

# Scordatura in the Irish Traditional Fiddle Music of Longford and South Leitrim

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## Introduction

Scordatura, a system of tuning a stringed instrument, is not often considered in the study of Irish traditional music. In this article, I explore evidence of the use of scordatura amongst fiddlers in a local tradition in the area of Longford and South Leitrim. In particular I draw upon the music collection of Fr. John Quinn and my own experience as a fiddle player who has learned to play in this tradition and place.

Fr. John Quinn, now of Gortletteragh, County Leitrim, but a native of County Longford, has amassed an extensive collection of local manuscripts and manuscript copies from Longford and South Leitrim, the ancient region of Conmhaicne. It consists of manuscripts dating from the 1840s to the present day. He has, in addition to his manuscript collection, a substantial library of books relating to Irish traditional music. For the most part the manuscripts, which he has or of which he has copies, were written down by members of a particular fiddle dynasty beginning with Thomas Kernan of Drumlish, Co. Longford, in 1844.<sup>1</sup> One of Kernan's pupils, Peter Kennedy<sup>2</sup> of Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim, his son, James, and his daughter, Ellen, contributed twenty three tunes to *O'Neill's Music of Ireland*<sup>3</sup>. In addition to teaching the fiddle to his own children, Kennedy taught widely and his pupils included Terence and Philip Reilly, of Drumreilly, Co. Leitrim and Alex Sutherland also of Drumreilly. They and their families in turn continued the fiddle tradition and contributed manuscripts, beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and spanning most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, copies of which form part of Fr. Quinn's collection.

The lineage of fiddle players reinforces the sense of a local and established tradition. Notable among the Reilly family were Frank Reilly, Philip's son, and Pat, Hughie and Michael, three of Terence's sons. Michael Reilly, in particular, gave Fr. Quinn a wealth of information concerning the local music tradition, as he was his fiddle teacher from his teenage years in the 1950s. Another pupil of Kernan was his own nephew, Bernard Rogers of Killoe, Co. Longford, who himself taught widely, and among Fr. Quinn's manuscripts there is one in the hand of Rogers from the 1890s. Bernard Rogers in turn taught, among many others, Larry Smyth of Abbeylara, Co. Longford, and Fr. Quinn also has a copy of his manuscript from the 1930s, a manuscript in which he gives special notice of tunes traceable to Kernan himself. Stephen Grier, a native of Abbeylara, but who lived most of his life in the parish of Gortletteragh, Co. Leitrim. Although not of the Kernan fiddle lineage, Grier transcribed his own repertoire of over a thousand tunes, giving precise dates in the year 1883, and copies of these are

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<sup>1</sup> Fr. Quinn has in his possession an original ms. of Kernan with precise dates spanning the period 1844 to 1846.

<sup>2</sup> See Francis O'Neill, *Irish Minstrels and Musicians*, (Chicago, 1913), 367-369

<sup>3</sup> Francis O'Neill, *O'Neill's Music of Ireland*, (Chicago, 1903)

included in Fr. Quinn's collection. One of the features of this local fiddle tradition is the use of scordatura in a certain small number of tunes. This is a rare feature in Irish traditional music and therefore its analysis in this article, in a local, national and international context, is of interest to the wider music community.<sup>4</sup>

I am also of the Kernan lineage, having been taught by Enda McNamara, a pupil of Fr. Quinn. McNamara introduced me to scordatura in the playing of "Drunken Kelly" and "Greg's Pipes", both of which will be analysed later in this article, and I in turn has taught the method to my own pupils, who include Pádraig Reilly, grandson of Pat Reilly aforementioned and great grandson of Terence Reilly, the pupil of Peter Kennedy. Suffice it to say that the local fiddle tradition, and in particular the handing on of scordatura technique, is being maintained and is evolving in Longford and South Leitrim.

## What is Scordatura?

Scordatura is 'any tuning of the violin other than its established tuning'<sup>5</sup>. It applies to other instruments also, and so can be further described as 'unusual tuning of a stringed instrument, generally to accommodate the chords it can play to the requirements of a particular composition'<sup>6</sup>. There are many reasons why the various forms of scordatura are used, such as tuning up to brighten the tone-colour, tuning down to increase the range downwards, and either of them to facilitate playing in certain keys<sup>7</sup>.

