

# The **Dunedin** **Session**

**Tune book**



**New Edinburgh Folk Club**

**ISBN 978-0-473-19574-8**  
Published September 2011



New Edinburgh Folk Club  
PO Box 6093, Dunedin 9059, New Zealand  
web: [www.nefc.org.nz](http://www.nefc.org.nz)  
email: [info@nefc.org.nz](mailto:info@nefc.org.nz)



# INTRODUCTION

BY SEÁN MANNING

BOUZOUKI / BANJO PLAYER

The traditional Irish or Scottish session is a relatively recent thing — probably not much older than the middle of the 20th century. Some, for instance Fintan Vallely and Charlie Piggott (1998), hold that it was created inadvertently by the priesthood.

There used to be a tradition of house dances, which may or may not have originated as a way of raising cash for people who were emigrating to America in the years following the famine. Typically a single musician, a fiddler or a piper, would play while people danced “set dances” designed for four couples or various other formats. If it was fine, it might be outdoors, if not, or if it went into the night, it would be in a cottage. With not much room, it’s as well they didn’t fling their arms about, and most movement was vertical, there not being a lot of horizontal room in your average cottage.

The priesthood, it would seem, disapproved, probably because these events brought young unmarried men and women into proximity, a thing that was known to lead to awful consequences. Having become fed up prodding the ditches for prone bodies, so the story goes, the priests discovered something called the Dance Hall Tax, designed to license premises that hosted the swing music and dances that were coming from America. Since house dances weren’t registered, a complaint would be made, the authorities would turn up and in one tight lipped righteous swoop, the house dance became extinct.

Musicians tended then to retire to the pub, where they began, for the first time, to play together. Before this, there seems to have been little in the way of ensemble playing of Irish dance music, which is what a session consists of. (A *ceilidh* used to be a Scottish gathering where stories were told and songs were sung.)

If musicians accidentally gathered in the same place, violence could result, as when the great Carolan, Ireland’s most famous harper, leapt across the room in a tavern, blind as he was, reaching for the throat of a piper who had dared tune up in his presence, at least according to Brian Keenan’s (2001) account.

Another influence was undoubtedly the *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann*, formed in 1951 as an offshoot of the Dublin Pipers’ Club, the first item of whose constitution stated the aim of reinstating the harp and the pipes to their right place in Irish culture.

A stroke of genius was their organisation of a national network of *Fleadh Cheoil* (pron. Fla Keeole), traditional music festivals, one for

every county and province in Ireland, and one for the whole country.

Although they were based around competitions, *Fleadh* mostly consisted of hundreds of musicians descending on some small country town for continuous sessions over a weekend. When I was young I went to a number of these, and it was ages before I discovered there were competitions at all. The one time I went up to the local school to watch, I was amazed at the expertise, but it wasn’t exactly entertainment. The sessions were the thing.

#### References:

Keenan, B. *Turlough* (2001). London: Vintage.

Vallely, F. & Piggott, C. *Blooming Meadows — The World of Irish Traditional Musicians* (1998). Dublin: Town House.

## SESSION PROTOCOL

There are protocols in a session. The *Comhaltas*-sponsored sessions are particularly rigorous (no guitars or *bodhráns* allowed, for instance) and the rigidity varies from session to session.

Most sessions in this country are friendly and open to all. The better ones, which attract the gun players, can be exclusive and hostile if you’re not very good. Mostly in Dunedin we have the former type. If you come across the latter you’ll know about it.

So, briefly, tunes are usually played in “sets” of two or three of the same kind — jigs, reels, hornpipes or even polkas. The basic rule is, if you don’t know it, don’t play, or at least do it quietly. This applies, admittedly with less success, to accompanists as well as tune players.

The *bodhrán*, by the way, if played at all, is preferably a quiet instrument.

The person who starts a set typically dictates what happens next — how many times each tune is played, what the next tune is. Everyone else follows and supports them. The idea is to make a total sound that is pleasing, and this is best achieved by listening.

There is no “jamming”. The tunes are traditional pieces, and some modern ones follow the same format.

The repertoire varies tremendously from session to session, and particularly from region to region. As a result, there are many books like this one, arising out of a local culture.

