

LESSON 1 🎵

THE NAMES OF THE NOTES

The pipe chanter has nine notes. They are called (reading from the lowest note upwards), low G, low A, then B, C, D, E, F, high G, and high A.

A framework consisting of five parallel straight lines (called "the staff") is used for writing music. Each line and space represents a different note, and the notes of the chanter are represented as follows:



As you see, the seven letters of the alphabet, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, are used for the names of these notes. Since we have two Gs and two As they have to be distinguished by 'low' and 'high'.

THE NAMES OF THE FINGERS

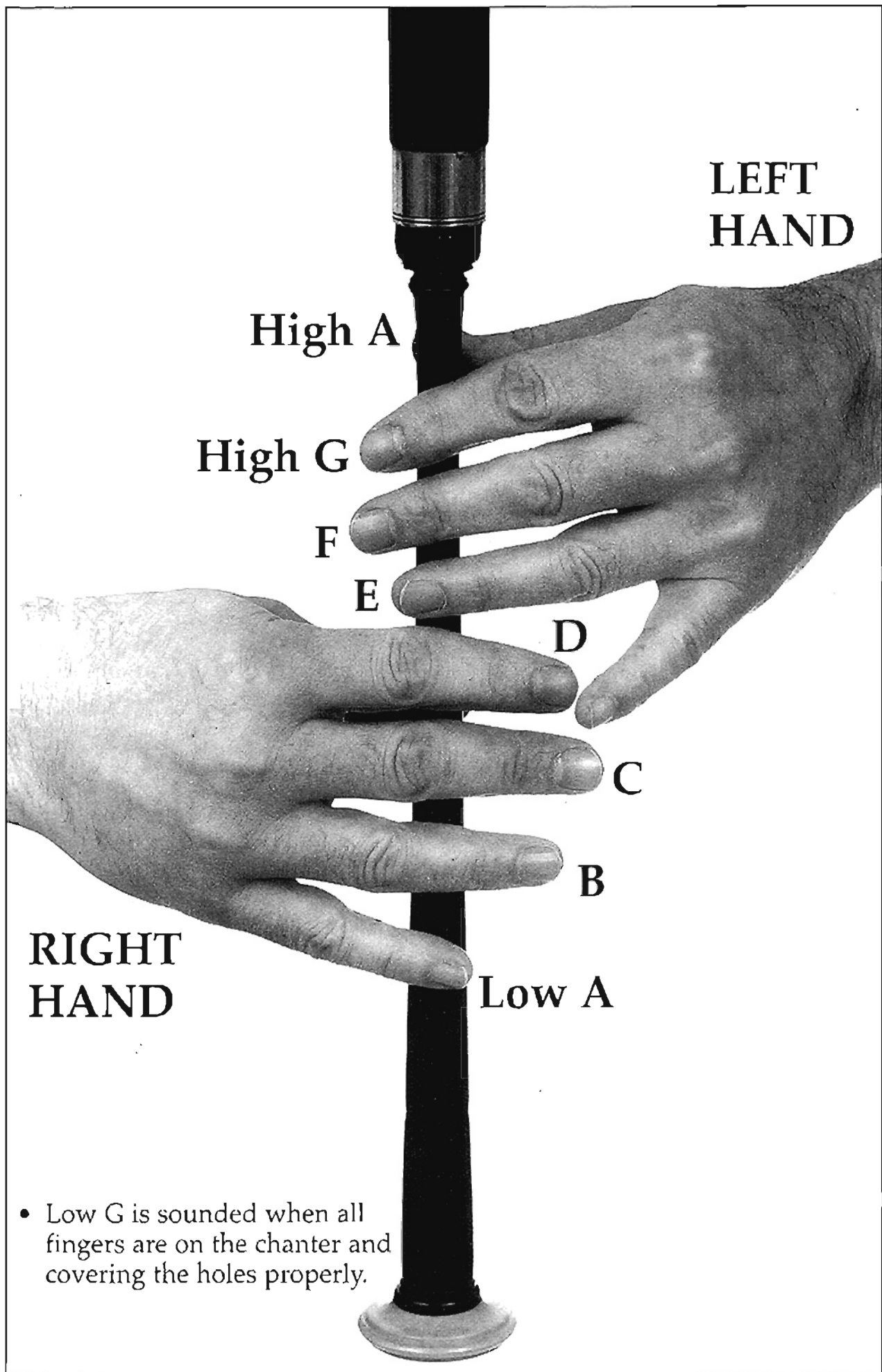
The eight holes of the chanter are covered by the thumb and first three fingers of the top hand, and by the four fingers of the bottom hand.

It is now conventional to play with the left hand above the right, but there are always some players who find it easier to play with the right hand on top, and this is perfectly acceptable.

