FOREIGN BODIES
IN THE
RIVER OF SOUND

SEEKING IDENTITY AND IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC

Helen O'Shea

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Social Sciences
Faculty of Arts
Victoria University of Technology
2005

CONTENTS

Chapter 7

FINDING A PLACE IN IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC

IMAGES

MUSICAL EXAMPLES

1 (CD1, Track 01) Gaelic Storm, 'An Irish Party in Third Class' (including 'John Ryan's Polka' and 'Blarney Pilgrim'). *Back to Titanic* (1998). New York: Sony Music Entertainment Inc., SK60691.

2 (CD1, Track 02) James Horner (conductor) and Sissel (vocals) 'Rose'. *Titanic: Music from the Motion Picture* (1997). New York: Sony Music Entertainment Inc., SK63213.

3 (CD1, Track 03) Kathleen Loughnane and Dordán, 'Lady Dillon'. *Ceol na Gealaí: 'Jigs to the Moon'* (1994). Dublin: Gael Linn, CEFCD168.

4 (CD1, Track 04) Nioclás Tóibín, 'Cáit Ní Dhuibhir' (Kate O'Dwyer). *Ceol na hÉireann: The Traditional Music of Ireland from the Sound Archives of RTÉ* (nd). Dublin: Raidió Teilifís Éireann. Recorded 1964.

5 (CD1, Track 05) Julie Mulvihill, 'Cáit Ní Dhuibhir' (Kate O'Dwyer). *Ceol na hÉireann: The Traditional Music of Ireland from the Sound Archives of RTÉ* (nd). Dublin: Raidió Teilifís Éireann. Recorded 1963.

6 (CD1, Track 06) Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, 'A Nation Once Again'. *Super Hits* (2000). New York: Sony Entertainment Inc., CK63540. Recorded 1966.

7 (CD1, Track 07) Frank Lee's Tara Ceilidh Band, 'Kitty's Rambles', 'The Merry Old Woman' and 'The Humours of Ballinafad'. *Irish Dance Music* (1995). London: Topic Records Ltd, TSCD602. Recorded 1932.

8 (CD1, Track 08) Michael Coleman, 'The Morning Dew' and 'The Woman of the House'. *Coleman 1891–1945* (1992). Dublin: Gael Linn Viva Voce, CEFCD161. Recorded 1927.

9 (CD1, Track 09) John McCormack, 'Believe Me, If All Those Endearing Young Charms'. *John McCormack: Irish Tenor Ballads* (2002). Tolpuddle: Regis Records Ltd, RRC1092. Recorded 1935.

10 (CD1, Track 10) Frank Quinn, 'Paddy McGinty's Goat'. *If You Are Irish* (1997). El Cerrito, CA: Arhoolie Productions Inc., CD7033. Recorded 1926.

11 (CD1, Track 11) Eleanor Kane, 'The Morning Dew'. *From Galway to Dublin: Early Recordings of Traditional Irish Music* (1993). Cambridge, MA: Rounder Records Corp., CD 1087. Recorded 1935.

12 (CD1, Track 12) Paddy Canny and P. J. Hayes accompanied by Bridie Lafferty (piano), 'The Morning Dew' and 'Reavy's Reel'. *Meet Paddy Canny: All-Ireland Champion — Violin* (2004). New York: Dublin Records. First issued 1959 in New York (Dublin Records) and Dublin (Shamrock Souvenir) as *All-Ireland Champions — Violin*.

13 (CD1, Track 13) Paddy Canny and P. J. Hayes accompanied by Bridie Lafferty (piano), 'The Morning Dew' and 'Reavy's Reel'. *An Historic Recording of Irish Traditional Music from County Clare and East Galway* (2001). Newton, NJ: Shanachie Entertainment Corp., 76001. First issued 1959 in New York

(Dublin Records) and Dublin (Shamrock Souvenir) as *All-Ireland Champions — Violin*.

14 (CD1, Track 14)   P. J. Hayes, 'Kathleen Collin's Reel' ('Sergeant Early's Dream'). Excerpt from Track 5, *The Tulla Ceili Band 40th Anniversary 1946–1986* (1986). Galway: G.T.D. Heritage Recording Co. Ltd, GTDHC014.

15 (CD1, Track 15)   Paddy Canny, 'Sergeant Early's Dream'. Excerpt from Track 6, *Paddy Canny: Traditional Music from the Legendary East Clare Fiddler* (1997). Indreabhán, Co. Galway: Cló Iar-Chonnachta, CICD129. Recorded 1995.

16 (CD1, Track 16)   Paddy Canny, 'Rogha Ghearóid De Barra' (Garrett Barry's) and 'Bruacha Loch Gabhna' (The Banks of Lough Gowna). *Milestone at the Garden: Irish Fiddle Masters from the 78 RPM Era* (1996). Cambridge, MA: Rounder Records Corp., CD1123. Recorded 1959.

17 (CD1, Track 17)   The Tulla Ceili Band, 'The Battering Ram'. Excerpt from Track 1, *Echoes of Erin* (2004). New York: Dublin Record Company, SLP903. Recorded 1958.

18 (CD1, Track 18)   The Tulla Ceili Band, 'The Battering Ram'. Excerpt from Track 6, Th*e Tulla Ceili Band: A Celebration of Fifty Years* (1996). Danbury, CT: Green Linnet Records Inc., GLCD1178.

19 (CD1, Track 19)   Bobby Casey, 'The Bank of Ireland', 'The Woman of the House' and 'The Morning Dew'. *Paddy in the Smoke: Irish Dance Music from a London Pub* (1997). London: Topic Records Ltd, TSCD603. Recorded 1960s.

20 (CD1, Track 20)   Paddy O'Brien, 'The Yellow Tinker' and 'The Sally Gardens'. *The Banks of the Shannon* (1993*).* Danbury, CT: Green Linnet Records Inc., GLCD3082. Recorded 1954.

21 (CD1, Track 21)   'The Morning Dew', 'The Woman of the House' and 'Rakish Paddy'. *Music from the Coleman Country — Revisited* (2001). London: Leader Records, LEACD2044. Recorded 1971.

22 (CD1, Track 22)   The Chieftains, 'The Morning Dew'. *The Chieftains 4* (2000). Dublin: Claddagh Records Ltd, CC14. Recorded 1973.

23 (CD1, Track 23)   Seán Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Chualann, 'Máirseáil Uí Néill' (O'Neill's March). *Ceol na hÉireann: The Traditional Music of Ireland from the Sound Archives of RTÉ* (nd). Dublin: Raidió Teilifís Éireann. Recorded 1968.

24 (CD1, Track 24)   Planxty, 'The Raggle Taggle Gypsy' and 'Tabhair dom do Lámh' (Give me your Hand). *Ceol na hÉireann: The Traditional Music of Ireland from the Sound Archives of RTÉ* (nd). Dublin: Raidió Teilifís Éireann. Recorded 1972.

25 (CD1, Track 25)   The Bothy Band, 'The Salamanca', 'The Banshee' and 'The Sailor's Bonnet'. *The Best of the Bothy Band* (1988). Green Linnet Records, Inc., GLCD3001. Recorded 1975.

26 (CD1, Track 26)   De Dannan, 'Langstrom's Pony', 'The Tap Room' and 'Lord Ramsey's Reel'. *The Mist Covered Mountain* (1980). Dublin: Gael-Linn, CEFCD087.

27 (CD2, Track 1)   Session musicians, Fibber McVey's, 'Maids of Mt Cisco', 'Green Groves of Erin' and 'Boys of Ballisodare' (18 September 1999). Melbourne: recorded by Helen O'Shea.

28 (CD2, Track 2)   Trouble in the Kitchen, 'The Beauty Spot', 'The Drummond Lassies, 'Return to Camden Town' and 'McFadden's Handsome Daughter'. *When the World was Wide …* (2001). Melbourne: Trouble in the Kitchen, TITK001.

29 (CD2, Track 3)   Danú, 'The Old Ruined Cottage in the Glen', 'The Morning Dew', 'Think Before You Think Before You Speak' and 'The First Month of Spring'). *Think Before You Think* (2000). Newton, NJ: Shanachie Entertainment Corp., 78030.

30 (CD2, Track 4)   Session musicians, Pepper's Bar, 'Johnny Allen's', 'Sporting Nell' and 'Toss the Feathers' (22 November 2000). Feakle, Co. Clare: recorded by Helen O'Shea.

31 (CD2, Track 5)   Session musicians, Lena's Bar, 'Willie Coleman's ', 'Sixpenny Money', 'Kesh Jig' and 'Gillian's Apples' (23 November 2000). Feakle, Co. Clare: recorded by Helen O'Shea.

32 (CD2, Track 6)   Brendan, Lena's Bar, 'The Low Lands of Holland' (18 January 2001) Feakle, Co. Clare: recorded by Helen O'Shea.

33 (CD2, Track 7)   Mary MacNamara, 'The Cavan Reel', 'Sporting Nell' and 'Rattigans'. *The Blackberry Blossom* (2000). Dublin: Claddagh Records Ltd, CCF32CD.

34 (CD2, Track 8)   Elizabeth Crotty, 'Geary's Reel' and 'Sporting Nell'. *Concertina Music from West Clare* (1999). Dublin: RTÉ Music Ltd, RTE225CD. Recorded 1950s.

35 (CD2, Track 9)   Mary MacNamara, 'Paddy Lynn's Delight', 'Connie Hogan's' and 'Kitty's Gone A-Milking'. *Traditional Music from East Clare* (1994). Dublin: Claddagh Records Ltd, CC60CD.

36 (CD2, Track 10)   John Carty, 'Paddy Lynn's Delight' and 'Hughie's Cap'. *At It Again* (2003). New York: Shanachie Entertainment Corp., 78054.

37 (CD2, Track 11)   Martin Hayes with Dennis Cahill (guitar), 'Rolling in the Barrel' and 'The Morning Dew'. *The Lonesome Touch* (1997). Danbury, CT: Green Linnet Records Inc., GLCD 1181.

38 (CD2, Track 12)   Mary MacNamara, 'Rolling in the Barrel', 'The Tap Room' and 'The Earl's Chair' (reels). *Traditional Music from East Clare* (1994). Dublin: Claddagh Records, CC60CD.

39 (CD2, Track 13)   Mary MacNamara and Martin Hayes, 'The Fisherman's Lilt' and 'My Love is in America'. *Traditional Music from East Clare* (1994). Dublin: Claddagh Records Ltd, CC60CD.

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates how musicians who play Irish traditional music, but do not identify themselves as Irish, understand their relationship to Irishness. The research was designed to interrogate frameworks for theorizing the articulation of music, identity and nation, emphasizing the need to understand both music and identity as socially constituted imaginative processes. Writing from the viewpoint that knowledge is embedded in discourse, it argues that certain repertoires and styles have been regarded as symbolically representing and expressing essentially Irish characteristics mythologized within colonial discourse and inverted within nationalist discourse. These understandings have been extended into the present and reinforced through the commodification of Irish culture.

Analyses of participant–observation data in Melbourne, Australia, indicate that young Australian musicians understand Irishness as a citational ethnicity, depoliticized and commodified, while older Australians value more highly the embodied musical performance of musicians from Ireland. Australian musicians who had made 'pilgrimages' to Ireland were relatively confined within a world of summer schools and pub sessions linked to the tourism industry's mythologizing of an 'Ireland of the Welcomes'. Extended fieldwork among Australians and other foreign musicians who had re-located to Ireland found current theorizations of musical community inadequate to account for difference and disharmony in group performances. Foreign musicians' failure to assimilate musically and socially was attributed to their status as strangers, their tactics and their perception by Irish musicians.

While there is no material barrier to foreigners playing Irish traditional music, an exploration of the relationship between music and place in the construction of Irish traditional music concluded that, even where musicians attempt to draw outsiders into this bounded area of Irish culture, the authenticating discourses that define it as essentially Irish impede their success.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my original work, except where otherwise cited, and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, for any other academic award.
I confirm that this thesis does not exceed 100,000 words (excluding the bibliography).

Helen O'Shea
September 2004

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has been a quest for knowledge and understanding, a journey that has been enriched by many encounters, trials and challenges, the *caritas* of strangers and *communitas* of fellow musicians and scholars. I want to thank those who helped me along the way:

Rob Pascoe, Brian Matthews and Graeme Duncan from Victoria University, who started me out on the journey;

my supervisors Ron Adams, Michael Hamel-Green and Barbara Bradby, and especially Julie Stephens, who guided me through out and clarified the task;

my colleagues Mícheál Ó Catháin, John Whiteoak and Patrick Wolfe, who read chapters, gave advice and opened up new pathways;

the Australian branch of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music, who welcomed me to a community of scholars;

the librarians at Victoria University and the University of Limerick and staff at the VU Postgraduate Research Unit, who advised and solved problems;

Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, Niall Keegan and Sandra Joyce at the Irish World Music Centre, University of Limerick, who welcomed me and engaged with my work;

Nicolas Carolan and staff at the Irish Traditional Music Archive, Dublin, who made available their collections and their help;

Judith Brett and Graeme Smith, Pauline Flynn, Amy Garvey, Maire Úi Ghuíbúin, Seamus and Marie, Marta Herrero, Maire O'Keeffe and Maire Winters, whose friendship, hospitality and understanding gave me comfort far from home;

Mary MacNamara and family, who welcomed a stranger with so many kindnesses;

Gary and Mary Pepper of Pepper's Bar and Ger Shortt of Lena's Bar, Feakle, and their patrons and all the many musicians who took part in this project, opening their hearts and sharing their music;

Jean O'Shea, Ros Smith, Chris Bagot, Verona Burgess and Vicki Molloy, whose encouragement and optimism kept me purposefully and joyfully on the long road;

and David Spratt, my partner in life, who made this journey with me and has shown me the meaning of living with 'heart'.

> Pilgrim, take care your journey's not in vain,
> A hazard without profit, without gain;
> The king you seek you'll find in Rome, it's true,
> But only if he travels on the way with you.
> (medieval Irish lyric, trans. Carney 1987: 80)

INTRODUCTION

> Ireland has had a long and violent history during which she remained individual, retaining all her individual characteristics. Such foreign influences as were felt were quickly absorbed and Gaelicised. Such foreigners as settled here rapidly became, in the hackneyed phrase, 'more Irish than the Irish themselves'. […] You might compare the progress of tradition in Ireland to the flow of a river. Foreign bodies may fall in, or be dropped in, or thrown in, but they do not divert the course of the river, nor do they stop it flowing; it absorbs them, carrying them with it as it flows onwards. (Ó Riada 1982: 19–20)[1]

Seán Ó Riada (1931–71) was a pivotal figure in the revival of Irish traditional music. He introduced modernist values by incorporating traditional music and instruments into his art-music compositions, creating new, urban, middle-class audiences for the 'native' music and inventing a format of group performance that had its precursors in the concerto, the chamber-music ensemble and in solo breaks in jazz music. His work was the catalyst for much of the group performance of Irish traditional music that continues to flourish today. Ó Riada's understanding of Irish music was based in a discourse of nativism that regards Irish music as unique, expressive of a purely Gaelic culture that has been 'untouched' by 'foreign' influences (Ó Riada 1982: 19); indeed, the concept that 'the Gael must be the element that absorbs' derives from one of Irish cultural nationalism's most dogmatic figures, D.P. Moran in *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland* (1905: 37). Ó Riada's metaphor of the river of Irish culture into which 'foreign bodies' are absorbed suggests the possibility that the foreign musicians who form the basis of this study might also be absorbed into the mainstream of traditional music performance in Ireland. At the same time, it hints at the incompatibility of a racialized ideal of national culture with Irish music's current status as a global commodity.

Irish traditional music, historically a symbol for Irish identity, is now also a transnational cultural form consumed by vast audiences worldwide and performed by a growing number of musicians in a multiplicity of locations. Each summer,

---

[1] From Ó Riada's introduction to *Our Musical Heritage*, a series of radio lectures he presented on Raidió Éireann in 1962. *River of Sound* (1995) was the title of a BBC/RTÉ television series produced by Nuala O'Connor and scripted and presented by Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, which generated the debate about continuity and change in Irish traditional music that was the catalyst for the 1996 Crossroads Conference on this issue.

thousands of these musicians arrive in Ireland from the USA and Canada, from England and Europe, and from as far away as Australia and Japan. Clutching audio-recorders and instrument cases, they come to hear and to play Irish traditional music at summer schools and music festivals and sessions in pubs. Some stay longer to explore further the music that enthrals them. Many more wait at home, making do with Irish music classes and sessions in their home towns and the merchandise available through the internet or the music store, keeping up with Irish music events through magazines and internet discussion groups, until their own 'Irish summer' arrives.

Who, in this scheme, is an Irish musician and who is not — and who decides? What does it mean for an individual to pursue a cultural identification through affiliation (identification in culture) rather than filiation (identification through heritage) (Said 1983: 174–5). What does 'Irishness' signify in a world dominated by globalized cultural flows?

The principal aim of this research was to investigate how musicians who play Irish traditional music, but do not identify themselves as Irish, understand their relationship to Irishness, and to find a way of theorizing this. This involved an analysis of the tactics musicians used and the ways in which they related to and were perceived by musicians and musical authorities in Ireland, and entailed extended observation of, and discussion with, such people in Australia and in Ireland. A further aim was to consider the implications of my findings for what Irishness has come to signify in a period of globalization. This involved a critical examination of relevant (past and present) social and cultural factors relating to concepts of Irishness and Irish traditional music in the light of current theoretical debates about nationality, identity and music.

A critical motivation in this study has been to contribute to current intellectual debates about how musical performance and identity might be theorized. As will be discussed further in Chapter One, the various academic disciplines in which music is studied have tended to assume an exclusive relationship between ethnicity and 'ethnic' music, while debates around identity in the developing field of postcolonial studies continue to focus on literary and historical texts. This thesis hopes to contribute to these debates by testing the usefulness of emerging theoretical frameworks for understanding the articulation of music, identity and nation.

In selecting a methodology and research location, I was determined to intrude as little as possible on musical scenes in which I participated. I focused on musicians

like myself, who came from backgrounds that did not include an identification as Irish (in my case, middle-class, Protestant, fourth-generation Australian of both Irish and English heritage). In retrospect, this choice also reflected my deference towards musicians from Ireland.

In setting up the research model, two intellectual positions were assumed. The first of these is encompassed by the term *discourse* as employed in the works of Michel Foucault, and as modified by feminist, colonial and postcolonial theorists. This term has been used in preference to *ideology* because of the latter's emphasis on social class and relative neglect of gender, nation and ethnicity.

The second concept that underlies this research is that of *identification*, and the position now widely assumed that identity is a process that it is fluid and opportunistic, rather than a progression towards wholeness or an awareness of the one, true, authentic self. The concept of *authenticity* is a recurrent theme in this thesis, where it is interrogated from a number of positions, as it performs a legitimizing, and hence gatekeeping, function in the discourses of the nation and of ethnicity, place and gender in which ideas about Irish traditional music are embedded. The term has operated as a kind of warning sign on the researcher's path, because it invariably indicates a case of special pleading, an undisclosed or unexamined claim to legitimacy and authority.

The thesis argues that musicians who play Irish traditional music construct musical and personal identities within these discourses. Musicians' understandings of Irish music are informed by their consumption of cultural products and their engagement with a network of commercial interests that range from local businesses to national bodies and international conglomerates in the tourism, hospitality and entertainment industries. Despite the emphasis by all these parties on the authenticity of face-to-face musical performance, forms of cultural communication and reproduction such as personal recording devices and internet technology play an equally significant role in the formation of 'Irish' identities and understandings of Irish traditional music.

The focus of this study then is the nexus of cultural production, identity formation and global processes. This calls for a multi-disciplinary approach to research and analysis. Chapter One situates the project in relation to theoretical approaches to the study of music, nation and identity as well as key texts and concepts relating to the study of Irish traditional music.

Chapter Two provides a reinterpretation of the history of Irish traditional music from the end of the eighteenth century, focusing on its construction within the discourses of Irish nationalism and English colonialism. It demonstrates how certain repertoires and styles of music came to be thought of as naturally expressing and symbolically representing an essential Irishness, despite its historical hybridity and the circulation of other repertoires and musical styles.

Chapter Three draws on critiques of colonial theory to demonstrate the ways in which, during the twentieth century, one strand of this repertoire, dance music, became both 'Irish' and 'traditional'. Using the example of musicians playing one particular tune, the relationship between music and identity is explored and it is shown how Ireland and Irishness have been experienced in complex and often contradictory ways, and not always according to the orthodoxies of the nation–state. It is argued that Irish traditional music is both an emblematic 'folk-culture' and a continuing and changing popular cultural practice.

Chapter Four examines the discourse of Irishness as it has circulated in Australia, especially during the past thirty years when Australian immigration policy has changed from one of assimilation to one of multiculturalism. This chapter draws on analyses of participant–observation data and interviews with Australian-born and Irish immigrant musicians to argue that young Australian musicians understand Irishness as a citational ethnicity, depoliticized and commodified, while older Australians value more highly the embodied musical performance of musicians from Ireland.

Chapter Five follows Australian musicians on their 'pilgrimages' to Ireland in search of authentic Irish traditional music and the acquisition of a more authentic style of playing. It argues that the Ireland they seek has been constructed within a nativist discourse that has been commodified, for example, in the tourism industry.

Chapter Six examines what happens when musicians from Australia and elsewhere make their homes in Ireland in order to participate in the traditional music scene. Their efforts are impeded by their status as strangers, their idealization of musical practices and their unsuccessful tactics in attempting to enter the musical field. This chapter demonstrates how difference among musicians affects the construction of a collective musical identity.

Chapter Seven explores the relationship between music and place in the construction of Irish traditional music in relation to concepts of nostalgia and the permeability of cultural boundaries and the possibilities for cultural translation. It concludes that, even where musicians attempt to draw outsiders into this bounded area of Irish culture, the authenticating discourses that define it as essentially Irish impede their success.

Irish traditional dance music has been an important part of my own identity for some thirty years. Consequently, these questions have a personal as well as an intellectual significance. In 1973, when I was supporting my university studies by playing in a dance band, I heard Irish traditional dance music for the first time, acquired a fiddle and set about teaching myself to play. My progress was painfully, and audibly, slow. As a graduate student in Ireland in the late 1970s, living in an Irish-speaking village in Connemara, I had the opportunity to learn more about this music and the way it was performed socially in Ireland. In the early 1990s, after over a decade of playing in dance bands and pub sessions in Australia, I began to teach others what I had learned. Many of my students were competent in the classical violin repertoire but had no idea how to learn by ear rather than off the page or how to incorporate the subtle rhythms of Irish dance music. Although my own struggles had allowed me to reflect on technique and style (and to impart this knowledge with some success), as an Australian I felt uncomfortable about teaching others to 'sound Irish'. Like other musicians in this study, I was convinced that what I loved was 'the music', not the aura of Irishness around it but, at the same time, I deferred to the authority of Irish musicians to decide what sounded like authentic Irish music.

Many aspects of my social, intellectual and musical background inform this study, including the formulation of research questions and the search for appropriate theoretical frameworks and methodologies. Consequently, this project in many ways has been a personal quest. I was aware that I risked losing the unreflexive pleasure of playing music and risked concluding that as an Australian I had no entitlement to play Irish music at all. On the other hand, I was thrilled by the opportunity to return to Ireland and to investigate ideas about Irish traditional music, questions I regarded as crucially important to our understanding of music as a way of performing identity in today's world. This opportunity came with the award of the inaugural Trinity College Dublin–Victoria University scholarship for a project researching an aspect of the Irish–Australian relationship, which included a year's study in Ireland. This thesis is the outcome of that Faustian pact.

CHAPTER ONE

THE RESEARCHER'S QUEST:
THEORIZING MUSIC AND IDENTITY

The primary aim of this chapter is to review theories about music and identity and the ways in which these concepts relate to one another in considering the nexus of musical performance, identity formation and global process which is the focus of this thesis. The research project set about examining these questions by investigating and attempting to theorize the ways in which musicians who played Irish traditional music, but who did not identify themselves as Irish, understood their relationship to Irishness. The second part of this chapter outlines the research methodology used and indicates how the research data, secondary literature and theoretical framework are employed in the development of the thesis.

1.1 Identifying identity

> The main job facing the cultural intellectual is not to accept the politics of identity as given, but to show how all representations are constructed, for what purpose, by whom, and with what components. (Sarup 1996: 160)

The view of identity as a pathway towards self-knowledge that involves disentangling 'the true from the false self' (Giddens 1991: 78–9) continues to have popular, but waning, credence. This liberal humanist view of identity as unified and self-determined — an interpolation of the modernist worldview in which societies are understood as progressively evolving — was challenged long ago by Marx's concept of the individual formed by social and economic relations and by Freud's understanding of the divided self and the power of unconscious processes. Popular understandings of identity[1] as referring to an essential sameness (as in 'identical'), to distinctive characteristics or personality (as in 'a theatrical identity') or more loosely applied to individual experience, are still used in much the same ways as they were in the seventeenth century. In academic discourse in the latter decades of the twentieth century, however, there was a 'veritable discursive explosion' of theoretical work drawing on Marxist and Freudian positions to argue against the

---

[1] From the Latin, *idem*, 'same'.

concept of an 'essential' identity (Giddens's 'true self') and against essentialism itself (Hall, S. 1996: 1).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, these revised understandings of identity are still in the process of moving into popular usage, as those of Marx and Freud did during the previous century. For individuals such as the musicians who participated in the present study, however, an understanding of identity as unified and relatively stable may co-exist with a lived experience that exhibits not only changing identifications as they move from one set of circumstances to another, but changing ideas about identity. This ambiguity is one of the dilemmas faced by researchers in the social sciences, for intellectual convictions, social behaviour and individual subjectivity are not necessarily consistent or unambiguous. When applied to collective identities such as nation and ethnicity, an essentialist understanding of identity suggests that they, too, are fixed and do not — indeed, cannot — change. Of particular significance to this study is the prevalence of essentialist conceptions of identity in the literature concerning collective Irish identities and musical performance. One innovatory aspect of this thesis is the selection of a research subject and cohort of research collaborators that challenge these assumptions.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, objectivist theories following Marx were strongly influenced by Freudian psychoanalytic theories (in particular Lacan's linguistics-informed work) through which the self is always defined in relation to an Other. Jacques Derrida's *deconstruction*, drawing on linguistic and psychoanalytic frameworks, has been broadly influential in challenging the notion of a stable identity. Social theorists have extrapolated from his argument that a word only gains its meaning in relationship to other words, to argue that all meaning lies in the relations between things, rather than in things themselves. Accordingly, identity is now more often defined in relation to what it is not: thus 'masculinity' can be defined only in relation to 'femininity', and so on (Hall, S. 1996).

Theories of the social subject after Marx have taken up various anti-humanist positions concerning the relationship between agency and structure, or individual subjectivity and action in relation to social structure and ideology. Louis Althusser's theory of *interpellation* as the process by which ideology 'hails' the individual into a 'subject position' (Althusser 1971) is one that informs the present study, which is concerned with the relationship between musicians and ideas about collective identities such as the nation. Michel Foucault also rejected the notion of the Cartesian self (the unique and self-contained subject whose existence depends on

the ability to reason), arguing that what we 'know' is constructed through historically and culturally specific *discourses*: linguistic conventions that produce fields of meaning (Foucault 1970; 1972). This study adopts Foucault's theory of discourse in relation to Irish traditional music.

Stuart Hall, following Althusser, uses the term 'identity' to refer to 'the meeting point, the point of *suture*' between the interpellating forces of discourses and the processes that produce subjectivities. Identities are thus 'points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us' (Hall, S. 1996: 5–6). Hall contrasts the popular understanding of identification as based on shared characteristics with his discursive approach, in which identification is 'a construction, a process never completed — always "in process"' (1996: 2). This process of articulation is 'overdetermined', a Freudian term Althusser introduced into Marxist theory to indicate the continual multiple and mutual influences between dominating and subordinate elements of a society (Althussuer 1979). Stuart Hall's concept of identification is also inflected with connotations of fantasy, projection and idealization that derive from psychoanalytic theories of identity. Hall's 'identity', then, denies the existence of an essential or 'one true self'. In his view, identity is positional, exhibiting a strategic flexibility rather than progressing along a single trajectory. This way of understanding identity has been productive to this thesis in several ways: first, in challenging the researcher to question fixed identities in relation to the literature, the research collaborators, and her own position in relation to these; and, secondly, in providing a theoretical model that assumes individuals to be creative, rather than the passive subjects of discourse or ideology.

This model of identity as a dynamic process is analogous to the relationship Bourdieu (1990) theorizes between social structure and *habitus*, which he defines as both structured (in the way our individual embodied history sets us up with 'dispositions' that become 'second nature') and structuring (the way these dispositions operate in relation to the social world is generative or innovative rather than fixed). Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (1984; 1986) has been particularly useful in demonstrating the power relations that inhere in musical performance. Bourdieu's methodology, however, and his emphasis on class make the application of his overall 'theory of practice' (1977) less appropriate to this study. In the following chapters I draw on both Hall and Bourdieu in examining the relationship between subjects and discursive practices in the field of Irish traditional music.

As the globalizing economies of post-industrial capitalism have created an increasingly unstable and incomprehensible world, a multiplicity of theoretical positions have been proposed across the social sciences and humanities to account for the effects of these over-arching changes upon individual lives. At the same time, popular understandings of identity and culture have become a pastiche, where contradictory positions coexist.

Postmodern theorists, most prominently Jean Baudrillard (1988), take an extreme view of the contingency and instability of identity to the point where any notion of its durability has worn away altogether. From this viewpoint, identity (the term itself inadequate) is a constantly restructured self that barely coheres as an assemblage of images and styles, desires and encounters, a 'supermarket' identity. There is no 'one' at home but a fragmented, multiple, changing and dislocated self, preoccupied with appearance and fantasy. While Baudrillard's work is a pleasure-dome for cultural studies of shopping malls and chat-rooms, its importance for this study of musicians is in its insistence that all culture is now commodified and that we are all consumers of culture. This point of view, as the later chapters reveal, is strongly resisted by many musicians, while culture industries downplay the extent of their influence and profit.

The concept of culture is also debated in both popular and academic discourse. Raymond Williams writes that culture is one of the most complicated words in the English language (1983: 87). First applied to the nurturing of plants and animals and later in a metaphorical sense to the human mind, it then became a synonym for civilization, the process of human cultivation and civility. Eighteenth-century German philosopher Herder (1744–1803) introduced the idea of cultures in the plural, referring not only to nations and ethnic groups but subgroups within a nation (1966). His vision of a mosaic of separate cultures also entailed the idealization of culture as 'natural' and thus outlasting temporary political divisions. It is Herder's sense of a culture as a distinct way of life that was adopted in anthropology and related disciplines. For example, cultural historian Peter Burke's definition of culture as 'a system of shared meanings, attitudes and values, and the symbolic forms (performances, artefacts) in which they are expressed or embodied' has been widely used in studies of 'folk' musics (1978: 1).

Williams identifies three contemporary meanings of culture as 'a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development'; as 'a particular way of life,

whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general'; and as 'works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity' (1983: 90–1). Rather than drawing on the notion that each culture is fixed in its essential difference from other cultures, contemporary studies are more likely to focus on symbolic systems, emphasizing their heterogeneity. While earlier work in cultural studies critiqued the idea of culture as 'high' artistic and intellectual activity and focused on the mass culture reviled in both conservative literary theory (F. R. Leavis, T. S. Eliot) and in critical theory (Adorno), more recent theoretical interventions in feminist, poststructuralist, postmodern and postcolonial studies have taken a similar stance in relation to white, Western and male-centred bias (see Brooker 1999: 51–2).

What, then, is cultural identity? Stuart Hall rejects the notion of a homogeneous, shared culture, 'a sort of collective "one true self"' (1990: 223) in favour of a position that has been taken up in many recent studies of culture, including this thesis, and which recognizes that:

> as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather — since history has intervened — 'what we have become'… Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (Hall, S. 1990: 225)

Cultural identities then, may best be understood as 'unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourse of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*' (Hall, S. 1990: 226).

1.2   Theorizing music

What 'self' is performed in the act of making music? When musicians play Irish traditional music, what is 'Irish' about that musical performance? Does this Irishness consist in the identity of the musician, in the music 'itself', its social context or its manner of performance? There is currently no single academic discipline in which such questions are addressed. The following is a review of various ways of understanding music and how they might be applied to the performance of Irish traditional music by musicians who do not claim to be Irish.

