



A GUIDE TO THE IRISH FLUTE

by Brad Hurley

Getting Started on the Irish Flute

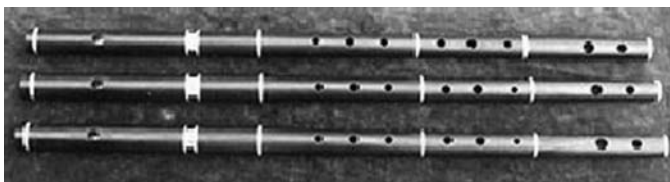
This section of the flute guide provides information that will help you choose a flute, as well as how to find instructors and books that can help you learn how to play. Once you know what kind of flute you're looking for, visit the directory of flute makers and dealers (<http://www.rovers.net/~bhurley/makers.html>), or the Wooden Flute Exchange (<http://www.rovers.net/~bhurley/exchange.html>), to find a flute. You can learn a lot about Irish flute playing just by listening carefully to good players. Check out the list of recommended players for suggestions. The interviews section also contains lots of good advice and food for thought from some of the best traditional wooden flute players and makers in the world today.



Flutes by Chris Wilkes, Photo courtesy Andrew Pickering

Choosing a Flute for Irish Music

The first thing to decide is whether you want a simple-system or Boehm-system flute. The vast majority of traditional Irish players use a wooden, simple-system (six-hole) flute:



(Three keyless simple-system flutes made by Bryan Byrne of Chelsea, Vermont.)

But some people prefer the Boehm system, which is the key system used on the modern silver flute:



(Boehm-system wooden flute designed and made by Chris Abell of Asheville, North Carolina.)

Boehm-System Flutes

Boehm-system flutes are available in metal or wood. They have a cylindrical bore and a complex key system. The renowned German flute maker and player Theobald Boehm developed this instrument in the mid-1800s because he believed it would make the flute louder and improve its internal tuning, especially in the third octave. These qualities make the Boehm-system flute especially appropriate for classical music in orchestral settings; in fact, by the late 1800s conductors were requiring all orchestra flute players to play Boehm-system instruments.

The fingering of the Boehm system flute is more complex than that of the simple system, making it less popular for traditional Irish music. Plus, without the open holes it is hard to slide from one note to another, which may limit your expressiveness – especially when playing airs.

For more info on the development of the Boehm-system flute, check out the "Standing Stones" Irish flute site (<http://www.sirius.com/~ststones/irflute.html>).

Simple-System Flutes

The simple system, conical-bore flute is what people played before Boehm introduced his cylindrical-bore design in the mid-1800s. Simple-system flutes are usually made of wood (cocus, grenadilla [also called African blackwood], rosewood, ebony, and boxwood are the most common), have six toneholes and anywhere from zero to 13 metal keys. Many experienced Irish flute players prefer six- or eight-key instruments. The six toneholes on a simple-system flute correspond to the six holes on a tin whistle: if you already play whistle, you won't need to change your fingering to play the same music on a flute.

Most simple-system flutes used by Irish musicians play in concert pitch: as with a D pennywhistle, the "D" fingering on a flute – six fingers down – produces a D (an octave below that of a pennywhistle) on the A=440 tuning standard in wide use today. People generally refer to these instruments as "concert flutes" or "D flutes," although

strictly speaking the latter term is incorrect since the flute may have keys that take it down to C-sharp and C.

As with the whistle, flutes are available in a range of keys. D is standard for Irish music, but you can also find flutes in A, G, F, E^b, C, and B^b. These are mostly regarded as novelty instruments, although they do come in handy for certain tunes or for creating a desired mood. By the way, the B^b flute is large, much longer than a standard D flute. You will often come across small “flutes” in the key of B^b, the same size as a B^b whistle; these are called *fifes*. A small, keyed flute in D, the same size as a D pennywhistle, is known as a *piccolo*.

To Key or Not to Key?

