a page from an illuminated manuscript such as the celebrated ‘Monogram Page’ (the XRI or Incarnation Initial page) of the ‘Book of Kells’. Standing well back it is possible to see the outline of the letters. Getting in closer shows ornamental detail. Closer still and more detail becomes apparent. A magnifying glass shows still more ornamentation. For me, this is a word picture illustrating my description of the ‘consummate performance’ above – the distance view equating to the good rhythm and structure which is the principal focus of this article but, as we will see, cannot be treated in isolation; large scale melodic variation might be the next layer; ornaments such as triplets and rolls might be the next; with the final layers being those minute shifts in rhythm and melodic nuance that make a good performance so satisfying to both player and listener. If such a thing as the Irish psyche exists, then there may be a closer link between the visual art of the ninth century and the aural art of more recent times than is immediately apparent.

Some of my earlier comments would suggest that the major focus of learners and many performers is on the middle layers, that is, highly technically proficient but insufficiently structured playing, possibly ornamentation for the sake of ornamentation. I believe that it is actually easier to achieve technical competence at this level than it is to put the top layer, the structure, on the music. Many would argue that with the change of function of most performances of Irish traditional dance music from dance to listening that solid structure is no longer needed. I will make two simple arguments against this stance. The simplest argument is this – people like to tap their feet to music. Without some sort of solid structure the listener’s body is not engaged. For the second I would like to return to the piping (role) models I mentioned above and expand the grouping to include the concertina playing of Mary Haren, the accordion playing of Joe Cooley, and the whistle playing of Miko Russell. I would hope to include an example of their playing on the CD for issue 2 for those who may not have heard them. All the models mentioned played a strongly structured music without all the many layers I have attempted to describe. And their music was great! The majority of people who heard their playing enjoyed it. They communicated with their listeners through the music. I believe it is fair to say they passed the ‘*geantraí* test’.

Once again, the excellently put words of Daniel Corkery sum up my feelings on the issue of structured playing that communicates, versus the more prevalent highly ornamented (and frequently very fast) playing that we hear today:

“... it was never simple-hearted enough to speak plainly, and so, *intensely*. It therefore dazzles us rather than moves us.”

Piping Styles.

As an introduction to some of the techniques to be discussed later, I would like to address the issue of the two historical style divisions in piping, namely the 'Tight style' and the 'Open style'.

In recent times, the tight style has come to be equated with staccato playing, where all the notes are separated by rests in between. The open style has been equated with legato playing where each note advances smoothly into the next with no divisions in between. While there have been pipers who chose to follow these extremes, my experience in listening to representatives of both schools, both live and on recordings, would suggest a very different situation.

The two styles are generally described like this: in the open style only those fingers necessary to sound the note are put on the chanter i.e. to play A only the thumb, first and second fingers of the top hand and the little finger of the bottom hand are on the chanter; in the tight style only those fingers necessary to sound the note are lifted off the chanter i.e. to play A all fingers are *on* except the third finger of the top hand.

I believe the major difference is one of *tone*. Also, with noted exceptions, it would, I believe, be more correct to say the open player *tends* to play the majority of notes using the 'open fingering' described above while the follower of the tight school *tends* to play the majority of notes using the 'tight fingering' described above.

During their lifetimes both Felix Doran and Séamus Ennis were respected pipers and their fame continues to this day. Felix was a follower of the open school and Seamus the tight school. However, on the 'Gentlemen Pipers' CD Felix can be heard making extensive use of tight fingering in the second part of the 'Lark in the Morning' (contrasted by a wonderful open fingered off-the-knee roll in the last playing) while Séamus does some completely legato playing as he goes into the start of the second hornpipe on track 11 of the same CD. In the examples quoted, we see the performers using a wide range of musical techniques while still remaining true to their individual piping styles.


Musical Signs.


I offer the list of signs below to help develop common understanding of many of the points to be made in this and future articles. In well-defined situations and circumstances I believe they will be of use in developing a fuller understanding of pipe music as notated. I would *not* like to see them become universally used. A fully analysed performance should be helpful in teaching advanced students, especially if the original sound recording is available. If musicians have learned the 'language and accent' of the music, then a book like Capt. Francis O'Neill's 'The Dance Music of Ireland' with its unadorned settings of tunes, becomes a valuable resource and frees one from the temptation to slavishly copy what another has done. And the best way to learn the 'language' is to seek it out and *listen*.