The premise on which this thesis proceeds, that music is a socially constituted process and not a thing, is not altogether new in academic studies of music.

Methods of studying music and, indeed, the very fact of making music an *object* of study, however, have resulted in a relatively small body of work that challenges essentialist notions of either individual or collective identities in relation to musical performance.

Academic discourse on music has undergone major changes, which correspond with crucial points in western intellectual history. The cycles of certainty and crisis that the study of musical groups has followed reflect the broader situation in the social sciences, where the object of study, research methods, and the fields of study themselves are all under interrogation. The main disciplines in which scholars have developed theoretical understandings of music are: musicology, folkloristics, ethnomusicology, popular music studies, and cultural studies.

The discipline of musicology developed in late nineteenth-century Germany alongside the practical study of western art music[2] in conservatoriums, and privileged this musical culture above all others. Its reification of notated music and its consequent focus on the form and structure of musical texts, rather than on music performance as a human activity, would seem to disqualify it as a model for this study of musical performance, where there are no definitive texts and the repertoire stands outside that of western art music. Its influence on ways of understanding music, both historically and in contemporary contexts, however, is the subject of discussion in the following chapters.

Musicology has its critics, however, who write both from within and outside the discipline and argue that there is no transparently autonomous 'music itself', but that it is a social construction, with ideological implications in relation to nation, gender, class, and ethnicity. French economist Jacques Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1977; first published in English in 1985) presents the history of music as a powerful social force, historically as ritual practice and more recently as professional activity, as commodity, and finally as composition that foreshadows the coming phase of western culture. Within this scheme, Irish traditional music as performed today would encompass all three of Attali's historical 'networks' of music in its amateur performance by groups,

_____

[2] Art music can be defined according to its function as music for listening (rather than for dancing or as part of religious ritual, for example) and its implied audience historically the ruling class, now also an educated bourgeoisie — as identified in Bourdieu's broad study of taste, *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984). In popular usage, art music is often a simile for classical music, which more accurately refers to art music of the period c1600 to c1910, the period of functional tonality.

its performance in concerts, and its 'deanimation' and commodification in recordings. Each of these aspects of the music will be explored in the following chapters.

In their introduction to *Mapping the Beat: Popular Music and Contemporary Theory*, editors Thomas Swiss, Andrew Herman and John Sloop (1998: 19) point out the parallel between Attali's networks and Walter Ong's formulation of the relations among oral, literate, print and electronic media (Ong 1988), which opens up ways to discuss a largely orally transmitted music in relation to written, printed and reproduced forms of that music. Musicologist Richard Taruskin (1995) similarly identifies four stages in the 'fall' of music from act to text: literacy, printing, the idea of autonomous art, and recording. This change in the conceptualization of music, he argues, means that there is no such thing as an 'authentic' performance of early music today, because the careful reconstruction of texts and instruments is a modernist phenomenon (which raises the possibility of a parallel argument in relation to outsiders playing a 'traditional' music). In terms applied by cultural geographers (for example, Carter et al. 1993) noise is 'space', but music is 'place', and thus ascribed social meaning, identity, and belonging: a home. This again suggests a useful framework for analyzing the place of outsiders within the musical 'place' that is Irish traditional music.

The unarticulated assumption on which musicological studies are commonly based is that music is autonomous. In *Music, Society, Education* (1996), musicologist Christopher Small challenges this perspective, arguing that the scientific revolution of the early seventeenth century produced a scientific world-view that coincided with a change in western musics from melodic lines to tonal harmony, the use of written musical scores, and the change to diatonic rather than modal scales. Feminist musicology has also challenged the paradigm of musical autonomy, most significantly in the work of Susan McClary (1991) and Marcia Citron (1994), who argue that western art music both reflects and constructs social meanings and relationships of gender and power in western society. These recent challenges to the assumption of music's autonomy are brought to bear on the discussion in Chapter Two of the historical construction of Irish music.

The semiotic analysis of music continues to make a significant contribution to the way in which we understand musical performance, although two aspects of this approach make it unsuited to the present study: its emphasis on the textual analysis of song lyrics and the visual iconography of music videos, and its basis in linguistic theory, which has the effect, if not necessarily the intention, of representing

music as a language. Although that assumption has wide popular appeal (as in 'music is a universal language') and some aspects of musical structures are analogous to language, the crucial difference is that musical signification is non-denotive. John Shepherd and Peter Wicke examine the nature of musical signification in their *Music and Cultural Theory* (1997), which maps the relationship of music, society, language, identity and subjectivity, and emphasizes the necessity to avoid reifying music as autonomous or theorizing it as a kind of inferior language. They argue convincingly that meaning and affect in music instead arise out of a set of socially and culturally mediated processes.

One intervention from the field of semiotics, however, is instructive in distinguishing between two comparable orders of musical production. In an essay on 'The grain of the voice', Roland Barthes defines 'grain' as 'the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs' (Barthes 1977: 188). He finds this materiality (without individual personality, expressiveness or intelligible communication) in the singing of a little-known Russian cantor, but absent in the singing of recording artist Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, whose art is 'expressive, dramatic, *sentimentally clear*', the art of the 'average' culture. Significantly, Barthes aligns 'grain' with the period before micro-groove recordings, the little-known, amateur musician's performance, and with an absence of artistic expression that reveals the symbolic without mediation. 'Grain' is *signifiance*, rather than meaning or interpretation or expression. In relation to Irish traditional dance music, this distinction is comparable to that which Irish musicians themselves make between music played with 'heart' and the expressivity that musicians, particularly from outside the tradition, often substitute for heart. This distinction will be examined further in the chapters that follow, and particularly in the discussion of musical aesthetics in Chapter Seven.

Although many of the theorists whose work is discussed above assume a relationship between society and music, there is a range of ideas about the nature of that relationship. These ideas focus around one of two positions: those that imply a causal relationship (as in the Marxist tradition, which sees music emerging from social conditions) and those that focus on the confluence of networks of ideas or discourses (as in the Foucauldian model). The influence of these paradigms on ways of thinking about music in Ireland will be discussed in the following chapter.

As Edward Said points out, 'all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and

unmonolithic'. He decries the type of nationalism that educates children 'to venerate and celebrate the uniqueness of their tradition (usually and invidiously at the expense of others)' (1993: xxix). And yet this still seems to be the goal of much current work in the field of ethnomusicology.

Ethnomusicologists have integrated ethnographic methods into the study of musical forms and practices and seek to understand musical concepts outside those of western art music, including the processes of learning, transmission and change. Like traditional anthropology, however, the discipline has its origins in assumptions of cultures as 'whole' and bounded rather than porous and changing, and for this reason its texts are to be approached with caution as the basis for a methodology and theoretical framework for this research project.

Developed under the influence of social evolutionary anthropology before its reformulation as 'the study of music in its cultural context' (Merriam 1964), ethnomusicology as a body of work deals mainly with music among isolated groups who have had minimal contact with the polluting West. Such work assumes essentialized cultural, national and ethnic identities in ways that have long been challenged in other social sciences. Since the 1970s, some ethnomusicologists have come to view their field as 'the study of music as culture' and have applied a structuralist framework to produce interpretations of closed musical systems, as in Steven Feld's acclaimed study of music, environment and myth among the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea (1990). Others have focused on relatively self-contained musical groups within large societies, producing accounts of the relationships between music and other social domains in the post-Marxist tradition exemplified by Althusser and Bourdieu. Prominent among these are Charles Keil (1992), who connects social class and polka music in the USA and Graeme Smith, who establishes homological relationships between Irish accordion style, migration and class (1994b; 1997).

These impressive studies, although thought-provoking in their insights into the relationships between social structure and music, are nevertheless limited in their usefulness to the present research by virtue of the ease with which they are able to draw geographic and ethnic boundaries around their subjects. The degree of cultural coherence that may exist among the Kaluli is not a feature of the looser affiliation among Australians playing Irish music, while the global movement of Irish and Australian people is no longer the lifetime's exile described by Smith, but more

typically is one of voluntary transience and short-term relocations.[3] Since the 1990s, American ethnomusicologists in particular have taken up Thomas Turino's approach to the study of music culture, which, in his analysis of urban transformations of Andean panpipe music and the relationship between musical processes and the construction of personal and political identities, calls into question such 'fixed, essentialist conceptions of culture and identity' (Turino 1993: 13). Turino's methodology combines ethnographic research with a theoretical framework that draws on Gramsci and Bourdieu (in particular, his concepts of cultural capital and habitus) and analyses ways in which musical traditions both sustain and create meaning for people in times of dramatic social upheaval. Although, again, the ethnic filiations among Turino's research participants are quite different from my research group, Turino's methodology has influenced my research design because of its ability to reveal the relationship between music and both individual and collective identities in a changing and non-traditional social environment. His essay on 'Structure, context, and strategy in musical ethnography' (Turino 1990) clarifies Bourdieu's formulation of habitus as a mediating principle between social structures and individuals' internalized dispositions (Bourdieu 1977) and Gramsci's *common sense* as emphasizing the variability of these dispositions among and within individuals (Gramsci 1971).

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *cultural capital* as the accumulated and unequally distributed cultural knowledge, skills and dispositions that secure social status is useful for analyzing the musical scenes within which this research project was conducted. Bourdieu develops the concept of cultural capital in a study of educational achievement among school children, in which he argues that success is the result not of individual ability but of the cultural capital passed on to them by their families (Bourdieu 1986). In that work, he outlines three forms of cultural capital: embodied, objectified and institutionalized. These categories are of particularly use in distinguishing between various kinds of musical and social knowledge among the research cohort discussed in Chapter Four.

During the 1990s, American ethnomusicologists in particular tackled the problematic relationship between structure and individual agency in writing about musical performance. Prominent among them is Mark Slobin, who in *Subcultural*

---

[3] As an example of these changed social conditions, during the 1990s, following the completion of Graeme Smith's research, musicians who had participated in his study of Irish accordion style made their first trips back to Ireland since emigrating several decades earlier. Since then, they have made regular visits to Ireland.

Sounds: Micromusics of the West (1993) proposes the concept of *micromusics* for small units within multi-cultural societies, which he places within a social structure of intersecting *superculture* (something like Gramsci's *hegemony*) and *subculture* (small, embedded units of culture) linked by *interculture*. Slobin rejects cultural studies' class-based work on subculture as excluding variables such as internal hierarchies, taste, generation, and desire to be in another class, and as overlooking the accessibility of all music, particularly mediated music, to groups beyond its originally intended audience. Slobin proposes the useful concept of the musical *affinity group* as constructed, non-exclusive and subject to change, as against the essentialist and exclusive claims of ethnicity and nationality. In a more recent work on klezmer music and musicians, Slobin examines the ways in which such affinities are related to both the production and the consumption of music (Slobin 2000).

There are, however, other approaches to the study of music and musicians that do not take as their starting point the assumption of a clearly defined ethnic group. Some recent work in the study of popular music provides insights into the relationship between music and identity, and between music and ethnicity, along with new perspectives on the narratives researchers produce in collaboration with those they encounter in the research field.

The study of popular music is a disciplinary-diverse field, presided over mainly by sociologists and social anthropologists. In their mapping of popular music research, Swiss, Sloop and Herman (1998) identify institutional, textual and ethnographic analyses. Institutional analyses generally refute Frankfurt School sociologist Theodor Adorno's view (expressed in many writings between the 1920s and 1960s) that mass-mediated culture manipulates passive audiences and standardizes music, but share Adorno's concern with the relationship between hegemony (a society's dominant ideology) and the production and consumption of music. Richard Middleton, for example, analyzes the meanings and identities that are formed when performers, the music industry and audiences articulate with each other and the surrounding culture and social–political system (Middleton 1990). The role of the music industry and other cultural institutions, and the consumption of musical artefacts, are important considerations in the present study, although not its primary focus.

The area of popular music studies closest in its approach to ethnomusicology is the ethnographic analysis of music as ritual in everyday life, exemplified by Ruth Finnegan's *The Hidden Musicians: Music-making in an English Town* (1989). Unable to

locate class as a separable category, Finnegan instead identifies differing musical *pathways* along which individuals achieve self-fulfilment and a sense of community. As a descriptive rather than analytical term, 'pathways' is not particularly helpful; however, Finnegan's insistence, in accordance with theories of culture developed by Bourdieu and by de Certeau (1984), that music-making should be regarded as a 'practice of everyday life', that musicians are as much consumers as producers of culture, and that accumulated cultural experience and knowledge secure social status as cultural capital, suggests a useful framework for looking at the construction of cultural identities beyond ethnically defined boundaries.

In employing the term *musical worlds*, Finnegan follows both sociologist Howard Becker (1982) (who in writing of 'art worlds', included all those involved in the production and consumption of art, not only the artists) and anthropologists of the so-called Chicago School (who produced many studies of 'social worlds' and particularly those of outsiders such as hoboes). All these valuable studies have influenced the present research.

Related to Finnegan's work are Barbara Bayton's essay arguing that the development of an identity as a musician is gender-differentiated (1990) and Lucy Green's theory of gendered musical meanings in contemporary music education (1997). My research is informed by an awareness of gender differentiation in the experiences and opportunities available to musicians and of the gendered discourses within which musical performance is situated.

Sara Cohen's ethnographic study of music in Liverpool (1991), and Jocelyne Guilbault's of zouk music in the Caribbean (1993), demonstrate close links between location, music and cultural identity, analyzing ways in which distance from a 'centre' inflects both the music and its meaning. These connections are important in investigating the Irishness of Irish music, and the differences between musical practice within and outside Ireland. The notion of a centre of culture, although disputed elsewhere as a model for cultural movement and change, is borne out by my research data, which indicates that Irishness in musical performance is more generously attributed in Australia than in Ireland, as discussed in Chapter Five.

Cultural studies of popular music are also based on ethnographic research, but, as Simon Frith points out, they construct popular music as a 'particularly *disruptive* kind of myth' rather than as an ordered cultural process (Frith 1992: 179). Subcultural studies of music are best known through Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) on the

punk phenomenon in the UK. Hebdige and his Birmingham colleagues adopt Raymond Williams's neo-Marxist conception of culture as 'a particular way of life' that includes 'ordinary' as well as elite culture (Williams 1965: 56). Their analyses are based on the concept of *homology*, which Hebdige defines as 'the symbolic fit between the values and lifestyles of a group, its subjective experience and the musical forms it uses to express or reinforce its focal concerns' (Hebdige 1979: 113). Subcultural studies, then, focus on subordinate cultural groups and their resistance to hegemony through style and values. Subcultural theory has been criticized for marginalizing women (McRobbie 1981), for the elitism of the concept of an expressive unity that ignores other listeners who do not share the subcultural style (Clarke 1990), and for the convenient fiction of stability that overlooks change and ambiguity and ignores the complex relationship with the parent culture (Middleton 1990). While the character of the Romantic 'primitive' has changed here to an urban, deviant subculture, these studies share something of the idealization and simplification that are present in most writing about Irish traditional music and which is critiqued in the following section.

Current research in popular music studies focuses on the role of the globalized music industry and its technologies in creating new audiences, new modes of reception and new opportunities for the construction of identities. Recent research in cultural studies, on the other hand, continues to focus on the consumption of culture as a 'mechanism of pleasure' (Ang 1985) or to create a sense of community (Radway 1984) to create new identities (Grenier 1989) or to subvert hegemonic identities by appropriation or hybridization (Sharma et al. 1996). As Steven Feld suggests, the rise of popular music studies in the 1980s, with its emphasis on mediation and intercultural influences, 'signalled to ethnomusicology that its uncritical naturalization of "authentic traditions" was in trouble' (Feld 2001: 192). This particular trouble, however, does not appear to have made much impact on ethnomusicological research in and about Ireland, as discussed in the following section. Although there has been little direct dialogue across the disciplines of ethnomusicology, cultural studies and popular music studies, concerns about cultural nationalism, musical change, consumerism and identity formation have begun to converge in studies of 'world music'.

'World music', as Steven Feld points out, is a catch-all that can include various music industry categories including folk, trad, fusion and hybrid (Feld 2001).[4] Studies of world

_____

[4] Irish ethnomusicologist Fintan Vallely tells the story that the term arose at a 1986 meeting of 'International–Folk' record-label owners in a London bar, where they discussed ways of promoting non-mainstream music. They decided to market all their products under the term 'world music' (Vallely 2003: 209). The term 'world music' was already circulating in American universities as an alternative to 'ethnomusicology'. Jeff Todd Titon's well-

music have taken up positions in relation to the 'cultural imperialism thesis', which contends that the western recorded music industry dominates and appropriates local and indigenous music production in the third world. Against this, Roy Shuker argues that Anglo–American popular music is already part of an international youth culture; that local musical production is not directly equivalent to local national cultural identity; and that imported musical influences are in any case ubiquitous (Shuker 1994). Postcolonial theorists including James Barrett argue that the cultural imperialism thesis denies agency to world music artists (Barrett 1996), while Tony Mitchell sees the global music market as simultaneously homogenizing local music to please the western consumer market and absorbing and 'indigenizing' outside influences in a kind of 'reverse appropriation' (Mitchell 1996). Essays by Sharma and others in *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: The Politics of the New Asian Dance Music* (1996) focus on the ways in which such hybrid musical forms may also act as forces for consumer resistance, political action and social change in postcolonial diasporas in the West.

World music is of little direct relevance to Irish traditional dance music, which is included in the category only as it interfaces with the Irish-language songs in the even more inexact sub-category of 'Celtic music'. However, debates over the morality of world music in the 1990s — what Steven Feld (2001) calls 'anxious narratives' about whether it is musical invasion or cultural exchange — have raised important questions about the international recording industry's domination, appropriation and commodification of 'local' musical practices, and these concerns have informed the present study. The recording industry's role in relation to taste, repertoire and style in Irish traditional music is considered in Chapters Three to Seven.

The relation between the global and the local has been identified as 'transnational domination and uniformity' by American capital or European culture ('McDonaldization') or, on the other hand, as 'the source of liberation of local culture from hidebound state and national forms' (Jameson and Miyoshi 1998: xiii). This global–local dichotomy has replaced the centre–periphery model problematized by postcolonial and cultural studies. Frederic Jameson argues that, where nation–states once restricted local culture, national culture now defends it against transnational domination (1998: xv). This re-emergence of national culture as an oppositional value has particular relevance to Ireland, where a resurgence of cultural nationalism in the face of conformity

---

known college textbook in ethnomusicology is titled *Worlds of Music: An Introduction to the Music of the World's Peoples* (Titon 1984).

to European economic and political priorities has given rise to reassertions of national culture in a global commercial context, such as the Irish dance show *Riverdance*.

Sociologist Anthony Giddens discerns identity formation as taking place in two interconnected dimensions, the first referring to the impact of globalization and the second to the individual's reflexivity (a self-conscious monitoring) in constructing identity (1990; 1991). Homi Bhabha has in turn questioned this formulation, advocating a postcolonial perspective that takes into account population movements and proposes the concept of 'cultural translation': the 'staging of cultural difference', an act of cultural communication that draws attention to the movement of meaning, a concept employed in the subsequent chapters (1994b: 227–8). Faced with the impossibility of a self-contained, uncontaminated local culture, but also the impossibility of imagining what a global culture might be, Bhabha proposes that we think instead of migratory and partial 'in-between' cultures that exhibit a hybridity and doubleness related to the reciprocity of Bakhtin's dialogics rather than to dualism or binarism (Bhabha 1996; Bakhtin 1981).

Arjun Appadurai (1990) proposes another way of theorizing the radical disjunctures of the global cultural economy, as comprising a set of fluid, overlapping 'landscapes', which he terms 'ethnoscapes' (shifting populations of tourists, workers, refugees, etc.), 'technoscapes' (technologies that cross previously impervious boundaries), 'finanscapes' (complex, high-speed and unpredictable movements of capital), 'mediascapes' (the global dissemination of images in which distinctions between news and commodities blurs) and 'ideoscapes' (ideological narratives, particularly the 'master-term' 'democracy'). For Appadurai, the crucial forces changing the 'world system' (Wallerstein 1974) are the fetishization of both production and consumption (virulent, mutant strains of Marx's 'commodity fetishism') and a prevailing contest between sameness and difference, between cultural homogenization and heterogenization. Appadurai's innovative conceptualization of the global cultural economy is used in this thesis to indicate the complex and fluid global forces that comprise today's cultural 'landscape'.

The available ways of theorizing the *process* by which identities might be formed, however, do not fit the case of non-Irish musicians forming and performing identities through playing Irish music. For example, postcolonial theories of identity can assume a 'base' identity from the past that mutates into a hybrid identity in the process of migration. Bourdieu's concept of the habitus appears to inhibit the adoption of a different cultural identity. Recent psychoanalytical theories of culture have posited new kinds of difference that stand outside the binary opposition of

Self/Other: Probyn's outsider (1996), Kristeva's stranger (1991), Deleuze and Guattari's 'difference in itself' (1987). But the musicians in our music session appear to be seeking identification with the Other: they want to be accepted as insiders, if not without caveats.

1.3   Understanding Irish music

The following review of literature relating to Irish traditional music demonstrates the lack of material that problematizes non-native musicians playing an ethnically and nationally defined music and indicates how this thesis challenges previous theoretical and methodological frameworks.

Throughout its documented history of a little over two hundred years, Irish traditional dance music (reels, jigs, hornpipes and other dance tunes, played on fiddle, uilleann pipes, concertina, flute, tin whistle, button accordion, banjo and other instruments) has remained an emblem of Irishness; at the same time, it has continually absorbed external influences as diverse as European ballroom dances and Beatles songs (Carson 1986: 5–6). Indeed, those developments that have been crucial to maintaining, reviving and transforming Irish traditional music throughout this period have come from outside its original rural milieu, and especially from emigrant communities in the USA and England: for example, the publication of *O'Neill's Music of Ireland* in 1903 and recordings of Irish musicians from c1920 in America; the development in England of the ceili band and later the session (informal group playing); the American success of the ballad band; and the influence of the internationally touring performing group, the Chieftains. The sum of these influences has been to standardize repertoire, performance criteria and style (although not without counter-movements), and to introduce styles of presentation and accompaniment that appeal to middle-class, urban audiences.

This paradox is reproduced in the numerous general and popular historical accounts of Irish traditional music published since its revival began in Ireland during the 1950s (Breathnach 1977; Carson 1986; O'Connor, N. 2001 among others), which confidently assert an essential 'Irish music' — what Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin (1981) calls a 'tribal' definition — while elaborating on its mutability of form, style, function, repertoire, performance practices, aesthetics and context. The important question of what constitutes a separate and continuous Irish musical tradition is not a subject of conjecture in such accounts; nor is the question of what constitutes an 'Irish musician'. Implicit in such popular accounts of the musical achievements of Irish emigrants to America and

England as Nuala O'Connor's *Bringing it All Back Home: The Influence of Irish Music* (2001) is the assumption that, despite geographical dislocation and musical innovation, an essential Irishness remains intact, in both music and musicians. This assumption will be challenged in the following chapters.

Despite a history of major changes, innovation in Irish music at the end of the twentieth century was a fiercely contested concept, as demonstrated by the vigorous debate at the University of Limerick's 1996 Crossroads Conference on the subject. So-called innovators, prominent among them Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, celebrate Irish music's transformation in new contexts, repertoires, styles, instrumentation and performance practices, while traditionalists recognize only gradual changes within established stylistic boundaries and by a process of testing, adaptation and incorporation, many regarding the more extreme innovations as having moved beyond the field of Irish traditional music as they define it (Vallely et al. 1999). The former view of innovation is similar to the process of hybridization that research in cultural studies has identified in the contact between western popular music and non-western traditional musics, while the latter resembles ethnomusicological definitions of acculturation and transculturation (Kartomi 1981). This study aims to contribute to this debate by interrogating these positions in relation to the reception of 'outsider' musicians and their influence on Irish traditional music.

Recent ethnomusicological research on innovations in Irish traditional music leaves essentialist notions of Irishness uncontested, and ambiguity and conflict in the construction of cultural identities under-examined. Three important studies recognize, but do not problematize, the presence of 'outsider' musicians. Mick Moloney's study of Irish music in America accepts both Irish immigrants (like himself) and 'Irish–Americans' (who claim Irish heritage) as 'Irish musicians', but writes that 'non-Irish musicians are not expressing an Irish ethnic identity by performing Irish music', implying an indissoluble link between ethnicity and its musical expression despite distance in both time and space from a 'home' culture (1992: 448). Graeme Smith, in 'Irish meets folk: the genesis of the bush band' (1994a), makes a clear musical distinction between, on the one hand, Irish immigrant players and their 'talented children' and, on the other, 'Anglo Australian' enthusiasts (like himself). By contrast, in her study of group performance in traditional Irish music, Hazel Fairbairn (1993) notes but does not problematize the presence of 'non-Irish' musicians (like herself) at the sessions that form her case studies. Situations in which musicians adopt musical practices to which they have no ethnic ties are the problematic at the centre of this thesis.

Critiques of folk revival movements demonstrate a more critical engagement with the ambiguous relationship of 'non-native' musicians to various 'folk' musics. They are also a valuable reminder of the vested interests intellectuals may have in their subjects. Born into German Romanticism, 'folk' is now a discredited concept, regarded as part of the redefining of national culture in the interests of hegemony. The most iconoclastic studies of folk revival movements have come out of a neo-Marxist tradition. In America, Charles Keil has proclaimed that 'there never were any folk, except in the minds of the bourgeoisie' (1978: 263). Dave Harker (1987) has exposed English folklorists' construction of 'fakesong' to highlight the nobility of the peasantry and the heroic struggle of the industrial working-class. Graeme Smith (1985) has documented the Australian folk revival of the late 1960s, which saw urban intellectuals seek 'authentic' expressions of lost communal values. Social theorist Roland Robertson contextualizes folk revival movements by placing them within a narrative in which periods of intense globalization coincide with periods of what Tom Nairn has called 'modern, wilful nostalgia' (Nairn 1988). According to what Robertson calls the 'nostalgia paradigm', the yearning for images of the past derives from the estrangement and alienation symptomatic of modernity and central to the homogenizing requirements of the modern nation–state in the face of ethnic and cultural diversity (Robertson 1992: Ch. 10). These critiques of folk revival have informed this thesis throughout, while Robertson's broader view is the starting point for a discussion of nostalgia in Chapter Seven.

Irish nationalism, and Ireland's status as a postcolonial nation, have been much debated in Ireland over the past two decades. This thesis examines these debates in the broader context of theories of nation and identity, and in the specific context of Irish traditional music. Irish studies that have been most influential, on the approach and the questions asked in this thesis, if not on the conclusions reached, include Richard Kearney's vision of a 'postnationalist' Ireland in relation to theories of sovereignty, nation and identity (Kearney 1997), Luke Gibbons's reappraisal of Irish culture as enacting and transforming, rather than merely reflecting, social experience (Gibbons 1996), and David Lloyd's theoretically nuanced postcolonial studies of Irish history and culture (Lloyd 1993; 1999).

The thesis also considers Irish musical traditions in a trans-national context. The essays in Heelas et al. (1996) *Detraditionalization* debate the postmodernist claim that we now live in a 'post-traditional' world resulting from the shift in authority from external structures to the individual subject, and the counter-claim that identifies simultaneous rejuvenation and construction of traditions as global change exacerbates nostalgia for

'home'. The terms of this debate are applied in this thesis to the construction of individual and collective identifications in relation to Irish music and to the question of which institutions and musicians have been authorized to define 'the tradition' (and hence, who is an 'Irish musician').

Most contemporary academic studies of Irish traditional music are by ethnomusicologists, but, given the small size of the publishing industry in Ireland and the scarcity of peer-reviewed journals, very little of the postgraduate research from Irish universities is available outside Ireland. Publications featuring essays on Irish music are generally within the field of Irish Studies in England and the USA. A fairly comprehensive but not annotated list of works on Irish traditional music can be found in Fintan Vallely's *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, where scholarly works, popular guides to Irish music, fiction, and self-published raves share equal status (Vallely 1999). This perhaps reflects the values circulating in the Irish traditional music scene, where the writings of musicians are generally well received, while a certain scepticism applies to academic work, particularly of those who do not play Irish traditional music. This situation is rapidly changing, however, with an increasing number of musicians undertaking ethnomusicological research, an indication, as I will later argue, of the scene's increasing bourgeoisification and institutionalization.

Joseph J. Ryan (1995) gives an account of the way traditional music has been enlisted in the nationalist project in Ireland, and promoted by cultural institutions such as the Conradh na Gaeilge (Gaelic League), Gaelic Athletics Association, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (Irish Musicians' Association) (CCÉ) and state radio and television. Several chapters of the thesis analyze the ways in which these institutions construct 'Irish musicians'.

In Australia, very little scholarly work has been done on Irish music, Graeme Smith's being the outstanding exception. Chapter Four draws on his historical studies of Irish music in Melbourne (Smith, G. 1990; 1994a) as well as his more recent work on the articulation of social policy, ethnicity and Irish music (Smith, G, 2001; Smith and Brett 2001), while his essays analyzing the social place of Irish music and the social meaning of Irish music (Smith, G. 1994b; 1997), and our many discussions over the past decades, have been invaluable in formulating the research questions this thesis addresses.

1.4   The researcher's quest

> An ethnography is a report of a unique experience. It is about the dialogue of sensibilities implicated in encountering and depicting a people and a place. (Feld 1990: x)

This thesis, the outcome of a project that has explored new areas of research in Irish traditional music, is both more and less than an ethnography in the sense of a dialogue of sensibilities in encounters with other places and other people. No amount of dialogue can outweigh either the researcher's final responsibility for the resulting text, nor the subjectivity of the researcher in producing it. Nor is a thesis, or a scholarly ethnography, the product solely of dialogue with other people and places: it is also a dialogue with both past and emerging epistemological and methodological frameworks. Like the musicians who travel to Ireland to learn more about Irish traditional music and seek acceptance into the Irish music scene there, the researcher's work is a quest for knowledge and acceptance.

As the above review of literature suggests and the outline of the research design below demonstrates, the research process has also consisted in the unwritten dialogues of musical performances (hundreds of sessions, thousands of tunes) and an ongoing dialogue with innumerable written texts: essays and books (both popular and scholarly), fieldwork journals and transcribed interviews, websites and online discussion groups, emails and letters.

The mind's movement between aural and literate forms of communication has paralleled the experience of immersion and reflection that the ethnographic project demands. Self-reflexivity in musical performance is possible, indeed novice players can rarely avoid it, but the experience of identification through musical performance, 'a fusion of imaginative fantasy and bodily practice' (Frith 1996b: 124), occurs at moments when self-consciousness is transcended. When music becomes a 'text', it begs to be reified, objectified. The pathway this research project has followed has therefore been a dialogue between the aural and the literate.

The texts discussed above were encountered in a way that is analogous to the ethnographic adventure (and, indeed, to the musician's lifelong quest): plans made and adapted, materials previously unavailable appearing at odd moments, a paper chase on which felicitous texts appear unexpectedly. The accumulated effect of these encounters has been to examine Irish music (and ways of thinking and writing about it) in order to understand better the authenticating discourse surrounding it. I

owe much to dialogue with colleagues, especially historians, for whom the notion of a sociological project confined to the present made no sense at all. The accumulation of atavistic accounts of Irish traditional music, both popular and scholarly, that reproduce the tenets of Irish cultural nationalism appeared as a firmament of discourse and representation which musicians could view, but not see beyond. This was equally true, if not even more pronounced, in Australia, where only one (romanticized, nationalist) *version* of Irish history was available in which 'the music' could be placed.

The opportunity to see beyond this firmament was greatly enabled by recent interventions in Irish cultural studies and postcolonial studies, in particular the works of Luke Gibbons (whose interpretations I sometimes rejected, but whose questioning of orthodox thinking about Irish culture was always challenging), Seamus Deane (whose re-readings of an Irish literature I had digested in my youth gave me courage to take another look at beloved writers and texts) and David Lloyd (in moving beyond the twin orthodoxies of nationalist and revisionist historians to view Irish history from a standpoint at which a whole world of alternative interpretations was visible beyond the outline of the tattered marquee enclosing the Irish nation). The most profound reward as a scholar has been the opportunity to penetrate the thick skin of received knowledge about Ireland and Irish traditional music and understand the personal implications of the power of discourse and representation.

This has not been a linear process, and the continual challenge has been to understand the ways in which apparently disparate texts articulate. One consequence has been the need to write in registers that differ with the kinds of engagement — with theoretical arguments, life stories, fiction, recorded voices, music, and my own recorded experiences — reflecting the view that the writer's identity is not a singular authoritative figure.