If you want a simple-system flute, you must decide whether you’d like one with keywork or not. With an eight-key, fully chromatic “D” flute, it is relatively easy to play tunes in keys like C, F, E^b, or B^b, and you can hit accidentals (such as F natural or C natural when you’re playing in the key of D) faster and more accurately. A keyless flute, on the other hand, is basically like a big whistle played sideways: you can cross-finger or half-hole to get the accidentals, but it’s less efficient than using keys. The biggest selling point for keyless flutes is that they’re much less expensive than those with keys.

With keyed flutes, you have a choice between post-mounted and block-mounted keys. Some people feel that block-mounted keywork is more aesthetically pleasing, but the wooden blocks are susceptible to cracking and shrinking with age. (Blocks are fairly easy to replace in most cases, so this is not a major worry.) Post-mounted keywork, in which the keys are attached to little metal posts, should generally be more stable over time.



If you think post-mounted keys are ugly, check out this detail of a lovely Rudall and Rose flute from about 1850. Image courtesy of Richard Moon.

Mind Your Head (joint)!

If you want to play regularly with other musicians, a tuning slide – the bit of metal tubing in the headjoint that allows the flute’s head to be pushed in or out – is recommended. Some flutes come with tuning slides; others (usually less expensive models) do not. A tuning slide is good to have because a flute that is in tune with other instruments at the beginning of a session will gradually become sharper as you play. (Here’s why: when you start out blowing warm air into a cold flute, the instrument’s cool walls reduce the temperature of the air column inside it. But after playing for a few minutes, your breath starts to warm the flute, allowing the air column’s temperature to approach that of your body. Because sound moves faster through warm air than cold, the flute becomes sharper in pitch as it warms up. Thanks to Henrik Norbeck for this explanation.)

Without a tuning slide you’ll have to compensate for this sharpening effect by adjusting your angle of attack across the embouchure hole. You can do it, but your tone may suffer. On the other hand, some flute makers eschew tuning slides on the grounds that they may make a wooden flute more likely to crack. You should also be aware that playing with the tuning slide pulled way out or pushed all the way in will make the flute sound out of tune with itself, unless you adjust the distance from the end of the end-cap cork to the middle of the embouchure hole.

On some flutes, mainly those made by (or patterned after) the great English flute makers, you’ll find that the headjoint is lined on the inside with a metal tube that extends right up the bore of the headjoint to the cork. Some flute players feel that a silver-lined headjoint produces a clearer tone, especially in the upper octave, while others prefer the sound of pure wood. Metal-lined headjoints do have some potential disadvantages: they make the flute somewhat heavier to hold and less evenly balanced, they’re more expensive, and they may make the headjoint more prone to crack. If you play flute regularly, the risk of cracking may be reduced, as the wood will have less opportunity to dry out and contract around the lining.

Volume, Tone, and Tuning

When choosing a flute, think about the quality of sound you want to produce. Do you crave the loud, reedy tone that many traditional players favor? Or do you want a flute that sounds rich, sweet, and “creamy,” in the style of Chris Norman? Do you want your flute to be heard over the din of accordions, fiddles, and banjos in a crowded session? Or would you rather blend in with the other instruments to create a sound that is greater than the sum of its parts?

A good player can achieve most of these qualities from any well-designed flute, but if your primary goal is volume and “reediness” you should look for a flute with large toneholes, such as the English flutes of the late 19th century (Nicholson, Pratten, Rudall and Rose).

A slightly squared-off embouchure hole – commonly called a “boxed oval” – may also help you get a big sound, while a round or rounded-oval hole will tend to produce a darker and more focused tone. The bore size and internal profile make a difference too: narrow-bore flutes are said to have a “sweeter,” more refined tone than those with larger bores. Rudall-style flutes (and Baroque flutes) have internal variations in the taper of the bore that are put there for internal tuning purposes or to bring out certain qualities in certain notes.

Large-diameter flutes with big tone holes and embouchure holes can be hard to fill with enough air to produce a satisfying tone. Big embouchure holes can also lead to a fluffy, unfocused sound in the hands of a beginner or someone who’s used to a smaller embouchure hole.