Scordatura is as old the fiddle itself, in fact older, as it existed in the fiddle's ancestors, the viol and the lute. The violin and its family of instruments are descendants of the viol and its own family of instruments. The viol then is directly descended from the lute<sup>8</sup>. Modern violin tuning derives from the tuning of the treble viol, itself modelled on the tuning of the tenor viol, which in turn took its tuning directly from the lute.<sup>9</sup> Thus we can see the route along which violin tuning travelled to arrive at its present recognised form. In alphabetic notation, we can describe the logical tuning progression from the lute, through the tenor viol, through the treble viol, to the violin in chart form, as follows:

LUTE:                    G C F A D G            or            A D F A D F (Gaultier's)

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<sup>4</sup> The original Bernard Rogers ms. is in the possession of the family of his pupil, Jim McBrien of Camber, Cloone, Co. Leitrim; the original Lawrence Smyth ms. is held by the Smyth family, Abbeylara, Co. Longford; the original mss. of Stephen Grier were give by him to his neighbour and protégé, William Mulvey, and Mulvey's grandson, Liam Maguire, Bellewstown, Co. Meath, now is their custodian.


<sup>5</sup> David Boyden, 'Scordatura', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Sadie Stanley, (London, 1980), xvii: 56

<sup>6</sup> J.A. Westrup and F. Ll. Harrison, eds. *Collins Music Encyclopaedia*, (London and Glasgow, 1959), 590

<sup>7</sup> Westrup and Harrison, *Collins Music Encyclopaedia*, 590

<sup>8</sup> Francisco Allegre, antique instrument maker, interview, May 2012, Veguellina de Orbigo, León, Spain

<sup>9</sup> Westrup and Harrison, *Collins Music Encyclopaedia*, 400 and 702-706

TENOR VIOL:	G C F A D G	or	A D G B E A (one note up across the six strings)
TREBLE VIOL:	D G C E A D		
			
VIOLIN <i>alla turca</i> :	G D A D		
VIOLIN <i>alla franca</i> :	G D A E		

From this chart we can see examples of scordatura evolving in tandem with the emergence of the violin. The tenor viol took its tuning from the 16<sup>th</sup> century lute before the lute scordatura ADFADF was introduced in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Denis Gaultier<sup>10</sup>, but itself developed a form of scordatura by occasionally being tuned one note up across the six strings. As can be seen from the chart above, the treble viol is tuned just three notes up from the lower of these tenor viol tunings across the six strings. Violin tuning is taken from the treble viol tuning, dropping the bottom D string altogether, starting with G then, compromising one D string for the two viol strings, C and E, and, in tuning *alla turca* retaining the top A and D, but in tuning *alla franca*, which is now the standard, moving top D up to E. *Alla turca* tuning is still used as an alternative tuning in Eastern Europe<sup>11</sup>. Elsewhere now, it is regarded as a form of scordatura, *alla franca* tuning being the norm.

## Scordatura in traditional fiddle playing

Before examining scordatura in the Irish fiddle tradition, it is useful to look at examples of scordatura as found in other related fiddle traditions. Scordatura is used to some extent in the traditional fiddle music of Scotland<sup>12</sup> and its descendant music, the fiddle music of Nova Scotia<sup>13</sup>. To an even larger extent it features in the traditional fiddle music of the United States of America, a tradition also closely related to that of Scotland and of Ireland. The American scordatura tradition is treated very comprehensively in one of the Mel Bay publications, *Cross-Tuning Your Fiddle* by Bill Shull<sup>14</sup>, who describes the reasons scordatura is employed by American traditional fiddle players. Even though the Irish use of scordatura is much scarcer than the American, nevertheless the same reasons can be seen to apply. He lists the following reasons: tunes become simpler to play, sonority changes, sympathetic vibration creates a rich sound, volume increases naturally, drone strings provide 'built in back-up', and finally, the ability to play the same melody on both high and low strings<sup>15</sup>. He instances seventeen different scordatura tunings used by American fiddle players, but explains that 'despite this variety, the great majority of cross-tuned pieces are set for AEAE, AEAC#, ADAE, DDAD,

<sup>10</sup> Westrup and Harrison, *Collins Music Encyclopaedia*, 400

<sup>11</sup> Fivos Anoyanakis, *Greek Popular Musical Instruments*, (Athens, 1976), 279

<sup>12</sup> David Johnson, *Scottish Fiddle Music of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, (Edinburgh, 1984), 106-118; Alasdair J. Hardie, *The Caledonian Companion*, (Edinburgh, 1992), 121-123

<sup>13</sup> Kate Dunlay and David Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic Violin Music of Cape Breton*, (Ontario, 1996), ii and 121-140

<sup>14</sup> Bill Shull, *Cross-Tuning Your Fiddle*, (Pacific MO, 1994)

<sup>15</sup> Shull, *Cross-Tuning Your Fiddle*, 4-5

or GDAD<sup>16</sup>. Small as the store of examples in South Leitrim and Longford is, by comparison, it is noteworthy that three of the above five tunings are used in this region, GDAD for “The Wise Maid”, AEAE for “Greg’s Pipes”, and the same set of intervals as AEAC# in the case of “Drunken Kelly”, except that here the tuning is one note down over the four strings, GDGB.