## A NOTE FOR ACCOMPANISTS

A good guitar or Irish bouzouki player can often pick up the “pattern” of a tune from among familiar forms, even though they don’t know it well, but most accompanists will learn the tunes by heart. When in doubt, a drone is good, and in general, chords consisting of a tonic and fifth work well.

I have once witnessed three guitar players in a session, all playing different chords. This is customary (though not very helpful) among guitarists. Moreover, when one played louder, indicating that he [sic] knew the tune, the others would take his signal and increase their own volume. It also seemed important that they not look at each other, for fear of distraction. The result was a single chord, consisting of all the notes in D and G major and some others as well.

Accompanists should follow the tune, not lead the pace (something I am not very good at myself, having a tendency to speed up, which is a bad habit.)

In general, the chords in this book are basic (see Mike Moroney’s comments following). There are many common substitutions — relative minors, playing the major on the 6th in a minor or “modal” key and so on.

## THE DUNEDIN SESSION TUNE BOOK 2011

For this collection, we simply took a snapshot of the tunes played at sessions in Dunedin over a two month period this year and found a version of most of them to put in the book. Louise Frampton did most of the work, being a layout expert at the local paper. Greg Waite and Louise adjusted the tunes to locally played versions and Mike Moroney added chords which I argued with.

Greg has also written a section on ways to learn music and the use of ornamentation. Although in this book we have largely left off the

ornamentation on the written music, because although it is, above all, what distinguishes Irish and Scottish music, and though there are traditional ways to ornament, it is idiosyncratic and depends on your instrument. Pipers, fluters, fiddlers, harpers and banjo players all do it differently.

So have a great time with this book. Join the session.

## CHORDS IN THIS BOOK

By Mike Moroney

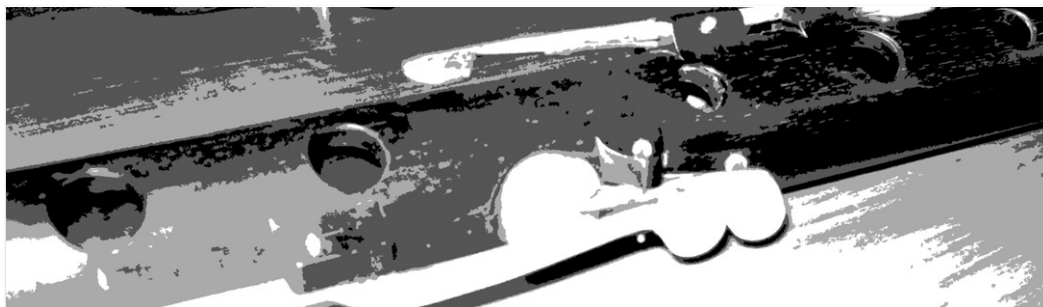
There is no single correct way to accompany these tunes, but there are plenty of wrong ways. The accompanist should approach the task in the first instance with the recognition that none of these tunes requires accompaniment. They stand alone, many for centuries, their melodic and harmonic beauty built-in. Strumming along is a somewhat modern invention and is best applied sparingly.

Having said this, there’s no doubt that a good player can enhance the rhythmic and melodic elements of a session in full swing and bring a more taciturn set to life.

To this end, I have supplied the most fundamental chords that will work with the tune. It is up to the player to learn how to use chord substitution and linear movement to become a skilled accompanist.

There is no substitute for knowing the tune. Only then will one hear how to support it and not detract from the melody in doing so.

**Disclaimer:** All reasonable efforts have been made to identify the ownership of modern tunes, and where possible, permission has been sought and granted for their publication. If we have inadvertently published a tune without permission or without acknowledging its author, we sincerely apologise.





# DEVELOPMENT OF A TUNE

BY GREG WAITE  
UILLEANN PIPER

“First of all, you have to learn it, and first you must learn the talk, and then you must learn the grip, and after that you must learn the truckly howl, and then you have the whole lot, only just to keep on practising it. — Seamus Ennis”

Seamus Ennis (1918–1992) is someone to take seriously (even when he is making a joke). His life was devoted to Irish piping and to the collection and study of folk song and music. He learned his piping from his father, and so his recordings transmit to us something of the style and feel of the 19th century traditions of Irish music.