A Note on Tuning:

If you use the traditional Irish flute fingering, like that of a whistle, you’ll find that on most English flutes (Pratten, Rudall & Rose,

Nicholson, etc.) and their modern replicas, the F# is flat, the A is sharp, and the C# is flat. The bottom D on Rudall and Rose flutes is also quite flat. You will have to adjust your blowing angle across the embouchure hole, or use the metal keys in the original simple-system fingering, to make these notes play in tune. You can blow downward into the hole to make a note flatter, and blow across the hole to make it sharper; this can be done by moving your head up or down slightly, by rolling the flute toward or away from you, or a bit of both. The bottom D on a Rudall-style flute can be played in tune by blowing hard and by using a flatter blowing angle than you would use on a Pratten.

I've had lengthy conversations with flute makers and players about why these particular notes are "off" and have heard several explanations. Some makers believe the off notes are casualties of the tempered scale devised to make the flute playable in three octaves. (Remember that these flutes were originally designed to play classical music). Other makers, such as Patrick Olwell, believe these toneholes were deliberately placed the way they were to accommodate Charles Nicholson's idiosyncratic way of playing the flute, in which he blew much more strongly on the bottom notes (G down to D) than on the A. (Nicholson was a very influential flute player in the early 1800s, who had a hand in designing the large-hole flutes favored by most Irish musicians today.) Still other makers believe the A and C# need to be slightly off in order to produce a good cross-fingered C natural.

A number of people have pointed out that these flutes were not originally designed to be played with the "whistle" fingering: if you look at the back of Hammy Hamilton's *The Irish Flute Player's Handbook* (or in *The Flute*, by Rockstro), you'll see a chart that shows how the simple-system flute was originally meant to be fingered. Opening either of the two F-natural keys while you play F# will bring the note closer to pitch; combining this with opening the D# key may bring it even closer. Opening the long C-natural key while playing C# (all holes open) will bring that note up to pitch as well. But while this explains why these two particular notes sound "off" when played with the traditional fingering used by Irish musicians, it still doesn't account for the sharp A found on many flutes. Plus it doesn't help you if you have an unkeyed flute.

At any rate, you should try playing scales on your flute against an electronic tuner to learn how to play the instrument reasonably in tune. Start by positioning your flute's tuning slide so you can produce a strong, full G at proper pitch, and then play up and down the scale from there to find out what you need to do to play the other notes in tune.

Choose Your Wood

Another factor to consider in choosing a flute is the type of wood (or other material) used: grenadilla (also called African blackwood) and ebony are believed to have a warm, dark timbre; boxwood is often said to produce a mellower sound, possibly because the surface of the bore can't be finished quite as smoothly as blackwood. These are fairly subtle differences, however, and not apparent to everyone's ear.

Good flutes can be made from a wide range of materials. Don't reject something simply because it's not blackwood or boxwood. Patrick Olwell's son Aran once made an acceptable (though temporary) flute out of a large carrot, and Vincent Broderick's brother Peter won the All-Ireland championship with a flute he made out of a length of copper pipe. Flutes have been made from bicycle pumps, plastic tubes, glass, ceramic, bones, and who knows what else.

Several makers now offer six-hole flutes made of bamboo or polymer. These are generally more affordable than wood, and certainly a better environmental choice than blackwood. High-quality bamboo flutes are becoming popular among Irish musicians. Bamboo flutes have a cylindrical bore, so their internal tuning is different from that of a conical-bore flute, and nobody's making bamboo flutes with keys or a tuning slide. Aside from these caveats, high-quality bamboo flutes are well suited for Irish music. Plastic flutes are scorned by many Irish players, but some very good ones are on the market now and they are obviously much more durable and easier to care for than wooden instruments.

The March 1998 issue of *Scientific American* has an interesting article on flute materials. It cites an experiment in which a blindfolded audience couldn't tell the difference between the tone of a flute made of cherry wood and one made of concrete. (The article does not indicate whether the audience included people with discerning ears.) In the end, the material used to make a flute may matter less than the shape and size of the bore, the size and shape of the embouchure hole, the size and shape of the toneholes, the presence or absence of keys, and other factors.

Some people are allergic or sensitive to certain kinds of woods, such as cocus; if you find that your lips get inflamed when you play, you can ask a flute maker to install a silver band or sleeve around the embouchure hole.

