

*NOTES to the ABC EDITION of
"O'FARRELL'S POCKET COMPANION for the IRISH or UNION PIPES"*

Introduction

The purpose of this project is a simple one: the introduction of a vast body of unfamiliar music, most of it quite remarkable, to an audience who might be better able than most to appreciate it.

In these Notes, the reader will find out more about "Mr. O'Farrell" and his collections, about the transcription process involved in analyzing music in the printed sources and making it suitable for digitizing, and finally about the ABC protocol used in drafting the files contained in this edition.

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[I] The "Pocket Companion" Collection

[a] Overview

O'Farrell's Pocket Companion for the Irish or Union Pipes (henceforth PC) was published in London in four volumes over a span of some five years, between 1805 and 1810 (although the exact dates are un-certain).

The four volumes of the PC are important to the history of Irish traditional music because they represent an early example of the transition from the medium of exclusively aural transmission of music to the medium of print. The PC also represents a prototype that later collectors of this music have followed to the present day, in that it is a collection mainly of dance music assembled by someone who actually played the music (and would have no difficulty in hearing himself described as a "traditional musician").

There are approximately four hundred tunes in the four volumes, most of them labelled "Irish", a

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sizeable percentage as "Scotch" (O'Farrell's spelling), and the others of origin not specified. Much of the material in this "grand Selection of favorite Tunes" is not in evidence prior to the publication of this collection, al-though - in testimony to the great respect the PC quickly achieved among musicians - its tunes reappear frequently in other subsequent collections.

More details on the PC's contents can be found in [c] below.

[b] Brief Biography of "Mr. O'Farrell"

Though his works remain influential after two hundred years, the biographical details on "Mr. O'Farrell" are scant, although the labor by dedicated researchers continues. The following information is borrowed from Brian McCandless' fine liner notes to Jerry O'Sullivan's 2005 CD "O'Sullivan Meets O'Farrell" (henceforth OSMOF) which is a "must-have" recording for anyone interested in knowing more about O'Farrell and his body of work.

O'Farrell - whose first name has been lost to history, although it might have been Peter or Patrick - was born in the mid-18th Century in southern Ireland, probably the Waterford - Tipperary area (Clonmel is mentioned as his native city), and flourished until the early decades of the 19th. His instrument was the Irish bagpipe, known as "union" or "uilleann" pipes (*uilleann* - pronounced ILL-en - is the Irish word for elbow, referring presumably to the means by which the bellows are inflated).

O'Farrell is known to have spent a great deal of time in London, where he performed in several stage productions, most notably a pantomime - a musical drama - called "Oscar and Malvina". In 1804 he is recorded to be selling music and instruments from his London home.

O'Farrell is perhaps best known among Irish traditional musicians for having produced a tutor for the uilleann pipes, a work that even after two centuries continues to exert great influence over the methodology for teaching this difficult instrument.

In addition to the tutor, O'Farrell also produced two other works, the four-volume tune collection called *The Pocket Companion for the Irish or Union Pipes* (? 1805-1810) and the *Collection of National Irish Music for the Union Pipes* (1804). These collections have recently been reissued in facsimile by piper Patrick Sky and are available from his website www.patricksky.com.

O'Farrell disappears from the record as mysteriously as he entered it; there is a mention of his performing in Edinburgh in 1832, but no details of his death seem to be available. As the saying goes, "the research continues".

[c] Contents of the Collection

There are 404 pieces in this collection, the vast majority of which are unique to it (i.e., they appear in no other contemporary collections). Most are "dance tunes" - jigs, reels, hornpipes - and almost all of these are straightforward enough to be easily absorbed into the today's Irish or Scots tradition. The

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many jigs and slip jigs come first to mind, then the 4/4 tunes which could be reels, hornpipes, or strathspeys. There are waltzes, airs and laments, even a few "gavots" and "minuets" - in short, something for everybody!