A number of standard musical signs are commonly used in notations of Irish traditional dance music. These include:




Staccato marks. Indicates that the note should be separated from the adjoining notes i.e. with a small silence before and after.


 The slur. Indicates the notes within the slur should be played smoothly i.e. legato. It has sometimes been used in Irish music notation to indicate that notes are grouped together rather than to indicate legato playing. In this case its sense would be akin to the phrase mark which is somewhat similar in appearance. I have proposed a different style mark below to use where notes are to be grouped.


 A sign, identical to the slur but with a number enclosed, is used to indicate triplets and quadruplets. There are a number of other conventions for indicating triplets etc. but I will make use of the type of sign shown here.


 Bowing marks are sometimes included with fiddle music.

 The Trill or Shake. Indicates a rapid alternation of the trilled note with the note above it. This ornament can frequently be heard as a short grace played at the beginning of notes in the top hand. Séamus Ennis played a particularly strong lower-hand trill on E and F in the second octave. He used G as the upper note for trills on both E and F.


A number of signs have been devised to deal with some of the special needs of Irish traditional dance music:


 A small curve over or below the staff was devised by Breandán Breathnach to indicate a 'roll' and is now in common usage. Rolls will be dealt with in detail in the section on advanced rhythms in part 2 of this article.


 The curved arrow pointing up to a note has been frequently used to indicate a slide up to a note.



 The comma above the staff has been used to indicate 'tight fingering' – a tiny silence between two notes, similar in duration and effect to reversing the bow stroke on the fiddle.



I will be using another standard sign to indicate phrases and would like to introduce a specialised sign with a number of variants to indicate the various methods of lifting the chanter off the knee along with another to show notes grouped together, primarily to link 'upbeat' to 'downbeat' notes:


 The phrase mark. This links all the notes within a single phrase.

 Popping. The chanter is very quickly lifted a short distance and returned to the knee during the sounding of one note. Depending on the individual chanter, the effect can sound like a dog-bark.

 The chanter is lifted for the duration of one note and returned to the knee. It accentuates the note but does not produce the *popping* sound.

  Lifting the chanter off the knee while playing a number of notes then returning it to the knee. This produces a contrasting tone colour and a slightly louder sound.

  Lifting the chanter very slowly from the knee. This is frequently combined with a slide to give a striking tonal effect on the note in question. The chanter may be returned slowly but more often is stopped (by tight fingering or a rest) after the note necessitating a quick return to the knee. In this situation it will not be necessary to show the closure, it being implied by the stop.

 I will use this sign to show notes which are 'linked' together but are not necessarily slurred.

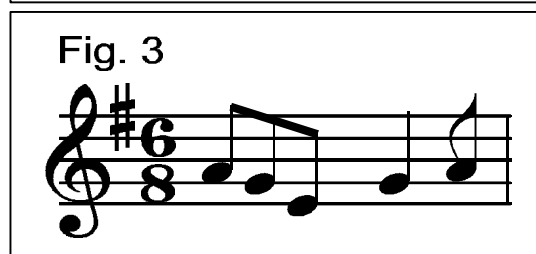
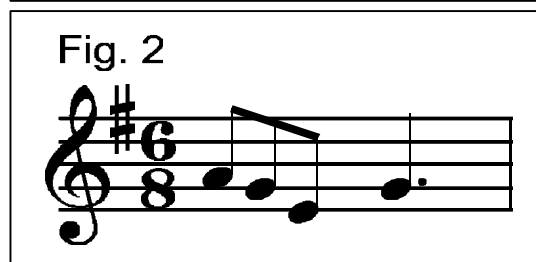
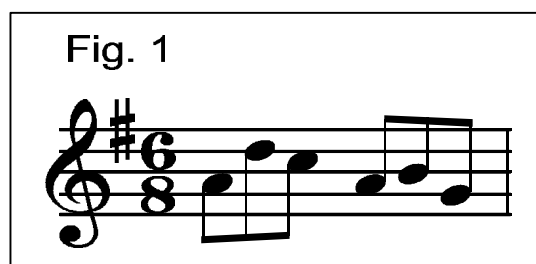
Rhythm, Time, Structure.

