

3.14 A Method for Miles

R. L. O'Mealy

One of the unusual aspects of the whole O'Mealy saga is the amount of memorabilia, documents and letters which people have seen fit to preserve. I am sure this is because of the importance Richard himself placed on every move he made - an importance he impressed on all his pupils and on those who bought his pipes.

While building up our stock of knowledge over the last few years, we were fortunate to be given scans by Dr. Lucy Delap of a series of letters from R. L. to her grandparents over the course of their purchase of a set of pipes in the 1930s. These letters contain very interesting instructions on how to approach piping but also insights into how O'Mealy felt about the state of Irish music. By the 1930s Richard was married again and seems to



Photograph sent to Miles Delap showing correct posture

have been making pipes more than playing music although from reading these letters it would seem that he would have preferred to be playing more concerts. A consistent topic running through most of his correspondence is financial worry. He gives the impression of being in great poverty and it would seem that he lived frugally - Seán Reid is known to have bought him a load of coal after a visit because the house was cold but no fire was lit; yet when O'Mealy died, his will showed that he was, in fact, quite wealthy.

Much is to be learned by all pipers from close study of O'Mealy's words and advice. He has thought a great deal about such matters and his advice merits heed. He explains all manner of things very

clearly and when he considers something to be of great importance, he underlines it and underlines it again in red and often repeats it a few times. A good example is his advice that one should always ensure there is no twist in the bellows tube, taking great care to set

it so that the tube is straight when the pipes are up in playing position - he must have been exasperated on more than one occasion by kinked bellows tubes!

Rather than try to illustrate what he wrote by re-typing his words and ending up with a transcription which is not as clear as the originals, I have decided to just leave the letters speak for themselves; they can be read umpteen times without becoming boring.

R. L. is not reluctant to ask for help, as can be seen when he asks the Delaps to write to the BBC requesting more O'Mealy, nor is he averse to expressing gratitude for payment.

He takes great care of his customers, writing in detail how to mind the instrument and how to approach playing it. His obvious love for his art comes out again and again as you read the letters.

The best thing to do is just read through the letters and build up a picture of how the man felt and the great amount of care he took in his business. There is one page of each letter on each page of this document and individual scans of the letters can be downloaded from the associated files section along with this article.

Ronan Browne

4th August 1930

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Please read instructions
carefully, before trying pipes

109 Rugeley Avenue,
Ormeau Road
Belfast
4 August
1930

Dear Mr. Delap

I have great pleasure in sending you one of the best Chanter's in existence. It would be very hard to get its equal or anything like it, and I want you to take real good care of it. As for the bag and bellows they will last for generations. Be most careful not to blow or allow anyone else to blow into any part of the pipes with the mouth. One blow with mouth is equal to £1 damage every time.

Arrange all bellows straps to suit your size and when placing the pipes in playing position see that the bellows tube is free from twist - I mean when the bag is in playing position. Place the bag pretty well back, causing the bellows to come somewhat forward so that your elbow will "sit" well back on the pad & not come over or interfere with the valve. When you attach bellows & put bag up see that there is no twist in tubes. When putting the Chanter blow pipe into the fitting in neck of bag I am leaving it so that you can keep it well in & it can come forward a little if necessary when you get more of the pipes. I am putting a

Slip leather loop on & off end of bellows - board

4th August 1930

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V/mark on it to guide you. - Have the two little marks meeting. If you could keep them in a large suitcase or suitable box or case you could lock it would be most advisable. It will be a very valuable instrument when finished & I want you to take good care of the Chanter. When all complete we can see about a case. You could make, or get made a box or case wide at one end & narrow the other with a lock to hold the present lot. A cheap strong thing about the size of a large fiddle case would do. Never keep your pipes in the heat of the Seán. Never keep them in a damp place. Never play them too near the fire. It is most important not to take out the Reed or interfere with in any way. It is very valuable & might not be possible to replace. It is in to stay & with proper care & playing it has a life of 100 years or more before it. Never take out the Chanter. I'll show ^{you} all about these things when I see you. See that it keeps tight in the toppiece (stock) If ever you want it round a bit, turn the toppiece in the cap (blow pipe-cap) & you will get the same as stirring the Chanter. Put your pipes on your
Brother and

4th August 1930

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3/ he got the fundamental note when he found the way of "covering".

If the pipes are kept in a suitable case, it is safer not to detach the blowpipe from the bag.