Each finger is called by the name of a note. The way of placing your fingers and the names given to them are given in the photograph opposite.

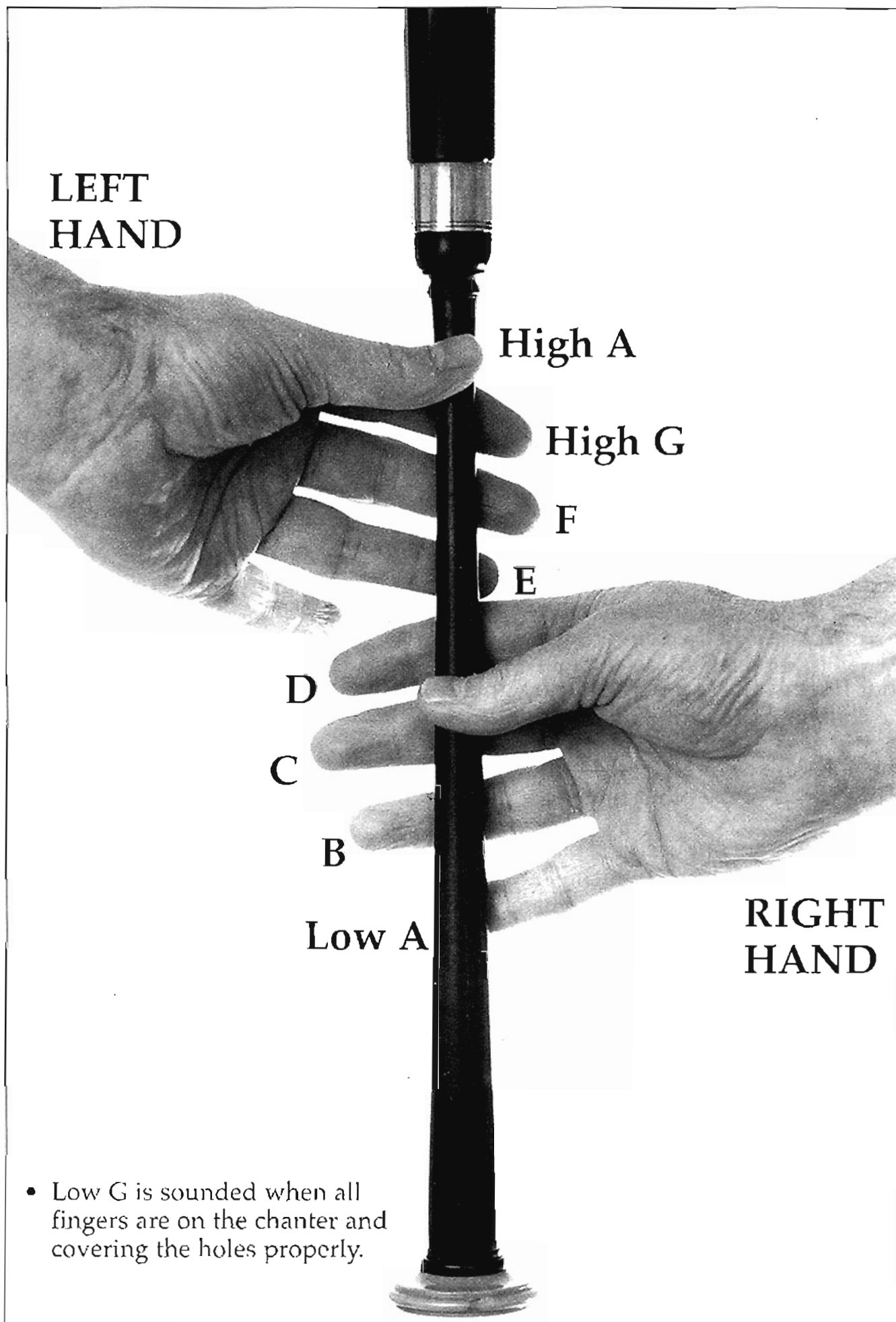
Memorise the names of the notes and the names of the fingers.

FINGER POSITIONS - FRONT VIEW



- Low G is sounded when all fingers are on the chanter and covering the holes properly.