The research questions this thesis addresses arose out of a thirty-year involvement with Australian musicians playing Irish traditional music. Aware that there were social and musical differences between Australian and Irish musicians in this music scene, but that most of the musicians in some circumstances claimed to be 'Irish musicians', I was interested in pursuing the question of how this identity was formed and under what conditions. The further question was what this might signify for the concept of 'Irishness' not only in Ireland and in Australia, but in a global

context, given that the Irish Republic at the beginning of the twenty-first century is a growing force in European politics and global economics.

The primary aim of this research, then, has been to investigate how musicians who play Irish traditional music, but do not identify themselves as Irish, understand their relationship to Irishness and, furthermore, to find a way of theorizing this.

This has involved an analysis of the tactics musicians use and the ways in which they relate to and are perceived by musicians and musical authorities in Ireland and has entailed extended observation and discussion with participants in this musical scene in both Australia and in Ireland. A further aim has been to consider the implications of these findings in relation to what Irishness has come to signify in a period of globalization. This has involved a critical examination of relevant (past and present) social and cultural factors relating to concepts of Irishness and Irish traditional music in the light of current theoretical debates about nationality, identity and music. The following is an account of the rationale and design of the research project, during which I spent a year attached to the Sociology Department at Trinity College, Dublin.

The research design assumes an interpretive epistemology, in which knowledge is understood as being constructed and negotiated by individuals within discourses of the nation, ethnicity, gender and place, and representations of Ireland and Irishness as well as of Irish traditional music. Three different kinds of knowledge have been investigated: the concept of Irishness as identified in written texts about Ireland and Irish music; in dialogues with participants including musicians and figures in the music industry and institutions; and in my observations as a participant in social life and musical events among musicians in Ireland and Australia. In each case, the aim has been to identify and interpret ways of understanding Irishness, including my own assumptions.

As an exploration and analysis of processes previously unstudied and not yet encompassed in theory, this research has adopted qualitative research methods. These include grounded research methodologies and a reflexive ethnographic method based on dialogic, bifocal participant observation.

The ethnographic approach I have taken is an adaptation of interpretive ethnography in which the focus has been not to make generalizations about 'a people' or 'a place', as suggested by Steven Feld in the epigraph to this section, but

to challenge those categories; indeed, the project interrogates such notions as 'the Irish people' and 'Ireland'. Ethnography investigates cultural practices using the method of participant observation and is the standard methodology in disciplines in which culture is studied. In *The Interpretation of Cultures,* Clifford Geertz describes ethnography as a semiotic approach to the study and interpretation of culture, in which culture is taken to be an 'acted document' (1973: 10). Carefully observed details of subjects' daily lives are examined from the 'inside', and recorded in rich or 'thick' description. Analysis then reveals subjects' conceptual worlds in a process of 'sorting out the structures of signification' (9) which make up the 'informal logic of actual life' (17).

While Geertz accepts that ethnographic writings are interpretations, and, as such, fictions (1973: 15), his approach, as Jonathan Friedman points out, is based on an understanding of culture as an object (whether a system of relations, a text or a code) that can be understood and represented, and assumes the existence of exclusive, shared identities within self-contained societies (Friedman 1994: 73). Frederik Barth, in his critique of the analysis of culture in complex societies, argues, against this substantialization of culture, that cultural meanings are relational: not inherent but attributed, not part of a shared paradigm but unevenly distributed according to social position (Barth 1989). By taking into account variation in both practice and meaning, this more open-ended approach to the study of culture has provided a useful model for this research.

The breakdown in 'ethnographic authority' has seen the rise of the 'new ethnography', encapsulated in the essays in James Clifford and George E. Marcus's *Writing Culture* (1986) and developed since then in ethnographic writing that employed new research methods and narrative strategies with the aim of avoiding the earlier tendencies to objectify, essentialize and exoticize the subject (Clifford 1988; Clifford 1997; Marcus 1992). Among these is the adoption of a reflexive approach, in which 'we understand and become aware of our own research activities as *telling ourselves a story about ourselves*' (Steier 1991: 3), as social relationships in which we are aware of our own positionality. This coincides with Stuart Hall's view of cultural identities as '[n]ot an essence but a *positioning*' (1990: 226). The 'us/them' dichotomy of the supposedly neutral observer is further broken down by the adoption of a 'bifocal' or reciprocal perspective that reveals the researcher's positionality in relation to that of the subject (Fischer 1986: 199). A reflexive approach thus challenges the 'rhetoric of experienced objectivity' (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 14) by acknowledging, for example, confusion and conflict in the researcher's relations with subjects.

Some reflexive accounts emphasize the collaborative nature of research, making 'informants' co-authors by narrating dialogues, interpreting culture as relational and contested. This dialogic approach derives from an understanding of identity as constructed and ongoing, as negotiated and not confined by ethnic or geographical boundaries, and is particularly relevant to a study of the formation of identities. My research has adopted a bi-focal, dialogic approach to participant observation, emphasizing dialogue and disputation with other research participants as well as with other theorists.

The impact of the ongoing critique of the ethnographic method has been less strongly felt in ethnomusicology than in some other disciplines. Claims of reflexivity in the field of ethnomusicology are not common, and where they exist may be somewhat exaggerated. An example is found in the second edition of ethnomusicologist Steven Feld's *Sound and Sentiment* (1990), in which the author describes as 'reflexive' and 'dialogic' his account of conversations with his informants about his already-published findings. Although an innovative approach to knowledge production in ethnomusicology, it also serves to emphasize the researcher's power, first in presenting his subjects with a *fait accompli* and, secondly, in including in the second edition what amounts to little more than a series of testimonials.

A welcome intervention has been a collection of essays on the experiential aspects of musical ethnographies, Barz and Cooley's *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (1997). As Timothy Cooley observes in his introductory essay, a reflexive ethnography has the advantages of questioning the ethnographer's colonial vantage point in relation to an Other and rejecting the scientific paradigm that regards culture as an observable object (1997: 16–17). In the same collection, Timothy Rice recalls how through 'fieldplay' (shared musical experiences) he came to understand his fieldwork situation as ontologically rather than epistemologically structured, and subsequently developed a hermeneutical model of fieldwork that rejects cognitive anthropology's theory of culture as a *mental* activity (1997: 107–9). Although I have not followed Rice's methodology, this problematic has been an important, if unresolved, issue throughout my research project.

Ethnomusicologists often employ a musical form of participant observation, 'bi-musicality' (acquiring musical competence in the field of research), which was formulated by Mantle Hood and adopted throughout the discipline (Hood 1960: 58). Its

effectiveness has been debated at various junctures. For example, Jos Koning, who has contributed a valuable study of Irish fiddle-playing technique, found that his bi-musicality distorted his research by restricting his musical roles and by altering his subjects' musical behaviour (Koning 1980). Nevertheless, the technique continues to be employed as a way of understanding music (allegedly) 'from the inside', reflecting the discipline's tendencies to regard each separate musical system as operating like a language or dialect. The musical confidence of ethnomusicologists (with western art music almost always their primary musical competence) has led to deluded beliefs such as that a few months' learning in the field will produce intimate knowledge of a musical system (Slawek 1994), or that one can gain 'a significant degree of cognitive and affective understanding and performative competence' by undertaking a six-week course (Kramer 1994: Abstract). My scepticism toward this methodology influenced me to employ 'bi-musicality' in a reflexive way, through musical, spoken and written dialogue, in order to scrutinize the effect of the researcher on the data gathered.

Another methodological assumption of orthodox ethnomusicology is that of the researcher's 'emic' (from the inside) or 'etic' (from outside) positioning in relation to the music culture studied. Not only does this assumption imply an understanding of a music culture as unique and bounded, but it also assumes that the researcher has a fixed relationship that is either inside or outside that culture, a dichotomy convincingly disputed by Marcia Herndon (1993), who argues for greater reflexivity and complexity in rethinking these categories. Most ethnomusicological studies in Ireland assume the researcher's position to be that of an insider (for example, Fintan Vallely's publications), as do works that include historical hypotheses (for example, Breathnach 1983) and this assumption can be traced back to Bunting's work at the turn of the nineteenth century (Bunting c1969). My research problematizes the implicit assumption that Irish nationality bestows knowledge of the lived experience of music cultures from which the researcher may be distanced by time, class and locality and in which they have not participated themselves. Even in cases such as the present research project, my long-term participation in a musical scene might be that of an 'insider', yet the complex and changing nature of the scene and my adoption of the role of researcher did not allow a single, fixed, 'knowing' relationship to be assumed. The question of who is an insider, and how this category changes according to viewpoint and geographical location, is discussed in Chapter Four and following chapters.

Where a researcher's project is located 'at home' (Jackson 1987), self-reflexivity is not necessarily adequate to the task of identifying and interpreting the researcher's

own knowledge, and for this reason, my research design has included points of view from outside the category to which the researcher also belongs. Thus, in addition to musicians like myself, who are not Irish and do not claim to be, interviews and encounters with and written texts by Irish musicians and others are also included in order to provide a form of cross-checking.

My experience playing Irish music in Australia and in Ireland and familiarity with musicians and performance contexts in both countries was nevertheless crucial to the choice of research questions, and also informed the aims of the research and the design of the research project. This familiarity gave me the opportunity to seek a different kind of knowledge than would be available to a researcher who was not a musician. For example, a musician who was a novice would also have gathered different kinds of data, as exemplified by Koning's project in the 1970s (Koning 1976; 1978; 1980). A learner is more likely to be shown the hows and whys of playing music on a particular instrument and in a social context; this was not available to me. On the other hand, I was more interested in questions about 'who' was playing and the aesthetic values that linked musician and audience, questions that it would be very difficult for a relative novice to formulate. I was also attuned to the many non-verbal communications among musicians and the significance of differences in style, repertoire, speed, volume, ornamentation, references to other musicians or repertoires and the ways in which musicians perform differently according to the social and musical context.

Familiarity with the musical scene in Ireland, if not in the specific locations where I conducted fieldwork, gave me insights that both aided and impeded the collection of data. For example, I was aware that the presence of tape recorders and cameras, even if not used, often detract from musicians' enjoyment and musical flow, making them self-conscious or hostile towards listeners. As a result, I made very few recordings. At one session I attended regularly, my request to record the evening's music (six months after I first attended) was met with agreement, with the added comment that I would 'hear from our lawyers tomorrow'. Similar requests from novice players were treated with generosity, for their tape recorders were regarded as essential to their learning process. This deficiency in recorded material was overcome by borrowing others' recordings; similarly, several tourists kindly sent me copies of the photographs they had taken at sessions.

It is unusual for a researcher outside the field of ethnomusicology to undertake participant observation as a musician. In cultural studies, Tony Kirschner (1998) has

gathered data on the road with his touring rock band. My research project, among a relatively transient population of musicians, has adopted something of this method by taking the seasonal paths musicians follow to festivals and summer schools, by joining in regular session groups, and by using my connections with other musicians to locate participants.

At the outset of this project, discussions with fellow-musicians arrived at estimates of about 100 to 120 Australians playing Irish traditional music in Melbourne, and around 500 throughout Australia. No doubt there are other musicians who rarely attend sessions or festivals, or no longer play, but the object was not to establish a precise figure. In Melbourne, I undertook research in a scene in which I was already a regular participant as an experienced fiddle player in sessions, sometimes as a leader. At the time, I also taught beginners who wanted to play Irish music, some of whom eventually went on to play in sessions and bands. This purposive sample was thus obtained through everyday contacts in a familiar musical scene. All of the musicians I interviewed and interacted with musically during the initial year of the project were already known to me, knew about the project and were willing to collaborate by discussing my research questions informally and in semi-structured interviews.

Locating a research sample in Ireland was more problematic. When I arrived there, I knew of only one Australian musician living in Ireland, but because I knew a wide network of Irish musicians, a 'snowball' effect soon located Australians in Dublin, Galway and Co. Clare. This was one reason for selecting a research location in Co. Clare, the other being my interest in revisiting the research field of ethnomusicologist Jos Koning, who lived in the East Clare village of Feakle, a district from which my musical mentors in Australia had emigrated. Unable to find accommodation there, I moved to the nearby village of Tulla, linked musically by the attendance of Tulla musicians at Feakle sessions and vice-versa. I was able to interview and play music with seven Australian musicians in sessions, and met others who were on short visits. Data from this relatively small sample was supplemented by my own observations and by interviews with musicians who had come to Ireland from Japan, Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, the USA, and Austria, as well as the more focused observations and discussions with musicians from England and Ireland that form the basis of Chapters Six and Seven. The process of gaining access to the field in East Clare is also discussed there. Another advantage of interviewing from a broader population was that, although regarded by most Irish musicians as belonging to the same category of 'foreigners' playing Irish music, their origins in

different countries and their range of expertise on their instruments allowed a constant check on hypotheses.

Internet discussion groups were used to recruit research collaborators in relation to Chapter Five. This proved to be difficult, due to poor communications networks in rural Clare, but once again, a snowball effect of connections among musicians facilitated meetings with members of a 'virtual' community of musicians that was temporarily 'realized' at festivals during the Irish summer.

The Irish research component was located in the Republic of Ireland for a number of reasons: my attachment to a Dublin university, my wider musical network in the Republic and unfamiliarity with the traditional music scene in Northern Ireland, and my impression that its social and political meanings are quite different in the North, as ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes suggests in his anecdote about a guitarist who was 'frozen out' of a session and his left hand later mutilated because he had played an instrument that was not 'Irish' at an Irish traditional music session (Stokes 1994: 9–10).

The decision to focus on instrumental musicians rather than singers was one that reflected the identification of the musicians who played Irish traditional music in both locations. Singers were rarely a part of a session's circle of seated musicians and were regarded by most musicians in Australia, and some in Ireland, as impeding its musical flow. I have also followed the practice among musicians in Ireland of referring to instrumentalists as 'musicians' and singers as 'singers' (a usage resented by many singers).

All those who collaborated on the research were made aware of the project's aims, the kinds of data I was collecting and the institutions I was associated with, and were given assurances of anonymity (with the exception of several 'famous' musicians, who gave permission to use their names). Some musicians chose their pseudonyms, while I allocated names to the others. In one of the research theses about Irish traditional music consulted, the writer had further concealed informants' identities by changing their gender and instrument played (Fleming 2000). This was deemed unnecessary and also potentially distorting of the data because an individual's gender is a crucial aspect of identity, while the instrument played has a strong bearing on a musician's status and aural reference point within a musical event.

A dialogic approach to research has been an aspiration rather than necessarily an achievement, for some musicians were simply not interested in pursuing a dialogue relating to my research. In some cases, the dialogue was largely non-verbal and (as discussed in Chapter Six) at times hostile. Other musicians, however, have continued to discuss the research, as well as reading and correcting interview transcripts. The women participants were more involved in this aspect of research than the men, with one or two exceptions in each research location.

In analysis and interpretation, I employed a version of the 'grounded theory' or thematic analytic approach developed by sociologist Anselm Strauss (1987). Used in conjunction with data gathered through the ethnographic method, grounded theory assists in the process of building or adapting theories by providing techniques for sorting and analyzing data to reveal underlying patterns and meanings. Having two fieldwork locations made it possible to refine the research methodology before moving to Ireland, while an initial analysis of the Australian data was used to develop interview questions and later served as a comparison to the analyses of the data collected in Ireland. Discourse analysis of interviews and my journal was again guided by Anselm Strauss (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Because this analytical method involves a perspective on language 'not as *reflecting* reality in a transparent or straightforward way, but as *constructing* and organizing that social reality for us' (Tonkiss 1998: 246), it was invaluable in locating common themes and concepts among research participants including myself, and particularly in locating the discourses and representations within which we understood Irish music and ourselves in relation to it. The quotations from interviews used throughout the thesis were selected after this process had taken place.

This discussion reflects something of my changing ways of thinking about the research process, from a version of the modernist quest for identity, in which the researcher is like an explorer, the ethnography a kind of adventure story or travel tale for the intellectual. The quest was a personal one (would I be accepted as a musician?) and was not entirely dissimilar to that of my research collaborators — except in the matter of time, for my quest to become an 'Irish musician' had begun in the 1970s. The outcome of this research project has been a questioning of the researcher's assumption of the role of arbitrator of knowledges and a more critical understanding of the musician's identifications in playing music that, like these knowledges, comes from elsewhere.

One task I set myself in writing about music was to find ways of avoiding the visual, and particularly the spatial, metaphors that have spread through the social sciences, from cultural geography. That project was a complete failure, due in part to the visual orientation of modern thought and the comparative scarcity, and weakness, of metaphors related to sound and hearing. Martin Jay attributes this visual bias to the 'scopic regimes' brought about by modernity (Jay 1992), like Walter Ong, regarding aurality (and orality) as having been overtaken by literacy (Ong 1988).

Stuart Hall writes that 'identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past' (Hall, S. 1990: 225). The following chapter follows the discursive construction of collective Irish identities and the ways in which certain areas of musical practice in Ireland were mobilized as part of this process. But first, I will make a brief detour to the North Atlantic, via Hollywood to the movie *Titanic*, in order to illustrate the persistence of contradictory stereotypes of Irishness and the role music plays in that process.

> Crowded and alive with music, laughter and raucous carrying on. An ad hoc band is gathered near the upright piano, honking out lively stomping music on fiddle, accordion and tambourine. People of all ages are dancing, drinking beer and wine, smoking, laughing, even brawling. Tommy hands Rose a pint of stout and she hoists it … Rose and Jack face each other. She is trembling as he takes her right hand in his left. His other hand slides to the small of her back. It is an electrifying moment … The music starts and they are off. A little awkward at first, she starts to get into it. She grins at Jack as she starts to get the rhythm of the steps … She bends down, pulling off her high heeled shoes, and flings them to Tommy. Then she grabs Jack and they plunge back into the fray, dancing faster as the music speeds up. The scene is rowdy and rollicking. A table gets knocked over as a drunk crashes into it. And in the middle of it … Rose dancing with Jack in her stocking feet. The steps are fast and she shines with sweat. A space opens around them, and people watch them, clapping as the band plays faster and faster … The tune ends in a mad rush … Everyone laughs and applauds. Rose is a hit with the steerage folks, who've never had a lady party with them. (*Titanic* 1997, James Cameron's screenplay with dialogue omitted)[5]

Throughout this movie, music steers our emotions, from the Irish dance music that celebrates uninhibited fun and fighting among third-class passengers (Musical example 1[6]), to the quasi-Gaelic laments that haunt scenes of premonition, tragedy

---

[5] James Cameron's screenplay can be accessed at www.script-o-rama.com.

[6] Gaelic Storm, 'An Irish Party in Third Class' (including 'John Ryan's Polka' and 'Blarney Pilgrim').

and transcendence (Musical Example 2[7]). As the agent of change, Jack's signature is the lively, exciting Irish dance music, while Rose's music is the high, lonesome sound befitting her social alienation and her doomed love affair. These two forms of Irish music (the lively dance and the melancholy air) signify two opposing stereotypes of the Irish (as exuberant and physical, or as melancholy and spiritual) that have co-existed in western thought for hundreds of years, to the point where different kinds of Irish music can be used to signify each set of characteristics. In each case, Irish music evokes a different kind of authenticity.

One reason why, at the time of its release, *Titanic* was allegedly the most expensive film ever made[8] was the accurate reproduction of the ship's first-class interiors and the glamorous costumes of the first-class passengers. This focus on material authenticity corresponds with an antiquarian view of the past as retrievable through physical reconstruction. By contrast, the steerage party scene, apart from a general sense of period costume, is relatively free of this obsessive replication. One effect is to contrast the stifling protocols of dress and behaviour in first class with the freedom of spirit and movement in third class. Implied is the spiritual imprisonment of the materialistic and class-conscious wealthy passengers, while steerage passengers express their love of life through their abandonment of physical restraint. In terms of historical accuracy, the scene is risible: in 1912, dancing styles were different, Irish musicians generally played solo (and never on mandolins), while a young woman playing the fiddle would have been highly unusual.[9] The world of the steerage party, Jack's world, demonstrates the moral authenticity of being 'true to oneself' and the unselfconscious authenticity that urban intellectuals have long associated with peasants and the working class. This focus corresponds with the social historian's emphasis on recovering the lived experience of the past by seeking the testimony of 'ordinary' people.

The steerage party scene in fact closely resembles what audiences would recognize as an Irish theme pub. Like these pubs, the film capitalizes on Irishness as an

---

[7] James Horner (conductor) and Sissel (vocals), 'Rose'. *Titanic: Music from the Motion Picture* (1997).

[8] In the year following its release in 1997, *Titanic* was proclaimed the highest-budget, most-watched, biggest-grossing film ever made, according to the official *Titanic* website (www.titanicmovie.com).

[9] The musicians featured in this scene do in fact perform as a band, Gaelic Storm, in Irish theme pubs on the west coast of the USA. The band's website (www.gaelicstorm.com) (in common with many posts by American participants in online discussion groups) reproduces the stereotype of the Irish musician as a demented Guinness guzzler. In 2002, the band's line-up included musicians from India, Ireland, England, China, the USA and Canada.

emblem of the unrestrained physicality that allows the heroine to challenge convention and realize her true (authentic) self. The scene also demonstrates Irish music's ability to cross cultural boundaries as passengers from many cultural backgrounds join in the party.

Titanic opposes what existential philosophers would call false consciousness with authenticity in its various manifestations: in self-identity (being true to one's 'real' self); in questioning patriarchal values (in Rose's rejection of the 'masters of the universe'); in opposing economic to cultural capital (Rose rejects a wealthy man for a poor artist) and emotion to rationality: that is, in opting for the world of the senses and the spirit instead of the manifestly unreliable world of the material and scientific.

In *Titanic*, the effect of class and economic status on the individual is shown to be, not structurally determined, as Marxist theory would have it, but quite the opposite. Through individual struggle and self-reliance, the hero and heroine successfully challenge powerful social institutions. Theorizing the subject as socially produced through ideology (Althusser), discourse (Foucault) or language (Lacan, Derrida) has challenged this way of thinking about the self as a fixed 'true nature' that needs to be recovered. In popular culture, however, and notably in the many Hollywood movies that adopt the mythical structures set out in Joseph Campbell's screenwriter's bible, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1968), identity remains the hero's (or heroine's) quest.

The soundtrack of *Titanic* demonstrates both senses in which Irish traditional music is now a globalized cultural form: in its accessibility to consumers worldwide as signifying a transformative authenticity of the body (in fast dance music) and of the spirit (in melancholy airs) and simultaneously as representing a stereotypical Irishness. Irish music is thus paradoxically both accessible and at the same time closed to those from other cultural backgrounds. This is the ground that will be covered in this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

WHEN SMILING EYES ARE TEARFUL:
THE HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF IRISH MUSIC

In the soundtrack of the movie *Titanic*, we hear a haunting Gaelic song and uplifting dance tunes, and in each case there is a close fit between the emotions the music evokes and the stereotypes that tell us Irish people are both melancholy and high-spirited. While sadness and joy are surely not confined to the Irish, why is it that in contemporary popular culture, Irish music is called on to represent these emotions?

Music, always a social and discursive construction, is also transgressive in the sense that it can cross over into, and become a part of, other domains that include class, gender relations and nationalism (Said 1991: Ch. 2). In this way, 'Irish music' and 'traditional music' are ideological constructions. This chapter outlines how what we now hear as Irish music was nurtured by Irish cultural nationalism to become emblematic of an imagined Irish nation.

In tracing the historical construction of Irish music from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century, I will propose that this process has been selective (in excluding some musical practices) and that the musical practices that came to represent Irishness were hybrid rather than essentially Irish. I will argue that this process was energized by cultural nationalists[1] seeking texts that would establish a connection between the former Gaelic ruling class of the sixteenth century and the Anglo–Irish propertied classes in eighteenth-and nineteenth-century Ireland (the main participants in this movement). They did this by 'translating' embodied musical practices into texts that were then reinterpreted in new contexts. As a result, Irish music came to be understood as something that was fixed in time and

---

[1] Cultural nationalists in Ireland promoted what they variously defined as Irish culture as a basis for a national identity that would encompass divisive political and religious allegiances. Ernst Gellner, in his many writings on nationalism, represents cultural nationalism as a regressive primitivism. John Hutchinson's *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* argues against this that in the case of Ireland, cultural nationalism was 'a movement of moral regeneration which sought to re-unite the different aspects of the nation — traditional and modern, agricultural and industrial, scientific and religious — by returning to the creative life-principle of the nation' (Hutchinson 1987: 14). Hutchinson identifies three periods of cultural revival between the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, each of which shared these general aims, although differing strategically.

place in an imagined, pre-colonized Ireland, and as something that both reflected the collective identity of those who performed and listened to it and symbolized a wider population who did not.

How did it become possible to think about music in this way?[2] One answer lies in the nature of musical performance, which is non-denotative — that is, sounds in music do not invoke specific things or ideas, but depend upon the signifying processes of language in order to take on meaning (Shepherd and Wicke 1997: 20). Thus any musical performance can be interpreted in varying ways. A more complex answer is that, paradoxically, once it became possible to think of music as autonomous (as independent of social and ideological forces) and to believe that a printed text provided the authority for musical performance (its reification or objectification) it was possible also to believe that 'the music' could be performed in different contexts while retaining a given meaning.[3] In this way, when performances of a musical repertoire were recorded through a system of musical notation and interpreted in new contexts, it was believed that the symbolic meaning assigned by revivalists to 'the original'[4] was retained in the newly created musical artefact and transferred to the new set of performers and listeners.

This view of music as autonomous is important in relation to my later interpretations of data showing that Australians learning to play Irish traditional music, particularly those with a formal musical education, at first perceive a transparent relationship between music as text and its embodied practice, reflecting the currency in the western art-music academy of this way of conceptualizing music.

This chapter also addresses the question of why Irish music was interpreted as characteristically melancholy or high-spirited. I will argue that because music is not in fact autonomous, and is open to co-option by either hegemonic or counter-hegemonic discourses (in this case, both), the stereotypes of Irishness that were

---

[2] Simon Frith begins his seminal essay on 'Music and identity' by establishing that 'The academic study of popular music has been limited by the assumption that the sounds must somehow "reflect" or "represent" people' (Frith 1996b: 108). In this chapter I analyze the intellectual history of that understanding in relation to Irish music.

[3] The rise of printing was as important to music as to other aspects of nation building (see Anderson 1991) especially in transferring authority from the oral texts that had prevailed in pre-modernity to written forms. Martin Jay discusses the implications of this critical change in an essay on 'Scopic regimes of modernity' (Jay 1992).

[4] As Declan Kiberd observes, 'the concept of an "original" comes into existence only after it has been translated' (Kiberd 1995: 624).

constructed within colonial discourse, and inverted in anti-colonial discourse, could easily be transferred to music.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to argue that understanding music to be simultaneously autonomous and essentially expressive and representative of a particular group of people allowed selective musical practices in Ireland to be co-opted by cultural nationalists. This further allowed its objectified and recontextualized forms to be defined as 'authentic', because the authority to define authenticity, as well as the desire for authenticity, resides with urban bourgeois intellectuals (who today include ethnomusicologists, folklorists and sociologists).

2.1   Music and autonomy

The idea that music is autonomous arose out of a paradigm shift[5] in scientific and philosophical thought around the turn of the eighteenth century. Literacy had already changed the way music was conceptualized by giving it a kind of material reality independent of its performance. The use of written scores, as Christopher Small argues in *Music, Society, Education* (1996), was but one aspect of a major process of reconceptualizing music that coincided with the so-called scientific revolution of the early seventeenth century and shared with it the privileging of rationality over revelation, a linear rather than cyclical concept of time, and the objectification of nature: in other words, a scientific world-view with man, not God, at its centre. Small argues that from this point onwards, the timbre, pitch, and tuning of voices and the preferred musical instruments reflected the values of scientific thinking, as did the more radical changes from melodic lines to tonal harmony and the shift from modal to diatonic scales. Scientific thinking in musical practice privileged the permanent, material text over the unpredictability and changeability of performance and over other aspects of performance that cannot be contained in a text. Popular musical practice in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland, however, differed from European practice in retaining a single line of melody transmitted orally, a cyclical form in dance music, and four of the older modal scales in harp music, singing and dance music.[6]

_____

[5] The concept of a paradigm shift or scientific revolution was introduced by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) in relation to major innovations in scientific thought, in which the new way of thinking was completely incompatible with the one it replaced.

[6] Irish harpist and scholar Máire Ní Chathasaigh explains that a variety of different modes or scales were used in European music until around 1600, when art music jettisoned all

Although claims for music's autonomy can be traced as far back as Pythagoras, the music of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment best illustrates the social values of the stabilizing middle class, expressed musically in harmonious, organic, unified and formally balanced sounds that were capable of absorbing and resolving all tensions (McClary 1987). The assumption of music's rational, logical basis has become the justification for western intellectuals' disavowal of its ideological construction and remains the basis of musicological studies, despite the fact that in other scholarly disciplines — the study of literature, or fine arts, for example — the 'worldiness' (Said 1991) of the work of art has been recovered and disputed several times around.

The final step towards establishing music as autonomous was made around the turn of the eighteenth century under the influence of what Marshall Brown terms a second 'revolution in musical consciousness' (Brown, M. 1997), which followed the publication of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781 (Kant 1929). Whereas Enlightenment philosophers had conceived of the mind as a *tabula rasa*, with human consciousness arising only as a result of the mind's contact with an external world, Kant's radical concept of a state of pure self-consciousness prior to any external perception initiated a radical and long-lasting change in European philosophy (Brown 1997).[7] In eighteenth-century philosophical and political discourse, reason was valued above other human attributes, as manifested in a belief in science, progress and the law, and a concomitant disdain for emotion and imagination. Kant's work, however, opened the way for a diverse but pervasive change in sensibility (later termed Romanticism) and the eventual reversal of these priorities, especially as they emerged in musical and literary forms. The change in art-music composition from the periods designated late-Classical to early-Romantic demonstrates this paradigm shift to a conceptualization of music as belonging in a different sphere from the everyday, an autonomous domain where its function was to inspire contemplation and emotion.

---

but two of these modes (now known as the major and minor scales). Gregorian chant and some popular musics continued to use four of these modes, lending Irish music its distinctive sound (Ní Chathasaigh 1999: 243).

[7] Although not mentioned by either Brown or Small, Max Weber had already demonstrated the parallel between 'rationalization' and the development of harmony in Western art music in *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music* (1958). Like Weber, Edward Said in *Musical Elaborations* attributes the rigorous logical structure of Western music to its 'ethic of productivity', which he contrasts to the digressions of classical Arab music (1991: 98).

In western art music, the expressive capabilities of music became more highly valued than form and structure, and the 'genius' musician joined the painter and the poet in the pantheon of Romantic artists who were regarded, and regarded themselves, as producing their art from above and beyond society (Wolff 1987). An understanding of music as an expression of natural and authentic feeling developed parallel to the 'discovery' of 'the people' in literature (Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798 were seminal in this movement) and in music (for example, Beethoven's settings of popular dance tunes). In pursuing 'authenticity', the (masculine) artist often sought inspiration from the natural world, of which 'the people' were seen as an integral part. In Romanticism, the musical text remained privileged, but its meaning expanded to encompass music's expressive capabilities and, in the case of Irish music, the expression of 'the Irish people'.

At the same time, with printed text becoming much cheaper to produce and its uses expanding exponentially, collections of printed music could be distributed widely for domestic music performance among the middle class (which was proportionally very small in Ireland). Four stages can be identified in Western music's 'fall' from act to text: literacy (about a thousand years ago), printing (about five hundred years ago), the idea of autonomous art (about two hundred years ago), and recording (about one hundred years ago) (Taruskin 1995). By the early nineteenth century, music as act had 'fallen' through three of these stages to become conceptualized by the literate middle class as text created independently of ideology, its embodied practice overlooked in favour of its expressive features. The fourth stage — recording — will be discussed in following chapter.

Radical intellectual movements such as Romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century coincided with a period of social upheaval in Europe, with developments in industry, urbanization, bureaucracy and the public sphere, together with significant anti-monarchic and anti-colonial movements towards the nation–state. This climate of political and cultural flux fostered the emergence of cultural nationalism among the urban intelligentsia of Ireland.