Finding and Buying a Flute

Good wooden flutes range in price from a couple hundred to several thousand dollars. Here in the flute guide you'll find an international directory of flute makers (<http://www.sover.net/~bhurley/makers.html>) and the Wooden Flute Exchange (<http://www.sover.net/~bhurley/exchange.html>), a free site for advertising flutes for sale and flutes wanted to buy. The Exchange also contains links to other websites where you can find flutes for sale.

Most of the finest eight-key flutes ever made were manufactured in Britain during the 1800s. Nicholson, Rudall and Rose, Pratten, and Boosey (Pratten's Perfected) were among the leading makers, and many of their instruments are still being played today. If you can get your hands on one of these, or a modern replica thereof, you'll have the entire flute you'll ever need.

If you wish to start with a smaller investment, there are many old German student flutes on the market that are fairly cheap and produce an acceptable tone – but often somewhat "pinched" or weak. A plastic flute may also be a good choice if you don't want to spend a lot of money. If you decide later to get a wooden flute, you

can keep the plastic one as a care-free knockabout instrument for traveling, camping, playing outdoors in the rain, etc.. Other good choices for an inexpensive instrument include bamboo flutes and some of the wooden flutes made by Ralph Sweet. Bamboo and plastic flutes have much less environmental impact associated with their manufacture than blackwood flutes. Blackwood (grenadilla) is an endangered tropical hardwood that cannot yet be grown in plantations.

If possible, try to spend a few days (or longer) playing a flute before deciding whether to purchase it. This is especially true for experienced players. Every flute has its own idiosyncrasies, and you may have to adjust your playing style accordingly. For example, someone who's used to playing a Pratten Perfected flute would initially find that the bottom D of a Rudall and Rose flute sounds weak and very flat, and might think the instrument was defective. But after some practice, the player would be able to get a strong D, on pitch, with little effort. Even flutes made by the same maker vary widely, so if you're shopping for a flute it pays to get your hands on as many instruments as possible to find out what you like and don't like. When you get a flute you like, stick with it and get to know it.

If you visit a flute maker who has several flutes on hand, ask if you can try several different headjoints on one flute body. No two headjoints are exactly alike, and you'll be amazed at the difference a good headjoint makes.

Australian flute maker Terry McGee's home page (<http://users.netinfo.com.au/~terry.mcgee>) has additional advice on what to look for in buying a flute.

Learning to Play Irish Flute

Most of us are not lucky enough to have a master Irish flute player in the neighborhood that can teach us how to play. But it's possible to become a good flute player by using instruction books, attending schools and flute workshops, and by listening to good players.

Many flute players today try slavishly to imitate Matt Molloy or other "star" flute players such as Kevin Crawford, Mike McGoldrick, Brian Finnegan, or Seamus Egan. This seems pointless to me – the stars have indeed set a standard, but their styles are their own. You can develop your own style too. All flute players can learn from listening to great flute players without trying to sound just like them. As the haiku poet Basho once wrote, "don't follow in the footsteps of the masters; seek what they sought."

Listen to other flute players to get a sense of the range of possibilities; also listen to pipers, fiddlers, whistle players, accordion players, singers, whatever. And remember that playing with other musicians is necessary to truly grasp the soul and spirit of Irish music.

Hammy Hamilton's book has a good discography of Irish flute players, including listings for recordings of the classic older players like Peter Horan, Seamus Tansey, Seamus Cooley, Paddy Taylor, Roger Sherlock, and Josie McDermott. Many of these are unfortunately out

of print now and unlikely to be reissued on CD. If there are other flute players in your area, ask them if they have any classic recordings or field tapes that you could borrow.

Check out the Flute Guide's list of recommended players (<http://www.rovers.net/~bhurley/players.html>) – there are a lot of them, and you'll learn much about Irish flute playing by listening to any of them.

Instructors

Going to a teacher is especially valuable in the beginning when you can easily pick up bad habits if someone isn't around to observe and correct them. If you live in the U.S., you might be able to find a flute teacher in your area by checking out Roger Chen's listing of music teachers (<http://www.teachlist.com/>).