Dust of any sort, including cigarette ashes, is not at all good for Uilleann pipe reeds. - It sometimes gets drawn in through the bellows, ~~here~~. Always see that the parts are tight, particularly the Chanter, and when "bedding" (clapping) is required, a little flax is about the best, as it can be put on light & even. I enclose a little flax.

The two "pip marks" on the valve tube should be upwards when pipes in playing position.

All parts are now tight. If at any time the Chanter requires "bedding" let me know. The other parts are simple for yourself.

4th August 1930

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4/ I enclose sketch of first mode
fingering first octave and some very
important notes which please study
carefully. also I enclose a little bit
of a tune suitable for learning at the
start, but take your time till you can
blow correctly and "cover" the Chants.
Feel the pulse of the first octave
& fix your effort to it. Never blow too strong
Please let me hear from you as soon
as you receive the pipes.

Thanks for your letter with Cheque
£3 dated 1 Aug. 1930 to hand in due
course. I'll try & find out about the Flute.
That is now £13 you have paid.
Hoping to hear from you by
return.


Yours Sincerely
Richard Lewis O'Meara #

15th August 1930

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

109 Rugby Avenue,
Ormeau Road
Dublin 8
15 Aug 1930

Dear Mr. Delap.

I hope the enclosed will be helpful at the start. It comes to the same thing as I have already sent with the chanter. I think, from what you say, you will find various hints in my letter useful as you go along, together with the general instructions for beginning, and, bearing my remarks in mind, you will get along quickly. But far better not to grasp too much at once and you will get along quicker with safety from wrong method. In the beginning, to learn proper blowing - even & steady & free from short puffs - is most important; and better use the little time I sent for the purpose - did you get it? - And don't try to get high notes for the present. Then you can try something with an E  (first note in 2nd press) in it. The first mode of fingering is called so because it is the basis of other and more advanced fingering, and, in playing proper, both are used intermixed according to the passage, time and rhythm of the tune, and also for getting effect. - So you see it is an instrument for the artist just like the violin. You can't expect to get the full tone or value out of your chanter till you get on a good bit. If you heard it here with me you would be appreciably surprised.

15th August 1930

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you will notice that E  is the first note in the second-octave-pressure and is got with some 2 fingers as E  in first octave - always. The next note F  (middle finger of right hand) is ~~also~~ got with the same finger in both octaves for the present. Little finger of right hand does not get anything by itself for the present. You will notice by my diagram sent with Chant, that the index finger alone of right hand is not a note. Never blow into any part with the mouth. Hope you got all instructions. Let me know how you are getting on. But in any case, I'll expect to hear from you in the beginning of the month. (Sep.) You will have a magnificent instrument, & you will say so when you hear it. I played your Chant on bap-bellows in my workroom several evenings, with window open, & great crowds gathered in the Avenue; they thought it was a wonderful violin with reed instrument in unison. Take me as a friend. - Be patient & careful in your effort & you will get on well and will, I can see, find your musical knowledge of great help.

Yours sincerely,
Richard Lewis O'neal

13th February 1936

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45 Rugby Avenue,
Belfast.
13 Feb. 1936

Dear Mrs. Delap,

Your kind letter with cheque £3 reached me in due course. Mr. O'Realy and I are very, very grateful to you. I have just sent the Pipes to you today by Regd post most carefully packed. The lid of box is put on with screws for safety in opening — no need to hammer. I registered the pipes to cover £20. I sent the Bellows as separate Regd parcels, in this case, the pipes packed better by themselves. They will, I am sure, reach you in good order. The whole instrument is now in splendid playing order, and the tone was greatly liked by musicians here. All they require now is playing to keep them in order.

The enclosed photograph shows the proper playing position holding a one-regulator set. The player adjusts straps to his or her size. The player should see that the bellows tube is free from twist when pipes in playing position.

13th February 1936

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I put a little gum paper mark on tuning tenon of baritone and bass drones showing the approx place I had them in tune here. Please let me know when you get the pipes. If you let me have future address I'll try and help Mr. Delap over some of the pipe difficulties. It would be necessary to give him some help at the start. The tenor drone tunes to the fundamental note of the Chanter.

