

Scottish Ornaments

To create a more authentic Scottish sound, you need to add ornaments to your songs. I always think of ornaments like spices for cooking. Many cultures use the same meat or vegetable, but when they add their unique spices, it gives their cooking a regional flavor that people identify as their own. You would not mistake a Mexican rice dish for Japanese rice dish because of the spice! The same goes for ornaments. Just like in cooking there are a few rules!

1. Don't overdo a good thing....use sparingly
2. Where to add ornaments is a personal decision.
Listen to where fiddlers, vocalists and pipers add their ornaments for clues.
3. Melody notes have the ornaments, not the bass.
4. The melody is more important than the ornament and you should hear the melody more than the ornament.
5. The ornaments are not counted in the rhythm! They must be played so you do not lose the beat!

The following are EXAMPLES of ornaments. Use these as a guide for adding ornaments to your songs.

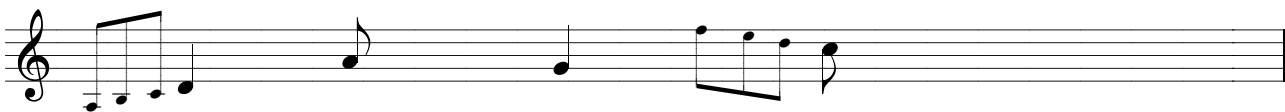
CUT OR GRACE NOTE: one note before or after the melody



DOUBLET; adding 2 notes before the melody

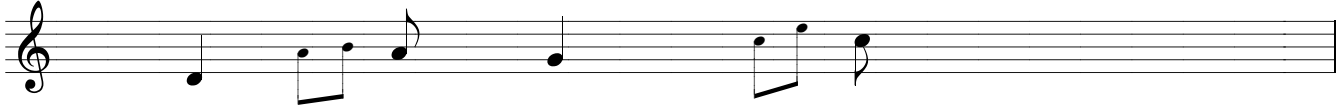


RUNNING TRIPLETS: adding 3 notes before the melody



For more information on Scottish music and ornaments,
check out any of Alison Kinnairds' books

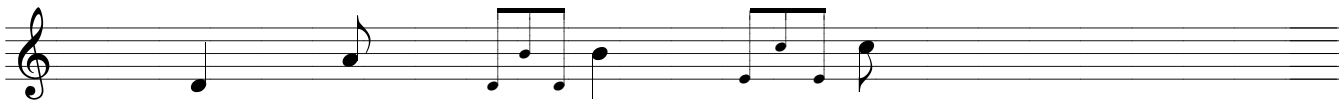
SHAKES OR BIRL: the first note is the same as the melody note



URNS: a chord rolled before the melody note



THROWS OR GRIP: an ornament from bagpipe music



TRIPLET ON ONE NOTE: use fingers 4,3 and 2 on 1 string.
This is also represented by a fingernail above the notes to be played. Also called a treble or trill.



In measure #2, it will be written out like triplett sixteenth notes

One key element of adding ornaments to capture the feel of the song is to be aware of what notes will define that song in a Scottish tradition. A lot of the older musical selections are based on a "pentatonic" mode, which is a scale having 5 notes. There are many ways to construct a pentatonic scale. One way to "see" a pentatonic scale on your harp is to play only the colorless strings, not the blue and red strings. On a piano, you can also "see" a pentatonic scale by using only the black keys. Why is this important for our ornaments? By choosing certain notes for our ornaments (that make up a pentatonic scale) we can help define that sound more accurately.

For example, if you are in the key of C, the pentatonic (5) notes would be: C D F G A
If you are in the key of G, the pentatonic notes (5) would be: G A C D E
In the key of D, the 5 notes would be: D E G A B

My example is in the key of C, so the best choices for my ornament notes would be: C,D,F,G,A.
There are exceptions to every rule, but use this as a rule of thumb!