Some well-known flute players also give master classes or leadflute "camps" that are worth attending if you're serious about the instrument. In North America, for example, Chris Norman runs his Boxwood flute camp (<http://www.chrisnorman.com/>) each summer, and there is usually at least one flute instructor at the Swannanoa Gathering (<http://www.warren-wilson.edu/~gathering/>), the Lark in the Morning summer camp (<http://www.mhs.mendocino.k12.ca.us/MenComNet/Business/Retail/Larknet/larkcamp>) or during Irish week at Augusta (<http://www.dne.edu/augusta/augusta.htm>). Also check out the Irish Arts Week (<http://www.east-durham.org/>) in East Durham, New York. There are also lots of opportunities to learn flute in Ireland during Willie Clancy Week, the Frankie Kennedy Winter School, and other festivals and music schools.

Check out the Ceolas events (<http://www.ceolas.org/events/>) listing for links to some of these events.

Books

The Irish Flute Player's Handbook, by S.C. (Hammy) Hamilton (<http://homepage.tinet.ie/~hammie>) is an excellent resource for beginning (or even expert) flute players. This 215-page book will tell you everything you need to know to get started, including what to look for when purchasing a flute, how to play the flute in the Irish tradition, repair and maintenance, useful addresses, a bibliography, and a discography.

After being out of print for more than a year, a very limited reprint of the *Irish Flute Player's Handbook* is now available. This is designed to satisfy demand while Hammy is preparing a new second edition. Because of the small print run, the reprint is unlikely to be available from the normal retail outlets, but can be obtained directly from the publishers. The price includes a cassette recording, which accompanies the tutor section of the book, and postage and packing. The original illustrations have been digitally remastered to produce vastly better quality photographs in this printing.

The Irish Flute Player's Handbook is available from:
Breac Publications; Coolea; Macroom; Co. Cork; Ireland

Tel +353 26 45209; Fax: +353 26 45219

Price:

Ireland £28 (discount price £27*)

UK £30 (discount price £28.50*)

Europe £33.50 (discount price £32*)

USA and Rest of the World *Air Mail* £43
(discount price £41*);

Surface Mail £31.50 (discount price £30*)

Prices are in Irish pounds. Payment can be accepted by VISA, cheque in Irish pounds, or bank draft in Irish pounds. *Payments by cheque or bank draft are at discount price.

You could also get a copy of Fintan Vallely's book *Timber: the flute tutor*, (1986, Long Note Publications, Milltown Malbay, Co. Clare, Ireland. ISBN 0 9511569 1 8) a self-teaching book for the simple-system flute, including tunes. This book and others are available from: Northstar Publications 4641 Lyons Hill Rd., Springdale, WA 99173. Or try Andy's Front Hall, PO Box 307, Voorheesville, New York 12186. Tel: 1-800-759-1775 or 518-765-4193.

One of the best guides to ornamentation for the flute (rolls, cuts, cranns, etc.) can be found in L. E. McCullough's (<http://members.aol.com/feadaniste>) *The Complete Irish Tinwhistle Tutor*, available from many mail-order music shops, including Andy's Front Hall (address above) and Melody Music (Houston, TX) at Tel: 1-800-893-4277. The basic fingering for ornamentation is essentially the same on whistle and simple-system flute, although that doesn't mean you should play tunes the same way on both instruments. Some good players do so (Brian Finnegan, for example, uses the same distinctive tongued ornamentation on flute and whistle), but most flute players prefer a flowing style while the whistle lends itself to a more bubbly or chirpy manner of playing. Tonguing is routinely used by good whistle players, but is usually avoided in traditional Irish flute playing where glottal stops are used instead for articulation.

If you want to learn Irish music on the Boehm-system flute, check out Mel Bay's *Complete Irish Flute Book*, which is geared toward that instrument. The book's approach is from a classical perspective and should be especially useful for a classically trained player who wants to play Irish music. The book covers ornamentation and includes many good tunes, along with a brief history of the flute in Irish music. The accompanying CD has a selection of tunes, mainly flute with synthesizer backup. To hear other recordings of Irish music on silver flute, listen to Noel Rice or Joanie Madden. For info on the book, see the Mel Bay Publications home page (<http://www.melbay.com/>) or send them an e-mail message (email@melbay.com). There are many good books and some online resources for learning traditional Irish tunes from sheet music. Look for O'Neill's Music of Ireland and the multi-volume Ceol Ricena h'Eireann (Dance Music of Ireland, pronounced, in Cork dialect, "Kyoal Rinkana Hairj").

