



Tips and Techniques on Irish Fiddling, Part Two

by Tim McCarrick

About Jigs, rhythm, and bowings

In the first article of this series (June 2006) I presented a basic version of Jim Ward's Jig; now for some details of the way the tune

might actually be performed.

In Irish Fiddling you'll run into more than one kind of jig: double jigs (in 6/8 time), slip jigs (in 9/8 time), and slides (in 12/8 time and often called single jigs.). But, when somebody says, "Hey, do you know any jigs?" they're talking about the 6/8 time plain old jig.

Jig are written in 6/8 time and have strong beats on the 1st and 4th eight notes like so:

| 1 2 3 **4** 5 6 | 1 2 3 **4** 5 6 |

You should be able to think in terms of the 2 groups of three as well as all 6 eight notes. The two groups of 3 are strongly accented by the first note in the group, 1 and 4. So when someone says to you, jigs are in 6, they're right. And when someone says they're in 2, they're also right, because of the 2 groupings of three eight notes. (And when someone tells you jigs are in 3, they are *sort of* right, but they are not hearing the bigger picture, so just smile politely.)

Musical example 1: demonstration of musical pulse



BOWING

There isn't one hard and fast rule that would apply to how to bow every jig, especially since Jim Ward's is unusual due to the frequent, long dotted quarter notes appearing in the A part. But, I can give some basics pointers and some advice on what NOT to do.

DO: You DO want to stress the strong beats mentioned above, but you DON'T want to overkill them. In fact, we're going to slur across some bar lines and across beats to really give the measured amount of emphasis on these. Again, this is something you want to really watch and hear up close when you see good fiddler play.

The next 2 examples are showing things we want to avoid. (Most of the time)

Musical Example 2: separate bows for each note



Musical Example 3: Slur 3 over and over



In musical example 2, we see the bowing of every note. There is a time and place for this, and in much fiddle music of the Donegal style you will see and hear bowing of almost every note as an element of the style. But in this particular tune, we're going to try some slurring.

In musical example three, that feeling of the right arm moving on every pulse starts to feel pretty good, but begins to sound a little dull. It's time to look at some alternatives.

Musical Example 4

Slurring across the barline is a common practice for fiddlers and is a good way to avoid a harsh down bow

another across the barline

Slurring across the beat into can give a similar effect. leaning into these notes can let you control the amount of "push" you want to give

Here's a "slur of convenience" to start bar 5 down bow

In this example, we see the use of slurs "over the bar line" and "over the beat". When I talk about "leaning into the beat" I'm talking about a downward pressure on the bow from the right index finger, and/or using more bow. By controlling those two factors, you can decide the emphasis **on** each beat, ie. in mid-bow stroke. Another benefit of this type of slurring is that it gives a nice little lift to some of the off-beat notes. You'll notice it's often an up-bow when I move into these slurs. **That is a personal choice.** They could just as well go down, but I feel I get more control on the up-bow because you're moving into the heavier part of your arm and the rougher sounding part of the bow. As always, try these new things VERY SLOWLY!

Musical example 5: Bars 5- to first and second endings.

This is similar to the first four bars, I but don't slur across the second beat of bar six because I'm looking forward to a long up-bow that will take me to the musical high-point of the phrase, the C note of bar 7. Come to think of it, that musical "high-point" isn't very far from your opening key-note of G. That's fairly typical. Remember, the main musical interest in this type of music is the rhythmic drive. Enough drive to move dancers!

Now see if you can apply the advice above to the second part of the tune. At the end of the next article, I'll give one last example of how I first heard the tune.

About the author

Coming from a musical home, Tim McCarrick made an early escape from piano lessons when he discovered stringed instruments. Since that time he has had as many diverse musical adventures as possible, from playing electric guitar, to bluegrass fiddle and mandolin; even getting a music degree and becoming a teacher. He currently evaluates educational music and music technology for JW Pepper & Sons, and is also the owner and writer of the Irish Fiddle website: (<http://www.irishfiddle.com>).