

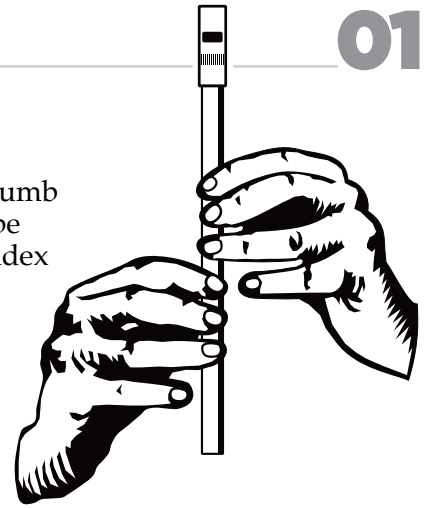
Whistle - First Steps 1

1.1 Holding the Whistle

Place the tip of the mouthpiece in your lips. Try to avoid using your teeth to anchor it; just use your lips. Grip the whistle with your left hand and cover the top three holes with

the pads of your first three fingers. Your thumb will probably be behind your index finger or your middle finger. Now cover the remaining holes with the first three fingers of your right hand.

Again, your thumb will probably be behind your index finger or your middle finger. Try to have a firm but relaxed grip.



1.2 Making a Noise

Say "too" or "tuh", say it without making the sound in your mouth. Say it onto the palm of your hand and feel how there's a sudden blast of air produced after the "t". This is what we need to do before each note, and it's called tonguing. For now, every note will be tongued. THE TONGUE STARTS THE NOTE.

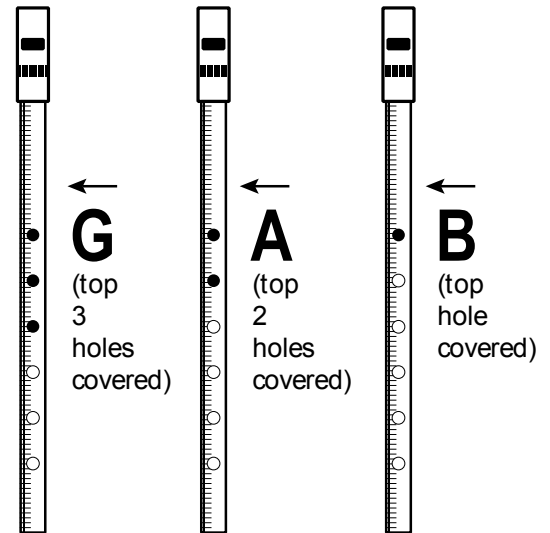
Start with your left hand covering the top three holes. Blow a steady stream of air through the whistle, firm, not too strong. You'll soon learn the

right strength. This note is called **G**. Now play three **G** notes. Saying tuh-tuh-tuh will help you make the right shapes with your tongue.

Take your ring finger off the third hole down so that you're covering the top two holes of the whistle. Again, blow a steady note. This note is called **A**. Play three **A**s in a row, remembering to say tuh-tuh-tuh. Experiment with going from two fingers down (the **A** note) to three fingers down (the **G** note) and back and forth.

Finally take another finger off so that you're now just covering the top hole. Blow the note; this note is called **B**. Blow three **B** notes in a

row. Experiment going from **B** to **A**, from **A** to **G** and so on.



1.3 Reading the Music

Nigel's Whistle Method uses a form of notation to learn tunes, and if you don't know how to read music, you can pick up the tunes using this notation. The first thing you must do is start memorising the names of the notes on the whistle. So far all you've learned is three notes, **G**, **A** and **B**, so it

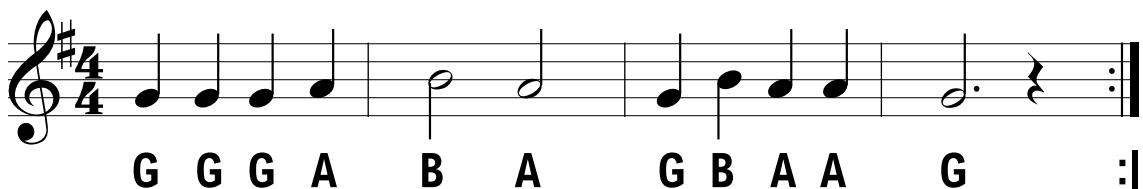
shouldn't be too difficult to learn three notes. We're going to keep adding notes to your repertoire, so soon you'll know most of the notes you need to play tunes on the whistle.