The quality of tune transcriptions that I've seen online varies widely – some versions of tunes are good and some are quite poor. Among the online sites for tunes include the following:

<http://www.ceolas.org/tunes/> Ceolas provides links to a number of tune collections.

<http://members.xoom.com/tradmusic/session.html> (this site features a new tune every week).

Maintenance and Repair

🌀 Wooden Flute Maintenance 🌀

Wooden flutes require much more care than metalones. A few tips:

🌀 Swab out the inside of your flute with a soft, dry cloth after you play. Occasional applications of cork grease on the joints will help your cork fittings last longer.

🌀 If you have thread windings instead of cork, be careful not to use cotton, unwaxed hemp, or any other fabric that is likely to absorb water. One flute maker recommends 100% polyester thread made by Gütermann, available in most fabric stores. It comes in 30-meter lengths; try to find the one marked with serial number CA 02776. This is good for the base winding, though you may want to use a thinner thread (silk is ideal, though hard to find) for the outermost strands of thread that you use to fine-tune the fit.

🌀 The conventional wisdom handed down from many years of tradition is that you must oil your wooden flute to keep it from cracking. This seems to be based more on word of mouth and logic than scientific evidence. Still, oiling does no harm unless you slobber oil on the keypads (which makes them sticky), so the best advice is to play it safe and oil the inside and outside of your instrument periodically, especially during the drier months of the year.

🌀 People have used a variety of oils for this purpose, including raw linseed oil, almond oil, mineral oil, orange oil, and commercial bore oil. Larry Mallette informs us of an article in *The Woodwind Quarterly* (volume 6 pp. 44-59) which implies that mineral and petroleum-based oils should be avoided, and recommends almond oil with 1% vitamin E oil added as antioxidant. Larry has had good results with this oil. Another flute player, Peter Heinlein, recommends buying cosmetic-grade almond oil rather than food-grade, which tends to oxidize faster and may gum up the bore of the flute.

🌀 Linseed oil is commonly used on wooden flutes. If you use it, be very careful to use raw linseed oil, not boiled. Boiled linseed oil will gum up the bore of your flute and may permanently ruin its tone. Linseed oil is made from flax; the residue left on your flute after oiling isn't toxic, and it's safe to use.

🌀 When oiling your flute, cover the thread or cork on the joints with tape, cover the keypads with small squares of kitchen plastic wrap, swab the tone holes with a Q-tip dipped in oil, and then run a lightly oiled cloth inside the bore. (If you have a lined headjoint, obviously you shouldn't oil the metal lining!) You can oil the outside with a few drops of oil as well, being

careful to avoid getting oil on the keypads. Let the oil soak in for a couple of hours, and then wipe it off with a dry cloth, being very careful to leave no traces of oil in the bore or the joints. The flute will have a nice sheen but should not look or feel oily. Your flute will probably sound a bit different after you oil it, but will quickly regain its normal tone.

✂ Patrick Olwell and several other flute makers maintain that oiling the bore (the inside) of a newly made flute can improve its tone, by filling up the pores in the wood. Again, this makes sense intuitively and is unlikely to cause any harm, so give it a try. Patrick recommends oiling a new flute at least once a week.

✂ Legend notwithstanding, it is **not** a good idea to pour Guinness down the bore of your flute or leave it to soak it in a barrel of water. Don't do these things if you value your instrument.

✂ Cracks can occur with sudden temperature changes, as metal and wood expand differentially. Wrap up your flute if you have to take it into the cold and leave it wrapped for a while at room temperature to warm up if it has been outside for long. A good, padded flute case should help protect your flute from temperature changes and other potential dangers. Jean Cavallero (574 Boston Avenue, Medford, MA 02155, USA. Tel: 1 (617) 628-6731) sews wonderful fleece-lined cordura instrument cases; several of her models are ideal for wooden flutes.