As mentioned above, many of the tunes in the PC are labelled as to origin. Brian McCandless gives the figure for each as Irish 53% and Scots 23%; there's one Welsh tune, and the rest are "unidentified". Mercifully there are none of the "gan ainm" (no name) entries that have plagued so many present-day collections (apparently O'Farrell preferred "A Favorite Air" for any tune of whose name he was unsure).

There are also many examples of what piper Jerry O'Sullivan has called "folk baroque", belonging to a style that is probably best exemplified to today's musicians by the harp compositions of Turloch O Carolan. These compositions - some taken from the score of "Oscar and Malvina", some possibly by O'Farrell himself, though they are not attributed as such - occupy a niche between traditional and classical that may well be worthy of further exploration, although purists in either camp will probably reject the very idea.

All the tunes are in "traditional" keys (D, G, A minor, E minor, etc) suitable for the "pipes, flute, flageolet, and violin" as advertised on the front cover of each volume. The note range is from B below middle C (one example) to D above the staff (two examples). No B flat or E flat key signatures are anywhere to be seen. Aeolian and Mixolydian modes are represented but not in overwhelming numbers, and any confusion in-volving key signatures and accidentals can be fairly easily resolved.

With regards to tune types, it's interesting to note that almost all of the PC entries in triple meter (6/8 or 9/8) are labelled "Irish". The 2/4 or 4/4 tunes can be either "Scotch" or Irish (more about the difficulties of identifying particular tunes types below). On some occasions a tune with an obviously Scots name will not be labelled as such - *why* is anybody's guess, since as far as I know we have no information on O'Farrell's "origin" criteria. Uncertainty on O'Farrell's part seems unlikely, so it might be just a case of inadequate editing by the publisher.

Also of interest is the fact that there are so few tunes in these volumes that can be clearly identified as "Irish reels". Given the importance of the reel genre to the corpus of Irish traditional music by O'Neill's time eighty years later, and certainly considering the heavy emphasis on reels in today's traditional repertoire, it is a minor mystery as to why there are not more reels in the PC. Even allowing for the fact that some of the otherwise unidentified 4/4 tunes may indeed be reels, it remains the case that no such air of uncertainty hangs over the 6/8 and 9/8 tunes.

It's not impossible that Mr. O'Farrell was reasoning backwards - if it's a 6/8 tune, it must be Irish - whereas he could not have the same assurance about the 4/4 tunes.

It would be difficult to fault him for this, since even today there are many reels that are common in the Irish tradition that are in fact of Scots origin ("Miss McLeod's Reel" being the best-known example).

Also present in the PC are airs, waltzes, and what I term "stage pieces". According to O'Farrell's

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labelling criteria, these can be either Scotch or Irish; some seem clearly to be composed tunes. Carolan is represented but unfortunately the information as to composers for some of the other pieces is lacking. O'Farrell credits himself (without the "O") only twice, but I suspect that at least a few of the other "stage pieces" are his own.

As far as I'm concerned, the fact that I personally am still not sure what to make of tunes like "Let Fame Sound the Trumpet" and "The Executors" (in PC4) - to name just two of many - should not interfere with someone else enjoying and performing them.

Undoubtedly in keeping with the musical tastes of O'Farrell's time and place, many pieces in the PC are accompanied (? beset) with "variations" or with sixteenth-note runs and flourishes which might strike a more traditionally-minded musician of the present day as being a bit overwrought. Nonetheless I have reproduced all these variations and flourishes in the accompanying ABC files, with the thinking that it should be up to the individual musician to make the decision on how appropriate or desirable this material is. The only exception I have made to this rule occurs when the ornamentation (e.g. grace notes) cannot be heard on playback of the ABC. This normally happens at faster tempos, and in such cases I have omitted the ornamentation entirely, comforted in the belief that musicians playing the piece will add their own ornamentation anyway if such is called for.

