

Introduction to Bagpiping:
The Practice Chanter

Fall, 2019



The Olympia Highlanders

The Chanter

Nine Notes. How Hard Can It Be?

Chanter Fingering - The Short Version

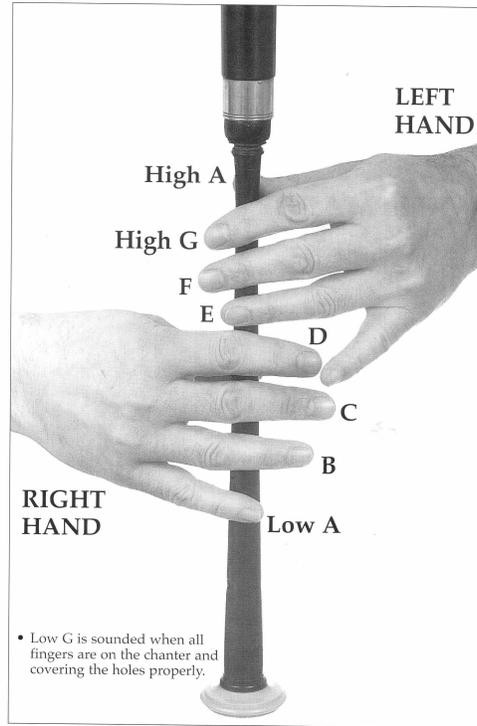
The diagram illustrates the fingering for nine notes on a chanter. Each note is shown with a chanter and its corresponding fingering on a five-line staff. The notes are: Low G, Low A, B, C, D, E, F, High G, and High A. The fingering is indicated by circles on the lines of the staff. The thumb hole is covered/closed on all notes except High A, where it is open.

Note	Fingering (Staff Lines)
Low G	1 (bottom line)
Low A	2 (second line)
B	3 (third line)
C	4 (fourth line)
D	5 (fifth line)
E	1 (bottom line)
F	2 (second line)
High G	3 (third line)
High A	4 (fourth line), Thumb Off

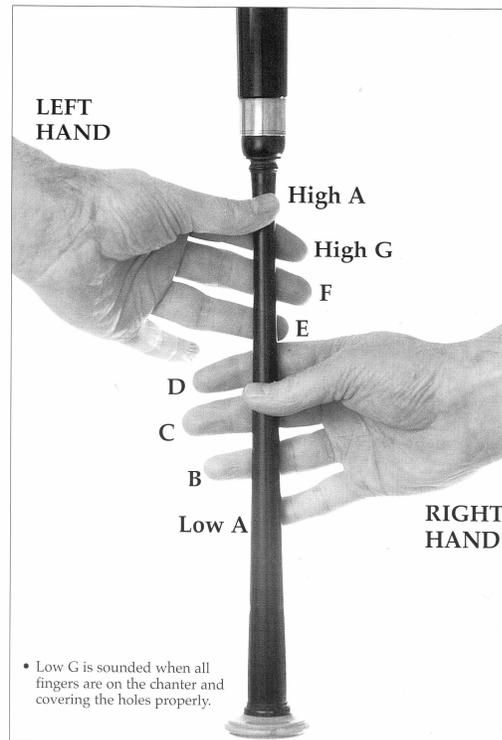
The thumb hole is covered/closed on all of the notes EXCEPT High A

