



Get to Grips

with the Highland
Bagpipes

REVISED



Ulster-Scots Agency
Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch





Instructions

- For each piece of music there will be a tutorial video available. These can be accessed by clicking on the YouTube logo.

- For additional help or if you're interested in online tuition via Zoom, you can message the Music Service for Pipes and Drums via Facebook or contact Andy on 07729346832.



Introduction

One of the most significant decisions of my life was made when I was just 8 years old and my Father decided that I would take up the Great Highland Bagpipes. This most majestic of instruments has moulded my life for almost 40 years and has seen me travel to many countries including Russia, USA and Dubai. During this period, I have met many friends and musicians which has encouraged me to learn other types of Bagpipes and Whistles.

Get to Grips is a tutor led introductory guide to take the learner through the scale and basic gracenotes then starts them on their journey of learning the Highland Bagpipes. The text is simple to read and as the student works through Get to Grips they will discover the basic signs and symbols that are needed to begin to read music.

This book includes links to tutorial videos to aid the student to develop the correct technique required to eventually perform at the highest level. Also included throughout the book are hints and tips which are extremely important to perfecting technique and therefore giving the student a strong foundation. The Highland Bagpipes is not a simple instrument and will take time and commitment to master but it is worth the effort.

I would now like to welcome you to the World of Piping and the opportunities that lie ahead.

Andy McGregor
Head Tutor for Music Service for Pipes and Drums

Before we Begin

Sound is represented on paper by signs and symbols. Here are the first few which you need to understand.

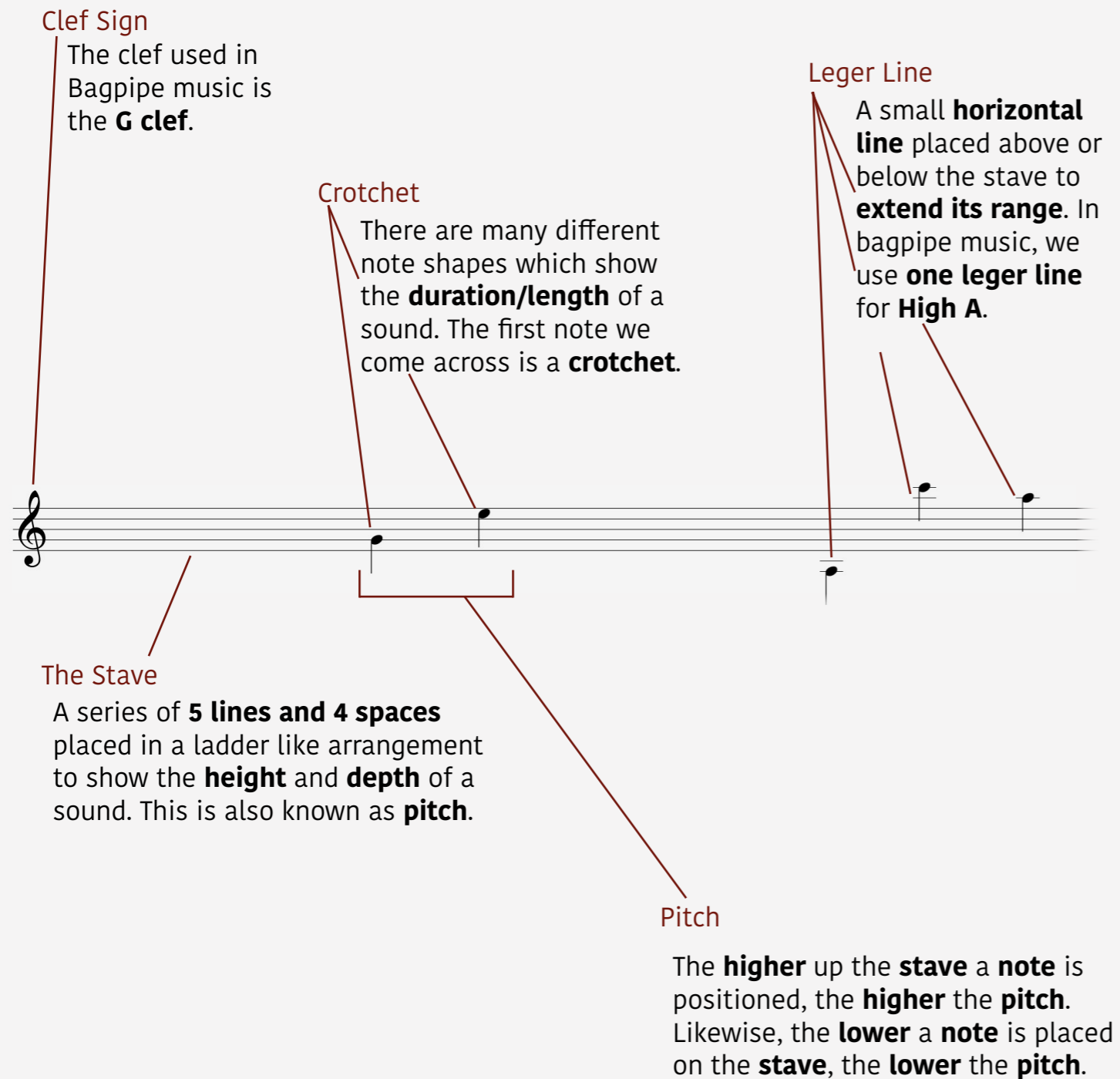
Clef Sign
The clef used in Bagpipe music is the **G clef**.