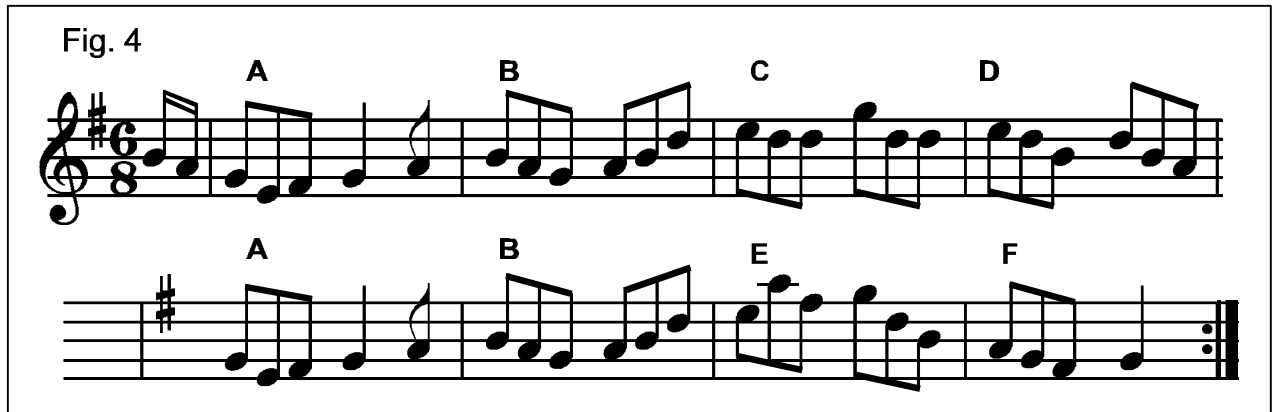
Rhythm is generally described as having to do with the whole feeling or sense of ‘movement’ in music. Time signatures indicate the number, and type, of recurring beats in a bar of music as it is notated. On paper, the Double Jig, the dance form under discussion here, is quite straightforward – its time signature is 6/8; in its most basic form each bar contains a total of six quavers grouped in threes (Fig. 1). Any group may be modified to become one ‘dotted crotchet’ (Fig. 2) or a ‘crotchet-quaver’ combination (Fig. 3). The three variants are heard in practice.

Where rhythm is concerned, the time signature is only the tip of the iceberg. To begin turning a sequence of notes into *rhythm*, we must add a beat or ‘pulse’ to the basic structure. This is done by stressing the first note in every bar or of the first note in each group of three notes. So the basic time might be shown as “ta-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta” and with a pulse “TA-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta” or “TA-ta-ta, TA-ta-ta”. In music texts it is generally suggested that the stressing be achieved by making the first notes louder. While this is relatively easy to do on, say, fiddle or piano the range of volume is restricted on the pipes. The more viable option for the pipes would be to lengthen the note (subtracting the time from the following notes of course), to play the note staccato or to play a strong grace note – a ‘cut’ – leading into the first note. The small volume and tonal change achieved by raising the chanter from the knee can, however, be very effective.

Just as the ‘pulse’ adds movement to individual bars, the overall tune is broken into a number of elements which should provide movement in the larger context.