FINGER POSITIONS – REAR VIEW



**LEFT
HAND**

High A

High G

F

E

D

C

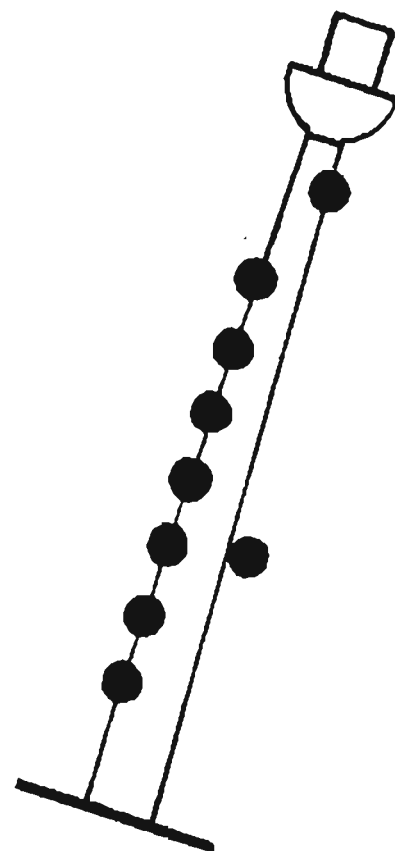
B

Low A

**RIGHT
HAND**

- Low G is sounded when all fingers are on the chanter and covering the holes properly.

THE FIRST NOTE – LOW G



The first note you must learn to play is low G. Place all fingers on the chanter as shown. (Please read the notes on posture on page 71 and study the photographs).

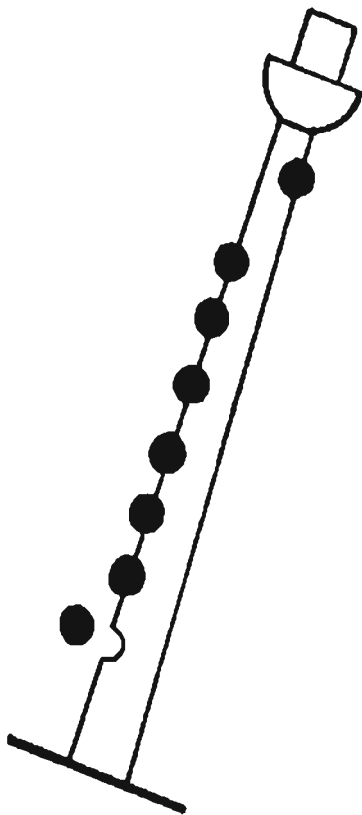
Note very carefully the following points:

- 1 Your fingers must be perfectly straight, even when off the chanter, and must hold the chanter quite firmly but not tightly.
- 2 The holes are covered by the middle sections of the B, C, and D, fingers and by the end sections of the other fingers.
- 3 The two fingers not used for playing (if the left hand is the top hand) are: the little finger of the left hand (which is always kept relaxed), and the thumb of the right hand, which is placed approximately opposite the D and C fingers (see page 17). This will cause a little discomfort in the right wrist at first but if you persevere it will soon feel quite natural.

Begin by placing each finger in turn carefully on the chanter and then ask someone to compare the final result with the photographs and diagrams, or you may examine the position of your fingers with a mirror. After any corrections have been made, blow the chanter, and if your fingers are covering the holes properly, a low steady note will be heard.

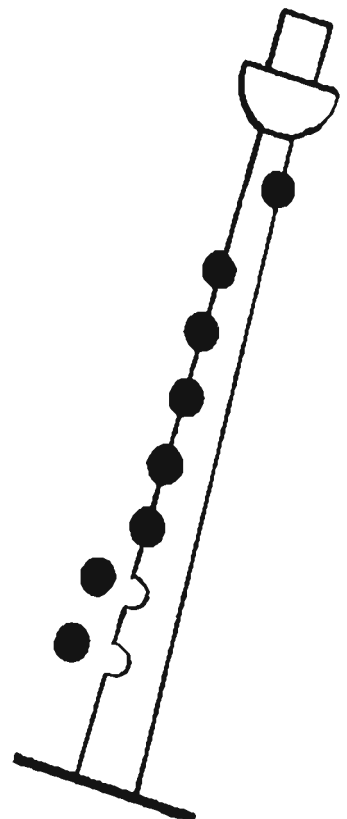
More likely, however, a high or wavering note will come out, which means that some of the air is escaping at one or more of the holes because your fingers are not properly covering them. Continue alternately blowing and adjusting your fingers until the low steady note is heard. This is the first important step in piping. Practise until you can be sure of playing low G every time you want to.

