

1.02 Transcriptions of Tunes by R. L. O’Mealy.

Robbie Hannan.

Among the musical instruments collection housed in the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum is a set of pipes which is probably one of the last O’Mealy was to make. The museum acquired the set in February 1976 from Angus McDonald, an antique dealer from Holywood, co. Down.

The set is in C#, which was particularly favoured by O’Mealy, and is of boxwood with ivory mounts and brass fittings. It was made, more than likely, c 1945 for a man by the name of McWilliams (his forename is at present unknown) of Groomsport, near Bangor in co. Down. Unfortunately, we know almost nothing about McWilliams, but he was known by Jack O’Rourke, a piper from Ballinamore, co. Leitrim a close friend of O’Mealy’s who spent his adult life in Belfast. In fact, Jack remembered O’Mealy actually making this set of pipes for Mr McWilliams.

The pipe box in which the set was stored also contained a letter from O’Mealy to McWilliams as well as a number of tunes written out by O’Mealy with notes on ornamentation and general hints useful to someone learning the pipes. The letter contained details of a planned visit by O’Mealy and his wife to Mr McWilliams’ home in Groomsport. It would appear that the purpose of the visit was for O’Mealy to carry out minor repairs to the pipes, and quite possibly to give McWilliams a piping lesson.

There are fourteen transcriptions in all. They consist of the following: four reels; ‘The Lagan Slashers’, ‘The Scholar’, ‘The Merry Blacksmith’, and ‘The Sligo Lasses’; three hornpipes, ‘McElligott’s Hornpipe,’ ‘The Cork Hornpipe,’ and ‘The Londonderry Hornpipe’; three double jigs; ‘The Cook in the Kitchen’ and two transcripts of ‘Jackson’s Morning Brush’; one single jig ‘The Round of Beef’; two transcripts of a slip jig entitled ‘The Moving Bog.’

One of the most interesting items in the collection is a transcript of ‘The Little House under the Hill’ and the accompanying commentary on it by O’Mealy. The word ‘Lesson’ is written at the top right hand corner of the transcription, as is the word ‘Fingers.’ The point O’Mealy seems to be trying to get across in this lesson is the importance of making an airtight seal with the fingers on the chanter. The test he suggests for ensuring this has been achieved, namely by sounding the bottom D, is fool-proof since this note will not sound unless the finger-holes have been completely covered. The tune, ‘The Little House under the Hill,’ was no doubt chosen by him as it contains the notes B and F#, which require respectively two fingers and one finger to be raised to sound the note. It provides a good exercise for the beginner to master the art of making an air-tight seal.

Another issue raised by O’Mealy in this lesson which must be addressed by the beginner at an early stage is not to over-blow the back D, especially when descending from the second octave.

It is interesting to have a transcription by O’Mealy himself of ‘The Cork Hornpipe’ as this was one of the tunes he recorded for the BBC in Belfast in 1943 and it appears to have been his curtain-call piece. The version here, however, is much simpler than the recording from the 1943 BBC recording, the second part of which abounds in back-stitching. His argument that the sequence G’ D’, F#’ D’ is easier to play than G’ A F#’ A is undoubtedly correct. O’Mealy’s comment that there were two further parts of ‘The Cork Hornpipe’ is intriguing since there does not appear to be any trace of them in music collections. In his notes to his two-part setting of ‘The Londonderry Hornpipe’ he states that there are two other parts, although a five-part setting is quite common.

It is somewhat curious that he describes 'The Round of Beef' as a single jig even though he gives the time signature as 6/8. Similarly, he describes 'The Moving Bog' in one of the transcriptions as a slip or sling jig despite the fact that the time signature is 6/8. His suggested fingering for back D in this tune with the thumb, B fingers and G fingers open is somewhat unconventional.

'The Sligo Lassies' is interesting in that, like 'The Cork Hornpipe,' this was one of the tunes O'Mealy recorded for the BBC in 1943. The version here is close to his 1943 recording. It can be found in DMI 636¹

'The Lagan Slashers' is not unlike the well-known reel 'The Flags of Dublin,' and it is very similar to 'The Miller's Maid' (DMI 528)². It is interesting to note that another version from O'Mealy's playing appears in JFSSI³ where it is given the title 'The League and Slashers.'⁴

It is submitted that this may be a misinterpretation by J. H. Neill, who supplied the transcription, for 'The Lagan Slashers' and it may be that the mistake arose from his unfamiliarity with O'Mealy's midlands accent.

Editor's note. See the associated directory for full size copies of the original manuscript, letter and notes.

¹ F. O'Neill ed., *The Dance Music of Ireland*, Chicago 1907.

² F. O'Neill op.cit

³ *Journal of the Irish Folk Song Society* vol vii 1909 pp32-4

⁴ *An Píobaire*, vol. 3. No 28, 1996, pp15.

45 Rugby Avenue,
Doneau Road,
Belfast.
26th Aug 1945

Dear Mr. McWilliams

I got your last letter alright,
Thank you very much

I am now allowed on Tram or Bus.
I dare not walk quickly or very far.

This is only a short note to say that
if either Tuesday or Wednesday (28 or 29th)
is fine, and if all goes well, Mr. O'nealy
and I will go there to see you and the
Pipes.

I have much to say, but,
in the hope that ^{we} will get there to see you,
I leave it till then. If we get there, it
will be midday or early afternoon
before we arrive, and we must not risk
a late train back from Bangor.