Look at the tune below, *Au Clair de la Lune*, also known as *Jesus' Hands Are*

Kind Hands, or *Silver Moonlight*. If you don't know the tune, you'll be using your ears to figure out how it goes, either from Nigel directly, or from a recording. When you know how it's supposed to sound, play the notes in the order below, giving it the rhythm you hear.

Note that at the end of the line of music or the line of notes there are a couple of dots. This is a symbol in music which means "play the section again", so when you reach the end of the line, go back and repeat it once.

1.4 Au Clair de la Lune (1) (traditional French)



Whistle - First Steps 2

2.1 Three More Notes

Now we're going to learn the notes **E**, **F#** and **D**. Start off in the first position, the top three holes covered by the index finger, middle finger and ring finger of your left hand (the **G** note). Now cover the 4th hole down and blow the note. This is the **F#** note (called "F sharp").

Next cover the top five holes and blow the note; this is the **E** note.

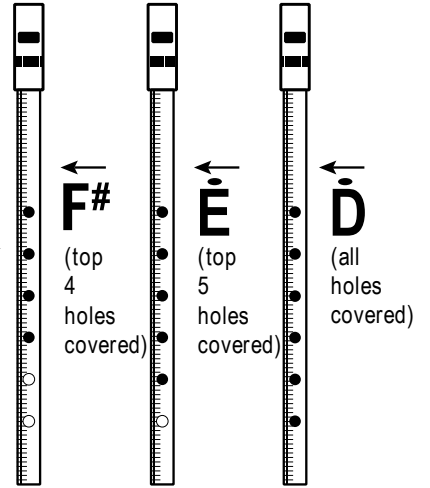
Now try the **D** note, six fingers down. The **D** is the most difficult note so far, and you

need to learn how softly to blow through the whistle in order to get this note. Very often people cannot get the note to begin with, but it does come with time. Just breathe softly into the mouthpiece to achieve the note.

Now we're going back to *Au Clair de la Lune* and learning the next line. The most difficult part will be going from the end of bar 5 (the **A** note) to the beginning of bar 6 (the

E note), because you need to place three fingers onto the holes simultaneously.

At the end of bar 8 you can see the letters "D.C.". That translates as *da capo* (Italian for "the head"), and it means go back to the beginning (or the head of the page). At the end of bar 4 you have *fine* ("end"), so once you



have repeated the top line of music, stop.

2.2 Au Clair de la Lune (2)

Musical notation for *Au Clair de la Lune (2)* in 4/4 time. The notes are: G G G A B- A- G B A A G- (fine); A A A A E- E- A G F# E D- (D.C.).

2.3 Egan's Polka

The next tune, *Egan's Polka*, is a test of finger dexterity. This time you have to go from the **B** note (just the top hole covered) to the **D** note (all holes covered).

You'll find this difficult at first, but it's great practise for you, because this is the sort of thing you must get used to to play more tunes.

Any musical instrument involves certain physical aspects: on the whistle it's getting to know how hard (or how softly) to blow, getting

used to covering the holes properly, and learning to lift and replace various combinations of fingers.

Egan's Polka (1) (traditional Irish)

Musical notation for *Egan's Polka (1)* in 2/4 time. The notes are: B D E D B D E D G A B A G E D; B D E D B D E D G A B A G G :|

Whistle - First Steps 3

3.1 Towards the Full Scale

We've learned the first six notes on the whistle, and you should now know the names of these notes (D, E, F#, G, A, and B) and you should be able to play them with confidence. If you can't, take a step back and practise until you can. Memorise the names of the

notes so that you can find them without thinking too much. Practise going up and down from the D to the B, and then practise different combinations, such as from E to A, or F# to B. Now we're going to learn more notes and expand our tune repertoire.

3.2 The High "D"

The way to play the next note, - the high \dot{D} - is quite simple: it's the same fingering as D, but you blow a little harder to raise it by an octave. The difference in the amount of breath you need to change from one octave to another is very subtle, and only experience can teach you that subtle

difference.

In *First Steps 2* we learned the first half of *Egan's Polka*. Below it's given again, but with the B part. (I call the first half of a tune the *A part*, the second half the *B part*).

Notice that in the tune, the high \dot{D} is shown with a dot above it.