THE SECOND NOTE – LOW A



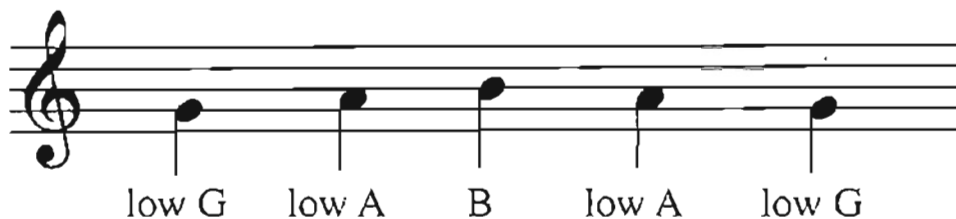
The second note is made very easily once you have mastered low G. To make low A, you simply lift your little finger, so that your hands are in the position shown above. Remember to keep the little finger straight even when it is off the chanter. When you are sure you can play low G and low A try:

THE THIRD NOTE – B



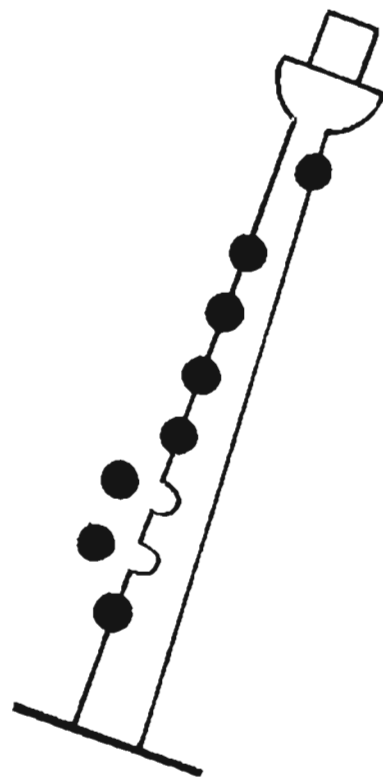
This one, as you can see, is also very easy. You only have to play low A and then lift the B finger off the chanter and you find you are playing B. Be sure that the little finger and B finger are straight and about the same distance from the chanter. Practise now playing low G, low A, B, low A, low G.

This is written:



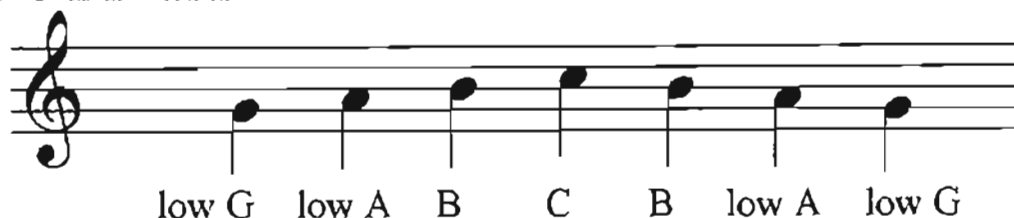
Practise this many times until you are sure you are playing each note correctly.

THE FOURTH NOTE – C



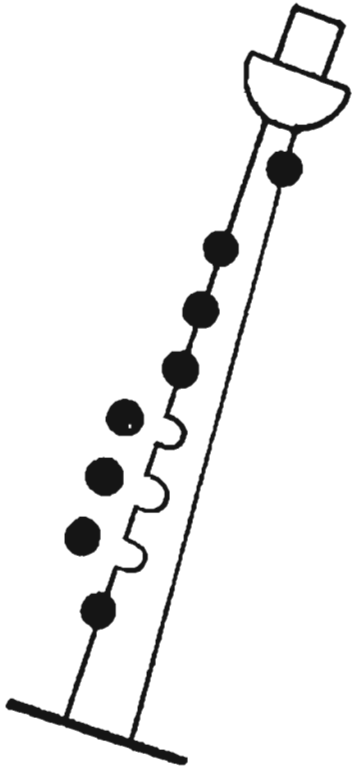
To play C, lift the B finger and C finger off the chanter, BUT KEEP THE LITTLE FINGER ON. Make sure that the two raised fingers are straight and at the same level. Try now to play up the scale from low G to C. As you go from B to C be careful to replace the little finger. When you go from C to B raise the little finger at the same time as you replace the C finger. It is very important to move the little finger and the C finger AT THE SAME TIME.

Play now:



The note C is played with the little finger on the chanter. Some players are erroneously instructed to play an open C (little finger off). This note can sound out of tune on the modern pipe chanter.

THE FIFTH NOTE – D



D again is an easy one. The D, C and B fingers are raised, all other fingers being kept on.

Be careful to keep these raised fingers straight and at the same distance from the chanter.

Play now:

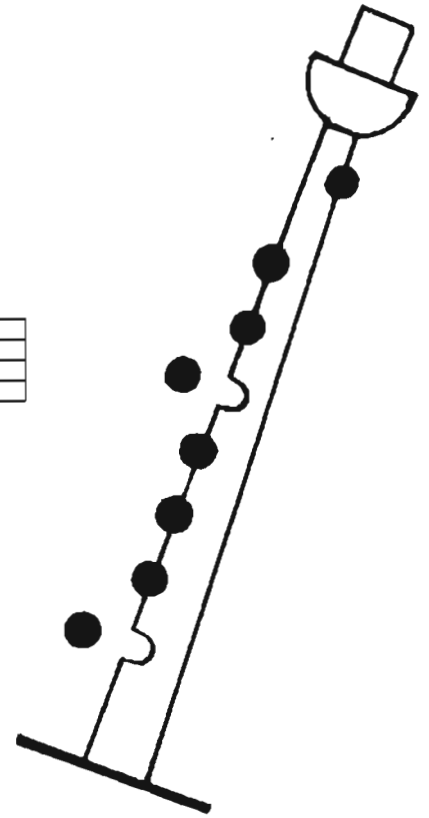


and also



Can you name, correctly, these notes?