Crotchet
There are many different note shapes which show the **duration/length** of a sound. The first note we come across is a **crotchet**.

Leger Line
A small **horizontal line** placed above or below the stave to **extend its range**. In bagpipe music, we use **one leger line** for **High A**.

The Stave
A series of **5 lines and 4 spaces** placed in a ladder like arrangement to show the **height** and **depth** of a sound. This is also known as **pitch**.

Pitch
The **higher** up the **stave** a **note** is positioned, the **higher** the **pitch**. Likewise, the **lower** a **note** is placed on the **stave**, the **lower** the **pitch**.

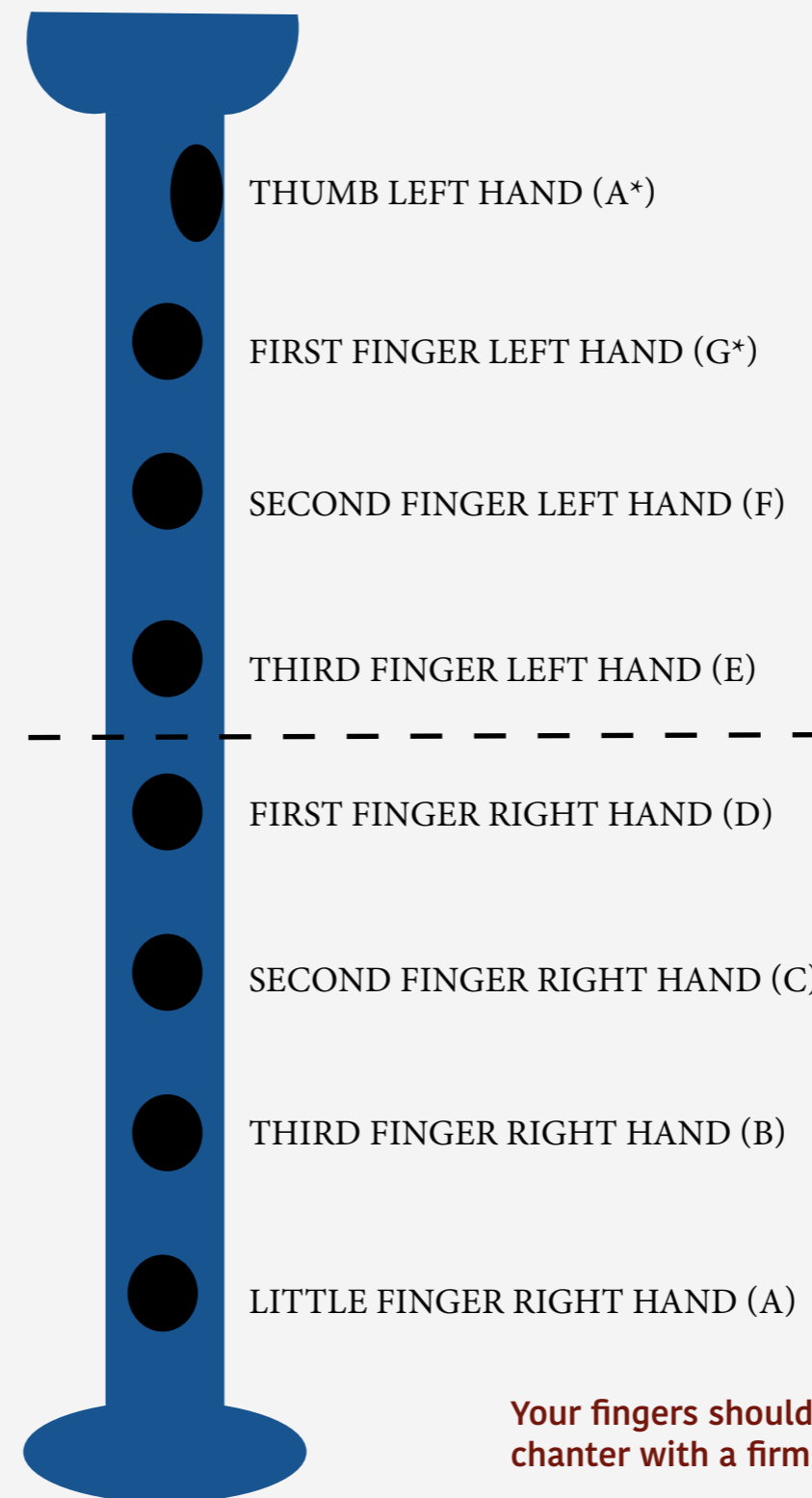


Throughout this digital book you will see the YouTube logo which is a link for a tutorial video to aid your progress.

Finger Placement

On the Highland Bagpipes there are two **A**'s and two **G**'s. These are known as **Low G** and **High G** and **Low A** and **High A**.

This symbol - * shows High G and High A.



- THUMB LEFT HAND (A*)
- FIRST FINGER LEFT HAND (G*)
- SECOND FINGER LEFT HAND (F)
- THIRD FINGER LEFT HAND (E)
- FIRST FINGER RIGHT HAND (D)
- SECOND FINGER RIGHT HAND (C)
- THIRD FINGER RIGHT HAND (B)
- LITTLE FINGER RIGHT HAND (A)

Your fingers should be placed straight on the chanter with a firm but not stressed grip.



Scale

Top Half ¹



● = Finger on/down

○ = Finger off/up

Scale from **D** to **High A** using the left/top hand.

Musical staff showing notes D, E, F, G*, and A*. Below the staff are five diagrams of a blue pipe with fingerings for the left hand (top) and right hand (bottom). A dashed line separates the two hands. For D: LH has a black dot on the 2nd hole, RH has a white dot on the 1st hole. For E: LH has a black dot on the 3rd hole, RH has a white dot on the 2nd hole. For F: LH has a black dot on the 4th hole, RH has a white dot on the 3rd hole. For G*: LH has a black dot on the 5th hole, RH has a white dot on the 4th hole. For A*: LH has a black dot on the 6th hole, RH has a white dot on the 5th hole.