## Scordatura in fiddle playing in Ireland

As a part of the Irish fiddle tradition, scordatura has indeed been used very sparingly. It is true that, in recent years, some of the younger generation of fiddle players have been experimenting in this field, principally Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh, who plays in a wide variety of scordatura tunings, but this is not at all representative of the older tradition in Ireland. Ó Raghallaigh states that he ‘rarely plays all fifths anymore at all<sup>17</sup>’. He may also be influenced by his playing of the Hardanger fiddle, the basic tuning of which is ADAE. In fact this is one of the three principal tunings Ó Raghallaigh uses for traditional music, the other two being AEAE and AEAC#.

In relation to older traditions, we can divide the types of scordatura used into three categories. In its fullest form scordatura involves cross-tuning and cross-fingering, in the sense that the fiddler plays over the four strings, adjusting his fingers to the new non-standard tuning. This is the first form of scordatura used in Ireland. A second and less full form of scordatura is where the fiddler confines his fingering to the strings that retain normal tuning and uses the cross-tuned strings only for drone or chordal purposes. A third form of scordatura is where the strings are simply tuned upwards or downwards but the intervals between the strings remain the normal fifths.

Examining these categories in reverse order, examples of the third type, from the playing of Neillidh Boyle and Danny Meehan, two fiddle players from Donegal, are described in an article by Caoimhín Mac Aoidh in the Summer 2009 edition of *Fiddler Magazine*<sup>18</sup>, where it is termed ‘playing sharp’. The second type of scordatura, cross-tuning without cross-fingering, is described by Jody Stecher in her article “Cross-Tuning Workshop” in the same magazine<sup>19</sup> from the playing of John and Mickey Doherty, also from Donegal, where the cross-tuned lower strings are used for the purposes of droning only. Arriving finally at the first type listed, involving the use of fingers on the cross-tuned strings, this type can be seen in the playing of the “Foxhunter’s Reel” by Seán Keane of the Chieftains, who learned this tune from Patrick Kelly of Cree, Co. Clare, but developed it by the introduction of octave playing, which involves extensive cross-fingering. In this tune Kelly’s own use of cross-fingering is practically non-existent, amounting to the occasional use of the open third string. Otherwise he confined his playing to the top two strings<sup>20</sup>. As in the case of the Dohertys, the main purpose of cross-tuning for him seems to have been the droning effect. His scordatura, therefore, belongs more to the second type than to the first. For this first, and fullest, type of

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<sup>16</sup> Shull, *Cross-Tuning Your Fiddle*, 11

<sup>17</sup> Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh, e-mail message to author, March 12, 2012

<sup>18</sup> Caoimhín Mac Aoidh, ‘The Scordatura Tradition in Irish Fiddle Playing’, *Fiddler Magazine*, Summer 2009, 26

<sup>19</sup> Jody Stecher, ‘Cross-Tuning Workshop’, *Fiddler Magazine*, Summer 2009, 40, 41 and 55

<sup>20</sup> Brendan Taaffe, ‘Aeroplanes out of Scrapheaps: Patrick Kelly from Cree’, (master’s thesis, University of Limerick, 2005), 42-44.

scordatura, the examples of its use in the Longford and South Leitrim tradition, which are to be analysed, will provide a much clearer picture of what is involved in cross-tuning and cross-fingering.

As to why cross-tuning is sometimes done in Ireland, a number of different purposes can be cited: firstly to give a brighter, or sweeter, or more resonant tone to the fiddle, secondly to facilitate octave playing without change of fingering, and thirdly to create special effects, especially droning in imitation of the bagpipes.

Scordatura by definition changes the tone of the fiddle and so in all cases our first purpose of change of tone or resonance will apply. But this purpose is most clearly seen in the playing of Donegal fiddlers as described by Caoimhín Mac Aoidh in his article already cited, where he instances 'brighter, more vibrant and ringing tone' as well as 'carrying power' achieved by its use.

The second purpose mentioned was the facilitating of octave playing. This is the main purpose for cross-tuning the fiddle for "Greg's Pipes" and "The Wise Maid" in the South Leitrim and Longford area, which will be dealt with more fully in the next section.

