

The Riley School of Irish Music

Student Handbook

Information for
Students who are new to the Riley School

Table of Contents

Bands	page 3
Board and Staff.....	7
Cds.....	5
Ceilis.....	7
Class time.....	5
Comhaltas.....	6
Concerts.....	6
Donations.....	8
Facility.....	5
Fleadh.....	6
Information, finding.....	7
Jig or Reel?.....	7
Learning by ear.....	4
Lunch.....	3
Open House.....	6
Parking.....	5
Performing.....	3
School Day.....	3
School Year	8
Sessions.....	3
Sheet music.....	3
Snow.....	3
Teacher emails.....	7
Workshops.....	6

The School Day. Classes take place from 9 a.m. until noon, with a few being held at 1:30-2:30. From noon until 12:30 we congregate in the lunchroom. From 12:30-1:30 we meet for bands and ensembles.

Lunch. For half an hour we eat, socialize, listen to announcements and listen to a 10-minute performance by teachers, students or visiting performers. Lunch is free to all of us, since we volunteer to bring it for each other. Each family is expected to take a turn during the year at bringing in soup or bread for everyone. Other items are always welcome! Two separate families split soup duties, so that a total of four gallons of soup comes in with some for vegetarians; one family should bring in 4 loaves of bread

Bands. Irish music is not played in isolation. It is a social music. To keep us all playing together, we invite everyone to participate in a band from 12:30-1:30 every Saturday. It is free if you are currently or formerly enrolled at the Riley School. For children there is Kids Band (Under 12) and Teen Band (ages 12-18). For adults there is a Slow Session for beginners, Adult Intermediate Ensembles and Ceili Band (for advanced players.)

Performing in public. When any of our bands perform outside the school, it is so that our students can gain valuable experience performing in public. The school receives any money earned. Bands whose names do not contain the Riley name are welcome to keep any money they earn by playing music.

Informal Sessions. When people are waiting between classes or before lunch, they often participate in the informal multi-aged session in the lunchroom. You can also sit at a table with a cup of coffee or hot chocolate and grade papers, do your homework, or read a book.

Snow. Sometimes we must cancel school due to snow/ice. Since some of our students and teachers live as far as 1 or 2 hours away, we must make a decision based on the region, not just on your street. If you have any suspicion of a snow cancellation, CHECK OUR WEBSITE (www.rileyirishmusic.com). Cancellation of classes will be on the home page by 7 a.m. It will also be announced on our answering machine, (513) 549-3780. We adjust our calendar to accommodate make-up days.

Sheet music: Traditional music is not learned by reading what someone else has written. Many generations of musicians in Ireland learned at their

parent's knee, or by hearing the tunes played as they were falling asleep in the next room.

Reading music is an essential skill in classical music and a valuable skill for advanced players who already know the sound of traditional music. But it is detrimental for beginner/intermediate students. Learning by ear uses a very different part of the brain from learning to play by sight. We have realized that this music can NOT be taught well in any other way.

You may find the notes on a piece of sheet music, but this will not teach you to play by the phrase with room for improvisation, to have a feel for the variations. You will not be able to play the tune differently each time or to play comfortably with others in a session. The template in your head that comes from sheet music, even if you have memorized the tune, will keep you locked into specific notes. Your playing will never be fluid, you'll never be able to express yourself through your music, even though you know all the notes. And you will not sound like the other musicians.

It has been said that the sheet music for a traditional tune is nothing more than the skeleton of the tune, or a snapshot of it in time. There are subtleties in rhythm and feel that can not be put on paper. When you mature as a player, you will strive to include variations every time you play a tune. The best players never play a tune exactly the same way twice.

Playing a tune that you have learned by ear has also been compared to telling a story vs. reading it aloud to someone. You will never use exactly the same words in exactly the same order, even though it's the same story. You will be able to put more of yourself into the one you tell, it will flow more like you're telling it from personal experience.