Musical staff showing notes A*, G*, F, E, and D. Below the staff are five diagrams of a blue pipe with fingerings for the left hand (top) and right hand (bottom). A dashed line separates the two hands. For A*: LH has a white dot on the 6th hole, RH has a black dot on the 5th hole. For G*: LH has a black dot on the 5th hole, RH has a white dot on the 4th hole. For F: LH has a black dot on the 4th hole, RH has a white dot on the 3rd hole. For E: LH has a black dot on the 3rd hole, RH has a white dot on the 2nd hole. For D: LH has a black dot on the 2nd hole, RH has a white dot on the 1st hole.

Bottom Half ²



Scale from **Low G** to **D** using the right/bottom hand.

Musical staff showing notes G, A, B, C, and D. Below the staff are five diagrams of a blue pipe with fingerings for the left hand (top) and right hand (bottom). A dashed line separates the two hands. For G: LH has a black dot on the 2nd hole, RH has a white dot on the 1st hole. For A: LH has a black dot on the 3rd hole, RH has a white dot on the 2nd hole. For B: LH has a black dot on the 4th hole, RH has a white dot on the 3rd hole. For C: LH has a black dot on the 5th hole, RH has a white dot on the 4th hole. For D: LH has a black dot on the 6th hole, RH has a white dot on the 5th hole.

Musical staff showing notes D, C, B, A, and G. Below the staff are five diagrams of a blue pipe with fingerings for the left hand (top) and right hand (bottom). A dashed line separates the two hands. For D: LH has a black dot on the 6th hole, RH has a white dot on the 5th hole. For C: LH has a black dot on the 5th hole, RH has a white dot on the 4th hole. For B: LH has a black dot on the 4th hole, RH has a white dot on the 3rd hole. For A: LH has a black dot on the 3rd hole, RH has a white dot on the 2nd hole. For G: LH has a black dot on the 2nd hole, RH has a white dot on the 1st hole.