The purpose of cross-tuning for special effects can be seen in Pádraig O'Keeffe's playing of "The Old Man Rocking the Cradle" where the wailing of the child is simulated<sup>21</sup>, or the knocking effect in "Drunken Kelly"<sup>22</sup>. And, of course, as already stated, one of the principal special effects facilitated by scordatura is droning. This is particularly evident, as we have noted, in Patrick Kelly's playing of "The Foxhunter's Reel", and even more so in the playing of his protégé in regard to this, Seán Keane of The Chieftains<sup>23</sup>.

## Scordatura in South Leitrim and Longford

As noted at the outset, scordatura has been used by some fiddle players in the region of South Leitrim and Longford, particularly the pupils of Peter Kennedy of Ballinamore, and their pupils in turn, and so on down the generation of fiddle players who can trace a musical lineage back to Kennedy, seven traceable musical generations in point of fact. Kennedy himself, as mentioned earlier, is thought to have been a pupil of the famous Thomas Kernan of Drumlish<sup>24</sup>, but in the scant manuscript music that comes from the hand of Kernan no obvious examples of scordatura have been noticed.

As shall be seen from the following analysis, in this region, scordatura is used for several of the purposes that have been listed earlier, in particular, enhancement of resonance, the facilitation of octave playing without change of fingering, and some special imitative effects.

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<sup>21</sup> Pádraig O'Keeffe, 'The Old Man Rocking the Cradle' on *Kerry Fiddles*, OSS-10, Side 2, Track 4, Ossian Publications, Cork, 1989, cassette tape.

<sup>22</sup> Fr. John Quinn, 'Drunken Man's Freaks', *Teathbha* 3, no. 3 (2008): 40-41.

<sup>23</sup> Seán Keane, private recording, Rathcoole, Co. Dublin, April 2012

<sup>24</sup> cf. Francis O'Neill, *Irish Minstrels and Musicians*, (Chicago, 1913), 369.

# The Wise Maid

The fiddle strings are tuned GDAD

The musical score is written for a fiddle in the key of D major (two sharps) and common time (C). It consists of eight staves of music. The first staff shows the instrument's tuning: G (open), D (open), A (open), and D (open). The melody is written in a single voice on a treble clef staff. The piece begins with a repeat sign and ends with a double bar line and repeat dots. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, as well as rests and accidentals (sharps).

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This tune appears under four different titles in the manuscripts of Alex Sutherland of Drumreilly<sup>25</sup>, a pupil of Peter Kennedy. They are “The Wise Maid”, “New Nora”, “The Musical Bridge” and “The Subterranean Piper”. The first two titles are also found in the manuscripts of his neighbours in Drumreilly, the Reilly family<sup>26</sup>. The latter two titles were more likely to have been made up by Alex Sutherland himself, as he had a reputation for supplying incorrect names of tunes when forwarding material, as he often did, to the Irish Folklore Commission, possibly to enhance his reputation as a source of unusual material, more probably to get a second emolument for a tune he had already supplied to them under another title! In the Sutherland manuscript “The Wise Maid” and “The Subterranean Piper” are written in what is obviously scordatura. And this is verified by a note written by Alex Sutherland under “The Subterranean Piper”, stating that “for the Subterranean the fiddle is not tuned in fifths”. Although he fails to indicate the actual tuning to be used, it is obvious from the notation that the E string should be brought down to D. As the tune doesn’t go down to the G string, we cannot tell whether or not the G string was altered. The tuning may have been GDAD, which, as already noted, is a recognised fiddle tuning, especially in Eastern Europe, known as *alla turca*. Some of the Reilly manuscripts also write settings of this tune with what is obviously scordatura.

Not all the settings contain the same amount of parts. The setting above was prepared by Fr. John Quinn, and might be called a critical edition. He used various Reilly and Sutherland settings. It consists of eight parts, although parts five, six and seven are merely each an octave above parts one, two and three respectively, and part eight is a variation of part four. Enda McNamara, a pupil of Fr. Quinn, has been working with the Reilly and Sutherland manuscripts, and has played Fr. Quinn’s edited setting with ADAD tuning, and he finds that this produces a magnificently resonant tone<sup>27</sup>. Either of the two tunings mentioned, ADAD or GDAD, facilitates the playing of those three parts of the tune an octave higher using the same fingering in each octave, as required by the manuscript notation. A shorter version of “The Wise Maid” appears in *Kerr’s Fourth Collection of Merry Melodies for the Violin*<sup>28</sup>, where it is obvious that the same scordatura tuning as our manuscripts suggest is required for the playing of the third part, a part which is more or less identical to the first part but an octave higher.

