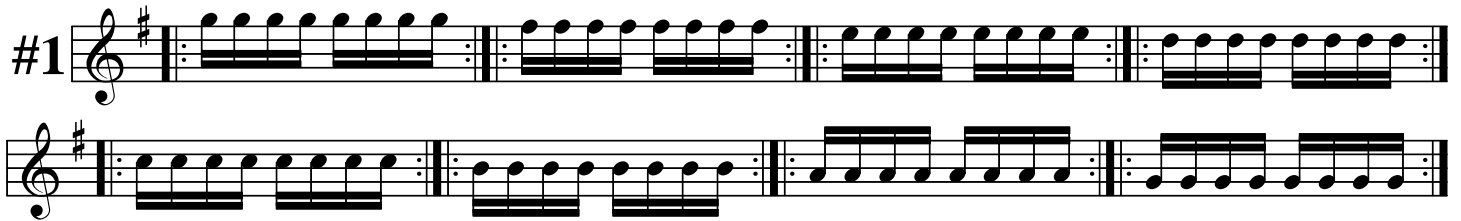


Dick's Favorite Warm-up Exercises for Northumbrian Smallpipes

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Why play exercises rather than tunes? When you play tunes, your "musical brain" gets distracted from the necessary technique, so it is important to work out your finger motions outside of a musical context.

This first exercise is for developing correct hand position and hand relaxation. The exercise itself won't relax your hands or ensure proper hand position, but it's easy enough to do while you're concentrating on touching the holes accurately, in good form, and with the least necessary pressure. Try to get a clear beginning and ending on each note, but remember, the goal is to get your fingers moving in the proper patterns in good form, not getting through the exercise in rhythm. Use the repeated notes to "shake" the tension out of your hand. Try to get a feeling of gently bouncing your fingers.



Pay close attention to hand position and relaxation on this second exercise also, but in addition try to play each note in the pair the same length, with the same length of space *in between* each note. (Articulation) Allow yourself to speed up and slow down as necessary in order to combine the goals of relaxation, good hand position, rhythmic accuracy, and consistency of articulation.



While remembering to pay attention to hand position and relaxation, try to play the following exercise with the greatest possible rhythmic accuracy and consistency of articulation. The rhythmic variations in the last two measures will help resolve bumpy spots in your scales. Spend about the same amount of time on each of these last two measures.



The rhythmic variations in the last two measures of exercise #3 can be used to work on all sorts of different technical problems. Just practice any tricky passage in both these rhythms.

The following exercise may seem redundant to the previous one. However, we normally make subtle changes in timing and articulation to emphasize the beat in our playing, even if we're not aware of it, so each of these measures feels very different.



The following finger-twister is an excellent introduction to the traditional repertoires of Peacock and Dixon. I suggest you play the first 3 notes of each beat slightly staccato and the last note quite staccato, which will bring out the beat. You can use the dotted rhythmic variations in exercise #3 to work on any timing inaccuracies. Don't try to do this one all as one phrase. Work on one measure at a time.



When practicing exercises, it's important not to overwork your little fingers. The muscles are small and don't recover as quickly as larger muscles do. You will probably notice quicker progress if you schedule your most strenuous finger exercises as if it was a weight training program - do them no more than three times a week on alternate days. Experience will show what works best for you. Remember that when you are working on strength issues in your technique (such as control of the little fingers), you can expect to see progress only after your fingers have a couple days to recover, not during that same practice session.

Here's one more exercise for the basic scale. I use this as a kind of shorthand for the previous ones. These figures also occur frequently in the traditional repertoire, and this seems like an efficient way to warm them up.



If you only learn one fast staccato triplet, it should probably be the following. Practice both of these examples and notice the subtle difference in timing and articulation between the two.



I haven't yet mentioned the keys. The basic hand position should put the hands in a position to reach the keys, but using the keys requires not so much the extreme relaxation implied by the previous exercises, but focused energy. How does one integrate the two? The problem is that repeated keystrokes, especially those keys under the little finger, tend to make the hand tense up and lose control all over, so practicing hand relaxation makes your hand recover its relaxation, position, and control *in between* keystrokes. You practice relaxation on the 8 holes alone so you'll be better able to work the keys.

Start with the low keys with #8. When you practice this, try to keep everything in time, and be careful to keep the staccato even between the keyed notes and the notes played with the 8 fingerholes.



If you want to play in the key of D, you should do a little homework first, but it doesn't take much. Do the following two patterns, with whatever rhythmic variations help get the notes and articulations even.

