



School of Piping

“The Minstrel Boy”
Pipe Tune Reference Book



Introduction: Welcome to your first tune. This booklet will set the foundation for building a step by step process of learning new tunes as you progress through you piping career.

We begin with a staple “The Minstrel Boy” which is an essential part of a piper’s repertoire. Welcome to your new start to piping.

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ALAP / ASAP / Pulsing

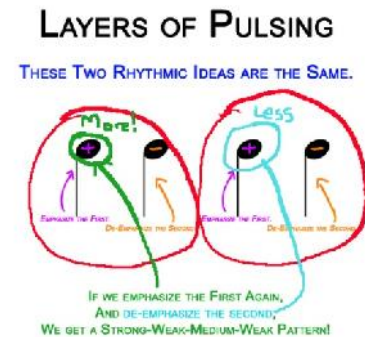
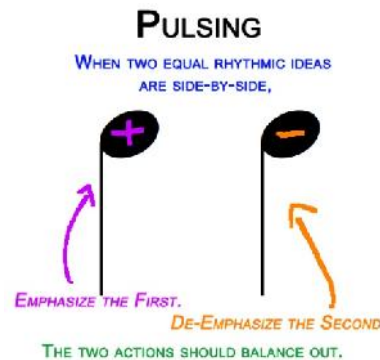
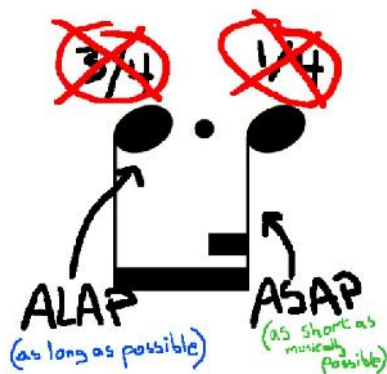
"As-Long-As-Possible" / "As-Short-As-Possible" Basics. This idea deals specifically with the "dot-cut" rhythm that we frequently find in bagpipe music. Bagpipers, will not *proportionally divide* a dot-cut rhythm. Instead, a good piper will stretch the dotted note as long as musically possible, and resultantly the cut note will be played as short as musically possible. That, of course, is where the acronyms of "ALAP" and "ASAP" come from. This stretching of the rules simulates an increased volume on the dotted note, thus providing an increased dynamic range to the rhythm.

Fusing ASAP Notes to Embellishments. When you look closely, the "ASAP" concept is also important in playing good embellishments. A good embellishment will contain a certain set of steps played accurately and evenly. But, in order for the embellishment to fit into the tune that you're playing, these even steps will have to be played quickly and efficiently. Just how quick should the steps be? You guessed it. In the vast majority of embellishments, the steps should be played as short as musically possible.

So, let's say we have a cut (ASAP) note leading into a doubling. That will mean that the cut note and the steps of the embellishment will all be the same length, and they will generate a "fused" effect. It's an easy enough concept to talk about, but can you do this in your playing? It's tricky.

Pulsing - Expression and Phrasing on a Larger Scale. *Expand and contract the length of beats to enhance the dynamic quality of bars and phrases.* Pulsing focuses on building dynamic flavor *across* two or more beats. In order to produce expressive phrases, pipers will often literally extend the length of certain beats, and condense others. This *simulation of volume changes* is what provides that dynamic flavor to our music. Pulsing and the degree of pulsing, is open-ended, and completely up to the performer.

Pulsing deals with the idea that somehow we need to dynamically show the important beats within a phrase. It's going to deal with the skill of bending and stretching the expectations of rhythm to simulate a diverse dynamic range during a phrase. In fact, the idea of pulsing is exactly what generates the idea of the "heavy left foot," and the idea of "Strong, Weak, Medium, Weak."



The Minstrel Boy

Set

Trad.

Objectives:

- Play every note accurately (crisp, clean transition to each note).
- No crossing noises
- Play rhythms accurately (To the foot).
- **Obey the Cardinal Rules of Embellishments**
 - **Rule 1:** Play each step accurately
 - ❖ **VERY IMPORTANT:** No crossing noises during the steps of these embellishments!
 - **Rule 2:** Play each step evenly (the same length).
- Keep your fingers properly positioned on the chanter.
- Don't worry about how *fast* the tempo is; worry about the *steadiness* of the tempo.

Tune Killer(s):

- Crossing Noise = poor scale technique (Amateur)
- Lacks Expression = poor ALAP / ASAP; poor control



Watch out for Crossing Noise!



Embellishments

Embellishments. Embellishments are played distinctly and with considerable conviction. They should be consistent, both technically and musically and should always be played in context with the music. Each embellishment has a set list of steps (usually two or three) that, when executed properly, produce the desired sound and effect.

