

Ornamentation in Scottish and Irish Traditional Music

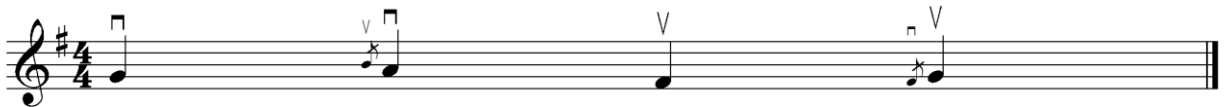
Single Grace Notes (acciaccaturas)

- Single grace notes are played directly before the beat in a very quick manner, almost crushed in before the primary note.
- They are done in the same bow, slurred in.
- They are most often played from one step below the primary note but can also be played one step above the primary note.
- Single grace notes are frequently used on long notes or the downbeat of the bar, but this is not a hard rule.



Bowed Grace notes

- A bowed grace note has the same principals as a single grace notes but it is done with a separate bow instead of being slurred in.
- The grace note can also be placed below or above the primary note, be the same note as the primary note or is the same as the note before the primary note.



Multiple Grace Note Patterns

- Grace notes commonly show up as one note above or below the primary note but can also be seen as a grouping of two or three notes before the primary note. Either in step or with leaps between the grace notes. This is left up to the discretion of the player.



Mordents

- Mordents are played on the beat like a quick flicking of the note and are played one step above the primary note.
- For example, if done on a first finger the note will be played with the second finger.



Lower Mordents

- Lower mordents have the same principal as the regular mordent but are played one step below the primary note.
- This is rarely seen in Scottish playing but is more common to Scandinavian playing.
- An example would be if the primary note was a third finger then the mordent would be on the second finger.

Looks like Played like

Cuts

- A cut is two notes consisting of a leap in between them before the primary note.
- Cuts are developed from the mordent and are very common to piping tunes. (piping tune = bagpipe tune)
- The affect is meant to sound as close to a piper as possible and is most common to Scottish tunes.
- They are played on the beat and flicked quickly, with very little contact with the string being required.
- They are close to grace notes but differ in the sound that is produced.
- Less actual sound and more of an effect or hitting on the string.

Other Cuts

- Another way to cut is to use the same principal as a regular cut but to use only one note prior to the primary note.
- This is often done with a third finger unless the primary note is a third finger, however other fingers are allowed.
- It is played quickly so the cut is indistinguishable in pitch.
- The cut is always done from above the principal note.

Double Cuts

- Again the double cut uses the same principal as the regular cut but this time it is done on two primary notes in succession with one note making up the cut.
- This is done to create an affect similar to the birl which is mentioned below.
- The note used for the two successive cuts can be the same pitch or different pitches.
- This is considered to be a very challenging ornamentation especially in reels and strathspeys.

Play like:

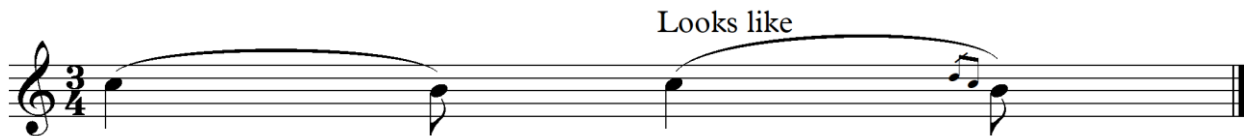
Birls

- Birls are also often called the treble or shiver.
- A birl is three rapid notes (two sixteenths and an eighth note) that replace the primary note with the same pitch but change in rhythm.
- This is most commonly used in reels and acts as a “rhythmic stutter”.
- It is usually played in the upper half of the bow and often on a down bow. However, it can also be played on an up bow.
- Birls can be played with each note being accented or played without accenting any note.
- They occasionally will be noted as a triplet and in Irish music they are often referred to as triplets even though the played rhythm is not a true triplet.
- Similar to turns, the birls are usually not written out but left up to the discretion of the player.



