

Notes on the pieces

De-Sul Vyttytyn

This traditional song comes from the repertoire of Brenda Wootton (1928–1994), an enchanting singer from Cornwall. Its title translates from the Cornish language as *Sunday Morning* and its lyrics pose the question: ‘When you awake early on a cold Sunday morning, should you let your lover sleep or awaken them from their dreamland afar?’ If you listen to Wootton singing it on YouTube, you’ll hear the gentle, expressive style in which it is to be played.

The New Rigged Ship

Scotland has a very rich tapestry of musical traditions, one of which is that found on Shetland Island – an archipelago straddling the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea. The island has a deep Nordic heritage stretching back to settlements by Norse farmers and Vikings in the ninth century and this is distilled with Scottish culture into a wonderfully unique tradition. This is clear to be heard on the album *Fully Rigged* by Aly Bain and Ale Möller, where this tune, a Shetland classic, can be found. It is played in a lively, dynamic fashion and can be repeated as many times as you like.

Beth yw’r Haf i Mi?

Translating from Welsh as ‘What is the Summer to Me?’, this melody was collected in the late eighteenth century at *Harlech Castle*, one of the finest thirteenth-century castles extant and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It was initially published simply as *Air collected at Harlech Castle* but its current title, by which it is best known, relates to the lyrics set to it in 1963 by Sir Thomas and Lady Amy Parry-Williams. In this classic song of unrequited love, the man asks: ‘What are the long summer evenings to me now, without my love?’. In my interpretation, the first part is slow and feels a little lost. You can bring in the rhythm gradually from bar 10 and build it up in dynamics and intensity until it fades at the final bar. Repeat the tune as you wish.

Tabhair dom do Lamh

Translating from Irish Gaelic as *Give me Your Hand*, this piece was written by Ruairí Dall Ó Catháin (Blind Rory O’Cathan or O’Kane), who lived in the period between 1550–1650. While there are multiple legends surrounding its composition, perhaps its most iconic interpretation is found as part of the track *The Raggle Taggle Gypsy* by *Planxty* on their eponymous debut album released in 1973. This tune is to be played expressively and with *rubato*.

Dance Macabre

I first heard this wonderfully edgy piece from the famous Galician piper Carlos Núñez’s Breton album *Almas de Fisterra*. This piece captures the entrancing rhythms of the Fest-Noz, a traditional social dance night. In the Breton tradition, this call and response style can feel like a playful duel!

The Athol Highlanders

This tune was traditionally played as a bagpipe march but is now commonly played in jig-time, as it is presented here. The title refers to the Duke of Athol’s ceremonial infantry regiment which, despite not having a military role, is regarded as the only private army in Europe. This arrangement provides an opportunity to explore many types of traditional ornamentation.

Merch Megan

Merch Megan translates from Welsh as *Megan’s Daughter*. The tune is associated with John ‘Blind’ Parry (c.1710–1782), a famous Welsh triple harpist. While originally, it most likely would have been performed as a slow air, it also works well as a waltz and I interpret it as such. You may wish to place a small *rallentando* leading up to bar 28 before continuing in tempo.

The Forgotten Highland

This tune belongs to the repertoire of the famous whistle player, Packie Manus Byrne (1917–2015) from Ardara in Co. Donegal. It appears in his book *A Dossan of Heather* and while it is listed as a highland, I prefer to play it as a slow reel to make the most of its exquisite, ghostly melody.

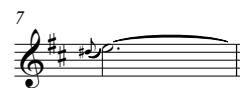
Style and ornamentation

The subject of style in Celtic music has received remarkably little scholarly attention, mainly because it is largely transmitted through the oral tradition as tacit/implicit knowledge: knowledge that either cannot, or is difficult to, communicate in explicit linguistic terms. Rather, it is acquired through watching and listening to master musicians. For instance, as integral as *swing* is to the genre, it is all but impossible to codify it in a manner that can be communicated precisely to another performer. Similarly, there are many styles of phrasing within the Celtic traditions. Rather than prescribe any one style, it is up to the interpreter to listen to recordings of master musicians in order to develop their own style.

One aspect of style that can be written is ornamentation. As I have documented in my doctoral thesis, there are hundreds of ornaments in use in the tradition, but for most musicians, these can be reduced to a few standard embellishments that are distilled as the result of factors including personal choice and the instrument that is being played. I have included ornamentation in the arrangements in this book but these are suggestive rather than prescriptive: everyone has a different idea of how a tune should be ornamented and in any case, master performers will rarely ornament a tune in the same way twice. The following ornaments are those you will come across in this book.

The **slur** is a term that in traditional music is typically used to describe a microtonal slide, generally ascending, and usually within the range of a semitone. On instruments that cannot play a microtonal slide, performers will play the first note (the grace note), then quickly add the second and when both sound simultaneously, release the first note to only sound the second note. It can be heard on *The Athol Highlanders* in the whistle part from bar 9. This ornament usually isn't notated as the degree to which it is employed varies

depending on the performer and the instrument. It is particularly effective at the beginning of long notes.



The **cut** is the equivalent of what is known in general parlance as the *acciaccatura*. In traditional music, these are used to accent a note and can happen so quickly as to just be a rhythmic device. However, depending on the instrument and the performer, the pitch of the cut can be audible and therefore of significance. Traditionally, the cut is written one tone above the note being ornamented but it can be played at any feasible interval above (and in some cases, below) the main note. The example below is from the jig *The Athol Highlanders*.



The **mordent** is a term that is generally not used in the Celtic tradition but the ornament itself may be heard freely. An example may be found below, from the first melody part of the slow tune, *Tabhair dom do Lamh*. It is usually played so quickly as to not deduct much time from the note to which it is attached.



The **treble** or **triplet** is a single pitch ornament. The use of two terms perhaps reflects the evolution of this embellishment from one which is traditionally written as a triplet in simple time, to that which is most often heard today and which reflects the much tighter rhythmic organisation of two semiquavers and a quaver. This can be seen below in reel time in bar 16 of *The New Rigged Ship* and in its compound rhythm form in bar 55 of *The Athol Highlanders*.



The **roll** is the Celtic music equivalent of what is known in the Western Art Music tradition as the *turn* and in this collection, the symbol for the turn is used above a crotchet or dotted crotchet, as in the jig *The Atholl Highlanders*, below.



It is played as follows:



This ornament is also used in reels and can be used exchangeably with the treble.

Another important stylistic aesthetic in Celtic music is **variation**. If you look up any of the tunes in this book on websites such as www.thesession.org or in other collections, you will generally find that no two versions are alike. Similarly, in performance, although a performer may have a basic setting of a tune in mind, they will ideally not play it the same way twice or even during the repeat of a part; there will be subtle changes each time.

Once you have learned the arrangements as presented here, you must begin to think about exploring the tune: how can you stamp your own individuality on the phrasing, the melodic and harmonic content, the ornamentation and the dynamics? This is where the joy of Celtic music lies and I hope you enjoy exploring it.