Yours Sincerely
R. L. O'Meara

14th September 1936

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The young man
 who has eyes
 danced to the
 rhythm of
 the Reel,
 jig & pipe
 & the effluvia
 of the song -
 -Hum R. & Dm


45 Rugby Avenue,
 Belfast
 14 September 1936

Dear Mr. Delap,

Your letter of 20th. Ult. reached me a few days ago. Many thanks for cheque £1. which will be very useful. Mr. O'nealy and I are very proud of your letter. We most heartily congratulate Mr. Delap and yourself, and pray God Bless your Son. Now, this is only a note to thank you, Congratulate you, and assure you I will gladly do the best humanly possible in writing some information helpful to you with your Uilleann Pipes, and you will hear from me soon. I am glad you tell me how you stand with the pipes, because it will give me a chance in my effort. I quite understand your difficulties. With natural patience and effort, difficulties with the Uilleann pipes become less & result in pleasure. Take it that you have a photo. of mine showing the instrument in playing position. - Try as best you can to place the pipes in that position. It is usual for beginners to have some difficulty in acquiring correct & steady blowing, and at the same time "cover" the Chanter fully. When you place the pipes in playing position, see that the bellows-tube leading to the valve-tube is free from kink or twist such as might impede the wind. The bellows-tube should be attached to suit

14th September 1936

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the playing position; if attached to pipes straight on the player's knees, placing the bag in playing position will cause a twist. Keep the bag well back and don't lean forward over the instrument. See that you can move your drone-stop-key (wavy mount at end of stock) up towards the stock for opening and down from the stock for closing, and, when not using a drone or drones, close it fully in case of unwanted leakage. When you find you can blow reasonably steady and can play some simple things going a couple of notes into the second octave pressure, let only your tenor drone go, keeping the corks in the larger drones, and work on & practice that way, feeling the pulse of the thing, until you feel you have mastered the blowing sufficiently to use, say, the baritone drone with tenor. When chanter is fully "covered" the fundamental note (Chanter off knee, allowing valve to open) should sound round & full like D string of violin, and the tenor should be tuned unison with that note, forming thereby a 5th with open A on chanter - same as D & A on fiddle. Never forget that the thumb note (octave of fundamental note) is in the first octave wind. The first note in the second octave pressure of wind is the one made with the 2 lower fingers of right hand, written  in modern notation. My next will deal with fingers, fingering, some advanced fingering, tuning, effect of open & close fingering, and pitch and tuning with other instruments.

14th September 1936

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2/ The Violin & other such instruments can always be tuned unison with the Uilleann pipes.

I did a little Broadcast for Empire on the 10th inst., I don't know whether it went to far part. From the time I got confirmation of the engagement a letter from here would not have reached you. I should get a better fee than 2 guineas for Empire stunt. Yet, only for odd engagements from the B.B.C. I would not be able to stay here at all. In other towns & cities authorities do something for fellows like me, but our authorities - local - are terribly hampered for want of brains, and where the brains exist with them Paranoia has set in.

For any help I shall always be most grateful for the pipe's sake.

Of course I am growing old & am not so able for all sorts of things as before. Playing is the best thing I can do now. The lathe work I feel too much for me lately, & and cooperation never allowed to worth of drive-power, so all must be done by O'neal's feet & legs.

Every Blessing to you & yours
- J. O'neal joins me
Yours very Sincerely,
Richard Lewis O'neal

3rd October 1936

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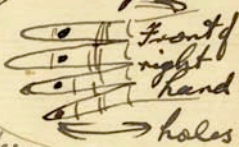
45 Rugby Avenue,
Belfast
3 Oct. 1936


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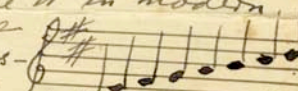
I wrote you on 14th. Oct. This is to give some further information to help in learning our Pipes.

The fingers of lower hand are placed straight across the Chanter so that the little finger reaches the hole comfortably.




The place of holes approx. when fingers in place



No matter what pitch the Chanter, the lowest note is always called D, and written  in modern notation, same as 3rd string of Violin; therefore, if we play the


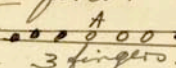

diatonic scale (D. E. F. G. A. B. C. D. \sharp) and write it in modern notation it will naturally be 2 sharps, thus -  (Key D., apart from pitch.) And it is the natural key of the



Chanter, the fingers getting the necessary intervals without the use of finger-keys. The violin tuned in unison with Chanter will test & show this clearly.