In haste

Yours very sincerely
R. L. O'nealy

Reel The Lagan Slashes

First time

Second time

Second Ending

for the present

Keep the 2 & 6 fingers open from 1 to 3.
Keep open B make grace note +
it will give you descend B. Strike
3 fingers to get A. Then slow back

Whatever the difficulties you find let me know and I'll help you. The turn on the E (triple) is done by making the second E into a triplet - make grace note, strike upper E finger only and you will have made (triple). When we meet again I'll put ... right in all this.

R. L. O'M

The Scholar Reel

The Scholar

The Merry Blacksmith. - Reel

Either 1 or open

The Sligo Lassies: Reel

Mr. Elliott's Hornpipe

A handwritten musical score for 'Mr. Elliott's Hornpipe' consisting of three staves. The music is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The notation includes various rhythmic values, slurs, and articulation marks. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a sharp sign, and a 2/4 time signature. The second staff contains a measure with a circled 'A' and a circled 'x'. The third staff features several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' in a circle) and other rhythmic notations.


The Londonderry Hornpipe

ULSTER FOLK MUSIC CENTRE
DUBLIN X9-1-12

A handwritten musical score for 'The Londonderry Hornpipe' consisting of four staves. The music is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The notation includes many triplet markings (indicated by a '3' in a circle) and slurs. The second and fourth staves have boxes labeled 'First time' and 'Second time' indicating repeat sections. A library stamp from the 'ULSTER FOLK MUSIC CENTRE DUBLIN X9-1-12' is visible on the second staff.

Double jig *Jacksons Morning Bunch*

The musical score is written on four staves. It begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 6/8 time signature. The music is a double jig, characterized by its rhythmic pattern. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ornaments (marked with a 'u' or 'v'), and fingerings. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

+ Keep A open, make grace note with B finger + it will make next A
 o Keep last A open + slur to BAB + put grace note on B if possible.
 v Keep D open, make A + let it slur into next A 
 vv When doing the high FGA.BAB, keep the G finger *Slur*
 when going to A and G + A fingers open when pointing to B
 - Slur up all the time + see how you fit on
 + it is a know
 A ✓

Doubly ff. or *Peakone morning Bowed.*

make last open if possible
with, say, 1 3 4 fingers, the 2 finger +
the thumb

one with 2 in fingers also is one with 2 + 2 6 fingers +
thumb (4 fingers + thumb) + 2

The image shows a handwritten musical score on a single staff. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The tempo/mood is marked 'Doubly ff.' (fortissimo). The title is 'Peakone morning Bowed.' with 'or' written above it. The score consists of several measures of music, including some with fingerings (1, 2, 3, 4) and dynamic markings. There are handwritten annotations in italics: 'make last open if possible with, say, 1 3 4 fingers, the 2 finger + the thumb' and 'one with 2 in fingers also is one with 2 + 2 6 fingers + thumb (4 fingers + thumb) + 2'. The score ends with a double bar line.

The Round of Beef A Single Jig

When open, slur in the is usual $\frac{6}{8}$ time. See that you make each $\frac{6}{8}$ is.

⁰ For open :- At FEF., make the F open with the lower 3 fingers + strike the F finger so to get E + then slur back to F to form the turn - ~~getting~~ leaving the fa note on the first F. It's the same as the turn with the G on next bar. I think you have the F turn before. When you become accustomed to making the turn on + with open F you will produce the correct quality of tone. There are two more parts, but you can make it complete with the 2 for the present. For many years the stormpipe was known as the "Dublin Stage Breakdown". You could, if you wish any time, play the as or use the F key on regulator with either way.

L. O'N

The Moving Bog = A Slip or Sling Jug

First

Second ending

*open - Thumb.
2 D fingers +
2 G fingers
(5 fingers)*

The Moving Bag *a sling jig*

first time

second

ending



I you may make the with one finger except you want then with 3 fingers




This type of jig is about the oldest in Irish music. They were known as "sling jigs" & very nice to see them danced properly. Though set in $\frac{6}{8}$ time they are not at all the double jig type but have a lovely slip when danced properly. Collectors & publishers generally don't understand them & sometimes write them $\frac{2}{4}$ & put them with the Reels. A.S.D.M.

Lesson
Fingers - 2 1 2 *The Little House under the Hill*



This will help to get the fingers into the way of the first fingering of first octave and will make the next fingering easier. Naturally, in correct playing, the fingerings are intermixed. Don't press your

fingers too much or your hands will get cramped. In trying over your first octave, test your covering frequently by sounding your fundamental note, . The low D will always tell you about your covering. Take the little lesson slowly and close each note before making the next one you will notice that it is quite easy to slur to certain notes as G to F etc  but for the present close the 2 fingers & then make the one. We will have plenty of slurring later on.

D  the thumb note is always in the first octave pressure of wind and should never get more pressure no matter what the fingering or passage. When going from, say,  to back D but we are much inclined to give the thumb note too much pressure and doing so leads to spoiling the note () and spoiling the reed by giving it a bad habit. Before trying anything at any note in second octave the covering should be really good.

R. J. O'Keefe

The Cook The Kitchen

Handwritten musical score for 'The Cook The Kitchen'. The score is written on five staves. The first staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 8/8. The second staff is in bass clef. The third staff contains handwritten instructions: 'when you play make it open, and the separate and open + stay either + change from one way to the other now as they as you repeat at will'. The fourth and fifth staves continue the musical notation.

The Cook Hornpipe

Handwritten musical score for 'The Cook Hornpipe'. The score is written on five staves in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 2/4. The music features numerous triplets and other rhythmic patterns. The score concludes with the initials 'P.T.O.' at the end of the fifth staff.

End.