2.2   The genesis of an Irish canon

Cultural nationalists in Ireland sought symbolic representations of unity that would transcend political and religious differences within the putative nation. It was in this role that music came to play a significant part in the formulation of a collective Irish

cultural identity towards the end of the eighteenth century. At that time, Ireland was an English colony with its own parliament, from which the Catholic majority of the population was excluded.[8] Members of the Anglo–Irish ruling class or Protestant Ascendancy, finding that their political and economic interests had diverged from those of the central British government, sought to identify themselves with the land they occupied. As part of this shift from an 'Anglo' to an 'Irish' identification, amateur enthusiasts began to take an interest in the history and culture of Ireland that pre-dated an English presence. The goals of this Gaelic revival were 'to reconcile the different traditions of Ireland and guide a reunited Irish people into a golden future via a return to the exemplars of the ancient past' (Hutchinson 1987: 56).

This goal differed somewhat from that of other European cultural nationalist movements in its narrower focus. An interest in the common people's culture — widely believed to retain remnants of earlier cultural practices, uncontaminated by cosmopolitan urban life — was part of a broad movement influenced by the philosophy of Johann Herder, who had proposed that European civilization was not a single, evolving culture, as expounded in the work of Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire and others, but comprised separate 'peoples' who were the foundations upon which separate nations might be built (Herder 1966). Ideally, each nation would have its own language and cultural forms such as music, dancing, art and poetry, which would provide a basis for political unity and distinguish it from other nations. As the urban middle class, the main participants in nationalist movements, were not necessarily familiar with the people's culture, folklorists, collectors and translators were needed to record and disseminate this knowledge. By the mid-nineteenth century, hundreds of collections of folklore, dances and music had been published throughout Europe.

In Ireland, however, collectors largely overlooked the popular dance music of the Gaelic Irish, mainly jigs played on fiddle and pipes. Instead, they sought out harpers who practised an art form that had flourished in the households of the Gaelic nobility until around 1600. Irish harp music had a documented history of admirers since the twelfth century, and was regarded as uniquely Irish and, indeed,

---

[8] Under the so-called Penal Laws, Catholics were banned from voting or holding political office, government employment, membership of the professions, land ownership (only five per cent of Irish lands were owned by Catholics) and Catholic worship (this last was unevenly enforced) (Coohill 2000).

emblematic of Ireland.[9] In the early eighteenth century, harpers had become itinerants dependent on the patronage of the few remaining Gaelic Irish and Anglo–Norman families of property and some of the new Protestant landowners. The cultural flux of this environment is evident in the harpers' repertoire, which included versions of this older music, compositions such as those of Turlough Carolan (1670–1738) in the style of Italian composers Geminiani and Corelli, and popular dance tunes and the airs of songs (Ó hAllmuhuráin: 1998; Vallely 1999) (Musical example 3[10]). Unfortunately, by 1792, when participants in this Gaelic Revival organized a harp festival in Belfast and employed Edward Bunting to transcribe (and thereby 'preserve') the moribund harp repertoire and technique, only ten surviving harpers could be located and brought to the festival. Bunting later 'collected' and transcribed more music, much of it from singers and pipers, on excursions through the northern and western counties.

Like similar antiquarian enterprises in the fields of literature, archaeology and philology,[11] Bunting's collections furthered the political ambitions of the disenchanted Protestant middle and upper classes. Bunting believed the music to be an essential expression of ancient Gaelic Irish culture, revealing 'the mental cultivation and refinement of our ancestors' that was 'unapproachably unique, so unlike any other music of the nations around us' (1840: 8) and unchanged by centuries of oral transmission: 'in a perfect state from the earliest times' (1840: 2).[12] The music Bunting published was adapted to the artistic conventions of contemporary Irish bourgeois society. Played on violins and keyboards in the drawing rooms of Dublin, Belfast and Cork, it would have sounded very different from the performances Bunting had heard from the singers and musicians whose

---

[9] Bunting claims that the harp has been the emblem of the Irish since 1567 (Bunting c1969: 45). The symbol of the harp is now found on the Irish Presidential flag, government letterhead and on police uniforms. Guinness continues to use the Irish harp (in reverse) as its logo, presumably to reinforce the Irish connection, since the company is now a subsidiary of the global, London-based Diageo PLC conglomerate.

[10] Harpist Kathleen Loughnane plays an air composed by Turlough Carolan (1670–1738) and published in Bunting's 1796 collection as 'Rose Dillon'. Although played on a modern instrument using different techniques, this performance exemplifies both the Irish form and the Italian influence in harmonic progressions and ornamentation.

[11] The Gaelic poems Charlotte Brooke translated into English as *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1789) were similarly regarded as remnants of a vanishing art, while the founders of the Royal Irish Academy, established in 1785, sought to reveal through the study of archaeological, documentary and philological evidence an 'authentic' historical account of the 'life-spirit' of the Irish people (Brooke 1789; Hutchinson 1987: 57; Bunting c1969).

[12] Page references are to the preface of Bunting's posthumously published *A Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland, Arranged for the Piano Forte* (1840), which is published together with *A General Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland* (1796) and *A General Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland* (1809) by Waltons, Dublin (Bunting c1969).

music he had transcribed. Apart from the inevitable simplifications and inaccuracies involved in transcribing a musical performance, Bunting had 'improved' some of the melodies from modal to diatonic scales, a change that was amplified when he added harmonic accompaniments for piano. Despite the changed musical and social context, these new musical texts and performances were thought to express the same ancient and essentially Irish qualities. This is not dissimilar to the ways in which some twentieth-century ethnomusicologists, anthropologists and folklorists, and now 'world music' impresarios, have acted in the field: seeking out remnant practices in preference to the contemporary; overlooking transcultural influences; and believing in their own capacity and prerogative to translate a musical culture by removing it via transcriptions and recordings to new contexts — that is, by making an object of a social process. Although some of Bunting's contemporaries found his settings still too crude and barbaric for their European art-music aesthetic (White 1998a: 39), his transcriptions formed the basis of a canon of Irish music on which subsequent studies and collections have drawn.

While historians sometimes point out, with a hint of derision at the backwardness of the Gaelic Irish in serving their own interests, that it was the Protestant ruling class who first adopted Gaelic culture to establish a separate Irish cultural identity, it must be countered that the Gaelic Irish had no need to do this. On the contrary, other elements of their culture that identified them as Gaelic — language, agricultural practice, religion — were precisely what separated them economically and politically from their colonists, and impeded their advancement in these fields. Ironically, while the Anglo–Irish were busy acquiring Gaelic accomplishments, the increased participation of Irish Catholics in politics and the market economy at the end of the eighteenth century resulted in the expanded use of English — the language of law, education, commerce, and emigration — and the consequent decline of Irish language use.

Bunting and other Anglo–Irish cultural revivalists appropriated, mediated, bowdlerized and commodified Gaelic cultural practices in the interests of constructing a 'cultural reconciliation' (Deane 1991: xxiv) that would bridge political divisions and open the way for political reconciliation. By using elements they associated not with contemporary Gaelic society but with the long-dead Gaelic nobility, however, the symbols they constructed for the leaders of a projected united Ireland were in their own image.

In transcribing the music of itinerant musicians, Bunting undertook two kinds of cultural translation: first, in making a fixed, written text of an oral performance, thus alienating it from its social context and meanings; and secondly, in translating older modal melodic forms into the diatonic scales and harmonies of European art-music. These transformations allowed members of the Ascendancy to identify with an earlier Gaelic aristocracy within an imaginative narrative conveniently removed from the lives of the contemporary Gaelic Irish, whose deprivations were a reminder of the violence of colonization and the obstacles to cultural unity. By employing cultural forms of an idealized past to imagine a future Ireland, while at the same time rejecting contemporary popular cultural forms, cultural nationalists implicitly consented to the colonial view of the Irish as unruly, unreliable, and unworthy to lead a future nation.

2.3 Cultural revival in nineteenth-century Ireland

During the nineteenth century, two waves of cultural revival and political nationalist movements saw Irish music employed in the service of patriotic texts. An early example was Thomas Moore's harvesting of airs from Bunting's 1796 collection for his sentimental verses in *Irish Melodies*, published between 1808 and 1834 and 'deplored' by Bunting for violating the airs' melodic integrity (Bunting c1969: 5). Moore (1779–1852) was one of the few Catholic students at Trinity College, Dublin, where he associated with supporters of the failed 1798 rebellion (Vallely 1999). His most popular song lyrics, although cushioned in sentimentality, evince a deep (if pessimistic) sympathy for that cause: they weep and sigh over Ireland's hopeless suffering, dream of past glories and mourn their loss. Music is a balm to assuage grief and to keep alive in the 'death-like moan' of the harp a memory of 'noble pride, now turn'd to shame, And hopes for ever gone'.[13] Hardly fighting words.

A later generation of cultural nationalists mobilized this nostalgic view of Ireland's lost glories — a view that continues to circulate due to the lasting popularity of Moore's songs among the English-speaking middle classes. Bunting's further objections to Moore's co-option of Gaelic airs indicate the difference between their projects:

───────────────────

[13] The song quoted is 'Sing, Sweet Harp'. The selection of Moore's work used is from Charles Villiers Stanford and Geoffrey Shaw (eds) (1958)*The New National Song Book*. London: Boosey & Hawke. In his Preface to the original (1905) edition, Stanford writes that this collection of 'British Folk-music' draws on 'two distinct racial types', namely the 'Keltic' and the English (1958: iv), a clear example of the discourse of Celticism, discussed below.

> The world have been too apt to suppose our music of a highly plaintive and melancholy character, and that it partook of our National feeling at the state of our country in a political view, and that three parts out of four of our tunes were of this complaining nature. Now there never was anything more erroneous than this idea. (from a draft of the preface to Bunting's 1840 collection, cited in White 1998a: 43)

Although, as argued above, Bunting had transformed Gaelic music in his published collections, he disapproved of his contemporaries' 'drawling dead, doleful and die-away manner' of performing the songs, comparing it with the 'spirited, animated and highly lively style' of the Belfast festival harpers, 'which certainly and in truth accords more with the natural character of the Irish' (White 1998a: 43). In Moore's lyrics and his adaptations of his musical sources, the imputed national character was transformed from spirited to plaintive. His sweet and melancholy song became the expression *par excellence* of a nostalgic view of Irish history.[14]

A second period of revival from the 1830s, again mobilized by Protestant patriots seeking an image of an ancient and uniquely Irish culture that they might comfortably identify with, looked to the period of medieval monastic settlements, which had achieved a highpoint of spiritual, artistic and social cohesion. This change in orientation, at a time of growing political agitation amongst the Catholic Irish, focused attention on a pre-Reformation golden age untroubled by sectarian difference (Hutchinson 1987: 75). The 'ancient' music was again employed as a potent emblem of Irish identity.

The central figure in this movement, George Petrie (1790–1866), was an antiquarian scholar who in 1855 published a collection of musical transcriptions 'to aid in the preservation of remains so honourable to the character of my country' (1967: x). Unlike Bunting, Petrie acknowledged that a melody might exist in variant forms, attributing this to the dilution of an original 'pure' form (in contrast to current understandings of orally transmitted music as continually changing). Petrie, like the intellectuals driving other European cultural nationalist movements, believed the conduit for these honourable 'remains' was the peasantry: the tenant farmers and agricultural labourers whose deaths in the mid-century famine years and loss through emigration accounted for a twenty per cent depletion in their number during the decade from 1841. This traumatic event increased the sense of urgency that Petrie, in common with other revivalists, derived from his understanding of the past

---

[14] The complexity of the concept of nostalgia and its implications for Irish music and identity are discussed in Chapter Seven.

as a lost golden age whose surviving artefacts and practices were on the point of vanishing. This indicates a conception of culture as static, rather than as a process that is continuously revised and continually reinterpreted according to contemporary priorities.[15]

Both Bunting and Petrie published the oldest music they could find, resulting in a very small proportion of dance tunes in their collections.[16] Yet the dance craze that swept Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century had enthusiastic participation among the Irish peasantry, as English geographer Arthur Young noted in 1780:

> Dancing is very general among the poor people, almost universal in every cabin. Dancing masters of their own rank travel through the country from cabin to cabin, with a piper or blind fiddler; and the pay is sixpence a quarter. (Young cited in Ó hAllmhuráin 1998: 46–7)

The dancing masters taught mainly solo dances of their own invention to young people who performed them at outdoor venues in a spirit of athletic competition and courtship. The dances were in jig time until late in the century, when Scottish reels and English hornpipes began to circulate widely. The dancing masters also popularized group dances like the minuet and stimulated the early nineteenth-century passion for set-dancing (quadrille sets adapted to local steps, figures and music) that had spread from France and England (Ó hAllmurháin 1998; Breathnach 1977; Hall, R. 1995; Vallely 1999). The collectors' selectivity reflects their aim to establish a noble lineage of art music, identifying with Gaelic aristocratic audiences of former times rather than with contemporary musicians or those for whom they performed. In this, Irish cultural nationalists differed from their counterparts in other European countries.

In the 1870s, popular musical practices in Ireland changed dramatically. Musicians in the rural Ireland of the early-nineteenth century had been artisans, not amateurs. They had accompanied itinerant dancing masters, provided music within one district, or travelled opportunistically to 'winter out' with well-off farmers for whom they played music for dancing and performed Gaelic airs for listening (Hall, R. 1995). The social reconstruction and land reforms that followed the Famine

---

[15] This anxiety is evident among twentieth-century folk revivalists and imbues the research ethic of researchers in the fields of folklore, ethnomusicology and anthropology.

[16] Breathnach claims that 'Bunting's three volumes did not contain a dozen dance tunes, and the complete Petrie collection [of almost 1600 items] less than 300' (Breathnach 1977: 117).

brought improved conditions for those who owned or could buy land, with changes in farming practices and bigger holdings, better incomes, and larger houses.[17] When a reformed and puritanical Catholic Church moved to eradicate outdoor dancing, most of the dancing masters lost their livelihoods, dancing moved inside and dance movements were adapted to the domestic setting. Around the same time, the increasing availability of affordable instruments (melodeons, concertinas, whistles, fiddles) saw amateur music-making flourish in rural Ireland. Repertoires changed and the number of reels and hornpipes expanded in what musicologist Reg Hall (1999) claims was the 'heyday' of Irish traditional dance music.

Published collections of Irish music in the late-nineteenth century included an increasing proportion of reels, jigs, marches and hornpipes collected from dance musicians, in addition to the older airs and harp tunes.[18] Yet they still bore titles such as *The Ancient Music of Ireland*, consolidating the naturalization of dance music (including English hornpipes and Scottish reels) into a national musical canon. In this way, popular musical practice in Ireland came to be regarded as both ancient and Irish, an example of the principle of 'absorption' proposed by D.P. Moran in *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland* (Moran 1905) as part of an increasingly politicized movement to purge Irish cultural life of indigestible English elements.

2.4   Cultural revival and de-Anglicization

The aim of the late-nineteenth-century literary revival, of which the poet William Butler Yeats was the central figure, was one of 'de-Anglicization', the building of a national tradition and literature in the English language (now the main language spoken in Ireland) that drew from Celtic mythology and Gaelic legends rather than historical figures, and imitated the Gaelicized English spoken in the West of Ireland. The main exponents were again Anglo–Irish (who once more assumed that they, as the ruling class, would eventually lead an independent Ireland), along with members of the emerging urban Catholic middle class.

---

[17] This excluded farm labourers, a large proportion of whom had died or emigrated as a result of the Famine. Land reforms in the second half of the nineteenth century resulted in an increase in the number of landowners, and a consequent decrease in the number of landless labourers (Coohill 2000).

[18] These include Patrick Weston Joyce's *Ancient Irish Music* (1873); James Goodman's *Tunes of the Munster Pipers* (1860s) (published in an edition by Hugh Shields in Dublin in 1998), and unpublished collections by William Forde (1840s) and Stephen Grier (1880s). Early collections of dance tunes include those by Walker Jackson (1724), John and William Neale (1726), and Patrick O'Farrell (1804–10) (Vallely 1999; Breathnach 1977).

Members of this literary revival drew on the discourse of Celticism promulgated through the work of English poet and essayist Matthew Arnold, whose approach assumed a 'positional superiority' (Cairns and Richards 1988: 48; Arnold 1973; Said 1978: 7) in proclaiming the Celt a loser in war and politics who possessed to a fault the 'feminine' qualities of emotionalism, sensuality, aestheticism and spirituality (a dichotomy analogous to the continued perception of Irish music as both spirited and plaintive). This characterization of the native Irish as Other to the Teutonic English — wild, untamed and outside modernity — implicitly boosted the case for an Anglo–Irish leadership.

In 1893 Douglas Hyde founded *Conradh na Gaeilge* (the Gaelic League) in Dublin, with a mission to revive the Irish (Gaelic) language, which Hyde saw as 'the life-line of that ancient Gaelic civilization that alone justified Irish claims to a historic nationality' (Hutchinson 1987: 1). With widespread membership in cities and rural towns throughout Ireland, the League's activities attracted those with a more political agenda, who eventually took over the leadership and used the organization to promote political independence. The Gaelic League's de-Anglicization program included building a more self-sufficient Irish economy and substituting Irish for English cultural forms. This transformation could not, however, achieve a translation between cultures. When music and dancing competitions were initiated in 1897, tension arose between the continuing rural tradition of *sean-nós* singing and the *bel canto* style of the urban middle class (Vallely 1999) (Musical examples 4 and 5[19]). Music competitions favoured the instruments and repertoire that had been adopted in the drawing rooms of Dublin, especially the uilleann pipes played by 'gentleman pipers'.[20] Irish music in this context was art music to be judged according to virtuosity, stage performance and presentation, rather than qualities valued in its continuing rural practice, such as timbre, melodic and rhythmic variation, and the 'telling' of a song.

---

[19] The difference between these styles is evident in these recordings of the same song, 'Cáit Ní Dhuibhir' (Kate O'Dwyer) performed in sean-nós style ('old-style') by Nioclás Tóibín (1964) and in bel canto style by Julie Mulvihill (1963).

[20] These gentlemen rate as a separate category in O'Neill's *Irish Minstrels and Musicians* (1987), where he gives biographical summaries of thirteen, indicating an engagement with Irish music among the upper and middle classes dating back to the late-eighteenth century. See also Vallely 1999: 151. The popularity among 'gentlemen' may account for the development of the pipes in the nineteenth century to a complex (and expensive) instrument capable of producing harmonic accompaniment (an innovation indicating its proponents' adoption of an art-music aesthetic).

One of the League's lasting interventions was in promoting a form of popular social dancing that was viewed as uniquely Irish. The League's dancing commission denounced as 'foreign' the most popular social dances of the day — quadrille sets — in favour of 'ancient' figure-dances newly choreographed for the urban ballroom (Vallely 1999).[21] These later became known as ceili dances through their performance at Gaelic League social nights or 'ceilis' (a term borrowed from Scottish revivalists). Meanwhile, in many rural areas, people continued to dance 'the sets'.[22] In a parallel move, the Gaelic Athletics Association (GAA) reinvented participatory rural sports as spectator sports suited to an emerging consumer society and promoted the restoration of Irish language and music, within an ideology of political, but non-violent, nationalism (Connolly 1997).[23]

Why did Ireland, unlike other new European nations, fail to fashion a national art music from its 'folk music'? Musicologist Harry White argues that cultural nationalists defined 'Irishness' as Gaelic and Catholic. The identification of art music with the Protestant Ascendancy, he claims, led to its rejection as a possible vehicle for cultural nationalist sentiment. 'Irish music', as a result, is synonymous with Ireland's 'ethnic' music (White 1998a; 1998b; 2001). This argument, however, overlooks the fact that the Protestant Ascendancy had been intimately involved with cultural nationalist movements in Ireland, especially the literary revival of the 1890s, but had sought cultural models in pre-Reformation Ireland, thus avoiding any association between Irishness and Catholicism. In addition, following the Act of Union that had dissolved the Irish parliament and brought about the subsequent decline of Dublin as a centre of European bourgeois culture, Ireland had fewer resources (audiences, music education, skilled musicians) to support Irish composers of art music.

While collectors from Bunting onwards refer to the emotional power of Irish music to express essential characteristics of Irish people across the ages, there are problems with such reductionism. First, there is disagreement about what exactly the music

---

[21] As discussed in the next chapter, this was one of the few instances of the 'invention of tradition' as defined by Hobsbawm and Ranger in their *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) although, in a more general sense, tradition is always invented, as it only becomes known *as* tradition after it has been viewed at a distance in time or space, its value becoming symbolic rather than solely functional.

[22] Ironically, set-dancing has experienced a vigorous revival in Ireland since the early 1980s and is now widely regarded as more 'authentic' than ceili dancing.

[23] Both the Gaelic League and the GAA (founded in 1884) survive in Ireland today. The GAA organizes local, regional and national competitions in Irish football and hurling, and exerts a conservative, republican political influence.

expresses, as in the perception that Irish music is simultaneously joyful and melancholy. Secondly, the notion that the urban middle class could become more Irish by performing Irish music suggests that Irishness, rather than being an essential quality shared by all those who had been 'absorbed' into Irish culture, was something that could be acquired, with the further implication that people could possess Irishness to differing degrees.

Section 2.3 ended with the redefinition of dance music in Ireland and its admission to an 'ethnic repertory' (White 1998a). This process was facilitated by an Irish musician who had emigrated to America, Francis O'Neill (1848–1936), whose work is discussed below.

2.5   Dance music joins the Irish music canon

The collections of Francis O'Neill exemplify the changed conditions in performing and in collecting Irish music at the end of the nineteenth century.[24] Collections of transcriptions prior to O'Neill were consumed mainly within so-called polite society and many were not circulated outside antiquarian circles. Like his many predecessors, O'Neill considered Irish music to be in decline and in need of preservation. His work was 'undertaken for the promotion of a patriotic purpose' (O'Neill 1965: 5) and because '[t]he music of Ireland is all that her oppressors have left her' (O'Neill 1973: 8). O'Neill also believed that Ireland's 'ancient' music expressed the unchanged, essential characteristics of a 'people':

> the ancient melodies of a country afford us one of the most unerring
> criterions by which we can judge of the natural temperament and
> characteristic feelings of its people. (O'Neill 1973: 8)

O'Neill was confident that his work would find a readership, because:

---

[24] Francis O'Neill (1848–1936) played flute, fiddle and pipes and left his home near Bantry, Co. Cork, at the age of sixteen, eventually settling in Chicago, where he joined the police force and by 1901 had become Chief of Police. O'Neill's initial project was to record in print the thousands of tunes in his own repertoire, transcribed by his friend James O'Neill. The project grew and in 1903 O'Neill published his first collection of airs and songs, Carolan compositions, jigs, reels, hornpipes, long dances, marches and other tunes. His second collection focused on the dance-music repertoire and reflects the repertoires of a large number of Irish musicians who had emigrated to America, where they were welcomed into the Chicago police department. O'Neill also collected from musicians from around Feakle, East Clare, on a visit to Ireland in 1906 (Vallely 1999; Ó hAllmurháin 1998).

> [a] reawakened interest in our national music, especially the jigs, reels, hornpipes, long dances, etc. of the old days has been happily aroused by the Gaelic revival and its apostle, Dr Douglas Hyde, and the desire, I may say the demand, for them has become insistent and continuous. (O'Neill 1965: 1)

O'Neill's work differed from that of many other collectors in that he was aware of scholarship showing the Scottish or English provenance of many tunes (and countered this by observing that the traffic in tunes ran in both directions). He also noted that many Irish tunes derived from songs, including a number collected by Bunting (notably those in jig time, the livelier songs that Moore had rejected or slowed down). O'Neill's work assisted greatly in integrating the relatively recent dance music into the 'ancient' repertoire that reflected an essential Irishness. O'Neill also differed from earlier collectors in his aim to provide a source book for practising amateur musicians like himself, who played dance music for pleasure.[25] Whereas his first collection (O'Neill 1903) had included song melodies, his second and more influential collection, *The Dance Music of Ireland: 1001 Gems* (1965) [1907] (which became known among musicians as 'the book' or 'the bible') was restricted to dance tunes, 'a class of melodies which has hitherto received but slight attention from collectors of Irish music' (O'Neill 1965: 3). Although there were shortcomings in O'Neill's collections,[26] 'the book' soon became the authoritative text for players of Irish traditional music and remained so until new collections became available in the 1970s.

Despite O'Neill's participation in an oral tradition, his works, like those of other collectors, constructed fixed texts (ironically, he could not write or read musical notation, and engaged a fellow-musician to transcribe the tunes he recalled, along with those of fellow-Irish emigrant musicians). The musicians for whom earlier collections were intended were largely from the urban middle classes, who read the tunes from the page, playing them note for note. For them, the transcriptions were prescriptive. O'Neill's notations, however, were intended for the musician already familiar with Irish dance music, and so were descriptive; that is, either a mnemonic to recall tunes already in the player's repertoire, or an introduction to the 'bare

---

[25] O'Neill dedicates his first collection 'To the multitude of nonprofessional musicians of the Gaelic and English speaking races all over the world, who enjoy and cherish the Melodies of Ireland' (O'Neill 1903: frontispiece).

[26] Vallely (1999) lists the under-representation of tunes from the north-west, invented titles, duplication of tunes, errors in keys and rhythm markings, invention of some tune parts and transcribing only a single setting with no account of variation and style.

bones' of a new tune to which the player added individual interpretations such as embellishment and variation.[27]

At the end of the eighteenth century, Bunting had sought the remnants of the art music that harpers had performed for the Gaelic nobility, in the interests of establishing cultural symbols suitable for an anticipated Anglo–Irish ruling class. A century later, O'Neill's collections show a much broader range of musical forms, reflecting both the dispersal of music-making to other social strata and the incorporation of dance-music types and tunes from Scotland and England. Unlike earlier collectors, O'Neill did not transpose his tunes into unlikely keys or change modal structures into tonal ones, although he did publish several collections arranged (by another musician) for piano and violin.

O'Neill's most significant departure from the practice of earlier collectors of Irish music was his acknowledgement of the process of change that is part of an oral tradition, and the omnivorous appetite musicians have for a good tune, notwithstanding its origin outside Ireland. A patriotic expatriate who had emigrated to America in the 1860s, O'Neill's observations about Irish music were not those of the mainstream of collectors and revivalists in Ireland at turn of the nineteenth century, whose views took place within an increasingly politicized and racialized discourse of nationalism.

2.6   Cultural nationalism and the modernist project

Irish nationalist movements, both cultural and political, followed the 'closed' model (essentially, the German tradition) that defines the nation in racial terms. An 'open' nationalism, on the other hand, defines the citizen as 'someone who willingly shares the values on which the nation was founded' (Goldring 1993: 126).[28] Earlier conceptions of Irishness had been more inclusive than exclusive of ethnicity: Vikings, Scots, Anglo-Normans, English had all become 'Irish'. This model of absorption or assimilation (dissolution) is analogous to that used by the editor of the nationalist journal *The Leader* D. P. Moran and later by composer Seán Ó Riada, who wrote that Irish culture is a 'river' in which 'foreign bodies' are absorbed (Ó Riada 1982:

---

[27] Niall Keegan expands on the ways in which traditional musicians use such texts in an essay on 'Literacy as a transmission tool in Irish traditional music' (1996).

[28] Citizenship was defined in this way in the early days of the French Republic, and in the Soviet Union (Goldring 1993: 126–7).

19–20). Successive generations of cultural nationalists had constructed an image of a unified Ireland by means of 'an imaginative transcendence of the facts of ethnic origin and past political allegiance' (Connolly 1997: 45). In the early 1900s, as the growth of the political nationalist movement coincided with the waning influence of the literary revival and the politicization of the Gaelic League, nationalists looked for support among the Catholic majority of the population. The result was critical: '[t]he mutation from the Celtic to the Gaelic Revival is quick, subtle, and in the end, sectarian' (Deane 1985: 25). The move to a Gaelic and Catholic definition of Ireland is reflected in the work of D. P. Moran, who coined the phrase 'the battle of two civilizations' for the growing division between the Catholic majority and the Protestant Ascendancy, whose representation of Irish interests in the British parliament had failed to produce Home Rule (that is, the re-establishment of the Irish parliament). Moran was highly critical, too, of both the literary and the linguistic cultural nationalists, rightly identifying in their Celticism a fraudulent idealization that legitimated the Ascendancy's monopoly over political power. Moran's 'Irish Ireland' ideology and his 'two civilizations' formulation captured the change in public feeling and became a bridgehead in the nationalist movement. From that point, nationalists defined Irishness as Gaelic and Catholic, locking out the Protestant Irish, in particular the Anglo–Irish but also Ulster Presbyterians, from an authentic Irish identity (Hutchinson 1987; Brown, T. 1981).

Cultural nationalism is a political movement that combines traditionalism and modernism. In the case of Ireland, the aim was to retain distinctively and uniquely Irish cultural values and practices and to join the modern world on an equal footing with other nations (Hutchinson 1987; Kiberd 1995). Successive governments in the newly independent Irish state gave modernization a low priority, however. After partition and civil war, the leaders of the new state were faced with the demoralizing exigencies of an economy in crisis, as colonial rule had left southern Ireland underdeveloped and virtually non-industrialized (Ireland's main industries of ship-building and linen-making were confined to Northern Ireland, which remained a part of Britain) (Lloyd 1992). Irish economic policies of agriculture-based self-sufficiency, an 'economic war' with Britain in the 1930s and economic isolation following Ireland's declaration of neutrality in World War 2, only exacerbated the situation. Éamon de Valera, Taoiseach (Prime Minister) from 1932 to 1948, articulated the nationalist dream of Ireland as:

> a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose
> fields and villages would be joyous with the sound of industry, with the
> romping of sturdy children […] and the laughter of comely maidens, whose

firesides would be the forums of wisdom and serene old age. (De Valera cited in Coohill 2000: 145)

The protectionist policies designed to translate this vision of Irish culture and values into the modern world were, as Irish historian Joseph Lee argues, a terrible failure, with repercussions for every aspect of Irish life: a stagnant economy and continued mass emigration that left rural areas depleted of population and demoralized by a punitive and puritanical church (Lee 1989). An economy based on small farming provided no impetus to change the form of social organization termed 'familism' (Arensberg 1959): the passing on of family holdings (or businesses) to a single heir, which came at the social cost of late marriage for the male heir and the dispersal of other family members who could not inherit.[29] Given the few opportunities open in the trades and professions, this most often meant emigration, a point to be developed in the next chapter in relation to musical production among emigrant communities.

Republican armies and successive nationalist governments in Ireland have excluded minorities from their concept of the nation by defining Irishness on ethnic and religious lines (Mac Laughlin 1996; McVeigh 1992). Like the rest of the Irish population, musicians have accepted this doctrine, or been its victims. Traveller musicians, for example, have contributed much to the performance standards and repertoire of Irish traditional music through their virtuosity and their mobility, as well as their mentoring of settled musicians, but information about Traveller musicians tends to downplay their ethnicity.[30] Catholic Church doctrine was enshrined in civil legislation despite the fact that ten per cent of the population (only four per cent by 1991) were Protestants (Pringle 1989: 42). Today, Protestant musicians playing Irish traditional music claim that they are likely to be met with such comments as 'they are playing our music', unless the music is from the Northern Protestant repertoire (which shares dance types and tunes with the 'Catholic' tradition), in which case their playing is dismissed as 'Orange music' (Hastings 1997).

---

[29] As Hugh Brody points out in his anthropological study of rural communities in the West of Ireland, the tradition of 'familism' that Arensberg and Kimball represent as unbroken since pre-Christian times in fact dated back only as far as the 1840s — an example of the influence of cultural nationalist discourse in imagining the nation's rural culture as unchanged since ancient times (Brody 1986: 5–6).

[30] Just one example is that of Traveller, Johnny Doran, who is generally described ambiguously as 'a travelling piper', for example in Vallely 1999 and in Ciarán MacMathúna's notes to *The Pipering of Willie Clancy Volume 1* (1980). Dublin: Claddagh Records Ltd CC32CD.

The Irish state also co-opted cultural activities, including music, in the interests of a unified national culture. As Gellner observes, however, when urban intellectuals seek to 'revive' linguistic and cultural forms, the effect is almost the opposite, 'For what they seek is a revived folk community, but what results is rather a modern science-based culture with native idioms' (Gellner 1983: 57).