Always Obey the Two Cardinal Rules of All Embellishments:

1. Each step must be played accurately.
2. Each step must be played the same length (with few exceptions).

1. “Throw on D” or “D Throw”: It is important to note that there are two different methods of playing the D Throw. we teach the “light” method to new students as we generally find it more musical and less complicated for a beginner.

“Light” D Throw:

Steps: Start on (come from) any note.

- 1) Play Low G
- 2) Open to D
- 3) Grace note D (tap your index finger)
- 4) Open the chanter to D

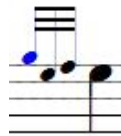


2. Doublings: A doubling produces two rapid sounds (**TEE-DEE**). To create these sounds, doublings each have two steps. (Downbeat/Accent goes on: Step 1)

E Doublings

Steps: Start on (come from) any note.

1. Play HG Gracenote to E.
2. Play F Gracenote to E.



High A Doublings

Steps: Start on (come from) any note.

1. Play HA.
2. Play HG strike on HA.



Note: Half Doublings. Something to realize about Doublings when the note you are starting on (coming from) is High G or High A. Notice that you will not be able to play a High G Gracenote. This tune has two half doublings.

Half Doubling on F

Steps: Start on High A.

1. Play F.
2. Play F Gracenote to F.



Pulsing/Rhythm: 1-2 or TEE-DEE . Play it over and over until this rhythm becomes natural and you’re able to duplicate it consistently.

Embellishments

3. Grips: The Grip has three steps, and thus produces three sounds (1-2-3). It is played by closing the chanter to sound Low G, playing a D Gracenote and returning to the melody note. Downbeat/Accent for the Grips in this tune go on Step 3.

Steps: In this tune you are starting from either a C or B.

- 1) Play Low G .
- 2) Play D Gracenote on Low G.
- 3) Play C. (tune specific)



Pulsing/Rhythm: 1-2-3 . Play it over and over until this rhythm becomes natural and you're able to duplicate it consistently.

4. Birls: The Birl (Low A and G Gracenote) has three steps, and thus produces three sounds (1-2-3-). If starting from Low A the birl becomes a two step embellishment (1-2). For the purpose of this tune, we are coming from an High A and will produce three sounds. Downbeat/Accent goes on: Step 1.

Steps: Start on (come from) any note.

- 1) Play Low A.
- 2) Play Low G Strike to Low A.
- 3) Play Low G Strike to Low A.



Pulsing/Rhythm: 1-2-3. Play it over and over until this rhythm becomes natural and you're able to duplicate it consistently.

Practice and Prepare

What do you need to do....

Identify the beats. Grab a pencil and draw an arrow pointing to the exact note that is played on each beat (Hint, they are already in blue). Individual Gracenotes are played on the beat, as is the first Gracenote of each doubling. Grips are played ahead of the beat. Taorluaths have their E Gracenote played on the beat. The low G of a D-throw will be played on the beat for this tune as well.

Tap and sing. After reading the music, marking the beats, and identifying the phrases, try to tap and/or sing the tune. This can help uncover the melodic and rhythmic line of the tune - and helps get the tune in your head before you try it on the chanter.

Slow to start. When learning a tune, play slowly and maintain control. Use a metronome. Control first, then speed. The perfect tempo is where you play every note accurately, have crisp clean transitions, correct technique and play rhythms accurately. Tempo must be consistent.

Maximize the dot and cut notes. Hold dotted notes As-Long-As-Possible (ALAP) and the cut notes As-Short-As-Possible (ASAP). Brilliant march playing requires you to maximize the contrast between the dot and cut notes. An otherwise a tune will sound boring and sloppy. Push it, to emphasize a particular note, hold it longer. As a general rule, you will want to emphasize the first note of each two bar phrase - that means hold the note longer. (If the first note of a phrase is a short note, emphasize the first long note of the phrase.)

The Big Doubling. The trick is to make doublings bigger (i.e., separate the two Gracenotes). This emphasizes the note without actually holding it.

Yes, you have to march. Marching is an important part of any well-presented performance. Simply walk as you would normally, keeping time with your playing tempo. Use longer steps when playing slower tempos; shorter steps for faster tempos. Walk normal. Don't stomp.

Challenge yourself. Keep it controlled, steady, and smooth. No chokes, no mistakes, no changes in tempo, no extreme variations in your style of expression.

The last detail. Practice the hard stuff. Every tune has easier/difficult parts. If you stumble at the same difficult spot each time you play, grab your pencil and circle it. Identify areas for more focused practice. Don't just play the tune over and over. Make a list of your biggest weaknesses in the tune (e.g., birls from B, E doublings) and review exercises to improve on them. You will never improve on something by avoiding it.

Only regular practice will lead you to gradually improve your consistency and control. Consistency builds confidence. Finally, know when to stop talking about piping and start piping.