Regarding specific tune names: O'Farrell's spelling in English is bad, but his Irish is awful, and it's obvious that he's working with strictly phonetic versions of the Gaelic names. In the ABC files I have kept the printed version of the tune name as the principal title (T: field), but I have also added a more accurate version of the Irish in a second T: field. The effect of this double titling is that both the dog-Irish and the real Irish will (1) show up in an ABC search engine (2) print out (in BarFly and the folkinfo.org converter, the second title appears in smaller type size under the first title).

[IV] Transcription Issues

[a] Tune tempos

Note: the following paragraphs will involve some ABC discussion. I have kept the technical details to a minimum but before proceeding any further, the reader not already familiar with ABC might want to skip to that section of the Notes dealing with the topic (including a sample ABC file). It starts on page 7.

O'Farrell presents his tune selections with very few indicators of tempo or accent, leaving today's musicians to do a lot of more-or-less educated guessing at how a particular piece in the PC should sound.

The 6/8 and 9/8 tunes are not a problem, since we can apply the usual tempos of today's jigs and slip jigs for the purpose of reproducing what O'Farrell's pieces sounded like (although of course anything we do in the early years of the 21st Century is not a guarantee as to what we would actually have heard played in London 1805).

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We can also apply a certain "experience factor" to airs, laments, and waltzes which should leave us confident that the 2010 sound is going to be close to what Mr. O'Farrell had in mind.

The area of maximum confusion is with tunes in 4/4 time: in the absence of obvious indicators in the tune names, should they be played as reels, hornpipes, strathspeys, marches, or something in between?

This would normally be another area best left to the individual musician's feel for the piece, except that in creating ABC files, it is necessary to set up some kind of tempo indication in the Q: field. This is where playback speed is controlled in ABC, and without an entry there, it would not be possible to generate the MIDI sound files that I feel are so important to this project.

That required that I make a call as to what speed might be best suited for the piece. The process is exactly analogous to what Jerry O. had to do before actually recording the pieces on OSMOF.

ABC files may also include an R: field in the header. To quote Phil Taylor's BarFly user notes, the R: field is "an optional field which may occur once in the header, and multiple times in the tune proper. It contains a text description of the rhythm in which the tune is to be played, e.g. jig, reel, march etc. BarFly uses this field in conjunction with the metre field to determine which stress program to apply when playing the tune."

An ABC stress program can provide an excellent means for accurately reproducing the rhythm and "feel" of a specific type of tune, which is all well and good except that in most cases Mr. O'Farrell doesn't provide much guidance beyond the basic time signature (which is why I list those and not "tune type" in the Index).

It should be kept in mind that the purpose of the R: field is not to represent a hard-and-fast statement of tune type but rather to serve as an instruction to the program's playback function as to what the file contents should sound like. In other words, just because I have entered "reel" in the R: field of a PC file doesn't necessarily mean that the tune is a reel; it just means that I thought the tune sounded best played back using a reel stress program. The same applies where I have used R: hornpipe, R: march, etc etc.

I have used R: blank or omitted the R: field entirely on those occasions where I felt that none of the stress programs were effective (or quite frankly where I couldn't decide exactly what Mr. O'Farrell had in mind).

The general criteria that I applied in deciding the tempo and stress qualities of the ambiguous 4/4 tunes in the PC were as follows:

If the tune had a Scots name and a lot of "Scotch snap" cut-note rhythm, it was probably a strathspey.

If the final measure of each part ended in three quarter notes or quarter - two

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eighths - quarter, the tune was probably a hornpipe.

If it looked and sounded more like a reel, it was probably a reel.

If it looked and sounded more like a march or a polka ... etc. etc.

How often these admittedly crude criteria have allowed me to guess correctly ("correct" meaning "corresponding to what Mr. O'Farrell had in mind") can of course never be known. Experience is a great thing but it isn't infallible; three other musicians could look at these pieces and come to three different conclusions as to how they should sound.