In the first or simple mode of fingering the first octave the Chanter is raised (valve open) to make (1) D . Close valve to get (2) E with 2 fingers. The major 3rd, written (3) F#, one finger. (4) G 2 fingers - (the # F & G fingers). (5) A, known as "Close" A, one finger. (6) B 2 fingers - (the A & B fingers). (7) C# 1 finger. (8) Ordinary D , octave of fundamental note, in simplest form, is thumb only. The C# finger should never be used with D , but certain other fingers are used - we will get them later - when it becomes "open" D, & Coloured as required.


3rd October 1936



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



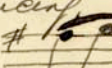




First Octave. First mode of fingering. For ordinary open notes in first octave we will take A  first. The first open finger A has the 2 & 6 fingers with it -  3 fingers.  Valve closed.

And next includes the upper F finger   A. 1

full open A has the whole lower hand open with it -  (5 fingers)

F# 1 all according to colour & expression required. This  A

E. 2 stands same interval with  "open" or "close", as A string & D string of violin (a fifth) and, as it is used in tuning, it is important. Ordinary "open" G  3 fingers

open G  the 4 fingers. In those 2 notes the same applies in fingering their 2nd octave. - Some more next time. It must be born in mind that the first method is the one upon which all advanced fingering is built. In playing, all fingering becomes intermixed. The first note in 2nd octave pressure is E  2 fingers. Close E fingers before getting F# . Valve & all fingers properly closed, the E  is easy with slightly more than first octave pressure wind. In practicing, learners find it easier to get G by slurring from F# into it, thus  which means you don't close the F# but slur into G. Then keep the G fingers open & slur up to  - 3 fingers open. It is wrong to produce a note in first octave and, with fingers open, try to force it into its 2nd octave. If we play, say, E  we must close the 2 fingers and manipulate them with reasonable 2nd octave pressure to get  Valve must be kept closed on knee except for its own note, or certain effects we will mention later. See valve working properly & if the pad falls off, fix it in place with Crocid, Elastic Glue or other good adhesive. (x  Fifth, a tuning interval)

3rd October 1936

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I know Mr. Delap will help you understand me.
Don't let pitch confuse you. Taking D as tonic note
on, say, Violin, the most natural position for the fingers
give same intervals as fingers on Chanter without using
finger-keys.

Please drop a line and tell me any difficulties
you find and I will do all I can to help you.

I have not even one playing engagement at
present. Nothing from the B. B. C. Do you know
Mr. Brown, the Music Director here? (E Godfrey
Brown, O.B.E.). Even a short note from you —
not saying I asked you, of course — to him Gp B. B. C.,
31 Linenhall St., Belfast would be good for me.
Pipers from Dn. are trying to get engagements here.

3rd October 1936

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Hoping you are all quite well,
and that I will hear from you soon.

Yours very sincerely,
Richard Lewis O'nealy

P.S.
Kind regards to all
from Mr. O'nealy RLDm

Practice The Little House
first RLDm

3rd October 1936

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For Uilleann Irish Pipes *The Little House Under the Hill = Lesson 1*
A lesson for simple fingering ("close" fingering)
Slowly for learning.

Value closed. 2, 1 2, 1 2, 1 2, 1 1, 1 2, 1 2, 2 2, 2 2, 1 2, 1 2, 1 2, 1 2
 fingers 2 fingers for G but only close G finger & you will have slurred down to the F# & so on

1 1 2, 1 2, 2 2, 2, 2, 1 1, 1 1, 1 1, 1 1, 1 1, 2 2, 2 2
 Don't close the F finger but open G finger & so slur into G.

1 1, 1 1, 1 1, 1 2, 1 2, 2 2, 2, 2, 1 1, Valve, Valve, 1 2, Valve
 Don't close A. Slur to B.

2 2, 2 2, 1 1, Valve, Valve, 1 2, 1 1, 2 2, 2
 Practice as above until you can make grace notes and some "open" notes really well and put in some. Open B has 4 fingers open

R.L. O'nealy

3rd October 1936

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2nd lesson for Wilson
Fish Pipes

The Harp that one thro' Tara's Halls -

For Practice

Slow with Expression

First note in Second octave wind

Value 2 1 1 2 1 1 2 / 1 2 1 Value Rest 1 1 1 2 1 1 2 1 1 1

Close valve when this note made Fingers

Try open 3 fingers the 1st & 28

Open 4 fingers the 2, 13 & 26

a pause

Valve

F is always in first octave pressure & wind

R. L. Omealy
October 1936