This more accurately describes the form of co-option that took place in the new Irish state than Hobsbawm and Ranger's more frequently cited 'invention of tradition', for more than two centuries of revivals had already established certain cultural forms as uniquely and indisputably Irish (Hobsbawm 1983). In a move begun by nationalist organizations such as the GAA and the Gaelic League, and later the national schools, hitherto-informal pastimes such as sports, dancing and singing were standardized and commodified. The venues for sports and dances changed from communal and private to public and supervised. The national education system inculcated both Catholic doctrine and a nationalist version of Irish history, which also informed music teaching in schools. As Marie McCarthy points out in her historical account of the transmission of Irish music, the Irish state fostered a narrow musical repertoire in schools:

> School music … advanced the canons of Gaelic culture through the transmission of Irish language songs, ballads, and in some settings, the founding of tin whistle bands. Catholic Church music was also transmitted […] Public mass media such as Radio Éireann and national newspapers broadcast and reported on music and musical events that disseminated and affirmed the essentialist view of Irishness as Catholic, Irish speaking and nationalist. (McCarthy 1999: 184)

Because of the continued emphasis on the Irish language, and, ironically, its association with the backwardness of rural life and with the informal house-dancing that the Church had tried to abolish,[31] dance music largely slipped by the net of nationalist co-option through the education system. It did not support nationalist ideology in an unambiguous way:

> Without the unequivocal support granted to Irish language songs, instrumental traditional music, although clearly belonging to the dominant Gaelic culture, was nevertheless viewed with ambiguity in terms of its socio-economic status and respectability as an art form. (McCarthy 1999: 184)

---

[31] Church pressure for criminalization of informal dances achieved legislation in the 1935 Public Dance Halls Act, under which dances required a licence. In most rural areas this resulted in the demise of house dances, set-dancing, and the status of local amateur musicians as dances moved to supervised public spaces where music was provided by professional bands (Vallely 1999: 103).

Throughout the period of cultural revival in Ireland, from its first appearance in the eighteenth century through to the early years of the independent Irish state, instrumental music was of less interest than songs, except in its emblematic form as a remnant of Gaelic culture. As Irish historian Terence Brown argues:

> Language in such an understanding of national identity is what bears the gifts of the past into the present and supplies a living link with a racial spirituality. Indeed, the spirit of a people is vital in their language and in the legends, literature, songs and stories which that language makes available. (Brown cited in Deane 1991: 516)

Between the 1920s and the 1940s, the fortunes of Irish dance music were poor, with the disintegration of rural life, mass emigration, and the punitive attitudes of the Catholic Church. While dance musicians continued to pass on their music outside institutional contexts, the demand for ceili bands to replace individual musicians as dancing moved to public halls changed the nature of the relationship between musician and dancers. The ceili band (a group of about six to ten musicians playing in unison) also demanded a more standardized style of playing, in which individual interpretations and embellishments were suppressed in the interest of clarity. On the other hand, ceili bands provided musicians with professional status, wider public appreciation and musical fellowship.

Zygmunt Bauman maintains that such moves were an essential part of the nationalist project, in which intellectuals, as 'legislators', facilitated social progress and taste formation and helped to transform the 'wild' culture of pre-modern times into the 'garden' culture of modernity. Under such a regime, '[t]raditional, self-managing and self-reproducing culture was laid in ruins' (Bauman 1987: 67). In Ireland, however, state co-option of dance music was incomplete due to the ambiguous relationship it had with the Irish language and Catholic morality.

2.7   The gelded harp: Irish music and colonial inversion

From the movement's genesis in the eighteenth century to its mobilization by political nationalists at the beginning of the twentieth century, Irish cultural nationalists drew on a gendered colonial discourse in which the ancient Gaelic culture they sought to retrieve was feminine and thus (according to contemporary understandings) 'by nature' weak and necessitating the leadership of an Anglo–Irish ruling class. In music, this was manifest in a melancholy aesthetic attributed in part

to the expression of grief and loss by a defeated people (as argued by Bunting) and in part to their weakness in the face of invasion (as implicit in the works of Thomas Moore). This aesthetic has continued to inform understandings of Irish music and of Irish ethnicity and, indeed, has recently resurfaced in the high, ethereal voices and mournful cadences of 'Celtic' music in the so-called 'world' music of the 1990s[32] and in the 'feminine' scenes of the movie *Titanic*, in which the heroine experiences despair, romantic love, grief or longing. It has a long history.

The English colonizers of the sixteenth century, realizing that the Irish were not going to adopt English customs and fearing cultural corruption of their own number, banned local practices including playing the harp, speaking in Irish, and wearing the woollen mantle. Jones and Stallybrass, in an essay on 'The sexualising of Ireland in early modern England' (1992), argue that to the English, the mantle was 'women's clothing', 'a veil that requires penetration' and a sign of the effeminacy of the Irish. On the other hand, when Henry VIII banned the harp, it was because of its associations with anti-colonial resistance. In this way, music historically has been an emblem of both the passive qualities associated with a vanquished Irishry and with their potential to subvert or even overthrow their vanquishers.

The collectors of the eighteenth century and those who followed them appear to have settled on a definition of Irish music as simultaneously melancholy and uplifting, an indication of colonial ambivalence toward the Irish. Joseph Cooper Walker writes in 1786 of the harpers' court music:

> The Irish music is, in some degree, distinguished from the music of every other nation, by an insinuating sweetness, which forces its way irresistibly to the heart, and there diffuses an extatic [sic] delight, that thrills through every fibre of the frame, awakens sensibility, and agitates or tranquillises the soul. Whatever passion it may be intended to excite, it never fails to effect its purpose. It is the voice of nature, and will be heard. (Walker 1796 cited in White 1998a: 20)

In 1840, Bunting praised the 'sweet cheerful music' of the vanquished Gaelic nobility but at the same time writes of its 'deep sorrows' and 'tender expressions' (Bunting 1969: 8–9). As mentioned above, one of Bunting's objections to Moore's interpretations of his transcriptions was that the 'spirited, animated and highly lively style' he had heard in the harpers' performances had been transformed into

---

[32] This aesthetic is illustrated by the recordings of Donegal singer, Enya, and in the *Lament* collection on Peter Gabriel's Real World label (1992). Holland: Real World Records Ltd; Virgin Records Ltd, CDRW 27.

the 'drawling dead, doleful and die-away manner' of the drawing room (White 1998a: 43). On the other hand, harpist and scholar Máire Ní Chathasaigh suggests that the modal scales 'help to give Irish music its characteristically plaintive undercurrent, even in such a rapid musical form as the reel' (1999: 243), a more scientific explanation for the response of ears attuned to the diatonic sound of European art music.

As I have argued throughout this chapter, making texts, or re-interpreting them, transforms the embodied social experience of playing or listening to music, and both Bunting's transcriptions and Moore's adaptations are exemplars of this process of translation. Cultural translation is 'the staging of difference' (Bhabha 1994b: 227) and despite their adaptations to more 'civilized' musical conventions, the 'voice of nature' that excites extremes of emotion was still discernible, especially to those of Bunting's contemporaries, according to whose European art-music aesthetic his settings still sounded 'crude' and 'barbaric' (White 1998a: 39).

Nineteenth-century women of the Anglo–Irish gentry played harp music from the revivalists' texts, using a lighter instrument and different techniques, while playing the uilleann pipes became a popular pastime among men of that social class (Carson 1986: 14). Both the harp and the pipes are still regarded as quintessentially Irish and are the instruments most heard in world music's 'Celtic' category. Neither instrument fits well with today's group performance of dance music in bands and sessions, and the harp, and to a lesser extent, the uilleann pipes, retain an association with the middle and upper classes.[33]

During the nineteenth century, Irish literary works employed Irish music as an emblem of both the feminine Celt and the masculine patriot, often almost simultaneously. In 1855, George Petrie wrote of the tunes he had heard in County Clare, that 'even when blended with cadence of tenderness and sorrow, breathe a manly buoyance of spirit' (Petrie cited in Mitchell 1976: 10). Irish poet Arthur O'Shaughnessy (1844–81) expresses this ambivalence in his 'Ode':

> We are the music-makers,
> And we are the dreamers of dreams,
> Wandering by the lone sea-breakers,
> And sitting by desolate streams; —
> World-losers and world-forsakers,

---

[33] This is not to deny the highly developed practice of the pipes among other social groups, as epitomized by the playing of Traveller Johnny Doran and West Clare's Willie Clancy.

On whom the pale moon gleams:
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world for ever, it seems. (Kennelly 1981: 265)

In a similar vein, Yeats wrote in 1899:

He heard while he sang and dreamed
A piper piping away,
And never was piping so sad,
And never was piping so gay. (Yeats 1967: 63–4)

By the mid-nineteenth century, Herder's view that each culture's language was incommensurable with all others had developed in the works of Fichte, Hegel and other German philosophers into a hierarchy of languages with the Teutonic languages taking all the top positions. The French philologist Ernest Renan, writing in 1860, proposed the notion of 'the Teuton as the energetic, brutal warrior' complemented by the emotional and melancholic Celt, 'an essentially feminine race' (Renan cited in Cairns and Richards 1988: 45–6). Renan's proposition formed the basis for Matthew Arnold's influential essay, 'On the study of Celtic literature', in which he proposes that, by accommodating the appealing aspects of the Celt's culture, the English could retain their political hegemony (Arnold 1973). Drawing on the early work of postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Ashis Nandy, David Cairns and Shaun Richards in *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* argue that such representations typify the ways in which colonial discourse 'establishes the colonized as the repressed and rejected "other" against which the colonizer defines an ordered self' (1988: 8).

As a political nationalist movement grew in Ireland, nationalist writers avoided a language that implied the Irish were feminine and subservient and instead emphasized masculine traits and figures such as the warrior–patriot (Cairns and Richards 1988: 49). Although representations of Ireland remained feminine, the ideal nationalist was masculine and thus capable of reassuming the role of national protector previously played by the Anglo–Irish Ascendancy. This is an example of the revaluing of colonial stereotypes — or colonial inversion — in the process of forming the nation–state (Lloyd 1993).

Political nationalist writers enlisted the more uplifting, masculine aspects of Irish music. In the 1840s, Thomas Davis, editor of the nationalist journal *The Nation* and author of a multitude of patriotic ballads he set to Irish tunes, wrote:

> Music is the first faculty of the Irish, and scarcely anything has such power for good over them. The use of this faculty and this power publicly and constantly, to keep up their spirits, refine their tastes, warm their courage, increase their union, and renew their zeal, is the duty of every patriot. (Davis cited in O'Neill 1965: 3)

Nationalism, itself a masculinist discourse, relies on the 'deep, horizontal comradeship' of the nationalist fraternity (Anderson 1991: 7). As the political nationalist movement became more powerful, women's participation was contained in separate 'women's auxiliaries' (Beaumont 1999). In De Valera's vision of Ireland, women nurtured the next generation of patriots, while the GAA promoted exclusively masculine sports. Irish traditional music became an ambiguously masculine field. While marches and patriotic songs-turned-waltz tunes were added to ceili band repertoires, those musicians who performed for private gatherings were left alone to play music for listening. It is notable that the revival of Irish traditional music subsequent to partition in 1922 supported a more masculine and more commodified music in ceili bands, recordings and, later, the chromatic accordion, the fleadhs and the session (all discussed in the next chapter).

Significantly, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Celticism's version of the Irish as sentimental and melancholy survives in art-music performances of music emblematic of Ireland (including Moore's songs). On the other hand, in an Irish theme pub in any part of the globe, the Irish songs performed are much more likely to include patriotic ballads such as Thomas Davis's 'A Nation Once Again' (Musical example 6[34]). The righteous patriotism and swaggering masculinity of Irish ballad bands and their repertoire of drinking songs and march-tempo 'rebel' ballads invert the colonial values of Irish masculinity as violent, drunken, irresponsible and seditious that had festered through the centuries from the Elizabethan court to the bestial caricatures of English political cartoons and the vaudeville stage in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century.

Irish cultural nationalists believed that music was a text that allowed the transfer of expression from one group to another (across time, class and place), yet the texts

---

[34] Here, the ballad with its chorus 'And Ireland, long a province, be A Nation once again!' is sung by the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem (1966). The four Irish expatriates made their first recording in New York in 1959, adapting Irish songs for an American 'folk' audience, introducing Irish–Americans to a repertoire that diverged from the more familiar sentimental Irish–American songs and creating new audiences for traditional music in Ireland. Their rollicking stage performance and unison singing created a new format for presenting Irish traditional music in a commercial setting, emulated by generations of performers since the early 1960s.

they ended up with demonstrate its transgressive, social qualities. Because music is not autonomous, and cannot be contained within a text, it is open to co-option by hegemonic or counter-hegemonic discourses. As this chapter has argued, cultural and political nationalist movements in Ireland enlisted musical practices to support the notion of cultural unity. Whether this cultural unity was imagined through a process of translating Gaelic cultural practices into Anglo–Irish contexts, or by proclaiming an authentic Irish identity that was capable of absorbing and Gaelicizing foreign influences, these imaginative constructions were possible only by regarding Irish culture (including music) as homogeneous and capable of representing, as well as expressing, an essential Irishness through fixed texts. As the following chapter will argue, musical practice is not homogeneous but changes in relation to time, place, and social conditions. As a transgressive social practice, music cannot wholly be co-opted by the state, for processes of co-option take place unevenly and ambiguously. The following chapter demonstrates the complexity of these processes in examining the ways in which the popular performance of dance music in Ireland became simultaneously 'traditional' and a modern cultural commodity.

CHAPTER THREE

OFF THE RECORD:
HOW IRISH DANCE MUSIC BECAME TRADITIONAL

In the critical period of political nationalist mobilization leading up to the Easter Rising of 1916, the Celticism of the Anglo–Irish literary revival had been transformed into a version of Irishness that drew together Gaelic heritage, the Catholic religion and an anti-colonial politics where notions of territoriality (Ireland for the Irish) and ethnicity (an Irish Ireland) merged with the project of an independent state. This redefinition of Irishness along ethnic and sectarian lines, which effectively excluded the Anglo–Irish who had dominated the colonial administration, formed the basis of the new state's project of transforming an anti-colonial nationalist movement into a modern nation–state. A crucial project in any new nation is the consolidation of a national identity, in the case of Ireland complicated by the incomplete conversion of a colonial to a national territory. As in other new nations, Irish nationalists drew on myths of cultural unity that had been developed in earlier cultural nationalist movements and which, as argued in the previous chapter, inverted such colonial stereotypes as the 'feminine' weakness of the Irish represented in Irish music, and invented traditions such as the ceili dance. Both these are examples of hybrid popular practices that had been homogenized and cultivated to suit the tastes of an urban intelligentsia. It would be inaccurate to suggest, however, that the efforts of the Irish state to incorporate musical practices in the service of creating a national cultural identity were wholly successful, or that Irish traditional music, as it is known today, was merely an 'invented tradition'. As argued in the previous chapters, music, as a transgressive social practice, is capable of moving into other domains structured by discourses that include nationalism; but it is equally capable of moving out again. This is particularly true of Irish dance music, which was not linked to specific literary texts. Despite its emblematic status as both representing and expressing a national — and now also ethnic and religious — Irishness, dance music did not (and still does not) support the nationalist project in an unambiguous way.

In focusing on a number of musicians and their circles, this chapter demonstrates how, during the twentieth century, Irish dance music became 'traditional', while at the same time continuing as a popular cultural practice. By selecting one tune from

the thousands in the repertoire — the reel 'The Morning Dew' — and listening to its performance at crucial moments, it will be shown that Irish musicians have not always experienced Ireland and Irishness according to the orthodoxies of the nation–state. In exploring the complex and often contradictory ways in which musicians have created individual and collective identifications with Irishness through their playing, this chapter also contributes to an exploration of the ways in which the relationship between music and identity can be theorized. For music, as an aesthetic practice, 'articulates *in itself* an understanding of both group relations and individuality' (Frith 1996b: 111).

In *Ireland After History*, David Lloyd makes the case for 'new' Irish histories, unconstrained by the progressive trajectory of both nationalist and revisionist historiographies, and which:

> trouble the distinction usually made, and constantly invoked in Irish debates, between the matrix of modernity, state institutions, rationality and historiography itself, on the one hand, and that of traditionalism, tribalism or localism, irrationality and mythology on the other. (Lloyd 1999: 81–2)[1]

Lloyd contrasts 'folk culture' with popular culture in proposing that:

> the fetishization of 'folk-culture' as a fixed and primordial expression of a transcendental people is in fact most often an *idée fixe* of official state culture, deployed in the monumental rituals and ceremonies which perform the identity of citizen and state.

On the other hand, he maintains that '[p]opular culture continues its hybrid and partially self-transforming, partially subordinated existence in the shadow of the state' (Lloyd 1999: 33).

In this chapter, I take up Lloyd's challenge in relation to Irish traditional music and attempt to trouble the distinction between modernity — in its manifestations of state bureaucracies, the music industry and emigration — and traditionalism, which is widely assumed to represent the world-view and cultural practices of musicians in rural Ireland during this period. I draw out the implications of the paradoxical situation in which Irish traditional music is *both* a designated form of 'folk-culture' (with the symbolic power to represent and express an Irish 'people') *and* a

---

[1] Instances of such debates in relation to Irish traditional music include the 1996 Crossroads Conference, at which participants debated the relative merits of 'tradition' and 'innovation'; and the debate that surfaced in various decades of the twentieth century over the possibilities for producing a distinctively Irish art music (see Vallely et al 1999 and White 1998a).

continuing popular cultural practice (with the openness and porousness that produce hybrid forms).[2]

3.1   'Farewell to Ireland':[3] Michael Coleman and modernity

The confluence of Irish dance music's status as a 'folk' music, as a continuing and mutating popular practice and as a modern cultural commodity is played out in the career of Michael Coleman (1891–1945), who became the most influential and most emulated of Irish dance musicians of the twentieth century. Yet Coleman went unrecognized in the Gaelic League's competitions (perhaps due to the bourgeois tastes of the judges, as discussed in the previous chapter) and was similarly excluded for reasons of class from the musical world of League members. The synchronicity of Coleman's emigration to New York just before the emerging American recording industry began to develop an Irish–American market ensured his place as the first, and perhaps the brightest, recording star of Irish traditional music.

Coleman developed his highly virtuosic and inventive fiddle style among the many skilled flute and fiddle players in an area around Killavil in south Co. Sligo. Despite the extraordinary flowering of traditional dance music in the area and much demand for musicians, the only prospect for a musical career there, as Coleman's biographer Harry Bradshaw points out, was as 'a travelling fiddle player, tramping the countryside to play a night's music at a house dance for a bed, a meal, and a few pennies' (Bradshaw 1998: 36). In his youth, Coleman had no access to the middle-class society of the Gaelic League's soirées and recitals, in Sligo town (Bradshaw: 1998: 38) where so-called 'ancient' Irish dances were performed in a form adapted for the ballroom. The dances preferred by country people of Coleman's class were adaptations of those that, ironically, had previously circulated in fashionable society — the polka, the waltz, and earlier, the schottische and mazurka (Bradshaw 1998: 40). Most popular were the 'set-dances' derived from the quadrille, banished from the Gaelic League, and later (1939) banned by the

---

[2] In attempting this, I gratefully acknowledge the inspiration of historians Donna Merwick, Greg Dening and Dipesh Chakrabarty, and their exhortations to write about lived experience, the vernacular, and the porousness between what happened and the story of it, at the 'Challenges to Perform Cross-Culturally' workshop, Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, Australian National University, 2002.

[3] 'Farewell to Ireland' is a popular Irish reel recorded by Michael Coleman in 1921. Sections 3.2, 3.4, 3.6 and 3.8 similarly take the titles of Irish dance tunes.

Irish Dance Commission, as 'foreign' (Vallely 1999: 101). The musicians who performed at Gaelic League functions were not necessarily from a country-house dance background, either. In the notes to his historical collection of *Irish Dance Music*, Reg Hall identifies the 'orchestral' style of one such ensemble, Frank Lee's Tara Ceilidh Band, which played for Gaelic League *ceilidhe* in London from the 1910s (Musical example 7[4]). Hall defines their style as a 'straight, undecorated manner, applying the technique of literate musicians[5] … [w]ithout the tonal textures, the ornamentation, the rhythm and the timing of rural musicians' (1995: np).[6]

Michael Coleman was among the four million people who left Ireland between 1856 and 1921 (O'Connor 2001: 36). Like most, he never returned. Arriving in New York City in 1914, Coleman worked as a musician, but his preference for solo work over regular dance-band employment ensured he remained poor. Coleman began his recording career in 1921, when individual entrepreneurs and recording companies, capitalizing on immigrant nostalgia, developed the market for 'ethnic' genres. Irish music was an important segment in this market. In 1927, when 'The Morning Dew' was released, Michael Coleman was at the peak of his recording career. That year, he made fifty 'sides' of 78 rpm recordings in addition to solo performances in dance-halls, concerts and at parties, and live broadcasts on some of the twenty-six radio stations with programs for Irish emigrants (Bradshaw 1998: 64; 68) (Musical example 8[7]).

Between c1920 and c1940, American recording companies marketed several Irish musical genres. The most successful were art songs, typified by Irish tenor John McCormack's recordings of Thomas Moore's songs, once popular among the Anglo–Irish and now adopted as a marker of taste among upwardly mobile Irish–Americans (Musical example 9[8]). The second category comprised variety acts using the stock character of the 'Stage Irishman', a bestial figure who by the early-

---

[4] Frank Lee's Tara Ceilidh Band performs 'Kitty' Rambles', 'The Merry Old Woman' and 'The Humours of Ballinafad' (1932).

[5] This is not to say that musicians from the country-house dance tradition were necessarily musically illiterate. Traditional musicians, however, use transcriptions as a shorthand version from which they extrapolate using their own musical idiom. Art musicians, on the other hand, tend to regard notated texts as prescriptive, playing them 'as read'.

[6] The combination of instruments — violins, piccolo, piano and drums — also indicates urban preferences: the violin players, from 'London Irish' families, were 'taught the violin at school … specifically to play for *ceilidh* dancing' (Hall, R. 1995).

[7] Michael Coleman, 'The Morning Dew' and 'The Woman of the House' (1927).

[8] Thomas Moore's 'Believe Me, If All Those Endearing Young Charms' recorded in 1935 by John McCormack.

twentieth century had become a harmless buffoon more acceptable to Irish–American audiences (Musical example 10[9]). Third was the dance music played mainly solo or in duets, the most successful exponents including Michael Coleman and other fiddle players such as James Morrison and Paddy Killoran, who came from the same musically vibrant area of Ireland. Other recordings mixed these Irish genres with elements of popular American music, the hybrid repertoire of variety bands that played at Irish–American taverns, dance halls and parties between the 1920s and 1950s (Moloney 1982: 85–93).

All four genres were marketed as 'Irish' and, as a result, international audiences (including in Ireland, where the records were hugely popular) came to understand 'Irishness' in association with all these categories.[10] In Ireland, however, recordings from America had more complex meanings, especially among the musicians who emulated the repertoire and style they heard on recordings that were often gifts from America, along with the machines that played them (discussed in Section 3.2).

Not every Irish emigrant had access to recordings of Irish dance music, or to live Irish music. Irish women in particular were alienated from social contexts where music was played informally. Michael Coleman and other musicians who had emigrated to American cities met in bars to play long sessions of music, but as Kitty Leyden (who left a small farm in West Clare for New York in the 1930s) recalls, Irish women at that time did not go into pubs unless they were 'the dregs from the gutter'.[11] 'They weren't allowed to put a drink on the bar for you. You'd have to go into a dark little room' (the parlour or snug). Of her years in America, where she had worked as a maid to wealthy New Yorkers, one of Kitty's strongest memories is of walking home from a dance hall and hearing Irish music — the kind of music played at house dances in her youth — coming from a hole-in-the-wall bar. Kitty stopped outside to listen 'with the tears streaming down', but could not enter the bar (Kitty Leyden, pers. com., 2 February 2001).

---

[9] Frank Quinn, 'Paddy McGinty's Goat' (1926). McGinty was a stock character of Stage Irishry, in this song a quaint and containable character, reflecting the contemporary stereotype of the Irishman. The song was written by R.P. Weston, Bert Lee and The Two Bobs in 1917.

[10] Ethnomusicologist Mick Moloney's anecdote about a cousin who '[l]ike many of her contemporaries … makes no distinction between native Irish and Irish-American songs; they are simply Irish' (Moloney 1982: 93) resonates with the identifications of her contemporaries among Australians of Irish descent and Catholic education, particularly in rural areas.

[11] This situation did not begin to change in Ireland until the 1960s (later in rural areas), when many publicans set up lounge bars where men and women could socialize.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Irish dance music came to be labelled 'traditional' in two quite different contexts, both in America. Whereas earlier collections in Ireland had been published as 'ancient', 'national', 'Irish' or 'native' music, Francis O'Neill, whose work was discussed in Chapter Two, uses the phrase 'Irish traditional music', perhaps for the first time, in the introduction to his 1907 collection (Vallely 1999: 401). In his collections and other writings, O'Neill uses the term 'traditional music' more or less interchangeably with 'folk music'.[12] O'Neill notes the 'traditional' process of transmission by which song airs were adapted as dance tunes and, by an 'evolutionary' process, became more complex: a kind of Darwinian version of cultural nationalism, which accounted for the continual change involved in the transmission of Irish music, without diminishing the notion that Irish music was an 'expression of a nation's soul in tuneful melody' (O'Neill 1987: 100)[13]. The term 'traditional' was also used to distinguish the dance music from other categories within the Irish ethnic recordings in America.[14] The label of Coleman's most popular early recording, 'The Boys at the Lough' (c1922), for example, identifies it as a 'Reel Medley (Traditional)',[15] although Coleman himself identified his music simply as 'Irish'.[16] To the recording industry, the term was a convenient

---

[12] 'Traditional music unlike any form of modern composition is not the work of one man but of many. Indeed it can hardly be said to have been composed at all. It is simply a growth to a certain extent subject to the influence of heredity, environment, natural selection, and the survival of the fittest' (O'Neill 1987: 127). 'Folk Music then is the true national melody handed down traditionally for centuries', 'conceived as a melodious poetic expression of the sentiments and feelings of the people' (O'Neill 1913: 101; 100). This conception is at odds with O'Neill's acknowledgement in his 1907 introduction of the relatively recent entry to the Irish repertoire of tunes from England and Scotland (as discussed in Chapter Two) (O'Neill 1965).

[13] For his exposition of this hypothesis, see O'Neill 1965: 4 and O'Neill 1987: 126–7.

[14] The term 'traditional' was later used in a similar way in Ireland when folk clubs sprang up in the 1960s as forums for '"acoustic", participatory music and song, influenced by post World War II radicalism there and in Britain and the USA, but based in a structure begun in the nineteenth century by such as Cecil Sharpe' (Vallely 1999: 141). 'Traditional' in this context distinguished 'authentic' Irish music from commercial folk songs (another recording-industry category) and political ballads.

[15] The label is reproduced in Irish radio producer and record producer Harry Bradshaw's *Michael Coleman 1891–1945* (1998: 58). The sleeve-notes to Philippe Varlet and Dick Spottswood's 1996 compilation *Milestone at the Garden: Irish Fiddle Masters of the 78 RPM Era* (Rounder CD 1123, Rounder Records Corp., Cambridge, MA) reproduces an undated (probably 1920s) advertisement for 'The Keltic Record Corporation', 'Organised to revive and perpetuate Traditional Irish Singing and Dance Music; also the Martial or Fighting Songs of Ireland'.

[16] In 1937, for example, Coleman advertised his services as a teacher of 'Irish music' in *The Irish World* (Bradshaw 1998: 83). In Ireland, a group of Co. Galway musicians recorded in the 1930s as the Ballinakill Traditional Dance Players.

marketing category for contemporary popular music, as part of the rationalizing process of the production of consumer goods.

The concept of 'traditional music', like that of 'tradition', is a product of modernity and is only identified retrospectively and from the outside. The contemporary musical practices of dance musicians in Ireland and America were labelled traditional not by the musicians but by an intelligentsia (among whom I include O'Neill) distanced in time and place from dance-music practice in Ireland, and by a recording industry that viewed cultural practice as product. In the nation–state, the concept of tradition is used 'to defend identity against the threat of heterogeneity, discontinuity and contradiction' (Sarup 1996: 182) and by assigning cultural practices to the horde of cultural treasures around which a national identity can coalesce.

3.2   'Far from Home': The impact of the American recordings

During the 1920s and 1930s, many Irish families received gifts of gramophones and records from relatives in the USA. As Sligo musician Tommy Flynn recalls, 'Not every house would have one, but anyone that liked music, they were off to hear the gramophone' (Flynn quoted in Bradshaw 1998: 59). These recordings not only broadened the repertoires and influenced the performance styles of eager musicians, but also changed the way they perceived their own musical efforts. Harry Bradshaw believes that Coleman's 'articulation, phrasing, bowing and dynamics became a "standard" style' throughout Ireland (Bradshaw 1999). In addition, Coleman's tunes became a staple of the repertoire, as were the length of sets (usually two or three tunes) and the number of times each tune was played (usually three), a convention that has far outlived the constraints of the 78 rpm disc. In Irish music sessions today, for instance, the reel 'Tarbolton' is usually followed by 'The Longford Collector' and 'The Sailor's Bonnet' to make up Coleman's set. Fiddle player Maire O'Keeffe (b. 1959) recalls that as a teenager, she and her friends 'for the crack' had sometimes played sessions in which every set was one of Coleman's (pers. com., April 2000) and today, most recordings of Irish traditional music will include tunes from Coleman's repertoire.

Coleman's virtuosity inspired many musicians, but discouraged others, according to many accounts of this period. Ethnomusicologist Philippe Varlet, for example, believes that:

> [m]any musicians put aside prevailing local styles to emulate the Sligo masters. In some cases, the challenge was too great and dejected musicians put their instruments away for good; frequently, people preferred the latest records from America to the local players. (Varlet 1993)[17]

Sligo fiddler Tommy Flynn, who first heard a Coleman recording in 1924, corroborates this view: 'to hear him play wasn't good encouragement because he was far ahead of every other one' (Flynn quoted in Bradshaw 1998: 58). In a later generation, fiddler Séamus Connolly (b. 1944) also felt the pressure of Coleman's performance standard: 'My father many times said to me, "Sit down there and play for me, play 'O'Rourke's Reel' till I see that you play it as good as Coleman"' (Connolly quoted in Taaffe 2002).

There were other reasons why musicians might have put away their instruments, however. The decline in popularity of traditional music and dancing can also be attributed to broader social and cultural changes in rural Ireland, including the effects of emigration, particularly of young women (making dances less viable) and the association of traditional music with poverty and 'backwardness' at a time when the prosperity and optimism of American life was a constant comparison. This period also saw the radio increasing in popularity as home entertainment and the growing preference of many young people for urban-style entertainments such as jazz dancing and cinema (Brown, T. 1981: 39; 153).

Harry Bradshaw claims that 'Coleman's influence on Sligo fiddle music was dominating and pervasive, and largely eclipsed the older style common among many country players at home' (1998: 66). This view is corroborated by the ambivalent reception of Coleman's recordings in his home district. Coleman's godson, fiddler Johnny Giblin, recalls that his settings transformed the plainest of tunes 'so that no one could ever go back to the originals' (Giblin quoted in Bradshaw 1998: 66). Another local fiddler, Martin Wynne (1916–98), 'got the notion that unless I heard the tune by Coleman, I didn't know how to play it' (Wynne quoted in Bradshaw 1998: 67).

Where musicians did continue to play, however, they did not necessarily abandon their regional idioms, and this was particularly the case in areas where set-dancing continued. When music for dancing was called for, local musicians were not

---

[17] Gearóid Ó hAllmurháin makes a similar assertion (1998: 104), as does Feldman in *The Northern Fiddler* (1979: 11).

replaced by recordings, which were the wrong tempo and duration.[18] Coleman's fast, highly ornamented and flamboyant style was thought unsuitable for dancers even in his home district:

> The ould step dancers now would have Jim [Coleman's older brother] before Michael because he couldn't give you time, he was too fast. Well, the man that didn't time out his music, he was out. (Pakie Hunt, flute player, quoted in Bradshaw 1998: 31)

This distinction between playing for dancers and playing for listeners had been a feature of Irish traditional music since the late 1880s both in rural contexts (Hall, R. 1996) and among urban and upper-class musicians, notably the 'gentlemen pipers' who formed pipers' clubs in Dublin and Cork. In America, music for seated, if not passive, audiences was far more prevalent in the commercial venues popular among Irish emigrants, including vaudeville shows and concerts. The introduction into Ireland of gramophone records and radio not only increased the distance separating musician and listener, but the musician disappeared altogether, becoming a disembodied (or 'deanimated') phantom of sound (Attali 1985). This meant a change from the face-to-face social experience of music, but paradoxically also allowed an intense one-to-one relationship between the listener and the sounds they heard.[19] Another feature of recordings is that they can be played repeatedly and early gramophone records could be slowed down by holding a finger against the spinning disc. This meant that from the 1920s, and more widely in the 1930s and 1940s, musicians in Ireland were able to listen intently to the slowed-down tune and, with skill, pick up each nuance, bow-change and embellishment, besides the melody and its varied repetitions. This detailed level of learning was quite different from that available through the face-to-face 'real time' relationship between teacher and pupil. Thus recordings introduced musicians in Ireland not only to a broader repertoire than that available locally and to a level of virtuosity that very few would have encountered before, but also to a means of studying techniques and style in greater detail.