A Pipe Band
is louder than a
pneumatic drill.

Full Scale



The **full scale** of the Highland Bagpipes has **9 notes**.

A musical staff in treble clef showing the full scale of the Highland Bagpipes. The notes are G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G*, and A*. Below the staff are two rows of diagrams representing the left and right hands of the bagpipe. Each diagram shows a vertical pipe with finger holes. Black dots indicate holes that are closed, and white dots indicate holes that are open. The left hand holes are on the left side of the pipe, and the right hand holes are on the right side. A dashed horizontal line separates the two hands.

A musical staff in treble clef showing the reverse full scale of the Highland Bagpipes. The notes are A*, G*, F, E, D, C, B, A, and G. Below the staff are two rows of diagrams representing the left and right hands of the bagpipe. Each diagram shows a vertical pipe with finger holes. Black dots indicate holes that are closed, and white dots indicate holes that are open. The left hand holes are on the left side of the pipe, and the right hand holes are on the right side. A dashed horizontal line separates the two hands.



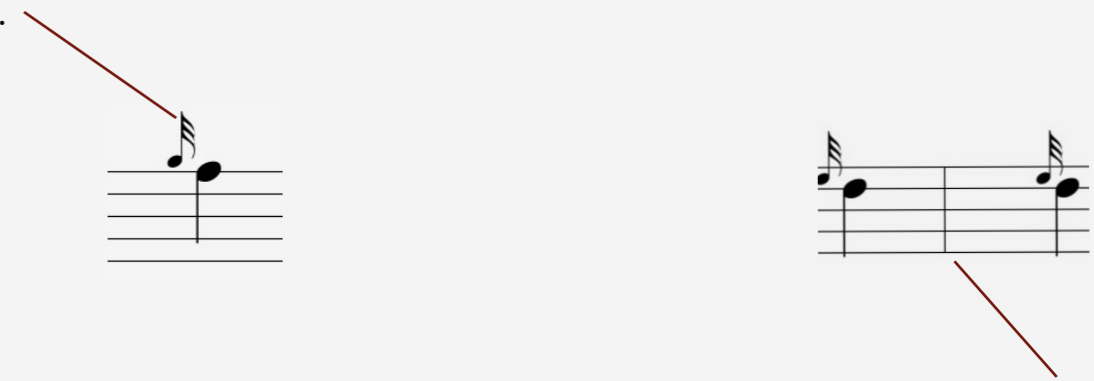
Make sure there are no crossing noises/catching notes between D and E.

Gracenotes

One of the properties of Bagpipe music that make it unique, is the amount of **embellishments** or **ornamentation** used to make the **music** sound **better**.

The first **embellishment** we will look at is the **Gracenote**. There are **3** main Gracenotes - **D**, **E** and **G**. The **G Gracenote** is the most commonly used but we will look at the **E Gracenote** first as they are the easiest to master.

Embellishments are written as **small notes** placed before the note with the **stem pointing upwards**.



In the exercises that follow, you will now notice a **vertical line** appears across the staff. This is called a **Barline**. Barlines are used to **separate** the music into **equal** portions.

E Gracenotes




A **Gracenote** is played by raising and lowering a finger quickly. An **E Gracenote** is played by raising and lowering the **E/3rd finger** on the **left** hand.

A musical staff in treble clef showing an exercise for the E Gracenote. The notes are G, A, B, C, D, D, C, B, A, G. Small notes with upward stems are placed above the two D notes, representing the E Gracenote. Barlines are placed after the first D and the second D.

G Gracenotes ⁵

The **G Gracenote** is played with the **G/1st finger** on the **left** hand.



G A B C D E F F E D C B A G

Make sure there are no crossing noises/catching notes between D and E.

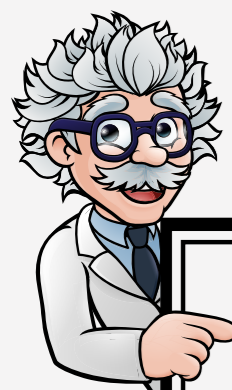


D Gracenotes ⁶

The **D Gracenote** is played with the **D/1st finger** on the **right** hand. The D Gracenote is only played up to C.



G A B C C B A G



We are unsure where the first bagpipes originates. Some historians say the oldest set was found in a Pyramid.

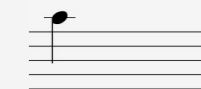
G Gracenotes from Low A

You will now notice **two numbers** appear at the **beginning** of the **stave**. This is known as the **time signature**.