One of the most popular versions of this tune, but not one that normally uses scordatura, goes by the name “The Pinch of Snuff”. It is associated especially with Donegal. The version played there, under that title, has in recent years spread throughout Ireland. A very interesting, informative and entertaining account of it and, in particular, of its performance annually at the Willie Clancy Summer School in Clare is given by Hazel Fairbairn in an article she wrote for the *Folk Music Journal* in 1994<sup>29</sup>.

This tune is also known in Kerry, and there, it seems, scordatura was also used, though not the same scordatura tuning as in the Longford and South Leitrim area. Mac Aoidh, in his aforementioned *Fiddler Magazine* article, tells of a manuscript in the handwriting of Pádraig O’Keeffe of the Sliabh

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<sup>25</sup> Over 200 tunes in the handwriting of Sutherland are held in the Department of Folklore, UCD. Other Sutherland manuscripts are in the private possession of the Sutherland family, Drumreilly, Co. Leitrim, or that of the families of his pupils, for example, the Mulligan family, Drumreilly.

<sup>26</sup> Most of the original Reilly family manuscripts are now in the Irish Traditional Music Archive, Merrion Square, Dublin, having been donated in 2010 by Marie Reilly of Yonkers, New York.

<sup>27</sup> Enda McNamara, interview, April 2012, Aughavas, County Leitrim

<sup>28</sup> James S Kerr, *Kerr’s Fourth Collection of Merry Melodies for the Violin*, (Glasgow, n.d., ca. 1870-5), 11

<sup>29</sup> Hazel Fairbairn, ‘Changing Contexts for Traditional Dance Music in Ireland: The Rise of Group Performance Practice’, *Folk Music Journal* 6, no. 5 (1994): 589-597.

Luachra region of County Kerry, which contains a version of what Mac Aoidh recognises as “The Pinch of Snuff”, with instructions to use AEAE scordatura tuning<sup>30</sup>. It is, of course, possible to execute the reel with such tuning and it may, in fact, give a better piping effect than if played with GDAD (or ADAD) tuning. Nevertheless, the resultant droning, if used, in the key of A would be quite foreign to the tune, which is in the key of D.

## Greg’s Pipes

The fiddle strings are tuned AEAE

The image shows a musical score for the fiddle tune 'Greg's Pipes'. It begins with a five-line staff showing the AEAE scordatura tuning. The main melody is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (D major) and a common time signature. The score consists of seven staves of music. The first staff contains measures 1 through 4, ending with a repeat sign and a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff starts at measure 5 and ends with a repeat sign. The third staff starts at measure 9 and ends with a repeat sign. The fourth staff starts at measure 13 and ends with a repeat sign. The fifth staff starts at measure 17 and ends with a repeat sign. The sixth staff starts at measure 21 and ends with a repeat sign. The seventh staff starts at measure 24 and contains two first endings, labeled '1.' and '2.', each ending with a repeat sign.

<sup>30</sup> Mac Aoidh, 'The Scordatura Tradition in Irish Fiddle Playing', 27.



“Greg’s Pipes” is a tune that has developed such a variety of different versions that its original form has become obscured. It seems to have originated as a combination of “The Reel of Tulloch” and another similar reel in the key of A, as yet unidentified, which were put together in a medley by Joshua Campbell, if we are to accept his claim to authorship<sup>31</sup>, some time before 1761 when it first appeared in print<sup>32</sup>. Campbell obviously thought they made a good combination, which they did. The combination became permanent, and so was born the original “Greg’s Pipes”. It seems to have required scordatura to facilitate the repetition of parts an octave down. “Greg’s Pipes” has taken many forms since that, not only in the original key of A, but also in D<sup>33</sup>, and more especially in the key of G<sup>34</sup>. For the most part, scordatura has not followed it into those keys<sup>35</sup>.

Alex Sutherland and various members of the Reilly family have manuscript settings of this reel in AEAE scordatura which are quite close to Scottish scordatura versions, but not quite as close to the Scottish as is the version in The Gunn Book from County Fermanagh<sup>36</sup>. While most modern versions of Greg’s Pipes are not played in scordatura, “The Foxhunters Reel”, a version of Greg’s Pipes, but more distant from the Scottish original than either the Leitrim or Fermanagh versions, is played in scordatura by Patrick Kelly of Cree, County Clare. According to Breandán Breathnach<sup>37</sup>, Kelly used GDGD tuning, whereas Seán Keane of The Chieftains, who learned it from Patrick Kelly and popularized that version, played with AEAE tuning for Breathnach. However, in an interview by the present writer with him recently, Seán Keane explained that he used both tunings<sup>38</sup>. It was obvious from his playing of it on that occasion that droning was the most important reason for using scordatura by him in this tune. However, unlike Patrick Kelly who didn’t use octave playing in this tune<sup>39</sup>, Seán Keane did. Keane has developed an enhanced way of playing this tune, over and above what he learned from Patrick Kelly, while at the same time playing with all the droning effect that was such a feature of Kelly’s rendition.

