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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 Lasses' 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 636^1

'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

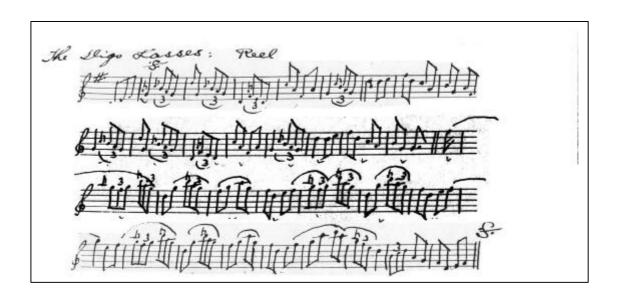
⁴ *An Píobaire*, vol. 3. No 28, 1996, pp15.

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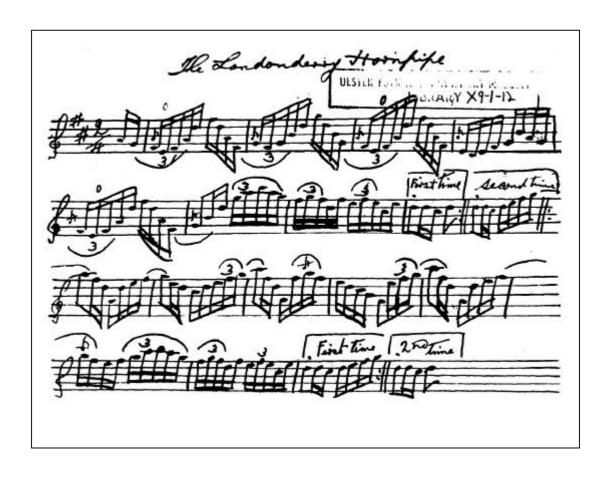










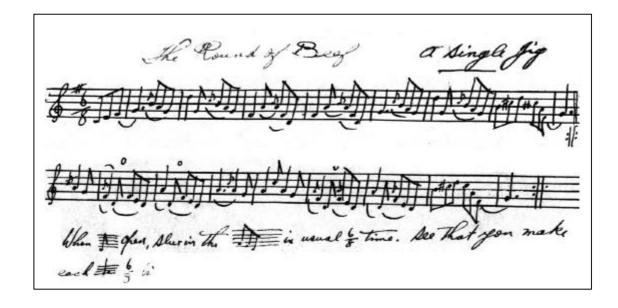




+ Keep A open, make grace note with B figer 7 it will make next A of Each A Open & Shur to BAB + furtificace not on By possibly.

When Dopen, make A + let it shir into next A stronger open when fringers open fit on Slew up all the time of See how you fit on



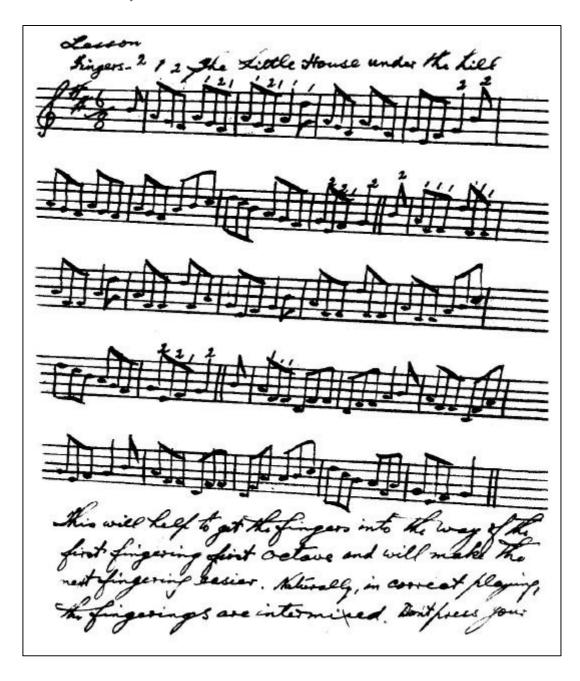


I store open :- at FEF. Thake the Fopen with the lower 3 figures of blick the Ffinger so to got & then she back to F to form the two agesting the facenst on the first F. It to the some as the term with the Gen maps become accomboned to making the him on the with often F you will froduce the convert grality of tone. There are two more fasts, but you can make it complete with the 2 for the freent. For many years to storepipe was known as the bublin stope Breaks down for could of you wiel any time, play the the as the property of the free with the store of the trule the free on regulation with either way.





Their type of Jig is about the oldert in Drich musice. They were known as 'Sling Jigs of very rise to see Them densed properly. Though set in a lime they are not at all the Double jig type but have a lovely Sling when done at frosely. Collectors of publishers forwally don't and water them to sometimes write them. I've the there with the Reels of Som







End.