The **top figure** tells us **how many Crotchets** are **in a bar** and the **bottom figure** tells us that each **Crotchet** note is **one beat** in **length**. We will cover this in more detail later.

The next sign we will see is the **Double Barline**. This is used to show the **end** of a **section** of music.



This Gracenote is called the **thumb/back Gracenote**. It is played when **going to/from High G**.



⁷



A G A B A C A D

A E A F A G* A A*

In the beginning, Gracenotes should be played slowly, lifting the Gracenote finger high off the chanter.



GDE's



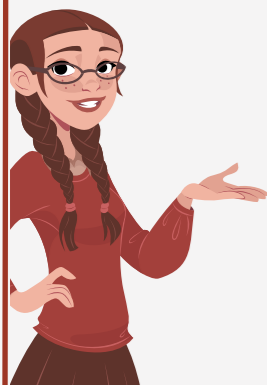
When all **three Gracenotes** are **played** one after the other on the **same note**, we call it a GDE.

In the exercise below, the time signature is **3/4**. This means there are **3 beats** in a **bar** and each **beat** is equal to one **crotchet**.

G G G A A A B B B C C C

C C C B B B A A A G G G

The speed of music is called **Tempo**. This is measured in **Beats Per Minute (BPM)**. Play the GDE exercise where the BPM is 60. This means that each Crotchet note will be one second long.



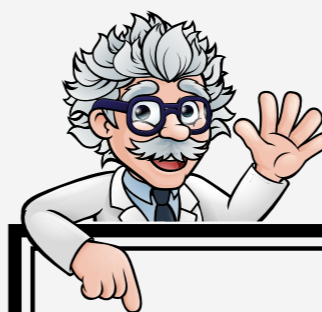
There are 110 different types of Bagpipes listed on wikipedia. The majority being from Europe.

Duration Table

The length of sounds are shown on paper by using different shapes of note. The Semi-Breve is the longest note and each note is half the length of the note above.

For example, if a Semi-Breve is 4 seconds long, a Minim will only be 2 seconds long.

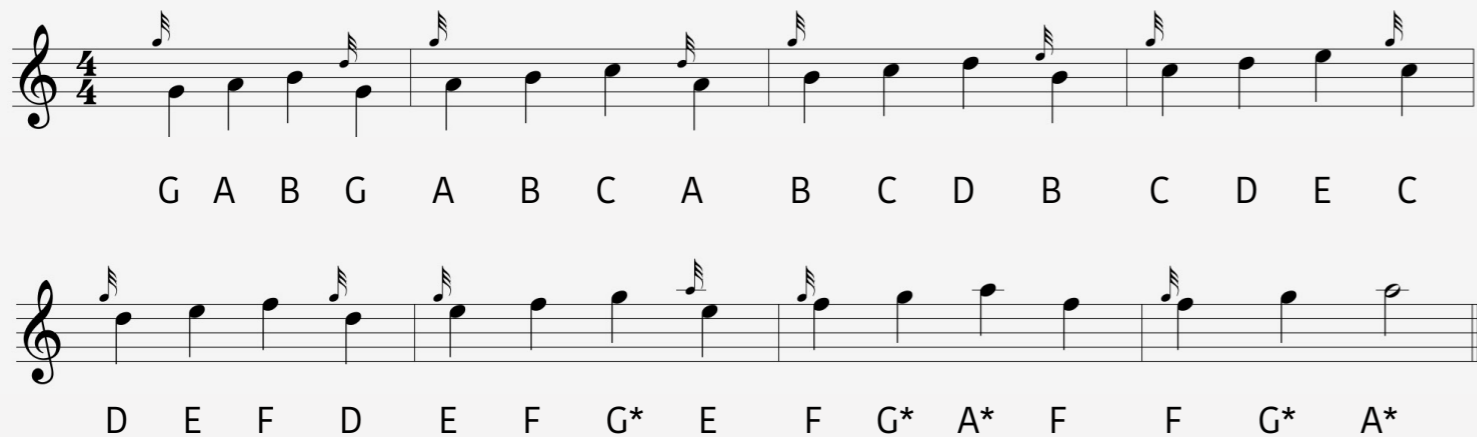
Semi-Breve		Whole note
Minim		1/2 note
Crotchet		1/4 note
Quaver		1/8 note
Semi Quaver		1/16 note
Demi Semi-Quaver		1/32 note



The first mention of Bagpipes in Scotland was in 1547. The first mention of Bagpipes in Ireland was in 1544. We are unsure who had them first.