✂ When you're not playing, it's a good idea to keep your flute broken down and stored in its case, rather than leaving it fully assembled. If you have cork fittings, the cork may lose some of its springiness if it's kept constantly compressed, eventually leading to looseness in your flute's joints.

Australian flute-maker Terry McGee's home page (<http://users.netinfo.com.au/~terry.mcgee>) has additional information on flute maintenance.

Repairs

Any shop that repairs woodwinds such as clarinets or oboes should be able to fix a wooden flute. Here are names of some people in the U.S. who specialize in repairing and restoring old or cracked wooden flutes. Many flute makers also repair flutes; it's worth checking with any of the makers listed in the International Directory of Flute Makers (included in this issue of the WWQ).

Linda Marie Doran

2410 Lincoln St. NE
Minneapolis, MN 55418 USA
Tel: 1 (612) 706-0106 E-mail: midledoran@aol.com

Skip Healy

Healy Fife Company
5 Division Street Box 4
Warwick RI 02818 USA
Tel/Fax: 1 (401) 885-2502 E-mail: healyflute@rcn.com

Mary Kirkpatrick

Ithaca, NY USA
Tel: 1 (607) 273-5256

Mike Leonard

50 Rice Road
Wayland, MA 01778 USA
Tel: 1 (508) 653-6139

Flute Quotes

- ✂ "From the start, when it was the instrument of the wood-god Pan, the flute has been associated with pure (some might say *impure*) energy. Its sound releases something naturally untamed, as if a squirrel were let loose in a church." -Seamus Heaney
- ✂ "The only woman awake is the woman who has heard the flute." - Rumi
- ✂ "At last the notes of his flute come in, and I cannot stop from dancing around on the floor..." - Rumi
- ✂ "The flute of interior time is played whether we hear it or not." - Rumi
- ✂ "Playing a flute is like writing a book. You're telling what's in your heart...It's easier to play if it's right from your heart. You get the tone, and the fingers will follow." - Eddie Cahill
- ✂ "All flute players have a latent predilection for danger, otherwise they wouldn't play that wayward instrument." - Merrily Harpur.
- ✂ *Flute - dark notes
poured through minds
flowing out through fingers.* - Rachel Marsh

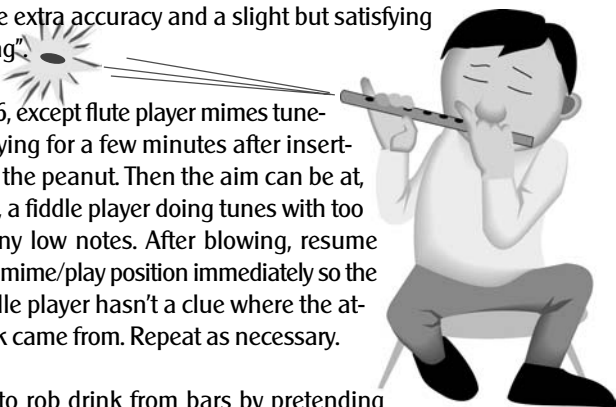
Why are Irish Flute Players so Disgusting?

Ten Disgusting Things Irish Traditional Flute Players Do

By Gavin Burnage (Gavin.Burnage@lang.ox.ac.uk)

1. Eat crisps immediately before playing, subsequently splattering those nearby with bits of chewed soggy potato.
2. Blow hard down the flute at irregular but frequent intervals so that the accumulated wet gunge goes on people's shoes (or ear holes or other orifices, depending on the angle of the flute).
3. While playing, hold the end of the flute over people's pints of beer and cups of tea so the wet gunge drips slowly into the glass or cup as playing progresses. (Best done to other players' drinks, as they don't notice till it's too late.)
4. Between tunes, bounce the end of the flute gently on the knee so that the gunge runs out and leaves a soggy wet patch on their trousers.