Chanter Fingering: The Long Version

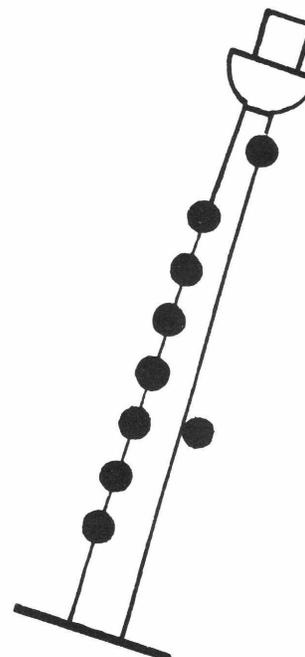
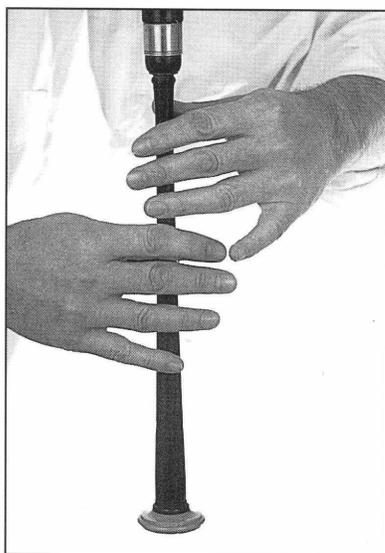
FINGER POSITIONS – FRONT VIEW



FINGER POSITIONS – REAR VIEW



THE FIRST NOTE – LOW G



The first note you must learn to play is low G. Place all fingers on the chanter as shown.

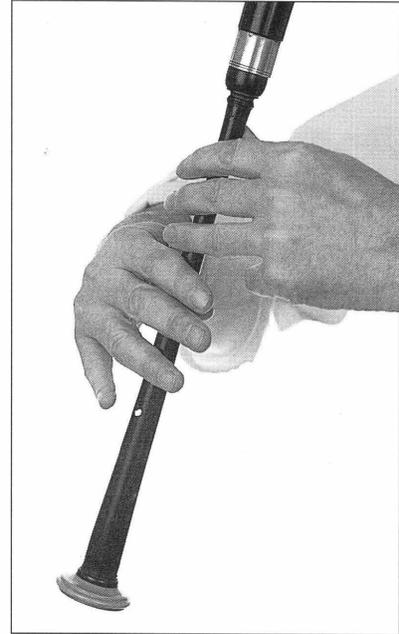
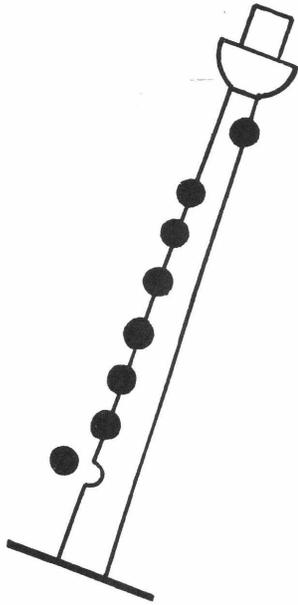
Note very carefully the following points:

- 1 Your fingers must be perfectly straight, even when off the chanter, and must hold the chanter quite firmly but not tightly.
- 2 The holes are covered by the middle sections of the B, C, and D, fingers and by the end sections of the other fingers.
- 3 The two fingers not used for playing (if the left hand is the top hand) are: the little finger of the left hand (which is always kept relaxed), and the thumb of the right hand, which is placed approximately opposite the D and C fingers (see page 17). This will cause a little discomfort in the right wrist at first but if you persevere it will soon feel quite natural.

Begin by placing each finger in turn carefully on the chanter and then ask someone to compare the final result with the photographs and diagrams, or you may examine the position of your fingers with a mirror. After any corrections have been made, blow the chanter, and if your fingers are covering the holes properly, a low steady note will be heard.