Frank Reilly, of Drumeela, a cousin of the Reillys of Drumreilly, recorded “Greg’s Pipes” for RTE radio in 1966 where, before he starts the tune, he plays the open strings in chords, saying ‘that’ll teach them how to tune it’. By comparison with the way Seán Keane played “The Foxhunter’s Reel”, Frank’s playing of the related “Greg’s Pipes” has much less of the droning effect. The more apparent reason for the cross-tuning for him would seem to be the ease of repeating the second two parts of the tune an octave higher without change of fingering. Another reason might be the greater resonance it gives to the fiddle.

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<sup>31</sup> See note under “Greig’s Pipes” in Francis O’Neill, *Waifs and Strays of Gaelic Melody*, (Chicago, 1922), 151

<sup>32</sup> cf. Breandán Breathnach, *Ceol Rince na hÉireann*, (Baile Átha Cliath, 1963), 93.

<sup>33</sup> see analysis of Kernan’s involvement in this branch of its development in the article by Fr. John Quinn, “Fiddle Music in Longford and South Leitrim since Kiernan”, *Teathbha* 3, no. 3 (2008): 74-78.

<sup>34</sup> e.g., “Píopaí Greig” in Breandán Breathnach, *Ceol Rince na hÉireann*, Cuid 1, 41 or “Craig’s Pipes” in David J. Taylor, *Give Us Another (Music of Ireland series)*, 16.

<sup>35</sup> The one exception is “The Foxhunter’s”, a version of “Greg’s Pipes” sometimes played in G with GDGD scordatura.

<sup>36</sup> Cyril Maguire, *Hidden Fermanagh*, (County Fermanagh, 2003), 112

<sup>37</sup> Breandán Breathnach, *Ceol Rince na hÉireann*, Cuid 2, (Dublin, 1976), 177.

<sup>38</sup> Seán Keane, interview, April 2012, Rathcoole, County Dublin

<sup>39</sup> Taaffe, ‘Aeroplanes out of Scrapheaps’, 42

## The London Lasses

The fiddle strings are tuned AEAE

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It consists of six staves of music. The first staff shows the tuning AEAE. The music features first and second endings, triplets, and concludes with 'FINE' and 'D.C. al fine'.

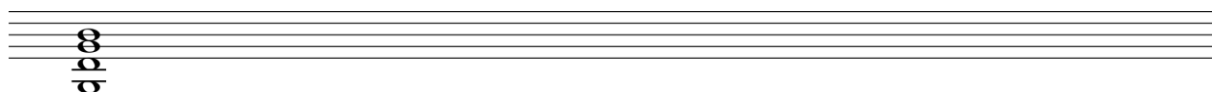
Fr. Quinn has been coaching Céilí bands of all age groups in Longford and South Leitrim since 1966. A feature of these bands, known as Ceolus<sup>40</sup>, is their repertoire of tunes from the local tradition. Several times since the mid-1990s Ceolus has played the scordatura version of “Greg’s Pipes” in competitions at various fleadhanna. This was done first and foremost out of a sense of upholding an old tradition and encouraging younger musicians in the area to learn the skills of scordatura as practiced by the older generation of fiddle players. The effect of playing it in a band situation was, of course, a new thing and it had an extraordinary effect. With four fiddles all tuned AEAE, the resonance associated with scordatura was greatly amplified. To comply with the fleadh rules, a second reel needed to be played. Only a tune that confined itself to the top two strings could be

<sup>40</sup> A contraction of the Irish words “Ceol” meaning “music” and “Muintir Eoluis”, which means “the people descended from Eolus the first Conmhaicne chief of the area of South Leitrim. The band was christened Ceolus on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1990.

played without resorting to cross-fingering as well as cross-tuning. The choice was “The London Lasses”, a tune that is included several times in the manuscripts of the Reilly family. It seems to have been taken down originally by Terence Reilly from *Ryan’s Mammoth Collection*<sup>41</sup>, and had obviously become a staple in their repertoire. Using the pattern of the repeating of parts an octave lower as it was done in “Greg’s Pipes”, “The London Lasses” was played singly three times, the middle time being played an octave down. The effect was tremendous, especially in the second part, which has, in the first, third and fifth bars, a feature known to fiddle player as “the rocks”, in this case “rocking” over and back from D on the A string to F#, A and F# again on the E string. When this was done in the lower octave on the fourth and third strings, now tuned up to A and E, the effect was quite exhilarating. A new tune had been added to the scordatura portfolio of the local tradition.