It should be noted that there is an alternative method for sounding the high d, and that is to have all your fingers down except the top one: leave the top hole uncovered. I don't use this method, but a lot of whistlers do. You'll have to choose one way and stick to it.

3.3 Egan's Polka (2) (traditional Irish)

5.1 The Upper Octave



5.2 Ex.2 - Traversing the Octaves

6.1 The G Scale

You should now be completely conversant with the D scale. You should know all the names of the notes on the D scale, and be able to play a normal scale, up and down from low D to high D. There are many, many tunes which you can now play which use the notes of the D scale, but by adding one more note to your skills - the C, or "C natural" - the number of tunes you could play will increase greatly.

6.2 A New Note: "C natural"

Let's look at the key of G major: there's only one note different between G major and D major, namely the 4th note of the G scale, the C natural. (C natural is just plain C, and we'll know it because it has no sharp - # - after it.)

One way to achieve that note is by half-covering the top hole of the whistle (see Diagram 1 on the right). Unfortunately, it's pretty difficult to use this method while playing fast, so you have to get into the habit of using an alternative fingering, by covering

the second and third holes, but leaving the top hole open (Diagrams 2 and 3). This isn't easy to begin with, but with practice it will soon become easier. This is a big hurdle in beginning to play whistle, but it's absolutely necessary.

Try the exercises below and start getting used to making this new note. Play each part of Ex.1 over four times, until you can play it through smoothly without making any mistakes.

6.3 Exercise 3

6.4 Exercise 4

In Exercise 4 we're exploring virtually the full extent of the whistle from its lowest note (the D) to one of its highest (the high B). There are higher notes on the whistle, but

you almost never come across them in Scottish or Irish music. Get to know your way around the whistle. Be able to play this exercise with confidence. First

play by tonguing every note, then try it without tonguing.

You now have the basic skills to play thousands of tunes on the penny whistle,

and the best way forward from here is to play, play and play. Enjoy it - there's nothing like it!

Nigel Gatherer's Scottish Collection

The Fairy Lullaby (traditional)

song air

G G B B D D B D D B A G G B B D D B G G A B A A G

●	●	●	● ^x
●	●	○	●
●	○	○	●
○	○	○	●
○	○	○	●
○	○	○	●
G	A	B	Ḋ

A Gaelic air from a song entitled An Coineachan, also known in English as The Fairy Lullaby, about a mother whose bairn was stolen by a fairy as she picked berries.



Fairy Lullaby

Sine Bhan

Sine Bhan (Fair Jean) (Duncan Johnson)

song air

D D E F# B A A | F# E F# B A F E
 D D E F# B A A | D D F# F# E D
 D D E F# Ḋ B B A | Ḋ B B A Ḋ F# E
 D D E F# Ḋ B B A | D D F# F# E D

D E F# A B Ḋ

D pentatonic

A Gaelic air from a song written by Duncan Johnson (1881-1947) of Islay. The song was for his wife, and his worry about whether he would see her again after fighting in WW1.

Sine Bhan

Nigel Gatherer's Scottish Collection

The Skye Boat Song (Boulton)

song air

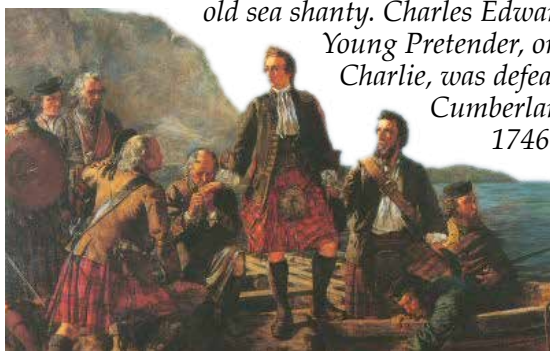
D E D G G A B A Ḋ B A B E E D D

B G B B A E A A G E G G G E E

B G B B A E A A G E G G G E D

D E D G G A B A Ḋ B A B E E D D

The words of this popular song were written by Sir Harold Boulton in 1884. The first half of the tune is said to be an old sea shanty. Charles Edward Stewart, the



Young Pretender, or Bonnie Prince Charlie, was defeated by the Duke of Cumberland at Culloden in 1746. Aided by Flora MacDonald, Charles escaped to the island of Skye. The song commemorates his flight.