The implications of this were several. Musicians could set themselves new standards of performance and with persistence achieve similar stylistic and

---

[18] Reg Hall (1995) reports that some records in strict dance tempo were made at the end of the 78 rpm era.

[19] Although this relationship is still possible, it is no longer the norm. During the course of the twentieth century, radio, gramophones and later television and new forms of sound technology have commanded less attention than when they were a novelty. On its introduction, television commanded silent attention; now it is just as often a background noise to our lives (along with radio, sound systems, muzak, etc.).

technical feats to those they heard on records. At the same time, the presence of recording industries in the USA and England presented musicians with the possibility, however remote, of becoming recording artists. This brought the ambitions of rural farmer–musicians into the same imaginative narrative as those bourgeois artists who had adopted the aesthetic and the values of Romanticism and lived for their art. It also gave to aspiring musicians the possibility of respectability, for until that time, music (other than as a pastime) was a lowly occupation, regarded (like busking now) as akin to begging.

Other aspects of the American music industry also had a lasting influence on Irish traditional music. New instruments were introduced in an environment in which they were associated with the wealth, opportunity and progress that American culture represented. Banjos and melodeons were sent as gifts from relatives in America and, as a consequence, the sound of Irish music changed. It became more 'modern' through its association with American prosperity and the music industry there.

A vamped accompaniment on piano, or sometimes guitar, was another aspect of the American recordings of the 1920s and 1930s to be adopted in Ireland, although mainly by ceili bands and later by recording artists. This is one of the few innovations that favoured women, or those women who had access to a piano (Musical example 11[20]). Although the notion of accompaniment was quite foreign to Irish traditional music, with its single melody line, it was not the first time it had been used (from Bunting onwards, collections of Irish music had featured harmonized piano adaptations and accompaniments to violin or voice). Now, however, it featured on almost all the recordings of Irish dance music coming out of American and English studios. The Coleman recording of 'The Morning Dew' suggests that the partnership of piano and fiddle is a difficult one, and even his

---

[20] Eleanor Kane, 'The Morning Dew' (1935). One remarkable piano player was Eleanor Kane (1915–93). Born in Chicago of Irish parents, Kane developed a unique accompanying style by adding to complex vamping (single bass note on strong beat, chord on off-beat) a melody in the right hand that is highly ornamented in the manner of fiddle or pipes. Her left-hand accompaniment shows a jazz influence in featuring a 'walking bass' and syncopation, while her right-hand treatment of the melody includes the rapid group of ascending notes that pianists of the time used to imitate the 'sliding' notes of the jazz singer and instruments such as trombone, which is not present on the earlier Coleman recording. Note that Kane plays a tone lower than usual, beginning on D rather than E, allowing the tune to be played entirely on the piano's white notes (which also exposes the comparatively colourless or 'flat' sound produced by the piano's 'tempered' tuning).

experienced accompanist, Ed Lee, cannot always keep time with Coleman.[21] Many reasons have been suggested for the inclusion of piano accompaniment on these recordings,[22] but of more significance to music in Ireland at this time was the symbolic meaning of the piano, with its ambiguous implications of middle-class respectability but also with class and colonial domination. The new factory-made piano, like the gramophone player and record, also symbolized an amazing world of mechanical inventions, a feature of modernization and progress.

Another, more subtle, implication of piano backing is found in the vamping style itself (in its simplest form, an on-the-beat bass note, with the rest of the chord filled in on the off-beat). In Coleman's recording of 'The Morning Dew' (Musical example 8), pianist Ed Lee adds to the usual vamping accompaniment more on-the-beat chords, giving the tune a fast, march-like rhythm. What became the orthodox piano accompaniment style in Irish traditional music developed in imitation of the strongly accented piano accompaniment that had been the rhythmic basis of ragtime era and 1920s Jazz Age dance-music accompaniment. Piano vamping for dancing (and song accompaniment) was codified in various tutors available throughout the western world. Many of these were accessible to those who did not read musical notation (Whiteoak 1999: 224–8).

While jazz is rarely mentioned in relation to Irish traditional music of this period, it had an unavoidable, pervasive and lasting influence on the rhythms of Irish music.[23] Jazz and blues influence, albeit often far removed from the jazz and blues practices of African–Americans, was in the air, on the radio, on sound recordings of tin-pan alley 'jazz' song and dance music, vaudeville acts from America, and, after 1928, Hollywood musicals. There were already aspects of Irish music that were sympathetic to a jazz or blues aesthetic: innovation through melodic variation, embellishment and rhythmic variation, the blues-like melismatic wailing of the pipes, later imitated on fiddle and flute; and the syncopated dance steps that are

---

[21] In fact this recording was selected for the relatively successful musical partnership of piano and fiddle. Many of Coleman's recordings sound like a race between the two instruments.

[22] The suggestions in Vallely's *Companion to Irish Traditional Music* include the recording-industry view that harmony is commercially necessary, with its associations with America, modernity, social status, the industry's contracts with piano accompanists, its value in ceili bands, percussive effects and volume (1999: 296-8).

[23] Australian musicologist Bruce Johnson (2000) explores the all-pervasive, but not-always recognized, influence of jazz on other popular musical forms in *The Inaudible Music: Jazz, Gender and Australian Modernity*. Sydney: Currency Press.

reproduced in music played for dancers. All these aspects of jazz music are present in another recording of 'The Morning Dew' (Musical example 12[24]).

3.3   'Sweet Jesus, 'tis a gift!'[25] Paddy Canny and P. J. Hayes

While the American 78 rpm recordings had a profound effect on the repertoire, style and performance standards of musicians in Ireland, not all Irish musicians adopted the Sligo fiddlers' highly embellished and inventive approach to the melody, and this is particularly true of those whose primary purpose in playing was to accompany dancers. Other musicians adopted some aspects of the recorded repertoire to develop highly individual virtuosic interpretations. One remarkable recording, *All-Ireland Champions — Violin* (1959), is an eloquent reminder of the complex relationship between tradition and modernity that is neither serial (modernity following tradition) nor mutually exclusive (both traditional and modern influences can co-exist). On the final track, Paddy Canny and P. J. Hayes's performance of 'The Morning Dew' in my view demonstrates the convergence of various modern musical styles (jazz and blues influences, Coleman's virtuosity and complexity, the art-music values associated with the piano and the recording studio) while at the same time generating the ideal experience of the (by then defunct) house dance through its 'gift' of tempo and rhythmic inspiration to the dancers, and of complexity and emotion to the listeners. As Frith (1996b: 123) proposes, their music 'articulates *in itself* an understanding of both group relations and individuality'. The musicians simultaneously *re*-create an ideal experience of community and create something new and exciting, an Irish version of what until then had been articulated only in the recording studios of America and England.

In an article on Irish traditional music and copyright, Anthony McCann concludes that 'grass-roots Irish traditional music transmission rests upon an as-yet-unarticulated system of gift or sharing' (2001: 89). The concept of gift, as it

---

[24] Paddy Canny and P. J. Hayes, 'The Morning Dew' and 'Reavy's Reel' (1959). The track sequence on this 2004 reissue is the same as on the original 1959 recording, which has been digitally re-mastered from the original master tapes but otherwise unmodified.

[25] Throughout the 1990s, 'Jimmy', an elderly emigrant from West Clare, often made the trip across Melbourne to the Normandy Hotel, where Joe Fitzgerald, an accordion player from East Clare, led a weekly session of Irish traditional music. After a set of tunes, Jimmy would lean across the table, shouting 'Sweet Jesus, 'tis a gift!' as he pumped Joe's hand in appreciation. The ambiguity of his exclamation — Joe's God-given musical talent, and his gift to listeners — adds to the complexity of the notion of musical gift explored in this section.

contrasts with that of commodity, is central to the way that the meaning of musical practices has changed in Ireland over the past century. At house dances up to the 1940s, as discussed above, country people valued musicians for making possible the dancing they enjoyed so much. On this recording, the musicians play at the pace preferred by dancers from their home district of East Clare, and play a local style and repertoire and compositions by local musicians. Musicians also contributed by performing for listeners, in this way giving in a more spiritual sense, especially when the musician played in the 'lonesome' style (highly valued in East Clare) that both expressed nostalgic emotion and evoked it in listeners. Other aspects of the recording situate it as a commodity and a symbol of modernity: its high performance standards; the prompt chords at the beginning of each track (a feature of ceili bands, discussed in the next section); the second tune a recent composition from America; its repeatability and its production in the new, long-playing format. In this recording of 'The Morning Dew', two aspects of the musician's gift (music for dancing and for listening) and two world-views (music as a gift, and music as a commodity) coincide.

Traditional music, as defined by the Irish Traditional Music Archive, is 'handed down from one generation to the next, or passed from one performer to another' (Vallely 1999: 402). This was the case for Paddy Canny, who as a child had eavesdropped on the music lessons his father Pat Canny gave to neighbours' children, learning much of the repertoire that his father had been given in his childhood by an itinerant Limerick musician, blind Paddy Mack, who had wintered in the Canny household. As a teenager, Paddy Canny passed on his father's tunes to a younger boy, P. J. Hayes, who lived nearby.[26] Yet only one of the tunes on the LP came from Pat Canny's repertoire. Apart from four tunes newly composed by local and American musicians and some from Francis O'Neill's book, most of their selections appear to be tunes circulated through recordings.[27] The two young musicians had built this repertoire by listening to recordings of Coleman and others on a gramophone sent home in 1930 by P. J.'s aunt in America (Meade 2001).

_____

[26] P. J. Hayes recalled that he learned his first few tunes by 'the old ABC way', where the teacher (in his case, Paddy Canny) transcribed each note of a tune with a letter (ABCD) for the finger and a number (1234) for the string. P. J. soon progressed to learning tunes by ear from other musicians and recordings, or from O'Neill's book via musicians who could read conventional notation. (Hayes quoted in Anick 1994). Many teachers (e.g. Kerry fiddle player Pádraig O'Keeffe (1887–1963)) had their own shorthand methods of transcription.

[27] Composers are Seán Ryan (Tipperary), Ed Reavy (Cavan emigrant to Philadelphia) and Patrick Moloney (East Galway) (Meade 2001).

All-Ireland Champions was as modern as a recording of Irish traditional music could be in 1959, not only in its fresh repertoire of recently composed tunes and new versions and combinations of tunes sourced from recordings. It was among the first commercial long-playing records of Irish music made in Ireland. It also sounded modern. The musicians play with a pronounced swing, accentuated by Bridie Lafferty's stylish syncopations and hinting at the 'groove' of currently popular African–American funk or soul. The record was something of an Irish response to the American recordings discussed above, its status as an emblem of national culture reinforced by its title, and the cover photograph of Glendalough, a monastic site and tourist destination near Dublin.

As a consumer item, demand far outstripped the modest supply of records pressed, and cassette copies made from the 1970s became valued gifts passed around among musicians in many countries. In his notes to the 2001 reissue, Don Meade claims that '[f]ew recordings in the history of Irish music have ever made such a deep and long-lasting impression on traditional musicians and their fans' (Meade 2001: 5). It is interesting to reflect on its reception in an Australian context. My first experience of musical community began with hearing this recording, a gift from a fiddle-playing friend that became the wellspring and touchstone for musical gatherings of revival players around the eastern states of Australia. The recording held the basis of a shared repertoire and aesthetic among those seeking the music of an older generation, rather than following the contemporary mainstream of 1970s bands such as De Dannan and the Bothy Band. When Paddy Canny's fiddle-playing brother Jack was 'discovered' living in a Canberra suburb the 'tradition' came alive for musicians who knew him.

The title of the recording's reissue on CD in 2001 — *An Historic Recording of Irish Traditional Music from County Clare and East Galway* — reflects this association between the 'historic' past and tradition, while also highlighting the change in the marketing and consumption of recorded music from its original promotion of a unified national musical culture to today's increasing market specialization. Claire Keville reveals this change in thinking about Irish music in her analyses of the recording's continuing influence on revival musicians and its perception as representing a regional, rather than national, musical style (Keville 2000). These are not the only indications of changing tastes and marketing conventions.[28] While

---

[28] On the original recording, the term 'violin' was used, in keeping with both the earlier (pre-revival) rural and formal usage (and the Irish, *veidhlin*) while the 2001 reissue uses the term 'fiddle', by then naturalized through the revival.

tracks on the original recording were divided between those including flute (Side A) and those without (Side B) and sequenced with the same tune types grouped together, the sequence on the 2001 reissue has been shuffled to produce the variety of tune types and ensembles that today's consumers expect. The piano prompts for dancers have also been cut (Musical example 13[29]). All these changes have shifted the presentation of the recording further away from music for dancers towards music for listening and further from gift to commodity — although at the same time, much of its new value as a commodity is in its association with an older social context in which dancing and music were integrated.

Although the inclusion of many of Coleman's melodic variations to 'The Morning Dew' identify that recording as their source (or one of them), a comparison of Coleman's speed and brightness of tone with the slower, more mellow sound of Paddy Canny and P. J. Hayes mark theirs as a different musical style.[30] Their ornamentation, rhythm and attack all vary considerably from Coleman's and the tune as they play it is fully integrated into their individual and local playing styles.[31] One way Paddy Canny and P. J. Hayes achieve their distinctive sound is by altering the expected structure of tunes, as when they begin 'The Morning Dew' on the third part of the tune, making a plaintive 'overture' of what is normally the final part.[32] The two main elements in this local style, however, are the rhythmic emphasis of P. J. Hayes, renowned since his youth as a dance musician for this strong rhythm and his sensitivity to the syncopated footwork of the best dancers, and the expressive style of Paddy Canny, idiosyncratic, but also exemplifying the more lyrical strand of Irish music-making 'most cherished' in this region (Hayes 2001: 4). This 'lonesome' or 'plaintive' touch (as it is known in this region) is evident here in emotive microtonal shifts and sliding onto notes. Other features are the preference for minor or (as here) modal keys, and the variation in dynamic range (highly unusual in Irish traditional music) in which a surge of the melody line is matched

---

[29] Without the piano prompt, with its reference to set-dancing, the track sounds less 'old-fashioned'. *An Historic Recording of Irish Traditional Music from County Clare and East Galway* (2001).

[30] The 'mellow' sound is due in part to the ringing tone produced by two fiddles played in unison, but also to the technique of sustaining, or appearing to sustain notes, longer phrases, and using more notes in the bow.

[31] This is not always the case, especially with revival players, who may (consciously) play Coleman medleys using his precise ornamentation and even bowing (see Image 3), but return to a more personal or regional style for other tunes (see Sally Sommers-Smith's comments on style and authenticity in Vallely 1999: 388).

[32] Paddy Canny and P. J. Hayes give the set a sense of symmetry when they play the following two-part reel ('Reavy's) conventionally until the end, when they finish after the first part.

with an increase in volume (facilitated by articulating the tune in longer phrases) followed by a dying away of sound at the end of the phrase.[33] It is easier to hear these stylistic elements in solo performance. The next musical examples are from much more recent recordings that illustrate the mature musicians' stylistic divergence. P. J. Hayes plays 'Sergeant Early's Dream' with strong rhythmic emphasis, especially in picking out motifs that complement dancers' footwork, while Paddy Canny's version is more expressive, with dynamic variation over much longer phrases, less emphasis on the beat, more variation both rhythmic and melodic, and much more embellishment (Musical examples 14 and 15[34]).

Perhaps one reason why *All-Ireland Champions* has continued to be a much-loved and influential recording is that it is simultaneously dance music and listening music and sounds both modern (to its contemporary Irish audiences) and traditional (to revival listeners). At the beginning of their third part of 'The Morning Dew', the two fiddles sustain (or give the impression of sustaining) a long B note, while picking off the quaver motif of the higher E'F#'E' (in fact alternating between the notes: B E'B F#'B E'B), bringing together the 'lonesome' aesthetic of music for listening (in the sliding, or glissando) with the dance musician's precise knowledge of dance steps (in picking out the high notes).[35] Together these produce a swinging sound that is emphasized by the syncopated piano accompaniment. Each of these rhythmic innovations produces the unexpected that 'lifts' the dancers' feet while encouraging them to 'batter' out a syncopated rhythm.

In the highly expressive effect of sliding between pitches and the excitement of the cross rhythms it shares with 1930s or '40s swing band music, this recording bears

---

[33] In Paddy Canny's solo playing, this is sometimes also accompanied by a slight change in tempo, or an overriding of the regular beat, an aspect of his playing that is compelling for the listener but off-putting for dancers.

[34] P. J. Hayes, 'Kathleen Collin's Reel' (more commonly known as 'Sergeant Early's Dream'), recorded in 1986. In example 14, Paddy Canny plays the same tune, recorded in 1995. A simple transcription of 'Sergeant Early's Dream' appears in O'Neill 1907 (number 656), the title referring to a tune recalled or perhaps even composed by O'Neill's fiddle-playing colleague in Chicago, Sergeant James Early. P. J. Hayes's name for it indicates that he learned the tune from New York fiddler, Kathleen Collins (who lived in Co. Galway in the early 1970s) or from her 1976 album. Both musicians play versions very similar to Kathleen Collins's.

[35] Here the two fiddle players blend their individual styles. On solo recordings, Paddy Canny tendency to slide up to notes is much more marked than in P. J. Hayes's music (although it is a strong feature of his son Martin's playing). As mentioned above, P. J. Hayes's emphasis on counter-phrases and his steadier beat mark him out as a dancers' musician. It is possible to view Paddy Canny's left-hand sliding action on the video clip ('Paddy Canny and Ursula Byrne') at the Comhaltas Ceoiltóirí Éireann website, www.comhaltas.com/seisiun/video.htm.

the signs of modernity. Also present is the melancholy sound that is identified at the heart of both Irish music and jazz-based genres, a musical metaphor for expression of the awareness of loss that accompanies the rush to embrace the new.[36]

Paddy Canny's playing history also contains something of this ambivalence. As a young man working on his family's farm, he stole what time he could to play music and often joined P. J. Hayes playing at house dances. In 1946, the two musicians were among the original members of the Tulla Ceili Band, formed in response to a band competition (which they won) (Keane c1996). Although he continued to play with the band until 1967, Paddy Canny's greater interest was in interpreting tunes for his own and others' listening pleasure. He maintains that his 'lonesome' musical style was not learned from his father, but was something he developed himself (Canny quoted in Vallely and Piggott 1998: 5). Despite his intense shyness and reluctance to perform publicly, Paddy Canny won the All-Ireland fiddle competition, recorded for Raidió Éireann, and in 1956 performed solo in New York's Carnegie Hall. In New York, Paddy Canny was invited by an American record company, Dublin Records, to make a studio recording, and the result was *All-Ireland Champions — Violin* (Meade: 2001).

In the many ways discussed above (the pervasive sounds of tin-pan alley mediated African–American influences, the sensibility of art music, the novelty of newly composed tunes and rearrangements of familiar ones, the variety of a different ensemble on each side of the record, the latest technological innovation in the long-playing record) this recording enabled contemporary listeners to place themselves in an imaginative cultural narrative of modernity that is both gift and commodity. As commodity, this record was originally marketed as 'Irish', as an emblem of national culture. On its recent reissue, however, it had become regional (reflecting the increasing specialization of consumerism) as well as 'traditional' and 'historic' (reflecting the revivalist view of Irish music, a form of traditionalism that will be discussed in the next chapter).

In all these ways, the practices of making, recording and marketing this recording point to a complex relationship between modernity and traditionalism, in which not only is traditionalism an aspect of modernity (as argued in Section 3.2, and evident in the recording's revised presentation) but modernity here is intertwined with

---

[36] Ethnomusicologist John Whiteoak identifies the glissando or sliding effect as an early defining aspect of white jazz (Whiteoak 1995: 116).

tradition (as opposed to traditionalism) in two styles, two sets of musical priorities, two imaginative cultural narratives. This would not come as a surprise to anyone who has danced to the music of the Tulla Ceili Band, the examples given here demonstrating the different degrees of variation, embellishment and expressiveness possible in a solo as opposed to a group performance, and the Tulla Ceili Band's famous swing as it sounded on the band's first long-playing record, and in a more exaggerated form in a recording made some forty years later (Musical examples 16–18[37]). It does, however, contradict the vision of tradition as it appears from the vantage point of both the folk revival, and of historians who view tradition as something that has been captured and remoulded by modern states to justify their existence, in the process sucking the life out of it and leaving behind the folkloric shell of invented tradition. A tradition, as a continually self-renewing social practice, may co-exist with modernity and with traditionalism.

3.4 'The Holy Land': The Church, the State and Irish music

It is difficult to conceive of Irish traditional music as a resistant or subversive cultural form; and yet, popular musical practices in rural Ireland were not the same as those sanctioned by the Irish state. While not as openly subversive nor considered as morally dangerous as jazz was considered to be in the first half of the century or rock in the second, Irish traditional music did exhibit a diversity and unruliness that needed to be standardized and disciplined in the interests of creating a unified national culture.

The commodification and standardization of Irish traditional music by culture industries and the state involved a process of reforming musical tastes and sounds, and contexts for playing and listening to music. It involved dis-embedding diverse musical practices from their rural social context and making them conform to urban bourgeois tastes and standards of respectability, and also to a market economy. This was by no means a straightforward process because of its entanglement with

---

[37] Paddy Canny, 'Rogha Ghearóid De Barra' (Garrett Barry's) and 'Bruacha Loch Gabhna' (The Banks of Lough Gowna) (1959). Note the less strict rhythm, greater use of embellishment and melodic, rhythmic and dynamic variation than in the band performances (also in jig time). Tulla Ceili Band, 'The Battering Ram' (1958). Note the 'bouncy' piano vamp and the drummer swapping from snare drum to the 'block' to emphasize the beginning of a new part of the tune. Tulla Ceili Band, 'The Battering Ram' (1996). Note the slightly different version of the tune. The sliding notes on fiddles (especially Martin Hayes), and walking bass and prominent syncopated rhythms on (electronic) piano (Jim Corry) exaggerate the jazz-based influences (sliding and syncopation) in comparison to the 1958 recording.

the many ambiguities and contradictions of what Tom Nairn defines as the 'Janus-faced' ambivalence with which nationalist states paradoxically:

> propel themselves forward to a certain sort of goal (industrialization, prosperity, equality with other peoples etc.) *by a certain sort of regression* — by looking inwards, drawing more deeply upon their indigenous resources, resurrecting past folk-heroes and myths about themselves. (Nairn 1977: 348)

From 1922 until the 1950s, the new Irish state gave its citizens the worst of both worlds in failing to modernize the Irish economy while imposing repressive cultural policies. A policy of economic self-sufficiency based on agriculture was made even more unworkable by worldwide economic depression, a crippling economic war with Britain, and isolation as a neutral state during World War 2. At the same time, the state authorized and institutionalized selected cultural practices and texts and censored or banned others.

The re-evaluation of everyday culture as 'traditional' and 'Irish' was the result of both modernizing and anti-modern influences and manifested in interventions from the state, the Catholic Church and nationalist organizations, and in the longstanding symbiotic relationship between the Irish in Ireland and emigrants living abroad. A later influence was the change in taste and values as Ireland eventually became more involved in European politics and the international economy. While some musical practices were co-opted into a national culture, commodified into consumables such as recordings or the labour of musicians in bands, and disciplined to conform to urban, bourgeois values, the continuing unruly, diverse and local cultural practices were devalued.

David Lloyd proposes that where popular culture and individual identification exceed state-sanctioned forms, 'the state designates it immoral, irrational, primitive or criminal' (Lloyd 1999: 33–4). This was the case with the craze for 'jazz' dancing (the jazz foxtrot, jazz one-step, blues, or Charleston, for example) that swept the world in the 1920s, and in Ireland began to displace other forms of socializing, including rural house-dances. At this time, the Catholic Church in Ireland had unchallenged moral authority, which it used not only to lobby for the censorship of films and books,[38] but also to exert a repressive surveillance of and control over Irish social life through its network of schoolteachers and parish priests. Dancing was one of their targets.

---

[38] State censorship of cinema was legislated in 1923, and censorship of publications in 1929 through the office of the Committee of Enquiry on Evil Literature (Brown 1981: 40; 69).

Those who had attended house dances in their youth remembered the pleasure of meeting other young people and the fun they had.[39] Paddy Canny's brother Jack recalled both spontaneous and planned dances in East Clare during the 1920s:

> In the winter, on cold frosty nights, there was a fiddle-player called O'Malley, and we'd talk nice to him and we'd ask him to play for a set, and we'd dance a Clare Set to get the frost off our bones […] They used to have relations back from the States and we had a big party — sometimes they called it a hooley — which means that all the locals are invited and they take out all the furniture from the main room and it's turned into a dancehall. And as soon as the musicians come in, they start playing and all the young people start dancing. The older people are in the back room, talking about different things, about the weather and politics and whatever, and all the local gossip. And all the younger ones, the young teenagers, they'd be all out dancing the sets and waltzes, and all the different dances that they could handle.[40]

The Catholic Church had discouraged dancing and music for centuries, but more strenuously since the advent of a puritanical form of Catholicism (Jansenism) in the mid-nineteenth century. Collector Francis O'Neill reports the Church's suppression of music and dancing in his home parish in County Cork from around 1860.[41] In the 1930s, the Catholic Church successfully lobbied for legislation that banned informal dance parties as well as their main target, 'jazz' dancing in private dancehalls.[42] West Clare musician Junior Crehan (1908–98) recalls the priests cursing musicians and demanding the cessation of house-dancing (Crehan 1977: 75). Co. Galway fiddle player Lucy Farr (b. 1912) tells a similar story:

---

[39] For example, my interview with Billy Moran (1999); Vallely 1998; Hughes and Ó Róchain 1978; Bradshaw 1998; O'Connor 2001; Austin 1993.

[40] From Jennifer Gall (1991) Interview with Jack Canny, Canberra, Australia. National Library of Australia, Oral History archive TRC 2734/1.

[41] In his introduction to the 1987 reprint of O'Neill's *Irish Minstrels and Musicians* (1913), Breathnach quotes from a letter in which O'Neill writes: 'Traditional Irish music could have survived even the disasters of the famine, had not the means for its preservation and perpetuation — the crossroads and farmhouse dances — been capriciously and arbitrarily prescribed [sic] and suppressed. 'Twas done in my native parish of Caharagh, West Carberry, in my boyhood days, by a gloomy puritanical pastor, and the same senseless hostility to Irish music and pastimes was drastically enforced with a whip wielded by a P. P. on the backs of my nephews and their fellow revivalists in the adjoining parish even so late as the early years of the Gaelic League.'

[42] Both jazz dancing and set-dancing were unpopular with the church, in part because of unsupervised courting at dances, but also because both dance genres called for the closed (or ballroom) hold, in contrast to the more chaste line and circle formations of the Gaelic League's ceili dances, where contact is more often limited to hands and elbows. It is notable, however, that set-dancers born between the 1920s and 1940s can be observed adopting a version of the ballroom hold that minimizes contact with their dance partner, the men achieving this by bending their knees and arching their body away from their partner, as if about to sit down.

> The church took over. We weren't allowed to hold the house-dances anymore, and that was the most awful crime against the Irish music that anyone could do. The priests, you know, they were vicious then. Oh yes, they'd condemn the late nights for stopping people coming to mass on Sunday because they were 'up all night the night before' playing this awful music. But it never stopped any of us coming to mass on a Sunday. In fact they wanted to open a parochial hall beside the local church and have everybody come there instead on a Saturday night to the dance and pay half a crown to come in! (Lucy Farr quoted in Vallely and Piggott 1998: 73)

In East Clare, house-dancing continued into the 1940s, despite police raids and denunciations from the pulpit (Hughes 1978: 115). More generally, though, the Public Dance Halls Act 1935, which outlawed unlicensed gatherings, resulted in a decline in domestic music-making throughout Ireland as dancing moved into controlled, commercial public spaces.[43]

Besides curbing unruly cultural practices, the new Irish state began the task of translating into state policy and legislation the nationalist ideal of a unified Irish culture identified with the Irish language, Catholicism, and a Gaelic ethnicity, within a nationalist narrative of Irish history.[44] One example was in the institution of a national musical canon, a process that affirms David Lloyd's assertion that 'folk-culture' most often formed an *idée fixe* of official state culture, in contrast to the continuing hybridity of popular culture (Lloyd 1999: 33).

It might be expected that a national school music curriculum of Irish language songs, ballads and, occasionally, tin whistle bands[45] would validate the musical experiences of rural children. In the view of music historian Marie McCarthy, however, it undermined the value of their musical world by replacing local repertoires with a national canon. McCarthy interprets this as an instance of the transculturation process of reciprocal influence between colonizers and colonized, which becomes institutionalized by the urban middle class in the bureaucracies of

---

[43] Reg Hall suggests an additional reason for the decline of rural house-dancing was the shortage of petrol, tea and sugar during World War 2 (2001: 14–5).

[44] The division between those who supported the Treaty formalizing the independence of the present-day Republic of Ireland from the Northern Ireland province of the United Kingdom (Cumann na nGaedheal, later transformed into the Fine Gael party) and those who opposed any compromise in claiming the whole island for the Irish nation (the Fianna Fail party which first came to power in 1932 under the leadership of Éamon de Valera) remained throughout the twentieth century, limiting the development of the Irish polity beyond its moment of formation and restricting the influence of non-nationalist parties.

[45] State music broadcasts to schools from 1937 to 1941 featured Irish songs, ceili bands, ballads, plainchant and traditional musical instruments, but the number of participating schools averaged only about 400 (McCarthy 1998: 72).

postcolonial states. Urban bourgeois values inform not only the canon as repertoire — which gives cultural authority to a small body of work represented as 'national' — but also the reification of music that focused on canon in its literal sense of 'knowledge and application of rules and theory', rather than on the process of performance. A central bureaucracy constructed a standardized repertoire, imposed compartmentalized learning and encouraged uniformity in performance, with a consequent disregard for local style and individual creativity (McCarthy 1999: 19–23).

Pierre Bourdieu's use of the theory of social reproduction to argue that educational systems can increase, rather than flatten out, social inequalities, is relevant here. Bourdieu analyzes a mass of data relating taste and style to variables such as class and education, demonstrating that social advantage in the home environment and class background give a head-start or 'credit' (cultural capital) in providing the 'basic elements of the legitimate culture' that the education system builds upon, while the socially disadvantaged have to undergo 'the labour of deculturation, correction and retraining that is needed to undo the effects of inappropriate learning' (Bourdieu 1984: 70–1). Musical practices such as playing Irish dance music in rural social settings were part of such 'inappropriate learning', and this perhaps explains why the majority of people educated in Ireland before the 1970s know little about Irish traditional music.

The propagandist, educative role of the state in defining a national music was further advanced with the opening of a state broadcasting service in 1926,[46] legislated to promote national identity through Irish language, music, and games. The station's first director, Séamus Clandillon, was a Gaelic revivalist and Irish music enthusiast and program schedules included traditional music, although both reception and subscription levels were limited, especially in rural areas (Vallely 1999: 304).[47]

Luke Gibbons has suggested that radio acted as a cultural agency that transformed, rather than simply transmitted, Irish culture. When jazz music (tin-pan alley-style syncopated dance music, swing bands, and crooning) became more popular than

---

[46] Initially Radio 2RN (a play on 'to Éireann'), it became Raidió Éireann in 1932.