THE SIXTH NOTE – E



For this note we cross over to the left or top hand. Only the E and low A fingers are off the chanter, as you can see from the picture and the diagram. Place your fingers in the position for D, then raise the E and low A fingers and drop the three raised fingers (that is the D, C and B ones) on to the chanter **AT THE SAME TIME**. The three fingers going down must pass the two coming up like a pair of scissors crossing. Do the movement first without blowing until you feel that you know what to do, then try and blow from the time you sound D.

If you make the mistake of putting down the three fingers more quickly than you lift the two others, you will hear a little low G coming out between D and E. This is called a 'crossing noise' and must be avoided by careful practice. Only two notes must be heard: D and E. You must not sound a little low G between them.



Play this very slowly, and listen carefully for crossing noises.

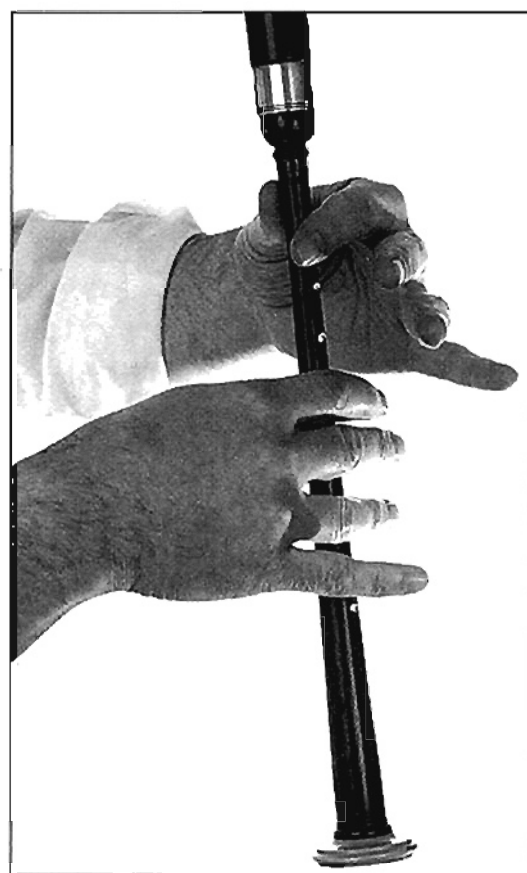
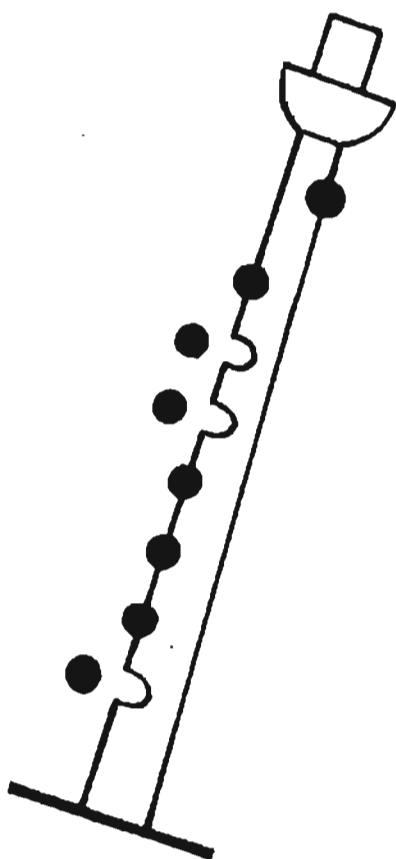
A crossing noise may also occur when you are playing from E back to D. This is caused by the E and low A fingers being put back on too quickly. When playing the practice chanter you will take frequent breaths. **BUT NEVER TAKE A BREATH AT A CROSSING**, that is, when changing from D, C, or B to a top hand note, or from a top hand note to D, C, or B. Always take the breath before or after, otherwise you may fail to detect a crossing noise simply because you are not blowing when it is made.

Play now very slowly:



Crossing noises constitute the chief cause of failure of candidates for the Institute of Piping's Level One Certificate. Too much stress cannot be placed on the necessity for slow, careful, practice at the early stage so that clean fingering habits may be developed. A learner should be his/her own most severe critic.