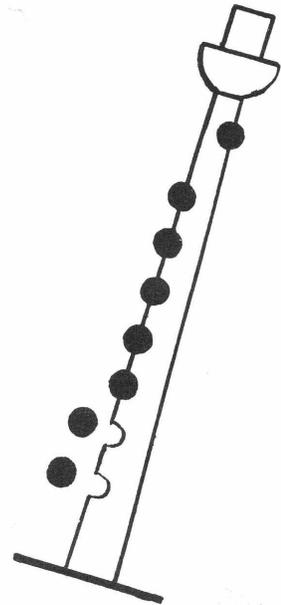
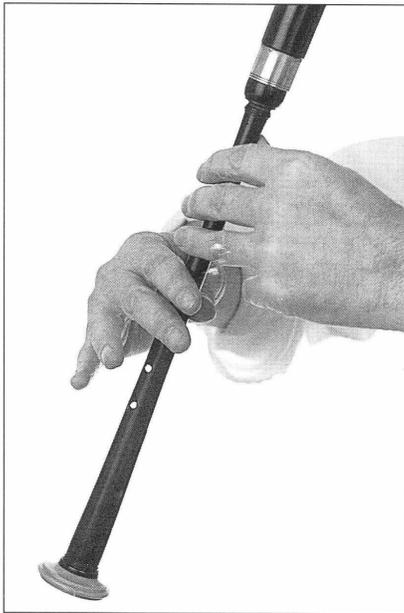
More likely, however, a high or wavering note will come out, which means that some of the air is escaping at one or more of the holes because your fingers are not properly covering them. Continue alternately blowing and adjusting your fingers until the low steady note is heard. This is the first important step in piping. Practise until you can be sure of playing low G every time you want to.

THE SECOND NOTE – LOW A



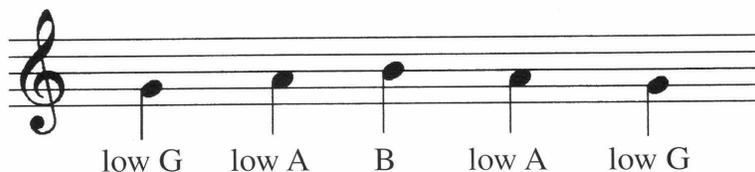
The second note is made very easily once you have mastered low G. To make low A, you simply lift your little finger, so that your hands are in the position shown above. Remember to keep the little finger straight even when it is off the chanter. When you are sure you can play low G and low A try:

THE THIRD NOTE – B



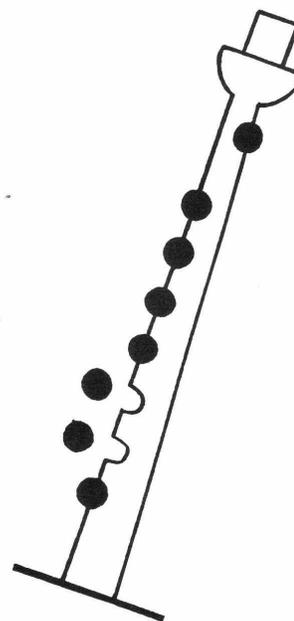
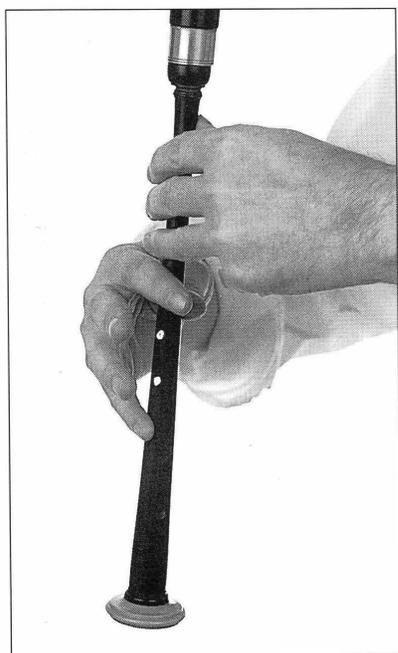
This one, as you can see, is also very easy. You only have to play low A and then lift the B finger off the chanter and you find you are playing B. Be sure that the little finger and B finger are straight and about the same distance from the chanter. Practise now playing low G, low A, B, low A, low G.