## Drunken Kelly

The fiddle strings are tuned GDGB



**In the tavern drunken Kelly goes to the bar**



**He knocks and asks for more drink**



**He gets drink and sings**



<sup>41</sup> William Bradbury Ryan, *Ryan’s Mammoth Collection*, (Boston, 1883), 54

He is put out into the cold and scolds



He shivers



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and has to go away



“Drunken Kelly”, or “Drunken Man’s Freaks”, is a descriptive piece of music involving the story of a drunken man, from his arrival at the inn to his departure. The music to be played appears in the Alex Sutherland and the Reilly family manuscripts in a number of different settings. Again the above is Father John Quinn’s critical edition, derived from those manuscripts. Traditionally, the fiddle player explained verbally the meaning of the various parts of the story intermittently as he progressed through the piece. Most of the manuscripts contain music only, but one manuscript setting from Hughie Reilly, in addition to giving the music, gives full instructions as to how it is to be played and which imitative effect each part has. The tuning is GDGB, which forms a G major chord. Arriving in good humour, knocking for more drink, singing to please, scolding to reprimand, shivering to gain sympathy and finally going away dejected are all simulated in turn by the fiddle player. The knocking effect is done *pizzicato* and seems to be the part that most requires the G chord tuning. The tune is based, but with some development, on the Scottish piece “Drunk at night and dry in the morning”<sup>42</sup>. There is no indication, however, that the Scottish version was played with scordatura. If it was played with scordatura, it would probably have employed AEAC# tuning, as it is in the key of A, a tone above “Drunken Kelly”. The second part in “Drunken Kelly”, where knocking for more drink is simulated by playing the open strings *pizzicato*, is original and does not derive from the Scottish version, as other parts do. The Scottish version has only four parts, whereas the version in this area has six parts. There is unfortunately no indication as to what, if any, significance the four parts in the Scottish version has, but three of the four parts correspond, in the music used, to the arriving, singing and scolding simulations in “Drunken Kelly”. The last of the Scottish parts has no obvious counterpart in the local version, and it is impossible to conjecture what it might be meant to

<sup>42</sup> Niel Gow and Sons, *Gow’s Repository of the Dance Music of Scotland*, Book 3, (Edinburgh, 1799), 77

simulate, if indeed any simulation is intended in the Scottish piece. Certainly, none of the Scottish parts corresponds to our *pizzicato* knocking simulation, the part that most demands the scordatura.

Fr. John Quinn, in an article entitled “The Drunken Mans Freaks,”<sup>43</sup> describes exactly how the story unfolds, as the following extract will show: ‘When the story starts, Drunken Kelly is inside the tavern, according to Hughie Reilly’s manuscripts. He approaches the counter demanding more drink, which he is given; but immediately he starts to sing drunkenly and is put out in the cold, where he can sing, scold and shiver for all he is worth and go away without being let back in’.

“Drunken Kelly”, played by Andrew Morrow, with the story narrated by Séamus O’Rourke, was broadcast live from the Corn Mill Theatre, Carrigallen, on RTÉ Radio, as part of a Céilí House programme, in 1997. As a grúpa ceoil competition entry by Ceolus in various fleadhanna, “Drunken Kelly” has been used as the centre piece of a musical arrangement depicting the pub scene described in the story. In the competitions over the years, the Drunken Kelly role has been played by many fiddle players, in addition to Andrew Morrow, most notably Enda McNamara, Paul McNamara, Pdraig Reilly and the present writer, all of the Kernan Kennedy musical lineage.

## Methods of indicating scordatura

The recognised classical way of writing out a piece of music to be played scordatura is to insert immediately after the clef a chord formed of the four open strings as they are to be tuned. This is followed by a double bar line and a second clef. After this second clef a key signature is inserted, which indicates to the player the intervals between his fingers on the various strings. This key signature will seem odd to the reader, as it will not be any of the usual recognisable signatures. The example given in Collins Music Encyclopedia will demonstrate the point<sup>44</sup>. The scordatura tuning is A $\flat$ E $\flat$ bGD. The key is B $\flat$ , but the normal key signature of B $\flat$  and E $\flat$  is changed to high F $\natural$  above low F $\sharp$ . This is the method followed by Dunlay and Greenberg<sup>45</sup>, except that they simply put the chord indicating the tuning before the clef without a second clef preceding it. All the examples they have are of AEAE tuning, which they call “High-Bass”. All the tunes for playing in scordatura are in the key of A, but the normal key signature of F $\sharp$ , C $\sharp$ , G $\sharp$  is replaced by a clef of F $\sharp$ , high C $\sharp$  above low C $\flat$ , high G $\sharp$  above low G $\flat$ .