So please bear with us while we teach you a new skill: learning by ear. It will open up new worlds for you.

Tips for Learning by Ear.

- Listen to a tune 100 times before trying to play it. The cds we give you each quarter contain a band version, an unaccompanied version for guitar students, and slow versions of the tunes. Listen to the band versions to get the tunes into your head only. You do not have to play that fast.
- You do not have to listen actively. Have the tunes playing in the background while you are doing other things. Bedtime is great, since the tunes stick better while you sleep.
- Frequency trumps duration. Fifteen minutes a day of either listening or practicing gets you much farther than one hour every four days.

- After listening, come to class and play the tune phrase by phrase as your teacher directs. Again, if you haven't done your listening, it will sound like a bunch of random notes, will have no meaning for you...you will neither grasp the phrases nor enjoy yourself.
- Practice the tune at home. Use the slow versions to pick up notes you're not sure of. Play it so many times that you can play it all by yourself.
- Play the tune with other people, either in bands or in sessions.
- After you've learned the tune, listen to other recordings and performers play the tune. You will hear subtle differences that you can incorporate into your own playing. Ask your teacher to show you some more variations.
- Practice with your eyes closed or distracted. Look out the window, watch the TV with the sound off or a pretty screen saver. In general, don't look at your hands.
- Record yourself and listen to how you sound. You might be surprised.
- Try to play carols, jingles and children's songs that you already know.

School cds. Each quarter our music committee chooses the tunes we will all try to learn so that we can play together. The committee, with the help of current and previous teachers, records cds of that quarter's tunes. The tunes are also available on the music page of our website for downloading. We encourage you to download the tunes, but if you are unable to, then please take a cd. They are free to Riley School students, one per family. For each tune, the cds contain an up-tempo band version, an unaccompanied version for accompaniment students, and a slow version for picking up missed notes while you are practicing. The up-tempo band tracks are for getting the tunes in your head only! Read the section called "Tips for learning by ear" for how to best use your cd.

The cds are available the first or second week of class, in the lunchroom. They go fast, so don't wait until mid-quarter to ask for one!

Class time. Our teachers use the traditional way to teach Irish music: by ear. Please be patient as you learn this new skill. Your behavior is expected to not interfere with the learning of the entire group.

Our facility. We are lucky to have almost the full use of the historic Columbia Baptist Church on Saturdays until 3 p.m. We are, however, almost at capacity and often don't have as many separate rooms as we would like. Rather than put students in classes that are too difficult or too easy, we strive to split them up. This sometimes results in the use of a janitor closet or powder room.

Please be understanding as we deal with these things that we cannot change: space constraints, time constraints, sewer odor, noise levels, temperature, snow removal, parking.

Parking. We are fortunate to have the use of the Gilligan Legal parking lot, which is just two doors east of the school. However, their office does request that we leave the three spaces closest to the street for them, as they are also working on Saturday. There is also parking on the street in front of the school on Eastern, in back on Morris (enter by the back door of the church), or on Donham Ave, one block east of Tusculum.

Workshops and Concerts. Cincinnati is not like Chicago, Boston or New York City, where the Irish immigrants continued playing their traditional music, handing it down for generations. Although we had the Irish immigrant population in the mid-1800s, the music did not survive the years. We had to begin it again from scratch. Because of that we strive to expose our students to as much Irish traditional music from outside our little bubble as we can. Please take advantage of the workshops we sponsor and the concerts by touring professionals that take place around town. We want you to grow in your knowledge of the music and the culture surrounding it.

Open House. As our students grow up, move away or move on, we hope to find new ones. Once each quarter we invite relatives, friends and neighbors to visit us at lunch. We show people what we do and hope to attract more people like you to come to the school. Please help by bringing a dish/snack to share with our guests. We are also happy to allow people to visit classes, but to minimize the disruption we ask that visitors contact the teacher ahead of time. All teacher email addresses can be found on the school schedule page. We allow anyone to attend one class for free without paying in order to sample the Riley School.

Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann. Comhaltas is the organization of Irish traditional musicians. Headquartered in Dublin, Ireland, it was founded in 1951 to preserve and promote the music. There are hundreds of local branches around the world. The Riley Branch of Comhaltas is our sister organization, and you are very welcome to join! Our branch chair is Dan Curtin. Please see Dan at school or contact him if you are interested. curtin@nku.edu Members receive a quarterly magazine about the music, are invited to regular sessions, and receive discounts on fees at the regional competition, the Midwest Regional Fleadh Cheoil.

The Fleadh. (pronounced "flah") In May of 2015 and 2016, our Riley branch will be hosting the fleadh! Several hundred Irish musicians and

their families will be traveling from as far away as California and Atlanta to compete, so we will be looking for lots of volunteers. Dan will be making plenty of announcements at lunch to recruit your help! This also means that our students will not have to travel to compete for the next two years. We hope everyone will attend the Midwest Regional Fleadh Cheoil in Cincinnati, if only to support our students and teachers.

Lots of information! There is lots of information that needs to be shared with our community: events, opportunities, weather cancellations, calendar changes, etc. The best ways to find out what is going on are: listen to announcements at lunch; read the white board on the first floor or the big sticky note by the lunchroom in the basement; open and read the Riley School newsletter in your email inbox; check our website (<http://www.rileyirishmusic.com>) and facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/rileyirishmusic>).

What is a jig? A reel? Although your teacher should fill you in on terminology and jargon, you may want this reference! A polka can be counted in 4, a jig in 6, a hornpipe in a slow bouncy 8, a reel in a faster even 8, a slip jig in 9, a slide in 12. An air is the melody to a song. There are other tune forms that you will encounter as you learn more and more about Irish music.

Who's in charge here?

Dave Gilligan, dave_g@rileyirishmusic.com . Dave is in charge of myriad daily details and "putting out fires". If you are having a problem on Saturday, see Dave.

Tim Kehoe tim_k@rileyirishmusic.com wears lots of hats, including that of Registrar. See him if you need help with registering/paying for your class. Sherry Michael, sherry@rileyirishmusic.com , is our webmistress and the person in charge of organizing lunch.

The board of directors makes long-term decisions. Officers for 2014-16 are Justin Bridges, chair; Nancy Keyser, secretary; Susan Gilligan, treasurer. The other members of the board are Kathy Schneider, Dwight Mitchell, Tim Kehoe and Dan Curtin.

Contacting your teacher. Your teacher's email address is on the schedule page of the Riley School website:

<http://www.rileyirishmusic.com/modules/content/schedule.php>

Please contact him/her if you know you will be missing a class or if you have a question about the tune you are working on, technique, etc.

Ceilis. Pronounced “kay-lee”, this is a night of traditional folk dancing, similar to contra or square dances. There is a caller, and our ceili band usually provides the music. We sometimes collaborate with other organizations to put on a ceili. All dances are taught during the evening, so even beginners have fun!

School Year. We have a 10-week fall quarter which starts just after Labor Day and finishes before Thanksgiving, a 10-week winter quarter which starts just after New Year’s Day and takes us up to the Saint Patrick’s Day madness, then a 7-week spring quarter which begins after that and goes until mid-May. Since our students and teachers disperse during the summer, there is no summer quarter. We hope you find another way to keep playing when school is out: sessions, private lessons with your teacher or summer camps for Irish music.

Donations. The Riley School is a 501(c)3 organization. Your donations to the school are tax-deductible. You may also donate painlessly by designating the Riley School as your chosen charity through Krogers or Amazon. Each of these businesses will donate a small percentage of the income from your purchases to our school. We use this extra income to benefit the most students possible.

To choose us through Kroger Rewards, go to:

<http://www.rileyirishmusic.com/modules/content/index.php?id=52>

To choose us through Amazon Smile, go to:

<https://smile.amazon.com/>