This is written:



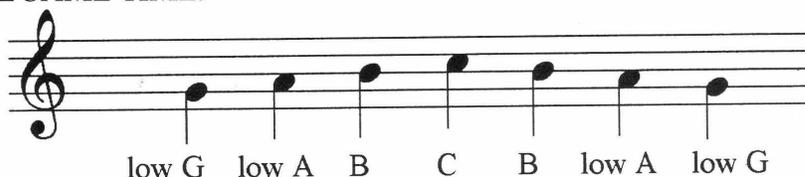
Practise this many times until you are sure you are playing each note correctly.

THE FOURTH NOTE – C



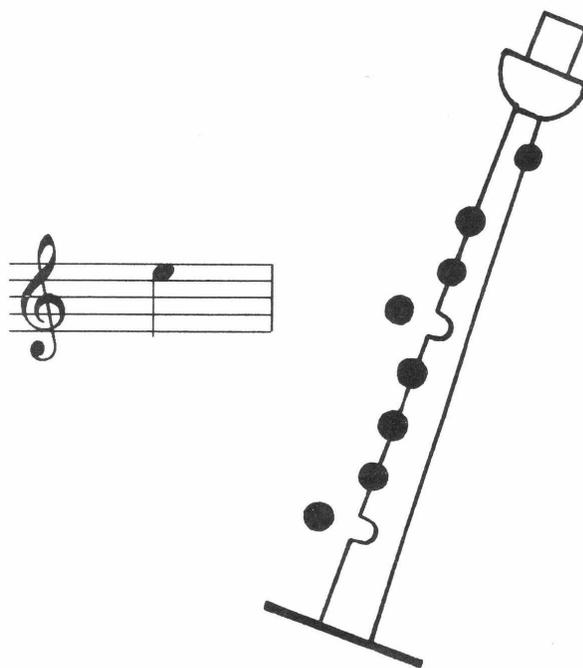
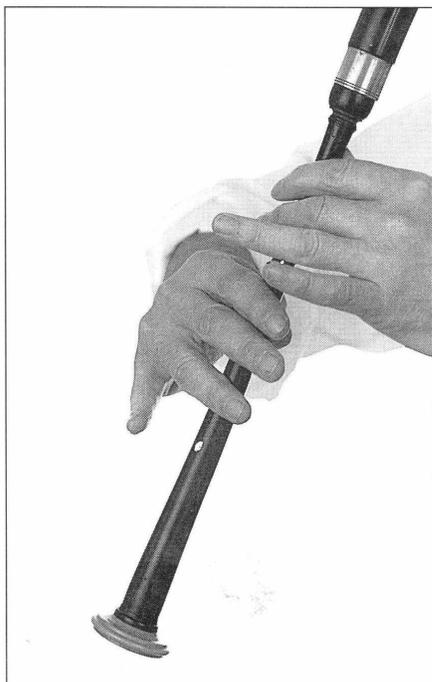
To play C, lift the B finger and C finger off the chanter, BUT KEEP THE LITTLE FINGER ON. Make sure that the two raised fingers are straight and at the same level. Try now to play up the scale from low G to C. As you go from B to C be careful to replace the little finger. When you go from C to B raise the little finger at the same time as you replace the C finger. It is very important to move the little finger and the C finger AT THE SAME TIME.

Play now:



The note C is played with the little finger on the chanter. Some players are erroneously instructed to play an open C (little finger off). This note can sound out of tune on the modern pipe chanter.

THE SIXTH NOTE – E



For this note we cross over to the left or top hand. Only the E and low A fingers are off the chanter, as you can see from the picture and the diagram. Place your fingers in the position for D, then raise the E and low A fingers and drop the three raised fingers (that is the D, C and B ones) on to the chanter **AT THE SAME TIME**. The three fingers going down must pass the two coming up like a pair of scissors crossing. Do the movement first without blowing until you feel that you know what to do, then try and blow from the time you sound D.

If you make the mistake of putting down the three fingers more quickly than you lift the two others, you will hear a little low G coming out between D and E. This is called a 'crossing noise' and must be avoided by careful practice. Only two notes must be heard: D and E. You must not sound a little low G between them.



