



Articulation (*chur in iúl*)

In classic flute playing and in the Irish style

Why do we articulate on the flute?

As stated by flutists John Krell and William Kincaid, “articulation is the pronunciation of musical sound”. As flute players, we use articulation to separate and emphasize notes, and we do this by using our tongues and air from our lungs in different ways.

Articulation in Classic Flute Playing

In present-day classical or modern music that we play, articulations and note/phrase emphasis is already written out for us by the composer. Here are some examples of different articulations that we see in music:

Staccato – the note is tongued and sounds detached, separated, short.



Tenuto – the note is tongued, yet sustained for the note’s full duration; little or no space between notes.

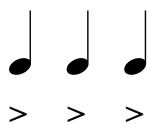


Legato – notes are to be played smoothly and sound very connected. Notes can be tongued or slurred in the legato style, but no space should be heard between the notes.

Tie / Slur - a sign consisting of a curved line drawn over or under a series of notes, indicating that those notes should be played legato. Only the first note of the slur is tongued. A **tie** is used to connect notes that are the same pitch; a **slur** connects notes of different pitches. The **slur** also indicates the grouping and phrasing of a passage in a composition.

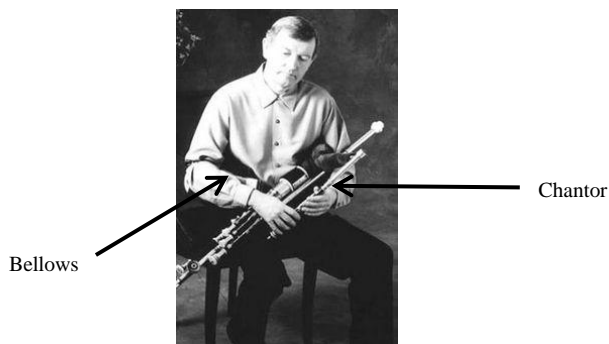


Accent – emphasis placed on a particular note, created by using more air and a louder sound at the beginning of the note. Accents can be tongued or not tongued (within a slur).



Articulation in Irish Flute Playing

The Irish style of flute playing comes from the way Irish bagpipes were played many years ago. The **Uilleann Pipes** (pronounced *ill-in* or *ill-yun*) are the most complex form of bagpipes. To create a sound, a bag is filled with air by a bellows held between the piper's elbow and side, rather than by the performer's lungs. The air goes through the pipes, and the piper creates the melody using different fingerings on the chanter. Because of the continuous, sustained air that is created by the bellows, the musical style is very sustained and legato in nature. Varying articulations on the Irish bagpipes were often achieved through fingerings and ornamentations, and this tradition carried on to the Irish style of flute playing.



Liam O'Flynn plays the Uilleann Pipes

“In the classical tradition [of flute-playing] the use of the tongue is imperative for precise articulation. In the tradition of Irish flute playing, the sound achieved on the instrument is more important than the manner of production. Articulation is often achieved through fingering/ornamentation as opposed to the tongue.”

From Mel Bay's *Complete Irish Flute Book* by Mizzy McCaskill & Dona Gilliam

Play with an “Irish Accent”: Ornaments (Fingerings)

Slide – used to give emphasis to a note or phrase, and is performed by gradually sliding the finger off of a tone hole. On an open-hole flute, do this by pushing your finger forward to open the hole slowly before the mechanism rises. On a closed-hole flute, create a slide by starting a note with the flute turned inwards (covering most of the embouchure hole), then quickly lifting the head and rolling the flute back out (uncovering more of the embouchure hole).

Cut – a grace note or note played quickly before the principal note. A cut is a note **above** the principal note. It's used to emphasize a note, or to separate two notes of the same pitch.

Tip/Strike – a grace note or note played quickly before the principal note. A tip is a note **below** the principal note. It's used to emphasize a note, or to separate two notes of the same pitch.

Roll – an ornament that involves **cutting** and **tipping** a principal note. In each roll the principal note is ornamented with two grace notes: the first grace note is above the principal note, and the second grace note is below the principal note. The tip retains the accidentals found in the key signature. The roll sounds like a “turn” in classical music.

Play with an “Irish Accent”: Legato Style

Irish flute and whistle stylings come from the tradition of the Irish bagpipes, which could only play in a legato, slurred fashion, with a continuous, unbroken stream of air. Articulations were only created by fingerings (like those mentioned above), and didn't interrupt the air flow. Playing legato makes your music sound more Irish.

Information gathered from *The Essential Guide to Irish Flute and Tin Whistle* by Grey Larsen, *Mel Bay's Complete Irish Flute Book* by Mizzy McCaskill & Dona Gilliam, and *Irish Music on the Classical Flute, Volume 1* by Brian McCoy (DVD).