We can reach back to that century also in the recorded playing of the older masters of flute, such as John McKenna, or fiddle players Michael Coleman and James Morrison who lived on into the recording era of the early 20th century.

To listen then again to our modern heroes such as Matt Molloy, Liam O’Flynn or Frankie Gavin is to hear their reweaving of the strands left by these earlier players.

When Seamus Ennis said “learn”, he meant listen and learn. Today we must listen to the old masters, listen to the new ensembles such as the Chieftains, Altan and Danu, and also listen to our fellow players in the session. No matter who is playing at what level, they may have some inflection, some howl that you might well wish to adopt.

## SO WHY ARE WE PRODUCING A TUNE BOOK?

I am ambivalent about such an enterprise. But here we have a snapshot of what is played in Dunedin in 2011 (or at least a bit of it), and it will give new players some guidance for what to focus on in order to join in with others. I often work from written music in developing a tune, but only with an eye to moving the dots as I go.

No one written version of a tune will suffice (even the minutely accurate transcriptions of an individual’s playing such as Pat Mitchell has produced in his amazing *The Dance Music of Seamus Ennis*).

Indeed, the best book you can read about Irish sessions and session tunes is poet and flute player Ciaran Carson’s *Last Night’s Fun* — there are no tunes in it at all, but the narrative is woven around many tune titles.

## ORNAMENTATION

If you take a tune from this book, you will need to give it a “feel” and

ornament it. Reels are technically in 4/4 as written, but often have more of a 2/4 feel. They may “swing” (that is, the notes are played dotted as “long-short, long-short”) or they may be played “straight” (1-2-3-4). It depends on the tune.

Ornamentation is as much about the “feel” and about articulating the tune as it is about merely “decorating” it or putting on icing.

Let’s begin with a jig, or 6/8 tune. Look at the first two bars of the Kesh Jig:



It might also be played as:



or



Both variations work on the chord progression G > D that accompanists might play.

Here are some other ways it can be played involving ornaments.

### Cut

Firstly, a “cut” can give emphasis and clarity to the beginning note, then another cut can be used to separate the repetition of the G notes in bar 1 and the A notes in bar 2 to replace tonguing on the whistle or flute, or bow-stroke change on the fiddle.



## Slide

Another effect often heard in this tune is to “slide” up to the first notes of bars 1 and 2.

The timing of the slide can vary. Here it is represented as starting on the beat, but it might be done slightly before the beat:



Try combining a cut and slide:



## Roll

Another very commonly used effect is the roll, which involves playing the note, cutting the note from above and then cutting the note from below:



For simplicity's sake this is often written as:



To master each ornament, take it out of the tune and practise it repeatedly on its own. For variety, try a scale, say rolling on each note as you go. When you've mastered your G-roll and A-roll, as in this tune, try the cut and slide before each.

## Triplet

Now for the triplet. Often in Irish music a player will put in three notes in the time of two. On the pipes the “ACA triplet” can be used in place of an A-roll. This is often written as:



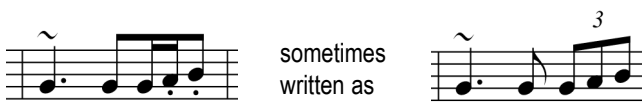
In reality, the rhythm is as follows:



And on pipes the effect is often played “tight” or as staccato notes. On wind instruments a similar effect can be achieved by staccato tonguing, or on the fiddle by bow technique:



Here is another variant of the first bar involving three into two:



## When to use ornaments

So now you see that as a piper I'm fiendishly keen on ornaments. Feel free not to ornament, but only after you can play ornaments well, and when leaving them out is a conscious choice, rather than because you simply can't do them. They are all part of the truckly howl.

Use the ornaments to make the music rhythmical, and to make it interesting for the audience (and for yourself). Vary the tune each time around with different effects. If you are playing solo you can please yourself, if in a group you may want to co-ordinate your ornaments with what others are playing.

## RESOURCES

These days there are endless resources for watching, listening and learning.