5. Insult fiddle players for playing tunes with notes lower than bottom D or C (not disgusting unless you're a fiddle player).
6. Insert a peanut at the embouchure of the flute, close all holes, point flute at nearby dog or other pet as available, then blow hard. A successful strike on the dog/pet often depends on the blood/alcohol level of the flute player. Flute players with Low C# and C keys are recommended to close those keys for that little extra accuracy and a slight but satisfying "zing".
7. As 6, except flute player mimes tune-playing for a few minutes after inserting the peanut. Then the aim can be at, say, a fiddle player doing tunes with too many low notes. After blowing, resume the mime/play position immediately so the fiddle player hasn't a clue where the attack came from. Repeat as necessary.
8. Try to rob drink from bars by pretending flute is the barrel of an antique gun and pointing it at bar staff (seldom successful).
9. Use cork grease for (censored).
10. Regularly smear flute with rancid oil (preferably oil from a tin of sardines past its use-by date) This also enhances the level of disgustingness achieved under items 2, 3, and 4.



The Flute: truly Irish Traditional Music's most disgusting instrument.

Other Irish Flute Websites

Terry McGee (<http://users.netinfo.com.au/~terry.mcgee/>), an Australian flute maker, has a site with lots of useful information for flute players, including a fingering chart for simple-system flute.

Rob Greenway (<http://www.geocities.com/feadanach/>), a flute player based in Washington, DC, has a site offering much good advice on holding the flute, tone, breath control, ornamentation, and more.

The Flow (<http://www.oblique-design.demon.co.uk/flow/>), a site by Edinburgh flute player Gordon Turnbull, focuses on different styles of Irish flute playing and includes an extensive flute discography.

The Wooden Flute Home Page (<http://www.woodenflute.com/>), by Larry Owens, has useful information on wooden flutes, a collection of links, and instructions for signing up on his Wooden Flute Listserv. Many Irish flute players are on the list, also classical players, flute makers, and others interested in wooden flutes. The Flute list has more than 1000 subscribers worldwide. Mostly classical in focus, but not exclusively. Subscription Address:

listserv@listserv.syr.edu

(type "sub flute your name" in message list)

Owner: Larry Krantz (lw@uniserve.com)

General Flute Websites

- You can find links to (mostly classical) flute sites, dealers, and makers from Larry Krantz's flute page (<http://users.uniserve.com/~lwk/welcome.htm>) and Jenny Grady's (<http://www.teleport.com/~fluter/>) home page.
- David and Nina Shorey (<http://www.antiqueflutes.com>) have a nice site on antique flutes.
- The Dayton C. Miller Collection (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/dcmhtml/dmhome.html>) of flutes at the Smithsonian Institution
- The Flute Network (mostly classical) (<http://www.flutenet.com>)
- Bamboo Flute Site (<http://www.goodnet.com/~siblown>)
- Folkers and Powell Baroque Flute Site (wooden flutes, but classical orientation) (<http://www.baroqueflute.com>)

Other Flute Resources

Flute Talk (a magazine for all flute players; one-year subscription is \$15)
200 Northfield Road
Northfield, IL 60093
Tel: 1 (708) 446-8550

U.S. National Flute Association
(4500 members, though presumably not all playing Irish flute!)
PO Box 800597
Santa Clarita, CA 91380-0597
Tel: 1 (805) 297-5287; Fax: 1 (805) 297-0753

Credits and Acknowledgements

This guide was written and edited by Brad Hurley, with grateful acknowledgment to Chris Abell, Bryan Byrne, Rob Greenway, Larry Mallette, Henrik Norbeck, Andrew Pickering, Gordon Turnbull, Hervé Yésou, and many others who have provided guidance, explanations, information, and inspiration about flutes and flute playing.

This guide began in the early 1990s as a frequently asked questions (FAQ) file on the Ceolas <http://www.ceolas.org/> website. Gerard Manning, creator of Ceolas, generously offered Ceolas as a site for the guide, maintained and updated it for a year while I was offline, and patiently helped me hone my still-rudimentary web page skills. I have moved the guide off the Ceolas site for now to make it easier for me to do timely updates.

Several people provided valuable advice for the redesign of the flute guide website, including Gordon Turnbull, Nancy Adams (who tweaked the images to make them load faster), and John Harvey. Thanks also to Gordon for informing me about Jakob Nielsen's (<http://www.useit.com/>) website usability work.

Please visit Brad Hurley's website at
<http://www.sover.net/~bhurley/index.html>