D E G A B Ḋ

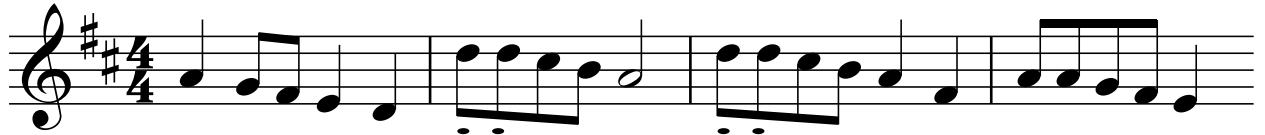
G pentatonic

Skye Boat Song

Nigel Gatherer's Scottish Collection

Doon in the Wee Room (Daniel McLaughlin)

song air



A G F# E D Ḋ Ḋ C# B A Ḋ Ḋ C# B A F# A A G F# E



F# G A G F# E D Ḋ Ḋ C# B A Ḋ C# B A F# A A G E D

Doon in the wee room, underneath the stair,
Ev'rybody's happy, ev'rybody's there,
An' we're a' makin' merry, each one in his chair,
Doon in the wee room, underneath the stair.

This song is about *Quin's Bar*, which is in the *Springburn* area of *Glasgow*. The tune has been heard in a *Laurel and Hardy* film



Coulter's Candy (Robert Coultart)

song air



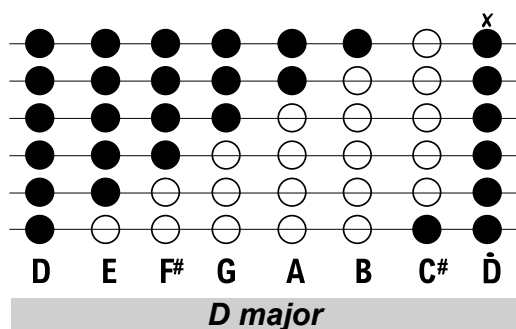
D F# A A B A G B A D F# A A G F# E



D F# A A B A G B A D F# A F# E D

Ally, bally, ally, bally, bee,
Sittin' on yer mammy's knee.
Greetin' for a wee bawbee,
Tae buy some Coulter's Candy.

Originally composed as an advertising jingle in the 19th century by Robert Coultart, who made sweets and sold them in the *Galashiels* area.



The Burns Collection



Auld Lang Syne (traditional)

D G G G B A G A B G G B Ḋ È

È Ḋ B B G A B A B G E E D G

È Ḋ B B G A G A È Ḋ B B Ḋ È

Ġ Ḋ B B G A G A B G E E D G



Auld Lang Syne is an old Scots song to which Burns added two verses (the third and fourth). He didn't think much of the original tune, so another tune - this one - was used in Thomson's collection.

Auld Lang Syne

Should auld acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to min'?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot, and days of auld lang syne?

Chorus: For auld lang syne, my dear, for auld lang syne,
We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet, for auld lang syne.

And surely ye'll be your pint-stowp, and surely I'll be mine;
And we'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet, for auld lang syne. [Chorus]

We twa hae run about the braes,
And pu'd the gowans fine;
But we've wander'd mony a weary fit,
Sin' auld lang syne. [Chorus]

We twa hae paidl'd in the burn,
Frae morning sun till dine;
But seas between us braid hae roar'd
Sin' auld lang syne. [Chorus]

And here's a hand, my trusty fiere!
And gie's a hand o' thine!
And we'll tak' a right gude-willie waught,
For auld lang syne. [Chorus]

D E G A B Ḋ

G pentatonic

Auld Lang Syne

Nigel Gatherer's Scottish Collection

The Barnyards o' Delgaty (traditional)

song air

F# E D A B D B A

F# E D A B D E

F# E D A B D B A

A A A G F# E D

The Barnyards o' Delgaty

As I gaed down to Turra market, Turra market for to fee;
I fell in with a wealthy farmer, the barnyards of Delgaty.

Chorus: Linten addie toorin addie, linten addie toorin ae,
Linten lowrin lowrin lowrin, the barnyards of Delgaty!

This is a Scottish "bothy ballad," a type of song which was popular amongst farm workers, especially in the North East of Scotland (Aberdeenshire, etc). The songs usually portrayed life on the farm or celebrated characters and exploits of the bothy "chiels" - lads or workers.



Barnyards o' Delgaty