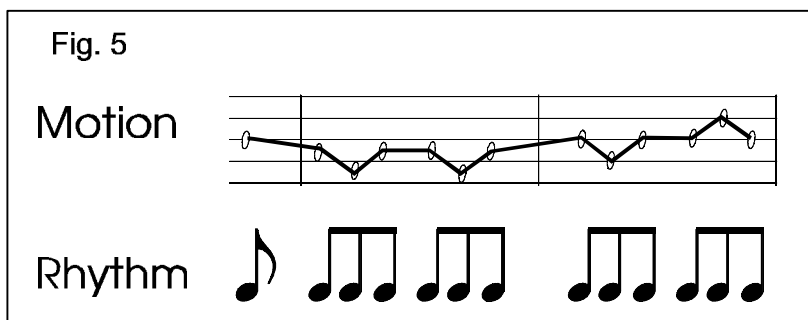
The typical jig is constructed from a minimum of two *parts*. Each part is eight bars in length and each part is usually played twice over before returning to the start of the tune and repeating the process at least once. In most double jigs the part concludes on the tonic or keynote of the piece, producing a well-defined cadence. The part subdivides further into two four-bar sections. This division is readily discerned when listening to performance or looking at a notation. Typically the first and fifth and the second and sixth bars are identical or variants. Changes may then start to occur, with the seventh bar being different to the third bar. Prior to putting this article together I was under the impression that the fourth bar also differed from the eighth, with the effect of an imperfect cadence in the fourth being resolved by the perfect cadence in the eighth bar. While researching this article, I discovered that many double jigs had identical or similar fourth and eighth bars or had the tonic in the stressed position in the second triplet of the fourth bar. Eighteen, with possibly another three, of the fifty four jigs in Breandán Breathnach’s *Ceol Rince na hÉireann I* have this structure. Bar by bar, the basic form would then give us a structure which is either ‘A, B, C, D, A, B, E, F’ (See Fig 4) or ‘A, B, C, D, A, B, E, D’. Close inspection reveals much more repetition than these two examples would suggest with the third bar frequently being similar to or a close variant of the first bar. I will include a chart of similarities in part two of the article.





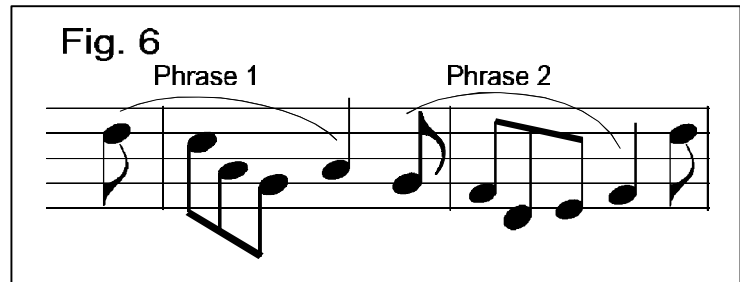
I have made no mention of the word “phrase” so far. Frequently the structure described above is referred to as an ‘eight bar phrase’ or two ‘four bar phrases’. A musical phrase, however, can be as short as one note. Most discussions I have seen go no further than the four bar phrase and the ‘A, B, C, D style’ bar structure mentioned above. To inject life and genuine expression into a performance, I believe you need to go further than this.

A final point should be noted. When rhythmic variation is introduced, the melody is also changed to some extent. It is impossible to separate melody from rhythm. Each musical sound has two fundamental qualities, pitch and duration. While this article is about rhythm, we will find that considering melody and rhythm as separate or even mutually exclusive phenomena is misleading. To illustrate the point, take a common and very simple rhythmic variation, say playing a G dotted crotchet (long G), with or without an ornament, in place of the three quavers GF#G. In this example, both rhythm and melody have been varied. If a distinction between the pitch structure (high-low) and the time structure (long-short) is needed, the terms are more properly ‘motion’ (direction of movement of successive notes, upward or downward in pitch) and rhythm. Melody may then be said to consist of motion plus rhythm. Every melody can be separated into a motion skeleton and a rhythm skeleton, and these may be illustrated on the standard music staff or by geometric shapes. An example of this analysis technique applied to the first two bars of a common setting of ‘The Lark in the Morning’ is shown in Fig. 5.



Rhythm and Structure for the Double Jig.