Gracenote Exercise ⁹

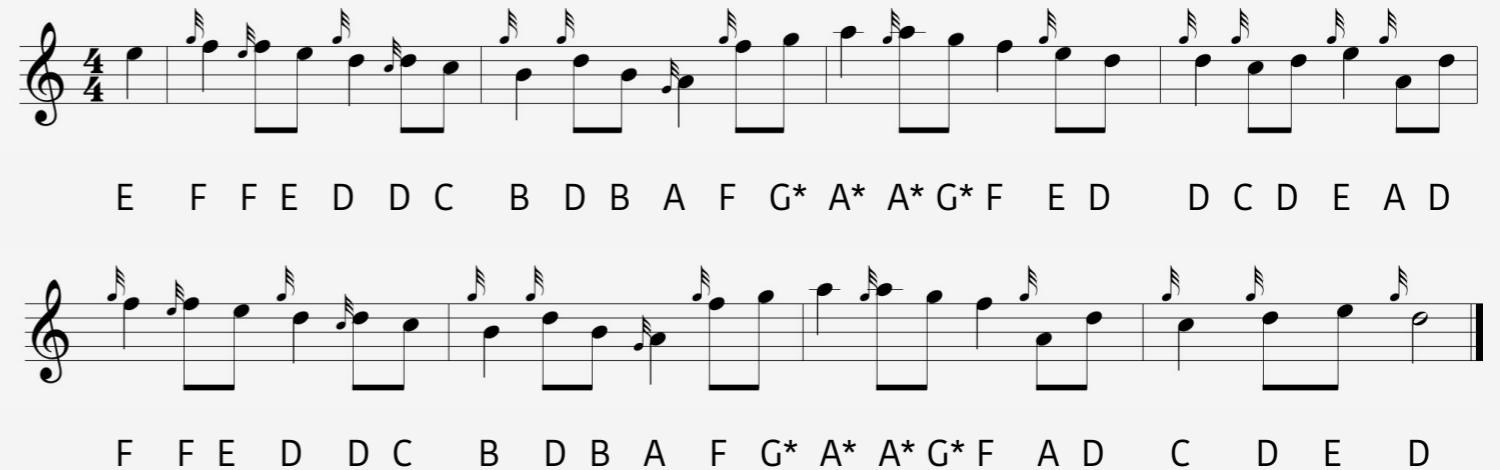
As you can see, the **time signature** is **4/4**. This means there are **4 beats** in each **bar** and each **beat** is equal to one **Crotchet**.



Two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. The first staff contains two measures of music with notes G, A, B, G and A, B, C, A. The second staff contains two measures of music with notes D, E, F, D and E, F, G*, E, F, G*, A*, F, F, G*, A*.

Green Glens of Antrim ¹¹

Now lets look at your first tune.

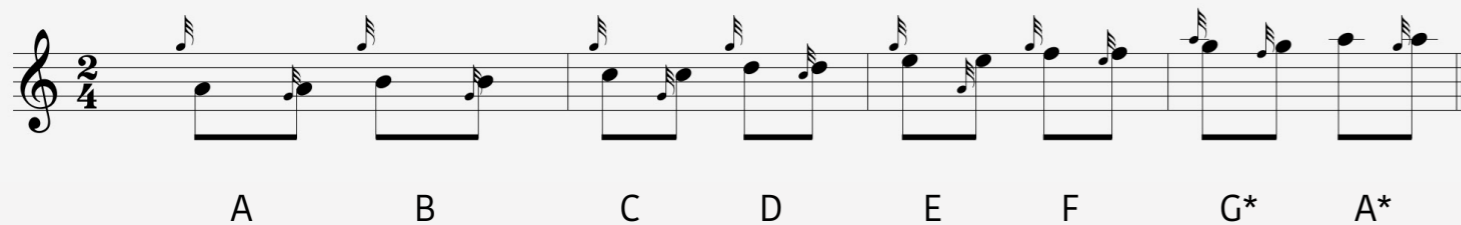


Two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. The first staff contains two measures of music with notes E, F, F, E, D, D, C, B, D, B, A, F, G*, A*, A*, G*, F, E, D and D, C, D, E, A, D. The second staff contains two measures of music with notes F, F, E, D, D, C, B, D, B, A, F, G*, A*, A*, G*, F, A, D, C, D, E, D.