[47] Terence Brown notes that before a stronger transmitter was opened in 1933, reception was limited to a small proportion of the country, mainly around Dublin and Cork. As late as 1939, forty per cent of radio licences were issued in the Dublin area, although it must also be assumed that many more people had access to a radio than possessed a licence (Brown 1981: 153).

traditional music, the Gaelic League launched a campaign against it, until eventually (1939) the state banned 'jazz and crooning' from Irish radio, although not before that horse had bolted (Gibbons 1996: 75; McCarthy 1999: 110). Rather than reverting to the earlier policy of promoting traditional music, however, state broadcasting from the 1940s favoured the art music that reflected middle-class tastes and aspirations (Gibbons 1996: 75). Tulla Ceili Band leader, Seán Reid, affirmed this with his calculation that Raidió Éireann's output of traditional music in the late 1940s was less than nine hours *per annum* (Taylor 1988: 53).

The process of the convergence of the traditional and the modern was far from straightforward in the new contexts for performing Irish traditional music on radio and in the public dancehall. One of Séamus Clandillon's early innovations was to promote the formation of traditional music ensembles (ceili bands) to play live on radio. Regional competitions were part of this scheme, in which rural musicians were encouraged to adopt urban cultural values in order to produce a more 'modern' sound.

Aspects of group playing in ceili bands mark it as a hybrid form that drew members from across classes and musical genres. Band playing encouraged rural musicians to adopt urban musical values and instruments as well as formal dress and professionalism. The Ballinakill Traditional Dance Players from south Co. Galway, for example, were assembled in 1926 and trained by the local curate as part of his drive to stamp out jazz dancing. The band also brought together men from a small-farming background with a musically literate, middle-class woman pianist, in a social and musical mix that 'could never have existed outside the formal structure of the band' (Hall, R. 1995). At a time when few people owned cars or telephones, travel and communications also presented problems that could be overcome only with the inclusion of members from outside the farming milieu. The Tulla Ceili Band, formed in 1946, for many years was reliant on Seán Reid, a civil engineer and musician, who negotiated bookings and squeezed the seven-member band inside his Morris Minor, with the instruments strapped to the roof. Reid's employer cautioned and eventually demoted him for associating with the *hoi poloi*:

> [T]he inspector objected to me in my exalted position as Acting County Engineer playing with a Ceili Band! 'How', he said, 'can Mr Reid have any control when he is meeting every Tom, Dick and Harry at the cross roads!' (Seán Reid quoted in Taylor 1988: 53).

The addition of drums and the piano (epitome of bourgeois taste and modernity) also changed the sound of Irish music in the ceili band. The coherent unison sound

required in ensemble playing called on musicians to standardize tunes and resist individual embellishment and variation of melody or rhythm. They took their timing from the piano and drums instead of from the dancers and tuned, if they could, to the tempered tonality of the piano.[48] Valerie Austin, in an essay on the effects of the Public Dance Halls Act, argues that the dance tunes, previously mainly modal, were gradually adapted to fit the piano's major and minor harmonies (Austin 1993: 15). The resulting sound thus drew together aspects of jazz (piano vamping and syncopation), art music (tempered tuning and diatonic harmonies) and the military (many drummers were from a military-band background). The hierarchy of instruments also changed as the accordion became important for its more powerful sound. A band also needs a leader, a new role for the Irish dance musician. Overall, the change was from a small domestic space where musicians and dancers had a close social and musical bond, to a formal, public space where a group of musicians were hired to play a rehearsed, edited sequence of tunes for dancers from whom they were separated both socially and spatially.

Inevitably, there were clashes between rural musicians in the process of adopting to new musical standards and the urban, modernist aesthetic of the national broadcaster, as the fortunes of the Tulla Ceili Band demonstrate. The band's historian recounts the effort involved in securing a radio broadcast in 1948: travelling from East Clare to Cork for a band competition, returning to Cork for an audition, and finally bringing the band to Dublin for the recording (Keane c1996: 35–7). Despite a warm response from Clare listeners, Raidió Éireann's Director of Music found the broadcast 'not at all satisfactory', explaining that:

> The main fault with your Ceilidhe Band in its first broadcast was the intonation; in other words, the instruments were not in tune. As you will recall, some of the players did not appear to be able to tune their instruments at rehearsal. The ensemble was also poor and if the band wishes to improve, this matter will need very careful attention. The piano arrangements were also doubtful in many cases. (Keane c1996: 39)

This is not to say that the continuing tradition of solo, orally transmitted musical practice in rural Ireland was universally changed by the advent of the ceili band and the consequent innovations of harmonic accompaniment, syncopated rhythms, standardized tuning, and a coherent ensemble sound. These have become

---

[48] This is particularly difficult on the uilleann pipes and the wooden flute used in Irish traditional music, which are notoriously out of tune with themselves, untempered (diverging slightly from piano tuning) and respond in anti-social ways to variations in temperature and humidity.

naturalized as standards for recordings and public performances of Irish traditional music, however.

Many musicians dislike the ceili band and its regimented sound, but for an older generation of musicians, playing in a band offered fellowship, musical nourishment and expression, competition, travel: a social and musical life that was unavailable to most of their contemporaries. Because it often drew on a wide and continually changing circle of musicians, a band also introduced its members to a wider repertory of tunes (including new compositions) and playing styles than were generally available to other musicians. Billy Moran (b. 1928), for example, speaks with pride of his association with the Aughrim Slopes Ceilidh Band:

> We had a couple of cousins, couple of sisters, couple of brothers, they had their own little band, and then I used to go with them. That's where you get a bit of confidence in yourself, then. There'd be a band for the local hall, Wednesday night, there was a good band up near the parish away from us, the Aughrim Slopes, the first band ever to record, and I was with them for about three years. I was seventeen when I was working in the band. I went all over Ireland. One of them had a van, with all the gear and all. They recorded their first [record] in 1937, in Dublin, and I think they were one of the first bands to do it, then they went to England, they toured England … they broke up then, three of them went to America. […] Twas great, especially then, because if you weren't in something like that, you wouldn't go anywhere, because you didn't have the transport at that time, all you had was a bike … It was a great way to learn, you know, it was. You were big-time then. (Billy Moran, interview, 19 December 1999)

The changes brought about by the demise of house dances included other, less happy, consequences. Opportunities for a musician to play solo for an appreciative audience were reduced. Many musicians became discouraged and abandoned playing in this atmosphere of competitive playing but declining local recognition (Vallely 1999: 103). A social system in which each contribution to an evening's entertainment was valued as a gift (McCann 2001) and as a way of making or performing community (Glassie 1982) declined as music-making became a business and music a commodity that took musicians away from their localities and demanded of them a more disciplined, standardized, urban aesthetic and demeanour.

3.5   *Paddy in the Smoke*: Irish music and the sound of modernity

Despite nationalist rhetoric representing rural Ireland as the nation's moral heartland and economic wellspring, rural life in the early decades of the new nation,

from the 1920s to the 1960s, was oppressed by widespread poverty and disillusion. The social mechanism for maintaining a stable rural population (familism) involved the passing of farms to a sole heir, necessitating the emigration of excess siblings to Irish towns or foreign cities, from where their remittances helped to sustain an unviable agricultural economy. For those who stayed, late marriage, and the celibacy demanded by a repressive church, left deep psychological marks. As recently as the 1970s, anthropologists have held this dysfunctional social system accountable for the widespread mental illness and unhappiness they found in rural Ireland (Brody 1986; Scheper-Hughes 2001).

While successive governments represented emigration as the continuing price of English colonization — thus emigrants were 'exiles' in official speeches and in popular ballads (many of American origin) and remain so in nationalist idiom (throughout Fintan Vallely's work, for example) — there was ambivalence among those who left, as well as those they left behind. In seeking individual freedom and prosperity outside Ireland, those who left were betraying the national dream by exposing its impotence.

To extend our understanding of the relationship between music and identity, it is necessary now to examine how Irish music came to represent an Irish ethnicity through the experience of emigration, and how in some cases this was defined politically, in terms of the Irish nation's experience under colonization and alleged economic rehabilitation. The enterprise of the Irish in America and Britain played a large part in restoring the reputation of Irish dance music and in encouraging individual musicians to continue either as dance-band players or as solo recording artists in the tradition of Coleman. Recordings by Paddy Canny and P. J. Hayes in 1959, and another by the Tulla Ceili Band in 1958, were made in response to encouragement from American entrepreneurs and were released in the USA by the Irish–American label, Dublin Records (Meade 2001; Keane c1996). Through those recordings, the musicians embraced the world of mass communications, their performances directed towards an anonymous audience, in contrast to the intimate gatherings in which they had initially played. In the process, they became international recording artists rather than local entertainers, and their music representative of Ireland, as reflected in the titles, *All-Ireland Champions* and *Echoes of Erin*. In America, this was music from 'home', while in Ireland, paradoxically, it was international recognition (particularly in America) that was valued.

During the decade following the end of World War 2, there was an exodus from rural areas. Emigration from Ireland more than doubled, with many joining the army of Irish labourers rebuilding post-war England. Billy Moran was among them. As he moved around England with a road-building crew, he gravitated to pubs where Irish musicians gathered, in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Bedford. Was it good music? I asked Billy.

> The finest of music! They were coming and going all the time. You might get three or four that have come from one county to another, they'll be there for a week or a month, it all depends on the work they were doing. That was one of the ways you'd learn, you know, you'd meet another fella from a different county, a different variety of tunes, and you'd get them, and you'd pass yours over to him … That was a great spree, there was a lot more musicians there, and you got the experience of travelling. (Billy Moran, interview)

Many of the Irish workers stayed on, settling in areas of London and other English cities, where Irish people drew together against bigotry and loneliness. Fiddle player and teacher Brendan Mulkere, who migrated from Clare to London, writes that:

> at that time the stock of the Irish in Britain was low for many reasons: the recent violent birth of the fledgling Republic; Irish neutrality during world War II; the status of Northern Ireland and above all, the images of the Irish as portrayed by cartoonists, journalists and politicians, each trying to justify untenable perspectives on Ireland and the Irish. (Mulkere 1997)

Among those who settled in England was West Clare fiddle player Bobby Casey (1926–2000), a self-taught fiddler who had picked up his father's versions of tunes from the American recordings. As a young man he played at 'house and crossroads dances, American wakes, sports meetings, parish concerts, céilis and in public houses on fair days' (including a stint with the Tulla Ceili Band) before emigrating to Dublin, then London in 1952 (Vallely 1999: 58; Mulkere 1988; Keane c1996). Bobby became a pivotal figure in the post-war Irish scene around Camden Town, where musicians from all over Ireland formed an intensely focused and creative enclave in pubs such as the Elephant and Castle (known to musicians as the Favourite). English folk-revival entrepreneur Bill Leader put together *Paddy in the Smoke: Irish Dance Music from a London Pub* from recordings he had made during the 1960s at the Favourite's Sunday-morning sessions, where the tape recorder's presence had became so familiar that '[n]o-one seemed to play up to the fact they were being recorded' (Hall, R. 1997).

Bobby Casey's playing of 'The Morning Dew' (Musical example 19[49]) is relaxed and lyrical in the style of West Clare fiddlers, with the plaintive touch of long, slippery notes, as one finds in piping (and in blues-singing) contrasted with staccato running-notes and a welter of melodic and rhythmic variations on each repetition of a phrase. The laconic accompaniment of a spoons player (who knows every nuance of the tune) and Reg Hall's syncopated piano rhythm and innovative touches (such as bringing out on the piano the motif that Paddy Canny and P. J. Hayes had also 'picked out'), add to the bluesy sound. There are telling differences between *Paddy in the Smoke* and the studio recordings discussed above. Instead of the silence of the studio booth, there is the buzz of the Sunday-morning session between mass and the dinner. Together, the music and conversations and orders for drinks make up the ephemeral community of a music pub. The music is continuous with the socializing: as Bobby Casey slides into the first note, the crowd are talking softly, and continue to do so throughout his playing and after he finishes.[50] The mix of sounds coming through the single microphone that hung from the ceiling is thickly textured, at the grainy end of the continuum between local texture and global sleekness, where, as Roland Barthes has written, the materiality of the body has not yet been flattened out into perfection by technique or by the recording studio (Barthes 1977).

Reg Hall, piano player, scholar and historian of the post-war 'London Irish' musicians, notes that these were 'one-off spontaneous performances' under the leadership of fiddler Jimmy Power, who:

> followed his normal practice of inviting musicians to play solo or in groups, and as often as not he would ask musicians to play together who weren't in the habit of doing so. (Hall, R. 1997)

Reg Hall echoes ethnomusicologist Hazel Fairbairn in suggesting that these music sessions were a kind of reincarnation of the country-house dance (Fairbairn 1993):[51]

---

[49] From recordings made in 'The Favourite' during the 1960s and released in 1968 as *Paddy in the Smoke: Irish Dance Music from a London Pub*. Bobby Casey plays 'The Morning Dew' as the last in a set of three reels, the first of which is 'The Bank of Ireland', the second 'The Woman of the House' (reversing the order of the Coleman set). Like Paddy Canny and P. J. Hayes (with whom he had played in the Tulla Ceili Band in the late 1940s), Bobby Casey plays the third part as an introduction to the tune.

[50] This is more evident on tracks of *Paddy in the Smoke* that begin a few seconds before the music starts or finish a few seconds after it.

[51] Fairbairn, however, refers to Irish music sessions in the 1990s, which involved larger groups of young, mainly urban and often middle-class enthusiasts playing in unison, in comparison to the Favourite's seasoned, exclusively working-class and predominantly male musicians who play solo or in small groups for a more intimately known and participating audience.

Dance music blossomed in Ireland several generations back in the noisy bustle and excitement of dancing in country cottages. At times that same excitement was generated in London pubs, when musicians from that rural background played to their work mates and neighbours a long way from home. *Paddy in the Smoke* is a fleeting, privileged glimpse at some of the best Irish musicians of their time playing on their own terms in their own semi-private world. (Hall, R. 1997)

Writing of Bobby Casey's 1960s London, fiddle player Kevin Crehan emphasizes the relative prosperity of Irish emigrants, compared to the musical world they had left:

It was the custom that any neighbor from home would come out and buy a drink for their local musicians, a testament to their support, appreciation and patronage. At the end of many nights, and particularly when Bobby played, there would not be space left atop the piano to hold the drink that was offered in tribute.

This image of a piano top laden with drink, that couldn't possibly be consumed, is a very potent one for me … Whereas in West Clare his neighbors could furnish rewards of respect and dignified, solemn thankfulness, London offered a lake of porter, flooded by eager, isolated souls seeking to surround and preserve the island of their consciousness and culture. (Crehan 2003)

Brendan Mulkere is more conscious of the sanctuary the music pubs provided in a hostile social environment:

In the pub the musician was in a different element: the music was a trigger in a mechanism which allowed people who had to work and live in a strained environment to regain their composure in a neutral way without the charade of mimicry … in an effort to blend in. (Mulkere 1988: 91)

Participating in music sessions was a means of celebrating their Irishness as a shared difference, as *not* blending in. Musicians benefited not only from their increased status, but also from a gathering of talent from all parts of Ireland. They were exposed to new tunes and techniques, and instruments such as the two-row chromatic accordion and the 'modern' style of playing it pioneered by Tipperary musician Paddy O'Brien in the early 1950s. Graeme Smith has linked the way emigrant Irish musicians used this instrument to create a 'perfected' style featuring virtuosity, control and smoothness with their incorporation into the industrial working class (Smith, G. 1997). This new sound — the sound of modernity, to paraphrase Smith's argument — is dramatic in its use of a chromatic scale and in-built harmonic accompaniment and domineering in its volume and range.

Paddy in the Smoke includes only one track of accordion playing, probably reflecting the preference of fiddle player Jimmy Power, who organized the sessions, but perhaps also indicating producer Bill Leader's revivalist preference for older and more 'authentic' instruments and playing styles in his selection of tracks. In fact, Reg Hall notes that 'in the late 1950s the Irish pubs in London bristled with young lads playing [presumably on accordions] "The Yellow Tinker" and "The Sally Gardens" learned from O'Brien's most famous recording' (Reg Hall 1973 cited in G. Smith 1997: 438) (Musical example 20[52]). This preference for an older sound in Irish music is also observable in the selections of Irish radio and television producers in the 1960s and 1970s, despite the fact that in those decades many musicians playing Irish traditional music were pursuing the latest sounds, whether on new instruments or in the performance groups discussed below. The resurgence from the 1980s of the older melodeon sound (reproduced on new instruments) is a further indication of a revivalist mentality that values an 'older' sound, in addition to other influences such as the impact of Jackie Daly's virtuoso melodeon-style recordings from the 1970s, the revival of set-dancing in Ireland from the 1980s (providing demand for the more rhythmic melodeon style) and the better balance of volume and tone between melodeon-style accordions and other instruments in group performance.[53]

Thirty years after the release of *Paddy in the Smoke* and coinciding with its reissue in 1997, two books were published — Peter Woods' *The Living Note: Heartbeat of Irish Music* in Dublin and Timothy O'Grady's *I Could Read the Sky* in London — in which the emigrant musician is the central figure (O'Grady and Pyke 1997; Woods and McNamara 1997)[54]. Many other recent cultural products explore the notion of Irishness from the perspective of the emigrant musician, or represent an essential Irish ethnicity unchanged by the process of emigration. These include the *Riverdance* show's 'plot' reflecting the emigrant's journey, the autobiographical Irish–American writing of the McCourt brothers (and their subsequent movies), alongside the many reissues in the 1990s of early recordings of Irish traditional music, and television programs such as *Bringing it All Back Home* (1991) and *River of Sound* (1995) and

---

[52] Paddy O'Brien, 'The Yellow Tinker' and 'The Sally Gardens' (1954).

[53] Graeme Smith suggests that contemporary accordionists reject the modern style for its association with an older and more musically conservative generation (Smith 1997: 461). I would add that there is also a working-class identification that most current players do not share. Melodeon-style accordions are also lighter (which appeals to the increasing number of women now taking up the instrument) and more suited to beginners owing to their quieter sound (allowing novice musicians to participate in sessions with minimum disruption and competent players to join but not overwhelm others).

[54] These texts are discussed further in Chapter Seven.

the celebratory television series *The Irish Empire* (1998), now published as a book, which claims that:

> without declaring war on anyone or seizing the territory of others, the Irish nation has managed to achieve many of the basic goals of imperial activity. They have found *Lebensraum*, wealth and power. In the process they have propagated their ideas and culture, spreading far and wide a notion of Irishness. (Bishop 1999: 8)

It is evident that the 1990s saw a wholesale revisiting and retelling of emigrant narratives, with music as a major symbol for Irish experience and ethnicity. In the glow of self-satisfaction generated by the 'Celtic Tiger' economy, emigration seems finally to have abated, while social and political upheavals during the past several decades have seen the purging of Ireland's sacred cows, from nationalist historians to Fianna Fail politicians, the clergy and, to a degree, the 'men of violence'. My argument with such reinterpretations is that they overlook the forces that continue to determine where Irish people work, in what conditions, and whether they might ever be able to stay home (as Americans do, for example). Instead of accepting yet another mythologized version of the Irish emigrant, it might be more useful to examine this most recent of Ireland's 'coming of age' economies to see whether indeed it allows Irish people to live in the kinds of communities, with the degree of self-determination, that they want. Irish workers in the global marketplace, whether currently employed in Ireland or elsewhere, are as vulnerable as any workforce today to the long-term movements of global capital. This new analysis, in my view, is as disabling as the nationalist discourse of emigration (in which those who leave Ireland are political and economic 'exiles' as a legacy of colonialism) or that of an 'Irish Empire' (in which Irish emigrants are celebrated for developing the New World) or of an 'Irish diaspora' — which, as Lloyd argues, 'has the effect of naturalizing the continuing massive outflow of skilled and unskilled labour from Ireland' (Lloyd 1999: 102).

The retelling of individual emigrant stories invites more complex understandings of the experience of emigration and the place of music within that experience: as a source of solidarity and community, of personal expression, a way to earn a living, to develop an art, or to recreate home in an alien environment. It is remarkable, however, that so many of these recent narratives restate, rather than question, nationalist ideology, albeit in a broader context. The cluster of recent cultural products celebrating Irishness gives a compelling — and eminently marketable — view of Irish people, particularly musicians, and the spiritual and creative essence that sustains them through the experience of emigration. In doing so, they represent

emigration as the struggle of the individual, sustained by an essentially Irish creative core. In the context of so much cultural production reinstating an earlier, much-denigrated, period of musical and social experience, could it be that a new period of mythologizing has arrived, which draws on revivalist values of authenticity associated with the past, old men (in particular), rural Ireland and a 'lonesome' aesthetic? In these texts, the relationship between modernity (a global economy) and traditionalism (a continuing core of Irish ethnicity) is troubling, rather than troubled.

3.6   'The Boys of the Town': The sound of the session

At the beginning the 1970s, another informal recording of 'The Morning Dew' takes us to a schoolhouse in rural County Sligo (Musical example 21[55]). Bobby Casey's rendering of the tune conveys the shared intimacy of his expatriate audience. *Music from The Coleman Country*, however, has a different intimacy, one that places the listener as participant, rather than as eavesdropper. Neither music for dancing, nor music for contemplation, this is excited and exciting music. The sound is not the clean sound of studio production, nor the standardized playing of a ceili band, but a wild diversity of simultaneous performances that invite the listening ear to join the musicians, tuning in to one then another instrument as it emerges from the group sound. This is the sound of the session: an informal group performance that produces an almost-unison ethnomusicologists term *heterophony*. The musicians on this recording are four on fiddle, two on whistle, two on flute, one on tambourine (bodhrán) plus organ and guitar accompaniment.

One of the musicians is the renowned flute player, Séamus Tansey (b. 1943), who has added his commentary, interspersed with the tracks from the 1972 recording, to its 2001 reissue as *Music from The Coleman Country — Revisited*. There was something of a revivalist rationale for the original project ('We decided to make a record to preserve the music of the Coleman Country') and its production (when

---

[55] This group of musicians plays 'The Morning Dew' followed by 'The Woman of the House' (Coleman's set) with the addition of another tune, 'Rakish Paddy', famously recorded by another fiddler from 'the Coleman country', James Morrison. Fiddlers and flute players from this area are renowned for their innovative embellishments and melodic variations. The instrumental ensemble on this recording brings together the anarchic clash of variant embellishments and tunings (the final note, with whistles and flutes at variance with the fiddle are an indication of what Raidió Éireann objected to in the Tulla Ceili Band's radio performance, see above). Although the musicians follow Coleman's version of 'The Morning Dew' quite closely, they play each tune only twice through, perhaps to allow for the maximum number of tunes on the recording (there are seventeen tracks on the original long-playing record).

record companies in Ireland rejected the project, it was taken up by Bill Leader, who produced recordings for the folk revival in England, including *Paddy in the Smoke*). It also includes a surprising innovation that brought them dangerously close to the structures of what Tansey elsewhere (1996: 212) deplores as 'jungle music':

> In our boredom we experimented with the backing of the local country and western band … and long before The Chieftains and the Bothy Band and Planxty were credited with adding backing to our music, we did it, in a small schoolhouse in Gurteen, Co. Sligo. (Tansey speaking on track 1 of *Music from the Coleman Country — Revisited*)

These hints of revivalism and 'modern' music are unexpected because Tansey is a fiery critic of both revivalists and innovators in Irish traditional music. In a separate insert to the 2001 reissue, he criticizes Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ), the largest organization relating to Irish traditional music, in ways that many other musicians in Ireland would probably support. He locates CCÉ's 'rationalization and politicisation' at the end of the 1960s as a point when it 'virtually became the cultural wing of the FinnaFall [sic] party', one consequence of which, he maintains, was that 'regional traditions in Irish Traditional music were quickly suppressed in favour of a National stereotype revivalist movement in music' (Tansey 2001: np). An indication that Tansey's articulation of a nativist ideology is more radically conservative than CCÉ's can be found in his paper for the Crossroads Conference in 1996, 'Irish traditional music — the melody of Ireland's soul; it's [sic] evolution from the environment, land and people' (Tansey 1999). The paper is an exposition of his view that Irish music is the essence of the Irish people and their physical and social environment, and that 'the mongrelisation, the bastardisation, the cross-pollination, the copulation of our ancient traditional music, with other cultures' would produce 'an obscene sound'. He claims that 'You can't impose jazz chords, therefore, the essence of Africa, on to the melodic structures of Irish traditional music and still retain its true message, its true meaning' (Tansey 1996: 212–3). At the same time, however, he dismisses the 'stereotype revivalists' who trivialize the music:

> In that region ['the Coleman Country'] Irish traditional music was a sacred cult or religion. It still is by its musicians and music followers. Not a harmless bloody recreation for the amusement of infantile peasants buck-leaping and clod-hopping around a cross-roads. (Tansey 1996: 213)

CCÉ, with its centralized, state-supported and Fianna Fáil-supporting bureaucracy, was a powerful agent in co-opting selected rural musical practices and repertoires to become 'Irish traditional music', emblematic of a unified national culture. The organization's competitions encouraged standardization of performance practices and repertoires. Diverse domestic musical practices from the very recent past were

idealized as part of an ancient national culture at the same time as they were being commodified and transformed into standardized, public, folkloric performances, largely within the expanding tourist industry. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it seems curious that an organization with much the same outlook and agenda as the Gaelic League should thrive a century later. Yet, in the 1990s, CCÉ stage shows presented much the same stereotypes of Irish culture — jovial peasants churning milk or jousting with hurleys — as they had in the 1960s. In the year 2000, over one million people paid to attend CCÉ functions advertised as 'a real Irish experience' of 'pure tradition', but in fact displaying a crudely stereotyped and commodified Irishness.[56]

Established in 1951 as an offshoot of the Dublin Piper's Club (Na Píobairí Uilleann), CCÉ from its inception adopted a guardianship role, its constituted aims being to promote Irish traditional music and dance and the Irish language, to restore the playing of the harp and the uilleann pipes, to create closer bonds among lovers of Irish traditional music, and to co-operate with bodies working for the restoration of Irish culture. In its early years, the organization had the enthusiastic support of musicians at the annual competitions, or fleadhanna cheoil, that attracted mature musicians like Paddy Canny and P. J. Hayes to compete for the coveted 'All-Ireland' trophies. While informal sessions at fleadhanna have continued to appeal to musicians (attendance at the August 2002 fleadh reached 220,000),[57] CCÉ's early vigour as an association of musicians dissipated by the end of the 1960s, when its energies were directed more at providing musical education for children and expanding its central bureaucracy.

The transformation of CCÉ into a government-supported and government-supporting agency came at a time of economic revival and social change, one aspect of which was the spread of an international folk revival movement from the USA and the UK, which manifested in folk clubs and folk-singing groups, mainly in Dublin and other cities (Vallely 1999: 141). A revivalist sensibility also emerged in the work of Raidió Éireann's Outside Broadcasting Unit and in RTÉ television programs presenting traditional music, dance and storytelling in quasi-rustic sets (not unlike the CCÉ stage shows).

---

[56] In 2000, a brochure advertising the public performance program of 'pure tradition' and 'a real Irish experience' at CCÉ's Dublin headquarters announced that it had 400 branches worldwide, with over one million people attending CCÉ functions annually (Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann 2000).

[57] CCÉ's official website www.comhaltas.com gives this figure, which includes some 4000 competitors and an estimated 10,000 non-competing musicians.

While CCÉ has undoubtedly broadened the base of participation in Irish traditional music-making, it has also fostered its commodification and standardization. Its perspective is steadfastly that of a conservative, nativist nationalism, from its inaugural aims to its association with the Catholic Church (the inclusion of clergy at official functions, a mass at every fleadh cheoil)[58] and controversial anti-abortion editorials in its official publication, *Treoir*.[59] The organization's political stance is evident in the inclusion of the Ulster region as an equal constituent within CCÉ and its cancellation of the 1971 fleadh cheoil in protest at internment without trial in Northern Ireland.[60]

'From its beginning, the goal of the Fleadh Cheoil was to establish standards in Irish traditional music through competition' (CCÉ website).[61] McCarthy notes that this competitive element standardized the music by 'blurring' local styles, because 'standards and repertoire were set and judged by an official body of experts at a distance from the context of transmission'. She also maintains that traditional music teaching, now aimed at 'the perfect stage performance in a competitive arena', became more like classical music teaching (McCarthy 1999: 136). CCÉ has continued to shift performance standards, stage presentation and teaching methods towards those of the art-music academy. In 1980 CCÉ set up a diploma in teaching Irish traditional music and in 1998 negotiated with the Royal Irish Academy of Music to introduce a graded examinations syllabus in Irish traditional music. While these innovations have undoubtedly increased the level of proficiency among performers, they have also further distanced the music from its earlier social context. CCÉ fosters an understanding of Irish traditional music as a commodity, both in turning it into a standard product — a canon — that represents the nation, and in its many revenue-producing activities.[62]

---

[58] 'We in Ireland are keenly aware of the close relationship between faith and native culture. In many ways they have become synonymous.' Editorial, *Treoir* 15: 5–6, 1983, p.1.

[59] 'We express this Irishness in our mode of speech; in our music, dance and games; in our love of freedom and rejection of oppression; in the sanctity we accord to human life — born and unborn.' Editorial on 'Irishness', *Treoir* 15: 4, 1983, p.1.

[60] CCÉ's official view on Irish culture bridges cultural — and political — nationalist ideologies: 'This country of ours has a vast reservoir of traditions — music, song, dance, games, literature — which are the hallmark of national identity: traditions which moulded us as a separate Irish nation and which were one of the chief motivations of our patriots in the Fight for Freedom.' Editorial, *Treoir*, 6: 1, 1974, p.1.

[61] www.comhaltas.com/fleadh

[62] Vallely lists 'tours, television programmes, and summer schools, teacher training, PR, albums, videos, lecturers, seminars, and courses' (Vallely 1999: 80). CCÉ has described the

The many critics of CCÉ among musicians in Ireland focus on a cluster of issues that underline the politically and musically conservative nature of the organization: its undemocratic structure; the influence of non-musicians; its suppression of regional repertoires and performance styles; its '1950s morality'; the restriction of tune types and instruments in its competitions; the non-payment of musicians performing on its behalf; and the pressures of competition. They also express distaste at such outmoded patriotic expressions as flags, the national anthem, dresses embroidered with Celtic knots and stage paraphernalia representing an idealized peasant culture (Mac Aoidh 1994: 19; Fleming 2000; Henry 1989: 91; Séamus Connolly quoted in Taaffe 2002).

These critics, however, are not the innovators who push back the boundaries of Irish music to introduce new instruments, repertoires, genres, performance styles or contexts — for those musicians, the organization is simply irrelevant. The most passionate critics (often former members) tend to be conservatives like Séamus Tansey. In the hands and minds of musicians from Coleman's country, the unofficial music culture that has continued in the session (discussed further in the following chapters) shows itself to be both resistant and compliant, further complicating the relationship of modernity and state institutions with localism and tribalism, as Lloyd has suggested (1999: 81–2).

3.7   The Chieftains: Irish traditional art music

In 1974 a very different group of musicians, the Chieftains, recorded a setting of 'The Morning Dew' that became one of their most enduringly popular pieces. The Chieftains' innovative settings and success as an international touring band have inspired many Irish musicians to adopt similar performance styles. Their formal arrangements have been influential in shifting performance values in Irish traditional music towards those of art music, away from the unruliness of the session or the intimate partnership with dancers (Musical example 22[63]).

---

fleadh cheoil as 'a shop window of our native culture' (1989 Annual Report, *Treoir* 22: 1, 1990).

[63] The Chieftains, 'The Morning Dew' (1973). The band's popularity increased significantly after music from this album was adapted for the soundtrack of Stanley Kubrick's movie *Barry Lyndon* (1976) Warner Brothers K56189.

In this much slower and more complex version, the tune is introduced by a counter-melody that weaves through the track, punctuating it and providing a counterpoint to produce a fuller, more complex sound. The tune is broken up and passed around among the musicians, allowing each instrument — whistle, flute, fiddle and pipes — to demonstrate its unique characteristics and adopting effects such as the two fiddles playing chord-like motifs to emphasize melodic points. It is dramatized, too, using pauses followed by percussive events on bodhrán and spoons to emphasize a new section. The tune is almost unrecognizable as dance music, especially when the tempo increases towards the end and the tune fades away with no perceptible finish. The Chieftains' music has delighted many traditional music fans, but is also accessible to middle-class art-music audiences because of its clarity and precision, its melodic and harmonic complexity and contrasting textures.