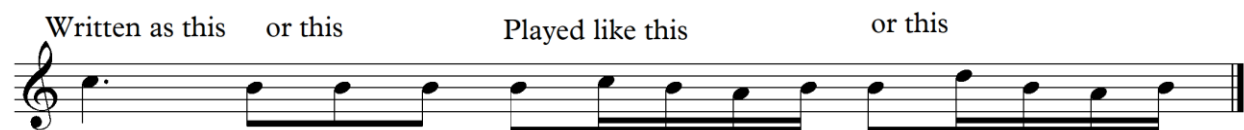
Pull Offs

- Pull offs are used in stepwise motion between two stepwise descending notes.
- The pull off is done coming from the note above the first primary note and going in stepwise motion back to the first primary note before continuing to the second primary note.
- It is most similar to adding two quick grace notes between the two primary notes.



Rolls/Turns

- The roll is used mainly in Irish traditional music but is also seen in Scottish traditional music. In Scottish music it is referred to more often as a turn.
- Rolls/turns are made up of four sixteenth notes in succession falling after the first primary eighth note in a dotted quarter value and replacing the second two primary eighth notes. The figure will start with one step or a leap of a third above the first primary note then continuing with a sixteenth note on the primary note, a sixteenth note a step below the primary note and the final sixteenth note returning to the primary note.
- Rolls/turns should still keep the original rhythmic feeling in place without distorting the tempo.
- When used in jigs the roll/turn is used to add embellishments to a single dotted quarter, three successive eighth notes of the same pitch or three successive eighth notes where the first and third are the same pitch.
- When used in reels, rolls/turns can be used in place of a triplet, birl or dotted quarter.
- When used in strathspeys the turn is used as an ornamentation primarily and less of a rhythmic tool, allowing for room in tempo.



Alternatives to Rolls/Turns

- Where rolls or turns are appropriate, there are a variety of other alternatives that can be used. These can be bowed grace notes which are usually done with the grace note being the same as the primary note. Another example would be changing a grouping of three eighth notes to one eighth, two sixteenths and another eighth note, or two eighth notes followed by two sixteenths.
- The alternatives can be endless and are up to the creativity and discretion of the player.

Slides

- Slides are used in both Irish and Scottish traditional music and are done similarly to most ornaments, at the discretion of the player.
- They are most commonly done with a slide from a pitch below the primary note, usually a slide of either a tone or a semi tone.
- They can also be done with a slide from above but this is less common.
- Slides are supposed to act as a subtle embellishment and not be the primary focus.
- They can also be used in conjunction with slurs, unisons or single notes.



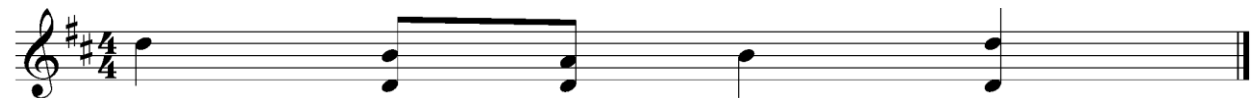
Unisons

- Unisons are used to emphasize a note, usually one of the open strings.
- They are accomplished through playing an open string and the fourth finger in first position on the string below at the same time.
- Unisons are frequently used with a slurred grace note or a slide to a semi tone below to create a dissonance or what is sometimes referred to as a “unison crunch”.



Droning

- Droning is one of the most commonly used embellishments and is when the open string either below or above of the melody is used to create power of sound and harmony.
- This is heavily used in traditional music from Shetland and is also used in Old Time and Scandinavian fiddling.



Double Stops

- Double stops are used to create harmony and emphasis and are achieved through playing two notes at the same time on two different strings.
- This is much more frequently used in Scottish fiddling than Irish fiddling as the players often had better technique than many of the Irish players.