Strikes ¹⁰

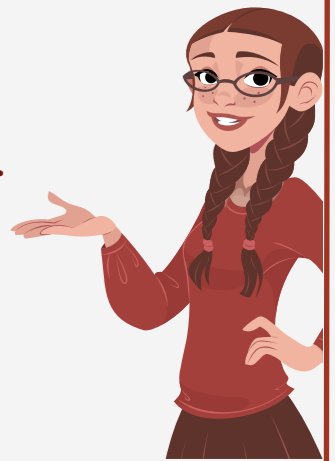
Strikes are played by **tapping/striking** the chanter with one or more raised fingers.

You will now notice the notes we are using are quavers. A Quaver is worth half a Crotchet, which means **2 Quavers** equal **1 beat**.



One staff of musical notation in 2/4 time. The notes are A, B, C, D, E, F, G*, A*.

Play your tune slowly and deliberately. Build up the tempo gradually.



There are Nine Glens of Antrim; Glenarm, Glencoy, Glenariff, Glenballyemon, Glencop, Glanaan, Glendun, Glenshesk and Glentaisie. There are located in North East Antrim.

Doublings



Now that you have mastered a simple tune and have started to read music, it is time to look at the remaining embellishments.

The next embellishment we will cover is the **Doubling**. Doublings are when **two gracenotes** are played **one after the other** on the **same note**.



Doublings from Low A

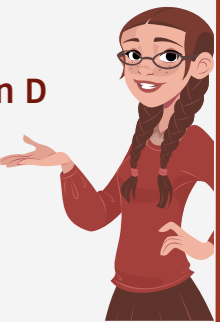


Pipe bags were traditionally made from animals which were commonly farmed. In the British Isles Sheep or Goat skin was used. In Egypt, Camel was used and in Australia, it was Kangaroo.

Throw on D



Make sure the Low G, D and C are played evenly within the Throw on D embellishment.



Grips/Leumluath



When playing the Grips make sure there are two Low Gs is separated by a D Gracenote before moving to the E.

Also, if you look closely, you will notice that when playing a Grip from D, the B finger is used instead of the D finger.



Taorluath

16



Tachums

17



You will now notice a Dot and Cut placed on the notes. **Dots lengthen a note** and **Cuts shorten it.**

18

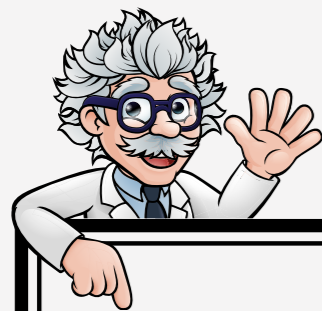
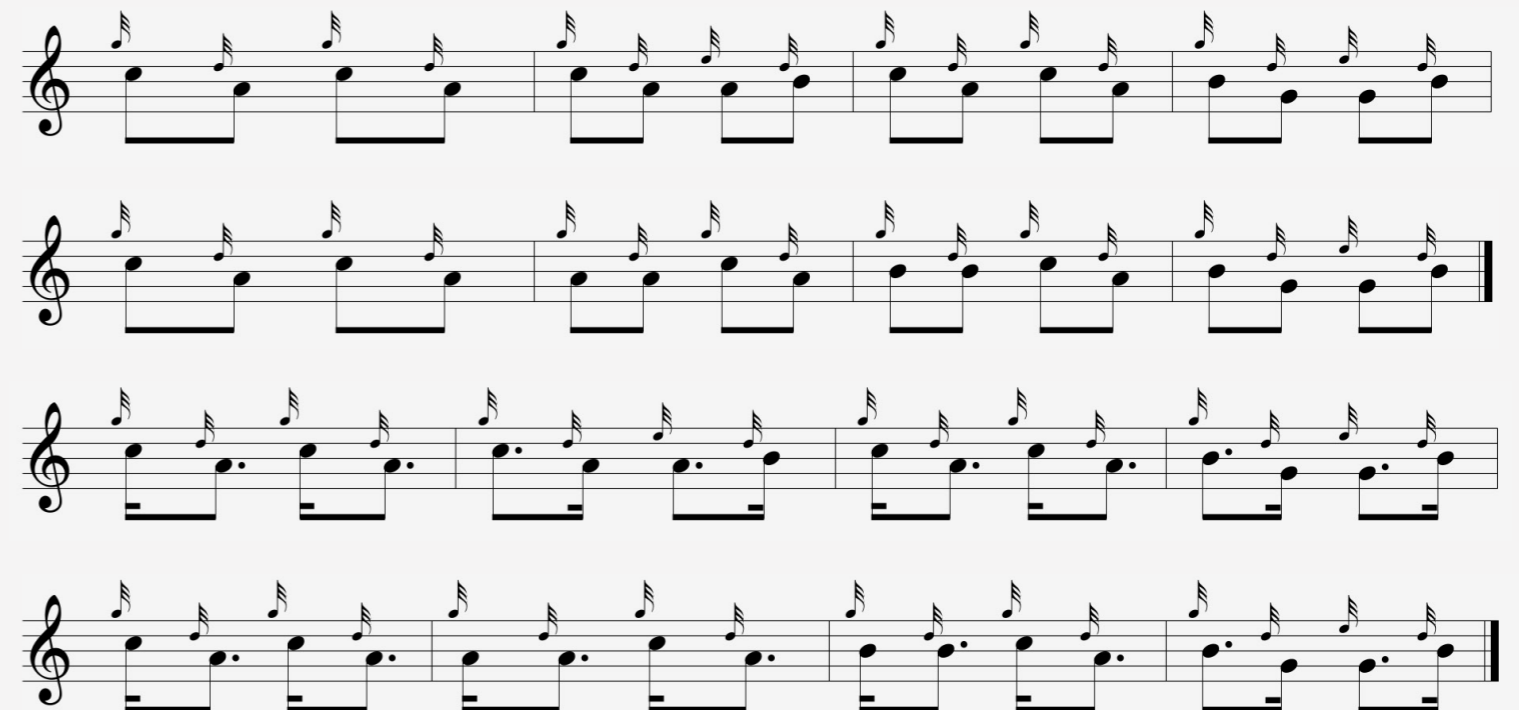