As I mention more than once in these Notes, one of the big advantages to ABC is the ease with which the end user can change any of the header parameters to suit her own requirements and tastes. The practical effect of this is that the R: field can be altered, e.g. R: reel to R: hornpipe, if a different playback stress is needed.

The same holds true for the tune tempo; by lowering or raising the number in the Q: field, you can slow down or speed up playback as you please.

Once you've downloaded the master file or moved it onto your hard drive somewhere, it's basically yours to do with as you please. However I would strongly recommend the following:

(1) Keep the original master files in a separate folder. Work only with copies so you always have the originals handy in case something goes wrong. (Of course you'll always have the CD as the ultimate backup.)

(2) Copy individual tunes into a "working" file where you can experiment to your heart's content. You can "save" what you like and "discard" what you don't.

Remember that there's a sample ABC file included on this CD that you can examine before tackling any actual files.

[b] Notation - engraving issues

I am not familiar with the finer points of late 18th - early 19th Century music engraving procedures, so I can't say for certainty whether Mr. O'Farrell's publishers did a good job. I can however say that I had to make a lot of adjustments in their notation when translating it into ABC, most notably in the addition of pickup measures to "balance" the piece (technical details available on request).

There were a few other "scribal errors" that I corrected, uncertain engraving (was a note on the staff line or the space below it?), a few erroneous key signature or tempo indicators, a few alterations of accidentals, etc. Where I made some change in the printed notation, I noted the fact in the tune files.

I tried to limit any changes to the notes to the correction of obvious scribal mistakes or engraving ambiguities. As mentioned above, I reproduced all the "Scotch snaps" and 16th-note runs, and even

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transcribed the few occurrences of 32nd notes, all for the sake of being faithful to Mr. O'Farrell's efforts to collect and print all this great music (while at the same time realizing that 99% of present-day musicians would either ignore or change these musical antiquities to suit their own tastes).

There are a few tunes in the PC volumes that are "irregular" in terms of the normal 8/16/32 measure structure of Irish dance music. Whether these pieces served the same purpose in O'Farrell's day as the "irreg-ular" tunes included in the "Set Dance" sections of the O'Neill's volumes, i.e. designed to accompany specific dance steps, I have no idea.

Of course there is always the chance that "scribal error" might also be involved. In any case I have left these "irregular" pieces intact.

[c] Alterations to the originals

Faithful to the originals as I tried to remain, a disclaimer must follow:

(1) I admit to extending a few note values beyond what existed in the original. This happened mainly in the cadence points of the slower pieces, where I felt that lengthening the important note over two measures made for a nicer sound than that supplied by the original.

I can't think that this slight change did any violence to the pieces affected, but since others may feel differently, this is probably the place to emphasize that one of the benefits to working with ABC files is the fact that the "end user" can make any alterations he/she desires in the individual notes (changes to the header fields have already been discussed).

Although a basic knowledge of ABC formatting would be required to accomplish this, it is knowledge that could be mastered very quickly (e.g. upper case letters for staff notes, lower case for higher notes, letter plus comma for notes below the staff, etc etc).

(2) Some of the PC dance tunes are of the same "circular" construction encountered in other Irish tune collections - that is, the final measure returns to the first measure without a distinct final cadence.

Of course this situation exists only on the printed page, since all tunes have to end somewhere.

I have therefore taken the liberty of adding whatever endings are necessary to "complete" the sound of a tune. Note that this change doesn't affect the ABC files themselves, only the MIDI sound files that are generated from them. In the great majority of cases the ABC files will be exact duplicates of the printed PC originals.

[V] The ABC Music Format

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I have included a file called abc_info.pdf on this CD. Its purpose is to introduce how ABC works to those who might be unfamiliar with it. There's an ABC sample file with brief explanations of the contents and a few suggestions on how to handle these files for maximum benefit.

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Good luck and have fun with "Mr. O'Farrell's" great music!

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