When I hear a dance tune being played, especially by a good performer, I hear a whole sequence of phrases, one following the other. One phrase seems to make a statement and the next gives a response – a yes-no, up-down, black-white sort of structure. To my mind, these phrases are the essential building blocks of the music and have the potential to make listening to an Irish traditional dance tune an exquisite experience – or an exasperating one. In the case of many double jigs, most of the phrases fall within the bar. However the phrase I hear does not consist of the two triplets but of the first triplet and the first note of the second. So to generalise, my thesis is that the *basic structure* has the phrase ending on the first note of the second triplet in each bar. The remaining note or notes in the bar would then become the ‘upbeat’ into the following phrase. The popular version of a number of tunes, which have crotchets in the ‘phrase end’ position, would tend to support my theory. The first two bars of Breandán Breathnach’s notation (Fig 6) of ‘Down the Back Lane’ illustrate the point.



Of course, in good performance, this structure is blurred and varied to add tension and excitement to the performance, so my describing a structure such as this should not be taken as a suggestion that all jigs be played strictly in this fashion. Variation is, as I have frequently suggested, the soul of Irish traditional dance music and it is quite a simple task to learn a range of rhythmic variants that can be applied *ad lib*. However, these variations will not succeed unless they are based on a sound structure to begin with. I will describe some of the possibilities in the section on **Advanced Rhythm** in the second part of this article.

Looking again at the two phrases depicted in Fig 6, the basic jig rhythm structure of ‘ta-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta’ has changed to something resembling ‘ta ta-ta-ta taa’ ‘ta ta-ta-ta taa’ with the sequence starting before the bar in each case. If you care to try singing or playing the sequence I believe you will find there is a greater feeling of movement inherent in this structure than in the plain ‘ta-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta’.

To illustrate the pulse, that is, *rhythm* overlaid on the phrases illustrated above some modifications are required. Before I go on to look at this aspect of the music I would like to share a few observations on the concept of the phrase structure outlined above.

When giving piping lessons I have always endeavoured to get my students to play their music by using the phrase structure under discussion. When teaching a new tune I break it up into phrases and attempt to get them to learn the tune on a phrase-by-phrase basis hoping they will pick up a solid structure along with the melody. Over the course of time I have noticed that if the tune is at all familiar to the learner they are inclined to add the final note in the bar – the upbeat to the *next* phrase, to my way of thinking – to the phrase I have asked them to repeat. Experiences of this nature over the past twenty five years lead me to conclude that it is difficult to break away from the ‘ta-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta’ style. By the way, I do not believe there is anything intrinsically wrong with this style of phrasing. In fact, analysis of the rhythms used by some of our favourite pipers will show that ‘within-the-bar’ phrasing is the prevalent one.

I would like to think that all pipers who read this article will attempt to reproduce the features I describe. The first requirement would be to 'think' your way into the structure before ever attempting to reproduce it on the pipes. To help in this regard, it is a wise idea to start out with tunes which are frequently played with crotchets at the phrase-end position. The first part of '*Port an Bhráthar*' (Fig. 7) is a good example.

Fig. 7

The image shows two staves of musical notation for the first part of the tune 'Port an Bhráthar'. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Both staves have a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some notes beamed together. There are several slurs and accents over the notes, indicating phrasing and emphasis. The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Perhaps you can see now why I do not think it would be a good idea to add too much detail to the notation of tunes for general use – tunes, say, used for memorising and adding to ones repertoire. When a lot of detail is added it becomes difficult to follow the notated melody. Better to use a basic setting for tune-learning purposes and interpret it to suit ones own style of playing.

I will now attempt to show methods a piper might use to layer a pulse or a beat on to the phrase structure. I will continue to use the first four bars of '*Port an Bhráthar*' as my example.

To produce the pulse, some notes must be stressed so as to stand out from the general flow of the music. To list the options available to pipers one can stress a note on the pipes by:

- lengthening the note
- shortening the note by stopping it abruptly and putting a rest after it
- playing the note staccato
- playing a strong grace note – a 'cut' – leading into the note.
- raising the chanter from the knee to get a small but significant volume and tonal change (the effect varies greatly from chanter to chanter)
- changing the number of opened finger holes
- 'popping' the chanter – very quickly raising it a short distance from the knee then replacing it.

Producing a pulse by lengthening notes gives us a 'dotted rhythm' (Fig. 8). Measurements I have carried out on players who subjectively sound as if they are playing a dotted rhythm have shown me that standard notation convention restricts the range of possibilities that can be depicted.