Again, you will notice that when playing a Taorluath from D, the B finger replaces the D finger.



Tachum Exercise

19



African Blackwood is the most common wood used to make the Bagpipes, but Crocuswood, Ebony and Rosewood are also used.

To get you started on tunes here are a few that are suitable for beginners.

I See Mull

20



Musical notation for the tune 'I See Mull' in 3/4 time. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is written in a simple, accessible style suitable for beginners, featuring a mix of eighth and quarter notes.

When you are learning a tune, learn one bar at a time, then try playing them as a group of two. Once you feel ready, play the full line.

Two Bars are known as a Phrase.

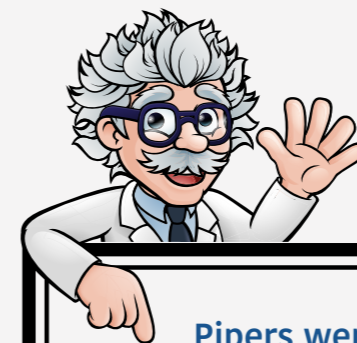


Colin's Cattle

21



Musical notation for the tune 'Colin's Cattle' in 3/4 time. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is written in a simple, accessible style suitable for beginners, featuring a mix of eighth and quarter notes.



Pipers were used in the military to lead soldiers into battle. During World War I, it is estimated over 1000 Pipers were killed in battle.

Minstrel Boy ²²



Musical score for 'Minstrel Boy' in 4/4 time, consisting of four staves of music.



Practice a few times each day for a short period of time rather than a long time all at once.

Blue Bells of Scotland ²³

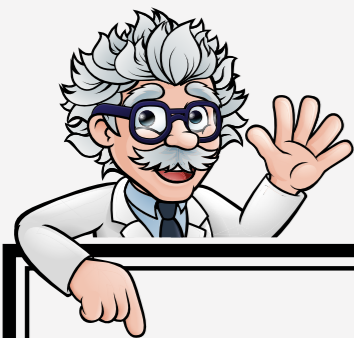


Musical score for 'Blue Bells of Scotland' in 4/4 time, consisting of three staves of music. The first staff includes first and second endings.



Wikipedia lists 14 different types of Bagpipes in the British Isles.

I Love a Lassie ²⁴



If played outside, the sound of the Highland Bagpipes can travel over 3 miles.

Castle Dangerous ²⁵



As you increase the Tempo of your tunes, make sure your embellishments remain clear.



**You have now completed Get to Grips with the
Highland Bagpipes.**

**Thanks to the Ulster-Scots Agency for making
this project possible and a special thanks to
Ian Burrows, Alec Brown and Grahame Harris
for proofreading this book.**

**Follow us on social media ‘Music Service for
Pipes and Drums’ for regular updates and
events.**

