

The Essential Ornaments

Many players create beautiful music by employing only a few essential ornaments. If you master cuts, taps, slides, and vibrato, your playing will really come to life. Expanded techniques of ornamentation are wonderful to hear. But even the best of players seldom use all of the techniques listed here.

Focus on the four basic ornaments. Master those. Then learn how to play rolls. After that, the rest of the possible ornaments can be learned as you find them useful.

These notes provide links to videos on YouTube. These short videos will let you hear how the ornaments sound. Often the videos provide some instruction too.

Slides

Sliding UP

Priority

HIGH. Slides create a lot of tension in music. Slides replicate the kind of gentle move from one tone to another that vocalists use. It is also much like bending a note on the guitar. A well executed slide will make the music sound authentic. This is a critical technique to master.

Definition

An upward slide is a technique to move smoothly to a target note from the tone immediately below it.

Performance

A slide is performed by slowly pushing a finger off the whistle. The actual motion is akin to rubbing the finger across the relevant hole. For good control of the slide, point the finger, slide it and raise it. The motion is one of pushing.

Uses

Upward slides are used:

- to accent notes
- mostly in slow airs
- Often ends with vibrato on the target tone.

YouTube Demo

Search on “Tin Whistle Lesson 7: Slides”

Or use this link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfzNX6uwp_Q&NR=1

Sliding DOWN

Priority

LOW. This technique is rare.

Definition

A downward slide is a technique to move smoothly to a target note from the tone immediately above it.

Performance

Sliding down from one note to another is rarely done. It lacks the kind of drama that an upward slide provides. To perform the downward slide, gradually place your finger on the hole of the target tone. Go slowly. It is critical that the placement of the finger is accurate. If it is not, the whistle will likely chirp. Apply vibrato to the target tone.

Vibrato

Priority

High. This technique is essential when playing airs, laments, ballads, and dirges.

Definition

Vibrato is created by pulsing the air flow in the whistle. The note will seem to quaver, or shake. It is a standard technique on most wind instruments (perhaps not on the tuba) and the voice. It is NOT an alteration of pitch. It is a controlled modulation of air pressure

Performance

Two vibrato techniques are available to whistle players. Diaphragmatic vibrato is created by tensing and relaxing the muscles of the diaphragm. Vocalists use this technique a great deal. So do wind players. If you have been trained to create vibrato this way, it will work on the whistle. However, care must be taken not to cause such a change in air pressure that the whistle will jump from one register to another. This critical pressure point will differ from whistle to whistle.

The more common whistle vibrato technique is the finger shake or the finger wag.

Here's a table of suggested finger wags to create vibrato. Note that the best choice of which finger or fingers to waggle will vary from whistle to whistle. Also it is possible to change the depth of the vibrato by choosing different fingers to waggle. You will need to experiment on your whistle to discover what fingers work best.

Primary Tone	For Deep Vibrato Try Wagging These Fingers	For Less Deep Vibrato Try Wagging These fingers
B – low register	T-3	B1 & B2 or B1, B2 B3
A– low register	B1 or B1, B2 B3	B2
G– low register	B2 or B2 & B3	B3
F#– low register	B3	B3
E– low register	Use diaphragm vibrato	
D– low register	Use diaphragm vibrato	
C Natural: T2, T3 T2,T3,B1	B2 & B3 B3	B2
C#	B1, B2, B3	B1, B2
D – 2 nd register	T1	
E – 2 nd register	Use diaphragm vibrato	Half Hole B3
F# – 2 nd register	B3	
G – 2 nd register	B2	Half Hole B2
A – 2 nd register	B2	Half Hole B2
B – 2 nd register	B2	Half Hole B2

*The fingering for C natural varies from whistle to whistle. Some whistles intone best using T2 and T3. Others intone best using T 2, T3 and B1. The vibrato technique will change based upon which fingering is used for C natural.

A and B in the 2nd register can be cranky. Experiment to find what works on your whistle.

Youtube Demo

Search on: Tin Whistle Lesson 13: Finger Vibrato

Or go to this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k10q2OZpnc&feature=related>

The Cut

Priority

HIGH. Cuts are fundamental to good performance in Celtic music. The cut is an essential skill to master. A well executed cut can make the music sound authentic. The cut is the first component of a roll.

Definition

A cut is performed by initiating a tone and then QUICKLY lifting and replacing a finger above the lowest finger used to create the tone. The cut causes a momentary interruption of the primary tone.