THE SEVENTH NOTE – F



Our troubles with the scale are nearly over. All the remaining notes are quite simple. The low A finger is kept raised from now on, and for F, the E and F fingers are taken off too, but at the same time. Just be careful again to make sure that the raised fingers are kept straight and not far from the chanter.

Play:

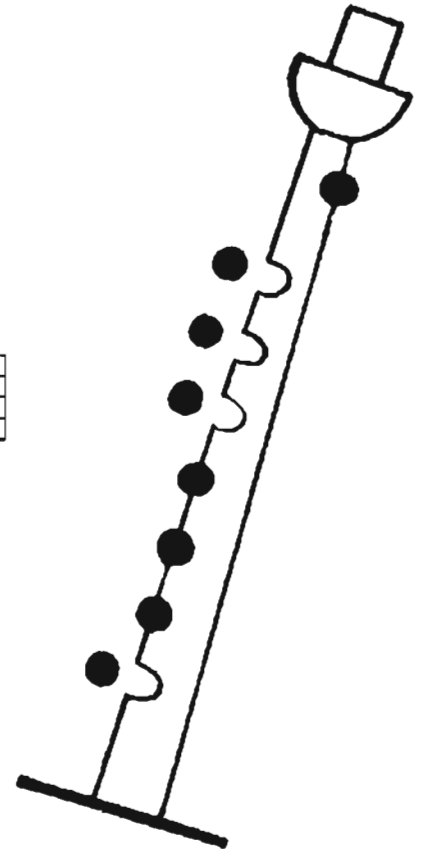


Try also very slowly:



Listen carefully for crossing noises. Can you name these notes?

THE EIGHTH NOTE – HIGH G



For high G, the low A, E, F, and high G fingers are raised, again at the same time. All are kept straight, but not stiff, and not too far from the chanter, as shown above.

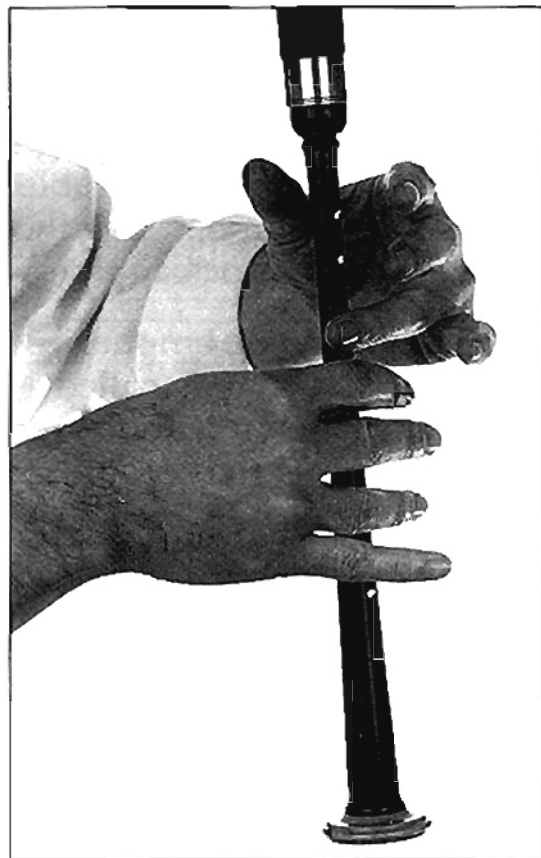
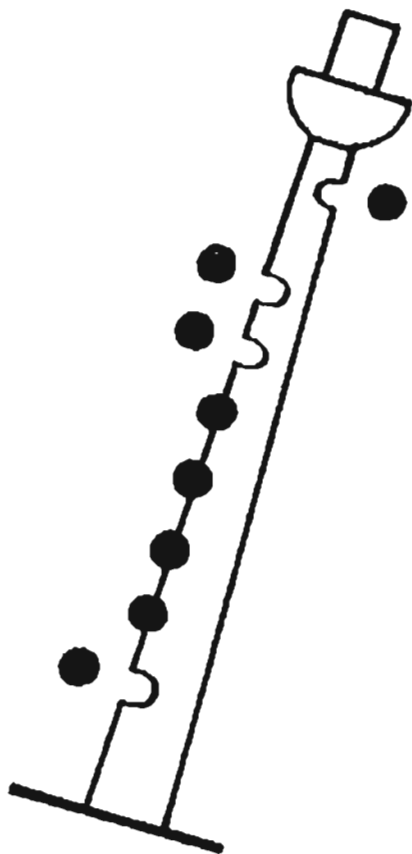
Play now:



Try also, very slowly:



THE NINTH NOTE – HIGH A



When playing high A, the low A, F, high G and high A fingers are off the chanter. This means that if you go from high G to high A you must lift off your top hand thumb and replace the E finger **AT THE SAME TIME**. You will notice that high A is written above the staff on what is known as a ledger line.