Play this very slowly, and listen carefully for crossing noises.

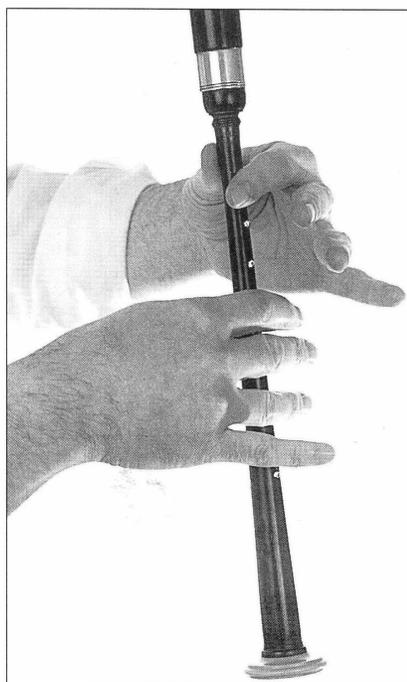
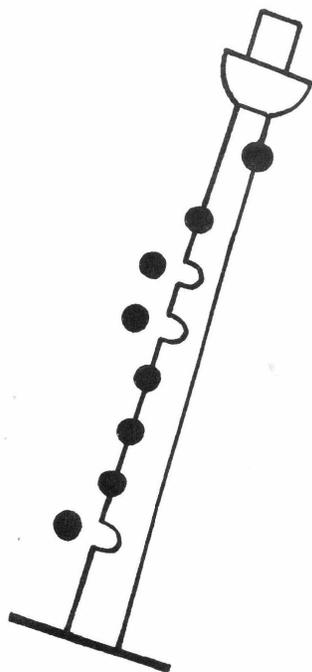
A crossing noise may also occur when you are playing from E back to D. This is caused by the E and low A fingers being put back on too quickly. When playing the practice chanter you will take frequent breaths. **BUT NEVER TAKE A BREATH AT A CROSSING**, that is, when changing from D, C, or B to a top hand note, or from a top hand note to D, C, or B. Always take the breath before or after, otherwise you may fail to detect a crossing noise simply because you are not blowing when it is made.

Play now very slowly:



Crossing noises constitute the chief cause of failure of candidates for the Institute of Piping's Level One Certificate. Too much stress cannot be placed on the necessity for slow, careful, practice at the early stage so that clean fingering habits may be developed. A learner should be his/her own most severe critic.

THE SEVENTH NOTE – F

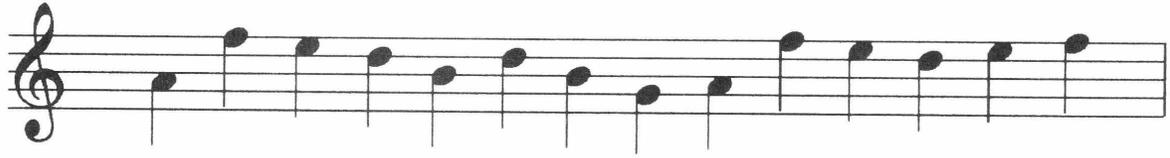


Our troubles with the scale are nearly over. All the remaining notes are quite simple. The low A finger is kept raised from now on, and for F, the E and F fingers are taken off too, but at the same time. Just be careful again to make sure that the raised fingers are kept straight and not far from the chanter.