However, standard dotted rhythm makes a good starting point. Rather than add more marks inside the staff I will put the rhythm skeleton below it.

Fig. 8

If you wish to try playing the example it might be helpful to sing the rhythm first – phrase by phrase. Starting at the first phrase it might go something like ‘ti-ti-taa-te-ta-taaa’ ‘te-taa-te-ta-taaa’ and so on. I would like to suggest that pipers think of the dotted rhythm along with the phrase structure I have described as the basic foundation from which to work. If a piper can consciously produce this type of rhythm and structure at will then it is fair to say they have good control of the chanter.

While it is relatively easy to sing the rhythm in the example above there are a number of practical problems when reproducing it on the pipes. For instance, what is the best way to go about separating the two consecutive A’s in the first and third phrase? The resolution might well depend on the school of piping followed. The two possibilities are:

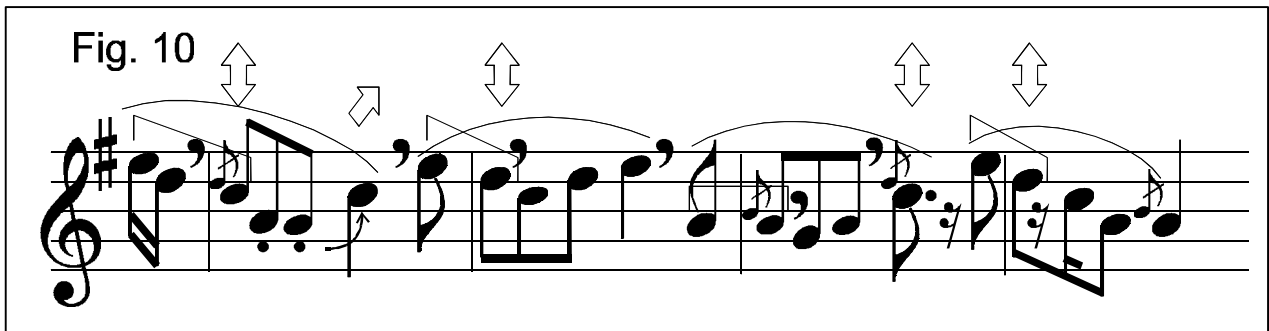
1. play a grace note between the A’s or
2. play the second, or possibly both, A’s staccato.

There is also the problem of getting a definite ending to the phrase. In the example shown the duration of the closing crotchets should be sufficient even if going legato into the following quaver. In the more usual situations where the phrase end is followed by two quavers, closure might be more definitely shown by putting a rest after the phrase-end note.

Another method for introducing a beat into the music is by lifting the chanter from the knee for stressed notes while playing either a dotted, or an even, underlying rhythm (Fig 9). In the example below, the chanter is lifted for the duration of the notes at the positions indicated but popped for the E at the end of the second phrase. I have also suggested the use of the ‘cut’ (a B grace note) to accentuate the A in the third phrase.

Fig. 9

To conclude this section here is an example (Fig 10) containing a number of the methods I have



outlined for creating a stress on notes. It should not be taken as the most tasteful way to play the tune but simply as a learning exercise. The value of the exercise can be extended by playing it once with a dotted, then again with an even, underlying beat.

Acknowledgements.

Extracts from “*The Hidden Ireland*” by Daniel Corkery used by permission of Gill and Macmillan Ltd, Goldenbridge, Dublin 8. First published 1924, the edition used was the eighth impression (1989) of that published in 1967.

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“*Ceol Rince na hÉireann I*” by Breandán Breathnach. Published by *Oifig an tSoláthair*, Dublin 1963

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“*The Gentlemen Pipers*” is a compilation published by Ace Records Ltd. on CDORBD 084. The items referenced are:

1. Track 11, ‘The Boys of Bluehill / Dunphy’s Hornpipe’ by Séamus Ennis and
2. Track 18, ‘The Lark in the Morning’ by Felix Doran.

Editor’s note. It has been necessary to enlarge the manuscript so that high definition is visible on screen. These may appear too large when printed and re-sizing is therefore suggested.

End.