Practise slowly:



Make sure that as the thumb goes on for high G the E finger comes off.

You are now able to play all the notes on the chanter. Starting from low G, play slowly all the notes up to high A, and then play down to low G again.

Take care to form each note correctly, with all fingers straight and not too far from the chanter when raised (about 2.5 to 3 centimetres is ideal). Listen carefully when changing from D to E and E to D to ensure that you are not making crossing noises.

Write each note of the chanter scale in your manuscript book. Try to do it without having to refer to any pages here. If necessary, write the names of the notes below them in order to help you to memorise them.

Well, that is the end of the first lesson. You should now continue to practise playing slowly up and down the scale taking care to form each note correctly, and listening carefully for crossing noises. When you are confident of this part and have memorised the names of the notes and their positions on the staff, you are ready to pass on to Lesson 2.

LESSON 2

GRACENOTES

If you listen to a song being sung, or a tune being played on the violin or piano, you will notice that considerable effect is attained by varying the loudness of different notes and so emphasising them. It is impossible to do this when playing a tune on the practice chanter or bagpipes.

We can, however, emphasise a note in piping by playing a very short note in front of it. This short note is called a 'gracenote'. (Ask any piper to play a simple tune, and then play it again without gracenotes, and you will hear immediately how lifeless and monotonous is the second rendering).

Gracenotes are also used to separate two of the same notes when played one after the other. If you were asked to play two low Gs you would probably blow a low G, then take a breath and blow another low G. This is the method used for separating notes in some instruments.

When playing the bagpipes, the flow of air to the reeds is continuous, so we use a gracenote instead. Gracenotes are produced in many ways, but mainly by using the G, D, and E fingers.

To do this, begin by playing low G. Then lift the high G finger off the chanter and replace it smartly so that it has made a chirping sound. Do the same with the D finger only, then with the E finger only.

The G gracenote is written:



As you see, the head or blob of the note is in the high G space, but to show that it is a gracenote and not a full note, the tail is turned upwards and it is much smaller.

In the same way:



represents a D gracenote

and:



an E gracenote.

The full scales for each gracenote are on page 66 and with the rest of your technique should form part of your daily practice routine

The three strokes on the tail indicate that the note is of short duration. We will deal with duration of notes later, but at present it is sufficient to know that the more strokes a note has, the shorter it is to be played.

Two low Gs separated by a G gracenote would be written:



and the three gracenotes on low G are written as:



Usually we make the first gracenote as we start to blow. Try this a few times and you will find it quite simple – move the G finger for the little short gracenote and blow at the same time. This means that we miss out the first of the four low Gs shown above.

Practise now:



Gracenotes, of course, are not done only on low G, so now try the G, D, and E gracenotes (in that order) on low A.

That is:



and also on B:



and also on C:



Practise these slowly many times.

Remember that the time taken in playing a gracenote must always be much less than the time you give to the note itself, even when you are playing slowly. Gracenotes, therefore, can never overlap one another.

So ends the second lesson. You can now go back and practise these two lessons until you can play them correctly, though slowly, and then you will be ready to proceed.

LESSON 3

CHANGE OF NOTE WITH A GRACENOTE

The next thing you must learn to do is to play a gracenote as you change from one note to another. This is the gracenote used for emphasis, and occurs very, very, often in pipe music. Firstly we'll try the movement which is written:



This is a low G followed by a low A, with a G gracenote played as you change from one note to another. To do this, you sound low G, then lift the high G finger to make the gracenote, and, AS IT IS FALLING raise the little finger to sound low A. These photographs show what is required:



1 The start of the movement—low G being played.



2 The high G finger raised to form the G gracenote.



3 The little finger raised and the high G finger back on the chanter to form low A.

Practise this first without blowing until you know what is to be done. The sound you should hear consists of two notes, low G and low A with the chirping sound of the gracenote on low A. The common mistake is to move the little finger before the high G finger producing an extra low A.

This would be written:



Make sure that the first finger to move is the high G finger.

When you think you can do the change with a gracenote, try changing from B to low A with a G gracenote. Just as before, you sound B, then raise the high G finger alone to sound the gracenote, and as it is falling put the B finger on the chanter to sound low A.

Practise slowly and carefully:



All these changes of a note with a gracenote are performed in much the same way. You sound the first note, then lift the gracenote finger and, as it is falling, change your fingers into the position for the second note.

Of course the actual time for which the gracenote finger is off the chanter is very short but practise slowly to begin with and speed will develop as you go along.