Play:

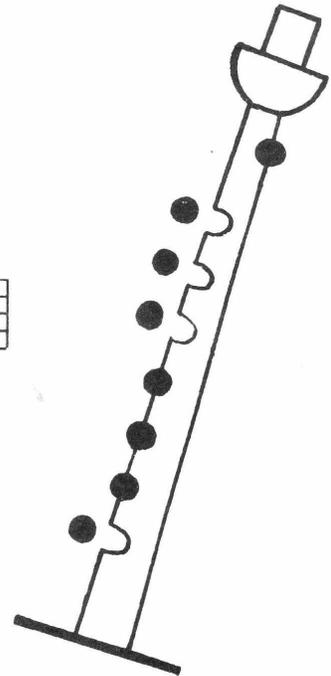
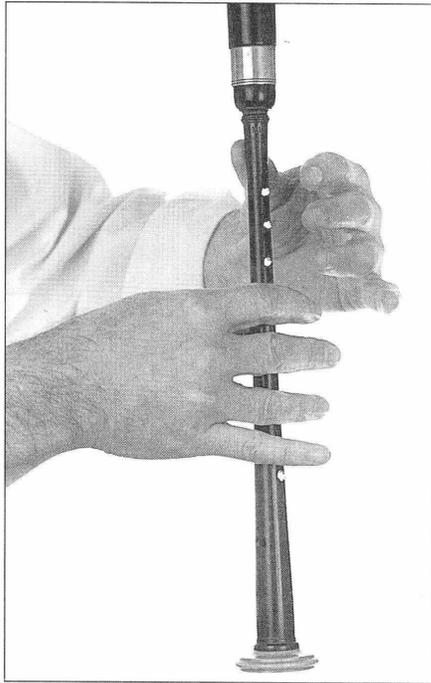


Try also very slowly:



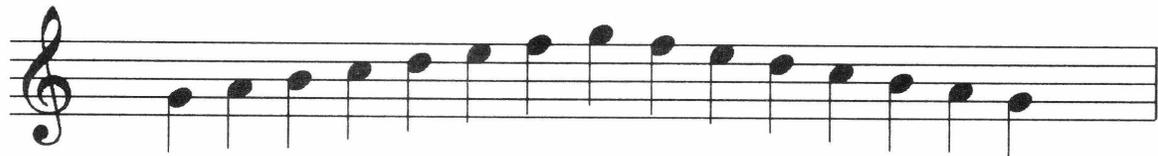
Listen carefully for crossing noises. Can you name these notes?

THE EIGHTH NOTE – HIGH G



For high G, the low A, E, F, and high G fingers are raised, again at the same time. All are kept straight, but not stiff, and not too far from the chanter, as shown above.

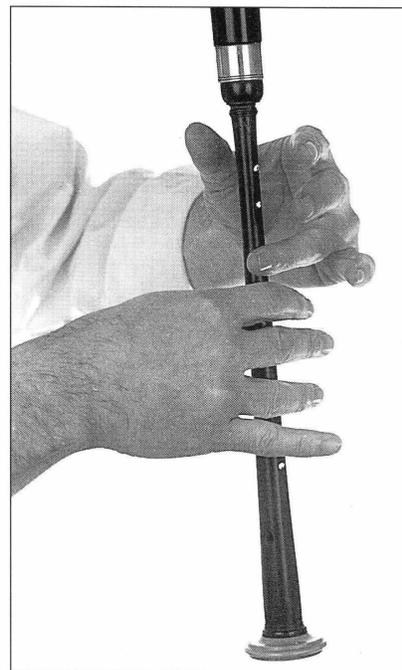
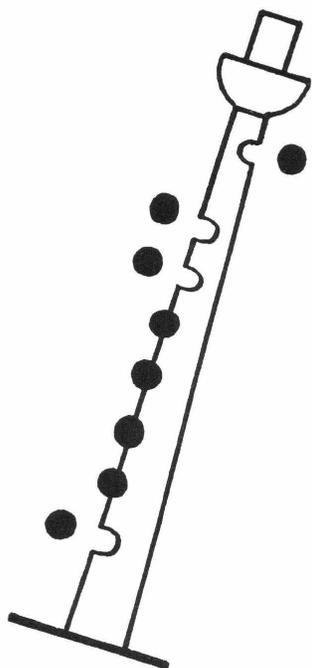
Play now:



Try also, very slowly:



THE NINTH NOTE – HIGH A



When playing high A, the low A, F, high G and high A fingers are off the chanter. This means that if you go from high G to high A you must lift off your top hand thumb and replace the E finger **AT THE SAME TIME**.