David Johnson gives examples of three scordatura tunings that were used in Scotland in the eighteenth century, ADAE, AEAE and AEAC $\sharp$ <sup>46</sup>. He puts the chord before the clef as did Dunlay and Greenberg, but rather than use the composite scordatura key signature, he allows the normal key signature to stay, and individually puts accidental signs before all the notes that need to be so

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<sup>43</sup> Quinn, ‘Drunken Man’s Freaks’, 40-41.

<sup>44</sup> Westrup and Harrison, *Collins Music Encyclopaedia*, 590.

<sup>45</sup> Dunlay and Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic Violin Music of Cape Breton*, 121-140.

<sup>46</sup> Johnson, *Scottish Fiddle Music of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, 106-108.

marked. Bill Shull has the same method, except that he puts the chord on a free standing short staff<sup>47</sup>. This method is the one used in this article.

Alasdair Hardie also uses a free standing short staff for the chord<sup>48</sup>. He too retains the normal key signature for the three examples of scordatura that he gives, which are all in AEAE tuning and all in the key of A, but instead of marking all the required accidentals individually, as did Johnson and Shull, he puts a small crotchet-head chord of C<sup>♮</sup> and G<sup>♮</sup> immediately below the C<sup>♯</sup> of the A key signature.

Kerr in the example we cite above has no indication at all that scordatura is intended. Without any chord, adjusted key signature or accidentals, he merely prints the notes of the tune in scordatura, and leaves it to the musician to realise that if they play, for example, “The Wise Maid” with normal tuning, something is seriously wrong on the E string. The musician is expected to deduce that, to get the tune to sound in key, the E string needs to be tuned down to D. This is the same method followed by Alex Sutherland and the members of the Reilly family in all their manuscript examples of scordatura. The musician is left to figure out which strings have to be raised or lowered by the necessity to get the tune to sound in key.

When working with the Ceolus bands, Fr. John Quinn devised his own method of writing out tunes that were to be played in scordatura. He indicated the tuning to be used by the chord, as well as an alphabetic indication, e.g., GDGB. Then he wrote out the tune as normal, with the normal key signature and normal notation, and individually marked the fingering to be used on the section of the tune where fingering needed to be adjusted. This method has an advantage, when the scordatura playing fiddlers are playing in a group with musicians playing on other instruments, in that it allows the other instrumentalists to use the same music sheet.

## The Future of Scordatura in Longford and South Leitrim

Through his use of scordatura tunes in Céilí Band and Grúpa Ceoil competitions in a number of Fleadh Cheoil competitions with Ceolus and with Ceoltóirí Conmhaicne over the past twenty years, Fr. John Quinn has succeeded in interesting a whole new generation of young fiddle players from Longford and South Leitrim in the art of scordatura. In particular, his use of it in a Céilí Band situation, where three, four or even five fiddle players have been playing scordatura side by side, gives a new and, for the young people involved, a very exhilarating feeling of fiddle power. Some of the audience, and even the adjudicators, may be puzzled by the re-tuning of the fiddles before the scordatura piece, but it is all part of the educative process, in which Fr. Quinn is a firm believer. Not only are the young local fiddle players of the Conmhaicne area being introduced to a very old tradition, one as old as the fiddle itself, but people from other parts of the country, where scordatura is unknown, or used in a more basic form, are being brought to an appreciation of what is involved in full scordatura.

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<sup>47</sup> Shull, *Cross-Tuning Your Fiddle*, passim

<sup>48</sup> Hardie, *The Caledonian Companion*, 121-123.

In conclusion, it is noteworthy that although evidence of the scordatura tradition exists in Ireland in different parts of the country, and to different levels of sophistication, it is a tradition the existence of which most modern fiddle players, and indeed the wider music community, are unaware. I hope that by creating awareness through the medium of this article, and also by actively promoting scordatura tunes through bands such as Ceolus and, above all, through individual performances, more musicians, seeking to discover the opportunities that scordatura provides, will start to explore and research scordatura in their own local traditions.

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