We shall consider only one further example at present:



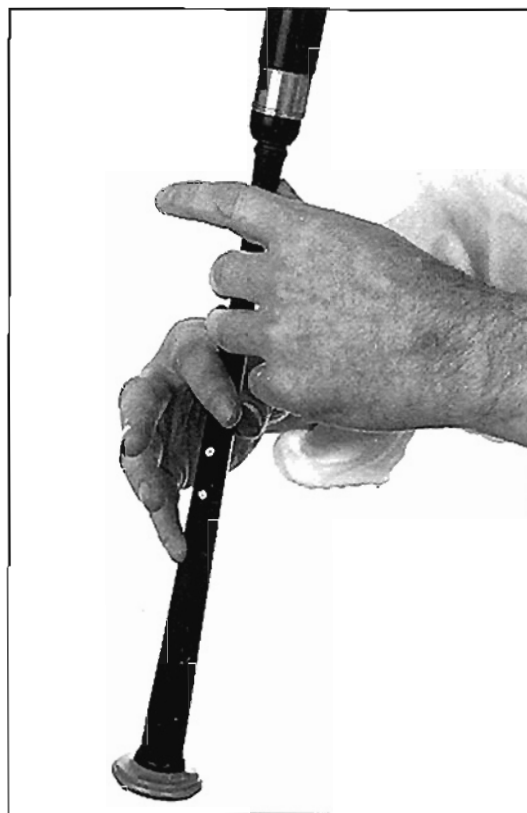
This represents C to B with a G gracenote between, or as we often say, C followed by a G gracenote on B.

To play it, sound C then raise the high G finger to sound the gracenote. Place it back on the G hole and as it is falling put the C finger on the chanter and raise the little finger at the same time.

Once more illustrations show the movement clearly:



1 C being played



2 The high G finger raised.



3 The high G finger and the C finger back on, and little finger raised to form B.

Practise this movement many times and then try playing:



THROWS AND DOUBLINGS

Each note has associated with it a 'doubling' which is a group of two or more notes played sometimes before the note for the purpose of embellishing it and adding interest to the tune being played. On some notes we can also do a 'throw' which has the same effect.

The throw on D is practised first because it is the only one which may be played in alternative ways.

ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF PLAYING THE THROW ON D

Most of the top pipers, especially in piobaireachd (ceol mor), will make the throw on D in what we will call Style I, and beginning on low A:

- 1 Sound a low G
- 2 Make a D gracenote on C (play a full D and drop the D finger quickly down to C)
- 3 Play D

This could be written:



or



Some also play the 'heavier' throw, Style II, especially in ceol beag (marches, strathspeys, and reels etc.), where it is played more quickly and evenly, with slightly less emphasis on the first low G. Again beginning on low A:

- 1 Sound low G
- 2 Make a D gracenote so that another low G is heard
- 3 Play C
- 4 Play D

This could be written:



or



See page 66 for the complete D gracenote scale.

Style II sounds unpleasant if played too openly, particularly in piobaireachd. For this reason it may be easier to adopt Style I safe in the knowledge that when played properly it sounds good in both ceol beag and ceol mor. It is best not to change from one style to the other, though, as we've said, many of the very best pipers use Style I for ceol mor and Style II for ceol beag. On your Tutor 1 CDROM audio file it is Style II that is taught.

Practise the throw on D slowly and evenly many times. SLOWLY, because that is the only way to become proficient in any tune or exercise, and EVENLY so that eventually the proper sound will emerge. The throw on D usually appears in tunes immediately following some other note, so it is important to be able to perform this doubling after other notes without mistake or hesitation.

We will try different examples using Styles I and II.



represents F followed by the throw on D using Style I.

For this:

- 1 Play F
- 2 Sound low G
- 3 Make a D gracenote on C
- 4 Play D



This represents B followed by the throw on D using Style II.

For this:

- 1 Play B
- 2 Close the chanter to sound the first low G of the throw on D
- 3 Make the D gracenote
- 4 Play C
- 5 Play D

When the movement has been practised for a while it can be done quite quickly and some of the notes become so short that they are really gracenotes, and are joined together. Practice the D throw from every note on the scale (see page 66). Most pipers, no matter how they play the throw on D, write it as per Style I.

All modern collections of pipe music use this form. Accordingly, from now on we shall write the throw on D in this way, and the people who decide to play it in Style II will interpret the symbol in their own way.

By now, having practised and revised all that has gone before, you are ready to learn your first tune. Keep playing regularly up and down the scale; the G, D, E gracenotes should be building up dexterity where it is most needed. Be sure that you can perform the throw on the D accurately, even if slowly, from all notes.

With this ability soundly acquired, the playing of tunes only requires the co-ordination of eyes and fingers. Remember that the job of the eyes is to watch the music; do not allow yourself to develop the bad habit of watching your fingers.