Practise slowly:



Make sure that as the thumb goes on for high G the E finger comes off.

You are now able to play all the notes on the chanter. Starting from low G, play slowly all the notes up to high A, and then play down to low G again.

Take care to form each note correctly, with all fingers straight and not too far from the chanter when raised (about 2.5 to 3 centimetres is ideal). Listen carefully when changing from D to E and E to D to ensure that you are not making crossing noises.

Write each note of the chanter scale in your manuscript book. Try to do it without having to refer to any pages here. If necessary, write the names of the notes below them in order to help you to memorise them.

Well, that is the end of the first lesson. You should now continue to practise playing slowly up and down the scale taking care to form each note correctly, and listening carefully for crossing noises. When you are confident of this part and have memorised the names of the notes and their positions on the staff, you are ready to pass on to Lesson 2.

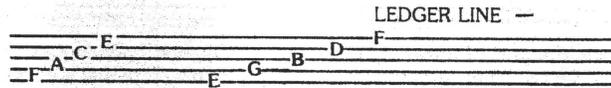
THE ELEMENTS OF NOTATION PERTAINING TO THE BAGPIPE

THE STAFF



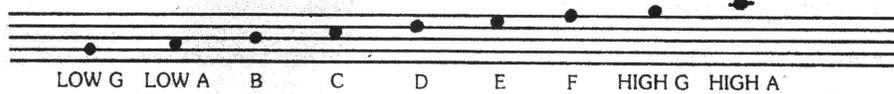
The STAFF consists of five horizontal and parallel lines, on and between which the musical notes are written.

THE NAMES OF MUSICAL NOTES



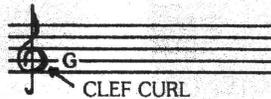
Each line and space represents a different note. The lines from the bottom upward are named E, G, B, D & F. The spaces from the bottom upward are named F, A, C & E. Notes required above and below the Staff are written on Ledger Lines and their Spaces.

THE BAGPIPE SCALE



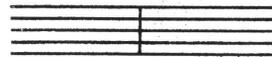
The BAGPIPE SCALE consists of nine notes. The scale begins on Low G and upward to High A. NOTE: The High G and High A are written on the Space and Ledger Line above the Staff.

G OR TREBLE CLEF



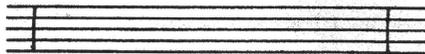
A sign placed at the beginning of the Staff is called a CLEF. This sign determines the name and pitch of the notes on the Staff. In Bagpipe music the G (Treble) Clef is always used. NOTE: The CLEF CURL is placed across the G Line.

BAR LINE



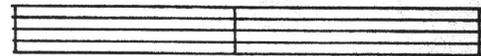
A BAR LINE is a vertical line drawn through the Staff.

MEASURE



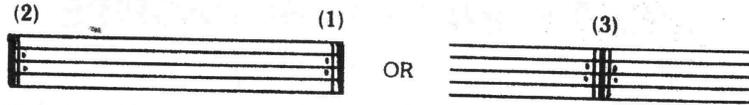
A MEASURE is the space between two Bar Lines.

DOUBLE BAR LINES



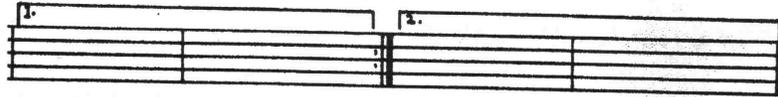
A DOUBLE BAR LINE indicates the end of a part of music. When at the very end, it represents the end of the tune.

REPEATS



When a double bar is dotted with two dots on the left side (1), it signifies that the preceding part is to be repeated. When dotted on the right side of the double bar (2), the part following is to be repeated, and when both sides of the double bar are dotted (3), both parts are to be repeated.