Uses

Cuts are used:

- to accent notes
- in pace of tonguing to start a note or repeat a note
- to embellish a note – often at the highest pitch of a phrase
- as the first move in a roll

What to Listen For

A properly executed cut will sound like a single note that has a “blip” in it. The listener should NOT perceive two separate notes.

To Cut This Tone	Lift & Replace This Finger
B	T1
A	T1
G	T2
F#	T3
E	T3 or B1
D	T3 or B2

Exercises

1. Run a scale from B down to D. Play each tone three or four times. CUT each tone in the scale. Repeat the drill in the higher register
2. To play an ascending line and cut on the final tone requires that you start on the note below the one you want to cut. Cut a target note by starting on a note below the target. Play the note below then cut into the second note.

Melody Pattern	Cut on
A to B	B (T1)
G to A	A (T1)
F# to G	G (T3)
E to F#	F# (T3 or B1)
D to E	D (T3 or B1)

3. To play a descending line and cut on the final tone requires that you start on the note above the one you want to cut. Cut a target note by starting on a note above the target. Play the note above then cut into the second note.

Melody Pattern	Cut on
B to A	A (T1)
A to G	G (T1)
G to F#	F# (T3)
F# to E	E (T3)
E to D	

The most common use of the cut in a descending line is when the melody moves from B to A. Master this move first.

D – E - D

This is a special, but very useful, case of the cut. Many tunes have a melodic passage that contains a phrase that goes D E D. Some players will use a crann to articulate this phrase. But many players find the crann difficult. A cut may work just as well. Here's how to do it.

Play D

Cut the E by STARTING with F# and landing on the E. Sort of a grace note

Play D

Youtube Demo

Search on "Tin Whistle Lesson 6b: Cut" or go to this address:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJYa_jYk4ug&feature=related

Taps

Priority

HIGH. Taps are fundamental to good performance in Celtic music. The tap is an essential skill to master. The tap is the final component of the ornament called the roll.

Definition

A tap is performed by initiating a tone and then QUICKLY "tapping" a finger below the lowest finger used to create the tone. The tap causes a momentary interruption of the primary tone.

Uses

Cuts are used:

- to accent notes
- in place of tonguing to start a note or repeat a note
- as the second move in a roll
- in place of a cut

What to Listen For

A properly executed cut will sound like a single note that has a “blip” in it. The listener should NOT perceive two separate notes.

Performance

Taps work on these tones: B, A, G, F#, and E. (C# and C natural too)

It is not possible to tap on D.

YouTube Demo

Search on: Tin Whistle Lesson 6a: Taps

Or use this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfgXsEcb1GY>

Rolls

Long Rolls – Sometimes called Standard Rolls

Priority

Medium. The long Roll is a defining feature of Irish music. This is a must learn technique. But, get taps and cuts down with perfection before trying to learn rolls.

Definition

A long roll begins with the target tone, is followed by a cut, followed by a tap. A roll is essentially three-eighth notes.

Performance

It is ESSENTIAL to have mastered both cuts and taps before working on rolls. Where ever a dotted quarter note appears in the music, it is possible to use a long roll. However, a dotted quarter note may provide time to breathe. That may make it impossible to squeeze in a long roll.

It is not possible to roll on the low D since there is no tone below it for the tap.

YouTube Demo

Search on: Irish Whistle Demonstration: Rolls

Or go to this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWua4TMtWOM&feature=related>

Search on: Tin Whistle Lesson 6c: Rolls

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOt9gPpN95w&feature=related>

Short Rolls

HIGH. The short Roll is a defining feature of Irish music. This is a must learn technique

Definition

A short roll begins with a cut on the target tone, is followed by the target tone followed by a tap. A roll is essentially three-eighth notes.

Performance

It is ESSENTIAL to have mastered both cuts and taps before working on rolls. Where ever a quarter note appears in the music, it is possible to use a short roll.

It is not possible to roll on the low D since there is no tone below it for the tap.

Double Cut Rolls

Priority

HIGH. An advanced technique that is not often used

Definition

A double cut roll is a double cut followed by a tap.

B to D as a Triplet

Priority

MEDIUM. The B to D triplet is very useful. Melodies in the keys of D and G often move from B to D. This technique makes that movement interesting.

Definition

The B to D triplet is played as three notes - B C D – on a single beat.

Performance

Play B. Play C natural . Play D. Note that C natural places T2 and T3 on the whistle. The move to D requires only that the bottom three fingers drop into place – B1, B2, B3. The move is very natural.