- You can live-stream the music programmes on RTÉ and TG4, the Irish television channels.
- YouTube is packed with clips of the great names, and tuition clips on various points of ornamentation.
- Go to sites such as <http://www.thesession.org> or <http://abcnotation.com/search> where you can find transcriptions of tunes and lists of recordings of each tune.
- Visit ITMA, the Irish Traditional Music Archive – Taisce Cheol Dúchais Éireann – a national reference archive and resource centre for the traditional song, instrumental music and dance of Ireland: <http://www.itma.ie>.

This book also contains some Scottish, Breton, Scandinavian and other tunes. These traditions each have their own tricks and inflections, and peculiar dialect.

By all means be eclectic in your playing, but remember that each tradition is an entity in itself (and even within each of these there may be regional variations).

Master one tradition well, whichever it is you choose. However contradictory or perverse it may seem, try to capture some of the old ways, even in a new and alien context.

Even in Ireland, that's the way it has gone, as the Poor Old Woman transformed herself into the Celtic Tiger, and then the Celtic Hyena (according to Mayo-man Mick Henry, Oxford's session leader and raconteur).

And as Iggy McGovern puts it in his *The Irish Poem Is ...*

a Táin Bó, a Spring Show, a video  
a trodden dream, a parish team, a tax-break scheme  
a prison cell, an Angelus bell, a clientele  
a brinded cow, a marriage vow, a domestic row  
a tattered coat, a puck goat, a telly remote  
a game of tig, a slip jig, a U2 gig  
a restored tower, a Holy Hour, a pressure shower  
a ticking clock, a summer frock, a shock-jock  
a hazel wand, a dipping pond, a page 3 blonde ...

Sláinte mhaith!

# LIST OF TUNES

## REELS

Bag of Spuds	1
Concertina Reel	2
Cup of Tea	2
Dinky's	3
Dublin Reel	3
Dunmore Lassies	4
Earl's Chair	4
Farewell to Connaught	4
Farewell to Erin	5
Fermoy Lassies	5
First House in Connaught	6
Flogging Reel	6
Frank's Reel	7
Gravel Walk	8
Humours of Carraigholt	9
Jenny's Welcome to Charlie	9
Lady's Pantalettes	10
London Lassies	10
Mactaquac	10
Malbay Shuffle	11
Maggie's Pancakes	11
MacLeod's Farewell	11
Morning Nightcap	12
Morning Star	12
Mountain Road	12
Old Bush	13
O'Rourke's	13
Paddy's Trip to Scotland	13
Perry's Reel	14
Poor Ould Woman	14
Pullet	15
Rakish Paddy	15
Rip the Calico	15
Sailor's Bonnet	16
Scholar	16
Sean Reid's	16
Silver Spear	17
Sligo	17
St Anne's Reel	18
Star of Munster	18
Teetotaler's	18
Tommy Peoples'	19
Trim the Velvet	19
Trip to Pakistan	20
Two-Fifty to Vigo	21
Wise Maid	22
Woman of the House	22

## JIGS

Banish Misfortune	23
Blackthorn Stick	23
Brian O'Lynn	24
Coppers and Brass	24
East of Glendart	24
Eddie Kelly's	25
Frieze Breeches	25
Frost Is All Over	26
Gold Ring	27
Green Cottage	28
Hag at the Churn	28
Haste to the Wedding	28
Humours of Ballyloughlin	29
Jimmy Ward's	29
Kerfunten	30
Kesh	30
King of the Pipers	31
Lark in the Morning	32
Maid at the Spinning Wheel	33
Maids of Selma	34
Miller's Maggot	34
Mooncoin	35
Out on the Ocean	35
Pay the Reckoning	36
Pipe on the Hob	36
Rambling Pitchfork	37
Rakes of Kildare	38
Stan Chapman's	38
White Petticoat	38

## SLIP JIGS

An Phis Fliuch	39
Kid on the Mountain	40
Na Ceannabhain Bhana	40

## POLKAS

Bill Sullivan's	41
Rose Tree	41

## HORNPIPES

Fairies	43
Liverpool	43
Red Haired Boy	44
Rights of Man	44

## SLOW TUNES

Auld Resting Chair	45
Camel Hump	45
Fanny Power	46
Hewlett	46
Marni Swanson of the Grey Coast	47
Si Bheag Si Mhor	48



*The Albar, Lower Stuart St, Dunedin*