REPEAT BRACKETS



When a certain phrase in a part of music is written differently when playing the repeat, it is indicated by using REPEAT BRACKETS. They are inscribed at the top of each bracket with a number 1 & 2. Thus indicating the playing order.

NOTES

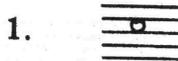


NOTES are characters written on the staff which represent musical sounds.

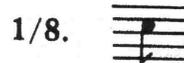
NOTE DURATION, The presence of a stem and the existence of one or more flags (tails) indicates the duration (length) of musical sounds.

SIX BASIC NOTES USED WHEN PLAYING THE BAGPIPE

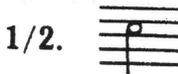
WHOLE-NOTE, The head is open without a stem or flag.



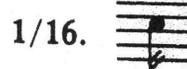
EIGHTH-NOTE, The head is closed and has a stem with one flag.



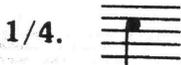
HALF-NOTE, The head is open and has a stem.



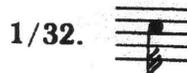
SIXTEENTH-NOTE, The head is closed and has a stem with two flags.



QUARTER-NOTE, The head is closed and has a stem.



THIRTY-SECOND-NOTE, The head is closed and has a stem with three flags.



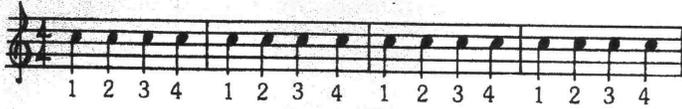
THE DOT, By placing a DOT after a note, it increases the note by half its own value.



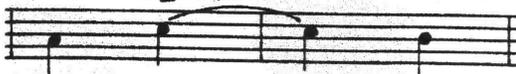
TIME SIGNATURES, At the beginning of every tune appears a **TIME SIGNATURE**, which is in the form of a fraction. The top figure **always** indicates the number of beats in each measure. The bottom figure **always** indicates what note gets the beat.

NOTE the following examples:

$\frac{4}{4}$ = Four beats per measure, and
each quarter note gets one beat.



A **TIE** combines notes of the same pitch.



Look Master, we have slain the dreaded plaid beastie !

Arpeggios and Other Stories

$\text{♩} = 62 \text{ bpm}$ Hold the hollow ('half') notes

1 2 3 4 5 6

7 8 9 10 11 12

13 14 15 16 17 18

19 20 21 22 23 24

25 26 27 28 29 30

31 32 33 34 35 36

37 38 39 40 41 42

43 44 45 46 47

More fingering exercises, introduction to grace noting and welcome to Rhythmic Fingerwork

Jim McGillvary's Rhythmic Fingerwork is mostly for players beyond the beginner stage but it does have some useful information for the beginner. Read Chapter 1, ignoring for the moment content that doesn't make sense, e.g., "I have discovered that difficulty with a doubling or a grip or a taorluath . . ." (p. 4) but pay attention to his more general comments, such as "manageable components," practicing, and metronomes.

Then try to work through pages 10 - 13. These are similar to the exercises in these materials. Pay particular attention to Exercise #5, as it introduces a rhythm pattern common to many pipe tunes, the dotted 8th note followed by a 16th note and then a normal 8th note.

If you still have energy left, work into Chapter 2, Single Gracenoting. This is a long chapter, so feel you have to get through in one sitting. Or even two or three. Remember "manageable components."

Just for fun

Try *On Top of Old Smokey*. You may ignore all of the grace notes for the time being if you wish. Don't tackle the three note embellishment in the last line.

On Top Of Old Smokey

The image shows a musical score for the tune "On Top Of Old Smokey". It consists of three staves of music written in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The music features a mix of quarter notes, eighth notes, and dotted eighth notes, with several grace notes indicated by small 'f' symbols above the notes. The second and third staves continue the melody, with the third staff ending with a double bar line. The overall style is characteristic of traditional Scottish pipe music notation.