The Chieftains formed as an extension of the experimental Dublin ensemble Ceoltóirí Chualann. Irish instrumental music and particularly dance music had evaded the attempts of classical composers to appropriate its melodies and establish an Irish school of art-music composers. Despite many attempts and much anguish by music critics and latterly the musicologists Joseph Ryan and Harry White (Ryan 1995; White 1998), Ireland had failed to produce its own Dvorak or Sibelius. Some of the most innovative work towards that goal was undertaken by Seán Ó Riada (1931–71), formerly John Reidy, a modernist composer whose breakthrough was not simply in taking melodies from 'folk music' and giving them the orchestral treatment, but in giving traditional musicians solo 'breaks' in orchestral settings. His vision of a 'folk chamber orchestra' mediating between Irish traditional music and art music resulted in his forming in 1959 Ceoltóirí Chualann, a group of traditional musicians in which Ó Riada played harpsichord and bodhrán (Musical example 23[64]).

As they had done under Ó Riada's direction in Ceoltóirí Chualann, the Chieftains presented Irish music in concert format, with complex settings of dance tunes, set tunes, marches and the older harp tunes, as well as a number of sean-nós song airs to which Ó Riada had introduced them. Their arrangements highlighted the capabilities of the instruments and the melodic possibilities of the tunes through melodic innovation that often extended the conventional limits of traditional musicians. This showcasing of instruments is similar to Benjamin Britten's approach in *A Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, and like that piece, functions to entice a

---

[64] Seán Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Chualann, 'Máirseáil Uí Néill' (O'Neill's March) (1968).

hostile or uneducated audience into appreciation of new music and instruments. It also suggests that the intellectual in the role of 'legislator' of taste (Bauman 1987) is at work in this project.

Ó Riada's work brought respectability to Irish traditional music, but (along with models in other popular music genres) also provided a blueprint for the many bands performing Irish traditional music that emerged during the 1970s. Instead of the unison performance of standardized tunes with rhythmic and harmonic backing, as found in the ceili band, this new format features counterpoint and more complex harmony, and most significantly, musicians playing solo and in varying combinations, as in chamber music, or jazz. The Chieftains' settings of tunes, rehearsed and repeated at each performance, however, are anathema to traditional musicians, among whom individual spontaneity of variation and embellishment in the informal group performance produce an unruliness of clashing interpretations (as in the Coleman Country musicians' playing). This form of standardization was the major limitation of Ó Riada's innovations — ironically, for it was the unison performance of the ceili band that he so disparaged as the 'rhythmic but meaningless noise with as much relation to music as the buzzing of a bluebottle in an upturned jamjar' (Ó Riada 1982: 74).[65]

The Chieftains' relatively fixed versions and settings of tunes meant that each performance was similar. Innovation had entered other aspects of their performance, however, in stage presentation and recording production values (for example, their recording of 'The Morning Dew' exploits the possibilities of stereo recordings by alternating channels in the percussion interludes). The Chieftains introduced Irish traditional music to audiences from different social backgrounds and taste groups, and most significantly, to immense audiences as a perennially successful act on the global entertainment circuit. Theirs is music to be listened to in the silence of a concert hall, and it demands more intellectual, but less physical and social, engagement than the earlier versions of 'The Morning Dew' discussed in this chapter. It is perfected music: smooth and clear, complex and changing, but (like a recording) each performance is necessarily much the same as the last. The music remains up on the stage with the artists, and does not invite us to join in. This is the rationalized music of modernity, marketed as 'traditional'.

---

[65] A more detailed review of Ó Riada's influence is available in the following: Bill Meek 1987; Ó Súilleabháin 1982; 1994; 1998; White 1998a; and Vallely 1999.

3.8   'The Woman of the House': Women's musical participation

In the twenty-first century, the legislated equality between men and women is widely regarded as an achievement of the modern state, and the oppression of women a remnant of traditionalism and tribalism. Yet women's participation in bands and on recordings did not increase significantly during the period discussed, nor does it even now reflect the proportion of women among musicians playing Irish traditional music. The biographical entries in Vallely's *Companion to Irish Traditional Music* (Vallely 1999), interviews in Irish music journals and books about Irish music include many stories of musicians whose first teachers were their mothers. Yet, while Irish women played traditional music, they rarely had the opportunity to do so outside their own homes.[66] As Paddy Canny has said, 'If the dance was in their own house they'd probably have a go, but they wouldn't ever follow it up that much' (Paddy Canny quoted in Vallely and Piggott 1998: 54). Once music-making moved to public halls, very few women — usually only those from musical families — were able to participate.

Traditional musicians formed a fraternity that supported their playing and gave them opportunities to perform and engage with new repertoires and styles at fleadhs, festivals and sessions. In the masculine world of the pub, where musicians gathered informally in England and America, few women were welcome, or felt welcome. In Ireland, respectable women did not even think of going into a pub. The key to women's inclusion in this fraternity was the 'music lounge', an innovation in pubs around Ireland during the 1960s, although even with these new spaces for 'mixed' socializing, the pub remained primarily a masculine space.

Women's virtual absence from recordings of Irish music up to the mid-1970s and from the pubs and bands that became the new centres of musical activity following the disappearance of house dances in rural Ireland has not been explored by the writers and film-makers of the 1990s discussed above. Informal music-making moved from the feminine province of the house into the masculine territory of the pub. Formally, it moved into public venues in CCÉ performances and in the dance hall. In these supervised contexts, women were once more included, but often in conventionally feminine roles: playing pianos or harps, singing or dancing. Women's

---

[66] The exceptions included ceili band members, usually pianists. Other notable women musicians include Kathleen Harrington (c1903–84), fiddle player with the Dublin-based Kincora Ceilidhe Band from 1937, and Julia Clifford (1914–97) who played the fiddle in dance bands in post-war England.

participation as Irish traditional musicians has varied according to their access to the places where music was played. That these included both the traditional household and the parish hall, each controlled by a patriarchal structure, is another example of the complex and paradoxical intertwining of modernity and traditionalism in Irish music.

3.9   Traditional music in a reformed economy

A major change in economic policy in the late 1950s finally moved the Irish nation towards the program of modernization envisaged in the 1920s. The development of an outward-looking economy brought a proliferation of social and musical changes to Ireland[67] and a degree of prosperity that allowed the generation that came of age in the 1970s the opportunity to stay in Ireland rather than emigrate. It also created an environment in which a viable Irish music industry and new musical forms could flourish.

Recording companies set up by culturally motivated groups — Gael-Linn, with its promotion of the Irish language and traditional music, and Claddagh, the project of 'gentlemen pipers' Garech Browne and Ivor Browne — promoted both established traditional musicians and members of an urban revival alongside radio and television programs devoted to traditional music. At the same time, the international marketing success of the English and American folk revivals allowed such Irish 'ballad bands' as the Clancy Brothers and the Dubliners to become international stars performing an Irish repertoire.

In the early 1970s, the group Planxty performed Irish ballads and traditional dance music in exciting new arrangements that brought together elements of the ballad bands' repertoire with the Chieftains' intricate arrangements using a combination of instruments new to traditional music: bouzouki, mandolin, guitar, uilleann pipes, whistle and bodhrán (Musical example 24[68]). Their commercial success and musical innovations had profound and lasting effects on the presentation of Irish traditional music, spawning new groups that took performance styles into more contemporary,

---

[67] The growth of an Irish tourist industry utilizing images of Ireland based on past constructs of national identity is discussed further in Chapter Five.

[68] Planxty perform one of their signature songs, 'The Raggle Taggle Gypsy' (vocalist Christy Moore) and segue dramatically into an instrumental, *Tabhair dom do Lámh* ('Give me your Hand'), a harp tune composed in 1603 and published by Bunting in 1840 (Bunting c1969). Recorded 1972.

rock-influenced directions. These included the Bothy Band, noted for reckless speed and driving rhythms (Musical example 25[69]) and De Dannan's 'Galway sound' (Musical example 26[70]). Each of these bands featured the newest instrument to have been absorbed into Irish traditional music's 'river of sound': the bouzouki.

While Irish traditional music groups have continued to exert an influence on performance styles and instruments among amateur musicians, the growth of informal group performance in the session (discussed in Chapters Four and Six) has at the same time seen the circulation of a new form of traditionalism that overlooks, or is ignorant of, the fact that these recent innovations have been only recently incorporated into 'the tradition'.

This chapter set out to account for the ways in which popular dance music in Ireland became 'traditional' during the twentieth century, and in doing so, to trouble the distinction between modernity and the traditionalism so often found in histories of Ireland and Irish culture. The experiences and recordings of musicians demonstrate that this distinction is not clear-cut. For most of the musicians whose performances of 'The Morning Dew' have been discussed in this chapter, Michael Coleman's recording was the touchstone and the point of departure for interpretations of the tune that performed community, or memories of community, but also spoke of individual creativity and ambition.

These performances took place within 'imaginative cultural narratives' (Frith 1996: 124) that emerged from their lived experience as citizens of the Irish state or as emigrants. For example, when musicians in East Clare adapted their music-making to the new context of dance halls and the ceili band, the standardized group sound and professionalized function of the music changed its social meanings, but earlier experiences and understandings of music continued to reverberate in rhythm and repertoire. In post-war London pubs, immigrant musicians from rural Ireland voiced the defiant gaiety of a disdained underclass along with the pain of homesickness —

---

[69] The Bothy Band formed in 1975, the year Planxty broke up, their band's name reflecting the revivalist ambition to recreate the atmosphere of the emigrant camps (called bothies in Scotland, destination of many Ulster itinerant workers). The set of reels performed here, 'The Salamanca', 'The Banshee' and 'The Sailor's Bonnet' (the last popularized by Coleman in his famous 'Tarbolton' set) was on their self-titled first album (1975), featuring Donal Lunny's 'wall of sound' in which bouzouki, mandolin and guitar create a complex harmonic and rhythmic backing to the melody, exchanged among Paddy Keenan's fiery piping, Matt Molloy's flute and Tommy People's gutsy fiddling.

[70] An example of 'the Galway sound' of De Dannan, formed in 1974. Recorded 1980. Bouzouki is played by English-born Alec Finn.

or homelessness, for the rural Ireland they had left behind was not the 'home' idealized in nationalist rhetoric. Nationalist ideology provided a narrative within which this music remained both Irish and traditional, but it could not re-create in new contexts the lived experience in which rural dance music had flourished.

In the case of the Chieftains, the urban concert hall demanded a strong, clear sound that was in perfect tonal pitch, standardized arrangements that could be reproduced at each performance, and a stage presentation in which the music was introduced in an educative but entertaining way, while listeners sat in silence. What links this formal presentation with its informal precursors as 'traditional' is the imaginative cultural narrative of nationalist ideology. Significantly, this cultural narrative is not that of the ballad bands that emerged in the 1960s under the influence of folk revival movements in the USA and in England, where songs in English were sung with manly vigour to the accompaniment of modern instruments such as the banjo and guitar. On the contrary, the repertoire of the Chieftains draws on much earlier narratives of a uniquely Irish culture, as suggested by their name (referring to an ancient Irish nobility) their repertoire (which includes eighteenth-century harp music) and their instruments (which include both the gentleman's uilleann pipes and the genteel harp).

As I have argued, musical performance neither represents nor expresses the common attributes of a particular group but (following Frith) that music 'articulates *in itself* an understanding of both group relations and individuality, on the basis of which ethical codes and social ideologies are understood' (Frith 1996b: 111). Reg Hall has written that Irish traditional music, as a reproduced and revived music, is an imitation that has passed its meaningful time (1999). Those involved in Irish traditional music as performers, listeners, critics and commentators have rejected this view, however. The vast, wealth-producing tourism and music-production industries and their offshoots continue to promote 'the tradition'. Recordings from the vinyl era have been reissued on compact disc with the cleaner sound and more varied sequencing that contemporary consumers demand, along with booklets explaining the music's authenticity, framing the musicians' lives in a newly mythologized rural past and their ethnicity as a newly conceived, transportable Irishness.

The question of authenticity in Irish music has concerned intellectuals for over two centuries. It has variously been located in geographical places (such as the west of Ireland), in private and public spaces (rural households and, later, pubs), in lineages

of musicians (who had learned directly from acknowledged masters or from their pupils), as well as in particular instruments, performance styles and repertoires. Since the beginning of the revival of Irish traditional music in the late 1950s, this concern has also become that of musicians.

The popular dance music of rural Ireland, with its mix of musical styles and sources, came to be understood as Irish and traditional (rather than simply 'music' or 'dance music') from the beginning of the twentieth century, as its texts were widely distributed, as it was heard on recordings and on radio, as it moved into public spaces in supervised dance halls and emigrant meeting-places, and in new forms of presentation for wider audiences.

While the state, the Catholic Church and cultural nationalists in the urban art-music field failed to invent a national art-music that was recognized as 'Irish', revivalists from the 1950s onwards succeeded in bringing together musicians under a nationalist credo and fostering a popular movement. Some of the effects of this were to 'discover' musicians previously unknown outside their own districts and make them stars. Other effects were to establish a new set of criteria for judging musical performances, teaching young musicians and educating audiences, in line with revivalist notions of authenticity (discussed in the following chapter). At the same time, young Irish musicians in the 1970s embraced new instruments, performance styles and repertoires, reaching a new generation of audiences and inspiring a surge in participation, paradoxically ensuring the continuity of Irish traditional music while also changing it radically.

Throughout this period it can be seen that Irish traditional music was Irish not only in the sense that it was played in Ireland, or by Irish musicians in other places, but also within the discourse of nationalist ideology that claimed the music as emblematic of Irishness. As discussed in Chapter Two, this Irish ethnicity was claimed on behalf of all inhabitants of the island, but in reality took a more limited form: Gaelic, republican, Catholic, and ideally also Irish-speaking, an identity that was brought into relief by defining it against 'foreign' popular music.

Brendan Mulkere (1994) recollects London music pubs as a resistant, secretive sub-culture. In the twenty-first century, Irish music culture is more public than ever, its secrets displayed, discussed, laughed about and argued over throughout the world. Irish traditional music has become a globalized commodity and performance practice, but at the same time some musicians and listeners imagine themselves still

to be contained within a tradition, to be 'innocent' of the outside or of being an outsider. Understandings of Irish traditional music from *beyond* the worlds of rural Ireland, American recordings and London pubs are the focus of the next chapter.

MUSICAL COMMUNITIES:
IDENTIFYING (WITH) IRISH MUSIC IN AUSTRALIA

> A diminutive old man pumps out a reel on his button accordion. Seated on a garden bench placed against a caravan, he looks beyond the camera, his mouth fixed in a half-smile. Beside him Lucky Oceans, a man several decades his junior and the presenter of a daily 'world music' program on national radio, strums a dobro. After ten seconds, Lucky smiles broadly at the camera and introduces this television documentary on Irish music in Australia (*The Planet* 2001) by announcing: 'I'm sitting with Billy Moran in his suburban Melbourne garden. The man is a master, a living treasure of Irish music in Australia!' Billy's expression does not change; he keeps playing, but the scene changes before his tune comes to an end. Forty seconds.

If Billy Moran is a master and a living treasure, why does Lucky Oceans not speak directly to him or let him speak for himself? Why does he mispronounce Billy's surname? And why picture him with the old caravan, as if he lived there, instead of in his house?[1] Why does Lucky strum chords as if he 'knows' Billy's music, talk over his playing, and cut him off mid-tune?

> In the next scene, two Australians in their early twenties, 'Matthew' and 'Simon',[2] play a jig together on fiddle and flute, then respond to Lucky Oceans' questions about Irish dance tune-types. They play a reel, this time joined by the other members of their band on mandola and guitar. When they finish the tune, Matthew explains that this 'nice blend' of instruments gives the music its 'driving sound'.

If Billy Moran is a master of Irish music, why are these young Australians the experts and why do we hear more of their playing than of his?

This chapter attempts to find answers to the questions posed above by examining musical and social interactions among musicians in Melbourne's Irish traditional music scene[3] in which I have participated for over twenty-five years. Where the

---

[1] There is a strong association between caravans and Travellers, Ireland's itinerant underclass.

[2] The names of participants have been changed, the pseudonym appearing in quotation marks the first time it is used. Billy Moran has kindly given permission to use his name.

[3] I adopt the term 'scene' because it is local usage — 'the folk scene', 'the Irish scene', 'the Irish music scene', 'the trad scene' — and thus does not set up a barrier between my research collaborators and an academic discourse. Will Straw advocates using the term 'scene'

previous chapter examined ways in which Irish musicians created individual and collective identifications with Ireland through their playing, this chapter explores the social experience of playing in Irish traditional music sessions[4] in Melbourne, Australia, where a struggle for dominance is played out according to conflicting notions of Irishness and differing positions in relation to other social categories including gender and class. It argues that young Australian musicians experience Irishness as a citational ethnicity, depoliticized and commodified. Older Australian musicians, on the other hand, experience Irishness as relating to Irish musicians, but only partially to their music, while musicians from Ireland bring to the session their personal historical sense of nationality and ethnicity. Australian music industry authority Lucky Oceans constructs Irishness as transportable and translatable within a celebratory discourse that commodifies Irish ethnicity and includes Irish traditional music as one among a series of 'world' musics circulating in a global field of cultural production.[5]

In this chapter I analyze the ways in which individual musicians invest their cultural capital in a struggle for both symbolic power, or authority, and economic power. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *cultural capital* as the accumulated cultural knowledge, skills and dispositions that secure social status is useful for analyzing this musical scene, in which cultural capital is a set of knowledge and skills, not only musical but also social. Its unequal distribution is one aspect of the struggle for dominance, but

because of its neutrality in indicating a collective identity that is neither oppositional, nor disruptive, nor entirely manipulated by the music industry. 'Scene' also avoids the normative value and implied homogeneity of the term 'community' (Straw 1991). I do not begin with this assumption, for the scene I examine also includes aspects of what Howard Becker called a 'world' (in his research, the art world) to convey the interrelatedness of the visual artist with promoters, entrepreneurs, collectors and others (Becker 1982). Ruth Finnegan follows Becker in using the term 'musical worlds' for the various musical networks she examines in *The Hidden Musicians*, a study of music-making in an English town (Finnegan 1989: 32). Like Finnegan, my focus is primarily on musical production among musicians who construct collective identities within a set of discourses and values. I choose not to use the term 'musical world', however, in order to distinguish this particular network of real, imagined and virtual relationships from that of 'world music' and 'Irish music world', which may imply that each 'world of music' is essentially different from but equivalent to any other and that all are universally translatable into any local context. This, indeed, appears to be the implication in the earlier use of 'world music' as an alternative to 'ethnomusicology' in American textbooks (for example, see Titon 1984).

[4] Colin 'Hammy' Hamilton defines the session as a 'loose association of musicians who meet, generally, but not always, in a pub to play an unpredetermined selection, mainly of dance music, but sometimes with solo pieces such as slow airs or songs. There will be one or more "core" musicians, and others who are less regular.' (Hamilton 1999: 345). The genesis of the session in England and Ireland is discussed in Chapter Three.

[5] Bourdieu's concept of the *field* as a relatively autonomous but dynamic network of power relations includes the *field of cultural production* (Bourdieu 1993) that competes with other fields such as those of commerce, politics and education. The Irish music scene in Melbourne can be thought of as one of an almost infinite number of lesser cultural fields.

equally important is the difference in value that each age cohort of musicians assigns to the various forms of cultural capital.

As outlined in Chapter One, Bourdieu has identified three forms of cultural capital: *embodied* (for example, the ability to make aesthetic judgements); *objectified* (specialized skills such as the ability to play a musical instrument); and *institutionalized* (as in the standardized knowledge acquired through formal music education) (Bourdieu 1986). In the Melbourne Irish music scene, the most effective forms of knowledge are acquired outside institutional settings, and, as I argue below, demonstrate a structural correspondence, not with class (as Bourdieu's research indicates), but with ethnicity. Young Australian musicians bring to the session an institutionalized cultural capital that the Irish musicians do not possess, while devaluing the embodied cultural capital that has accumulated as the Irish musicians' musical style (a generative form of taste, or aesthetic). This situation changes over time, however, as the young musicians begin to 'unlearn' what their formal music education has taught them and to recognize and value more highly the Irish musicians' embodied knowledge.

4.1   A musical scene

In the previous chapter, and again in the television documentary described above, we met East Galway accordion player Billy Moran (b. 1928), who toured England with the Aughrim Slopes Ceilidh Band in the 1940s and later returned there to work alongside other Irish men on post-war reconstruction projects. In 1950, Billy migrated to Australia, where he again worked on major construction projects. While he continued to play his accordion, swapping tunes with European and Scandinavian co-workers, Billy found 'very, very, very little' Irish music in Australia. Settling in Melbourne in the 1960s, he began to play at Irish dances and for step-dancing competitions. By the end of that decade, further migration from Ireland and the expansion of an Irish immigrant social network had brought more Irish musicians to Melbourne (including East Clare accordion player Paddy Fitzgerald). The music scene was still small, however, and a far cry from the London pubs where, Billy recalls, 'There was music seven nights a week: the finest of music!' (Billy Moran, interview, 19 December 1999)

As part of this expansion of Irish immigrant socializing, in 1970 a number of Irish musicians formed a Melbourne branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ) and

began to teach Irish traditional music to their children, some of whom went on to play in sessions, in ballad bands performing Irish traditional music and songs, and in 'bush bands', which combined the style of the Irish ballad band with Australian songs and Irish tunes (Smith, G. 1994a). When bush bands declined in the mid-1980s, some of these musicians continued to play in ballad bands in pubs that attracted an Irish immigrant crowd. In the late 1990s, the new Irish theme pubs attracted a broader audience and ballad bands were again in demand.

The Dan O'Connell Hotel was a focus for all these musical activities. In the 1970s it was the venue for a folk club, bush bands, rock bands and Irish traditional music sessions, thus providing opportunities for both audiences and musicians to participate in overlapping musical scenes. As in Ireland, the beginning of the 1970s saw the gradual acceptance of women in bars and the commercial success of pubs that provided live music for mixed audiences. Of particular significance was the interplay between musicians who had learned traditional music from their Irish parents and other musicians attracted by the Irish music sessions and bands. My own participation in this scene dates from that period. Billy Moran recalls sessions at the Dan O'Connell in the 1970s:

> They were nearly all Australians. I was going down there for years … they used to have the band in the back and we used to have the session in the bar … all the young lads. The Tramways [Hotel] was the next one. There wasn't many Irish pubs around then, there was only one or two that you could have the music in. It's the opposite now, it's all Irish pubs and no Irish music! (Billy Moran, interview)

At the Dan O'Connell's Saturday afternoon sessions there was a core of strong players, surrounded by others learning and listening. Solo songs punctuated the sets of dance tunes. Apart from Billy Moran and occasionally Clare immigrants Paddy and Joe Fitzgerald, the musicians were young Australians. The musical and social nucleus was a band formed in the mid-1970s by young Irish immigrants, and later including local musicians as they acquired a repertoire of Irish dance music on fiddle, accordion and banjo. The most enthusiastic and capable of the young musicians quickly amassed a large common repertoire of tunes that would allow them to play for hours without repeating a tune. They were all self-taught musicians, picking up tunes and techniques from one another and from records imported from Ireland of such inspirational bands as Planxty, the Bothy Band and De Dannan. There were no women in the bands and only a handful of Australian women playing music, although many of the listeners were young women. It was a vibrant musical

and social scene, but there was little contact between the young Australians playing Irish music and Irish immigrant networks.

During the 1980s, the scene moved to other pubs where publicans paid one or more musicians to lead sessions. Musicians, even those being paid, were aware that this made a fundamental difference to the nature of the gathering. Billy Moran shares a view held by many musicians in Australia, and in Ireland, even though he now rarely plays in sessions where he is not the paid leader:

> The money has everything ruined. You'd come into a session one time, and that was it, you played, and you enjoyed it. The money came into it then and if anyone comes in they say, 'Well, if he's getting paid and she's getting paid, why amn't I getting paid?' That's the attitude. (Billy Moran, interview)

The distinction between amateurs and professionals is not always clear, however.[6] Session leaders often try to conceal the fact that they are paid and conduct the session as if it were a meeting of amateurs, while some musicians who call themselves professionals perform only seasonally on the festival circuit.

In 1999, there were five or six pub sessions in Melbourne, most with paid leaders. These resembled in many ways those of postwar England discussed in the previous chapter: people of various ages seated around a table crowded with drinks and ashtrays, playing instruments that probably included fiddles, flutes and accordions; the music fast, high-pitched and rhythmic; musicians playing without scores, tapping their feet in time and listening intently as they play. By the 1990s, however, the instruments included many more accompanying instruments: the bodhrán, guitar, mandola and bouzouki. Most of the musicians were from the urban middle class and to them, playing Irish traditional music was a discovery of their adolescent or young adult years rather than continuous since childhood. The session was part of that discovery, and they adapted it to their own ideas about music, friendship and community.

The number of Irish-born musicians in Melbourne sessions, including short-term visitors, was relatively small, while the musician children of Irish immigrants participated almost exclusively as professionals in ballad bands. Those without any recent Irish connection played in sessions, occasionally in their own bands playing Irish traditional music (mainly at festivals), but not in the ballad or 'plastic Paddy'

---

[6] This coincides with Ruth Finnegan's findings in her study of musical 'worlds' in an English town (Finnegan 1989).

bands, as they called them. While men predominated among paid session leaders and band performers, there were many more proficient women musicians than in the 1970s. Musicians arriving from Ireland were accorded a higher status than local Australian musicians and those on one-year 'backpacker' visas (about 16,000 annually) often found temporary work in bands or as session leaders, stimulating sessions and introducing new tunes. The following discussion identifies the musicians who formed one subset of the overlapping circles of musical friends who made up Melbourne's Irish music scene in 1999.

4.2   Discovering an ideal musical community

Of the fifteen musicians selected for this part of the study,[7] all but two were Australian-born,[8] most did not practise a religion, most were educated to university level and in 1999 were students or in low- to medium-income jobs. Three had English parents, and four had distant Irish forebears, but all described themselves as Australian, rather than, say, Irish–Australian.[9] The musicians fell into two distinct age cohorts: eight who in 1999 were in their twenties, and six aged around forty. All were competent musicians who played in various sessions with overlapping membership before joining to play in a paid session at a new inner-suburban bar, Fibber McVey's. The older of the 'Aussies', as Billy Moran called them, were acquainted with the Irish immigrant musicians and their musician children, having played regularly in sessions for around twenty years, occasionally in performance groups, and in sessions at music festivals. All had visited Ireland. Their instruments were fiddle, wooden flute, whistle, banjo and guitar. The 'young ones' (Billy's term), including the four band members featured in Lucky Oceans' television program, had begun to play Irish traditional music around 1990. They played fiddle, flute, whistle, mandola, bodhrán, guitar and banjo and enjoyed a lively social life that included pub sessions and house parties.

---

[7] The cohort of musicians playing at Fibber McVey's pub during the research period included Billy Moran, six fortyish Australians (three women, three men), and eight Australians in their twenties (four women, four men). Many other musicians were consulted or were present during discussions of the research questions. Some took part in the sessions that were recorded.

[8] 'Barbara' was born in England, 'Collette' in Ireland. Both migrated to Australia as children. They began to play Irish traditional music as university students.

[9] This differs from Americans with a similar Irish lineage, as found by Mary C. Waters in *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Waters 1990).

These Australian musicians spoke of hearing Irish traditional music performed 'live' for the first time as a transformative experience. They recalled being struck by the music's beauty and energy and its authenticity.[10] The scene itself was also attractive and the younger musicians in particular were drawn to emulate the bands they heard at festivals.[11] Like musicians on the threshold of other musical scenes, they became infatuated with a particular musical energy and sound and wanted to make it their own. It was, as fiddle player Matthew (b. 1977) puts it, 'the music I feel I can best express myself through' (Matthew, interview, 9 November 1999). Apart from the sound of the music, the Australian musicians in both age groups were attracted by what they perceived as a musical community.

The older Australians had vivid recollections of discovering a 'ready-made music scene' and 'the most wonderful thing in the world'.[12] Younger musicians recalled their first encounters in similar ways, using the language of their own generation. They were: 'blown away by the whole scene … the whole vibe'; it was 'cool' and 'authentic'.[13]

What is it about the sight and sound of musicians playing together in a session or a band that leads outsiders to assume that it is an accessible, ready-made community? To answer this, we need to look at ideas about communal music-making in circulation in Australian society.

When the older musicians began playing Irish music in the 1970s, communal cultural activities that offered participation to unskilled newcomers had become a hallmark of youth culture. Following the lead of young Americans of the 'Woodstock generation', young, urban Australians thronged to youth festivals and political demonstrations and experimented with co-operatives from learning exchanges to food and childcare co-ops to communal households. In the mid-1970s, there was a

---

[10] Examples of recalled responses to the music: fiddle player 'Oriel' (b. 1972) was inspired by 'real, raw' music that had 'guts' and 'soul' (interview, 2 February 2000); flute player Barbara (b. 1960) thought it 'the most lovely music I've ever heard' (interview, 29 September 1999).

[11] Examples of younger musicians' responses to the scene: fiddle player Matthew (b. 1977) was 'blown away by the whole scene' (interview, 9 November 1999); flute player Simon (b. 1979) thought it 'cool' (interview, 13 November 1999). Other musicians were attracted to what the musicians were doing: banjo player 'Mike' (b. 1959) admired their technical ability (interview, 5 January 2000); Oriel the musical communication between players (interview, 2 Febuary 2000).

[12] Quotations from interviews with Mike and Barbara, respectively.

[13] Quotations from interviews with Matthew and Simon, respectively.

choice of acoustic music scenes on offer: contemporary and folk singing, Irish traditional music and bluegrass, among others. These were social scenes as well, where aspiring musicians, performers and fans mixed. Most participants were middle-class and of British or Irish descent and the vast majority of performers were male. An anti-elitist, 'anyone can do it' ethos prevailed, particularly in the bush bands, which were strong on participation but more relaxed about musical skills.[14]

As Billy Moran's account of playing Irish music in Melbourne suggests, the 1970s saw immigrant Irish musicians playing in pub sessions along with more recent immigrants, second-generation Irish musicians and their friends. There was a good deal of cross-fertilization with ballad and bush bands as well as rock bands. Graeme Smith has written about the genesis of the bush band during this period and its endorsement of a notion of Australian national character as essentially Irish–Australian (Smith, G. 2001). Bush dances were a popular entertainment in the 1970s and 1980s, regarded as performing an Australian identity, despite drawing more heavily on the English folk revival's 'barn dances' than on earlier dance formats in Australia, both in terms of the dances performed and the organization of the event. Such bands as Melbourne's popular Bushwackers Band both promoted a strongly nationalist ethos and claimed to play 'traditional Australian folk music' (Wositzky 1980), a claim that subsequently has been discredited. The bush band repertoire, which featured simple tunes played in a 'no-frills' style,[15] was not welcomed in Irish traditional music sessions, where the repertoire was dominated (as it is today) by sets of reels played in a fast, rhythmically complex and ornamented style.

The notion of musical community has been explored in relation to folk revival, particularly in drawing together the notions of an idealized community expressed musically with an imagined local or national community. In *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (1993) Georgina Boyes gives an account of the early twentieth-century English folk revival movement, which idealized an

---

[14] Two examples of this from my own experience: In 1976 I was invited to join a touring 'jug' band on the strength of the fiddle case I carried. No audition was necessary. A folk festival I attended in rural Victoria in the late 1970s included a 'do-it-yourself' workshop on how to form a bush band.

[15] Although Graeme Smith proposes that bush bands played predominantly Irish dance tunes (1999: 12), *The Bushwackers Band Dance Book* (Wositzky 1980) includes equal numbers of Irish and Scottish tunes, along with tunes from England and the USA. My own tune lists from performing in bush bands indicate tune origins in similar proportions.

imagined 'organic community' of the people when the majority of the population actually lived in unhealthy and potentially unruly industrial cities. At a time of waning imperial power and the rising threat of Germany, recreated folk performances became 'an index of Englishness' (Boyes 1993: 99). Another impetus for the English folk revival, and others in Europe, was the development of evolutionary anthropology, the political implications of which included claims for Aryan supremacy and the justification of imperialism and class stratification (1993: 9).

This concept of the 'folk' did not have much attraction for the Irish, however; indeed, the term was rarely used in Ireland except in reference to the urban 'folk clubs' of the 1960s (Vallely 1999: 141), influenced by a mid-twentieth-century English folk revival, which emerged from the socialist Workers' Music Association (WMA) in England and a similar movement in the USA. Both promoted social justice through a repertoire of collected and composed songs valorizing industrial working men.

Folk revivals have been a feature of new and consolidating nations since the eighteenth century, when the supposed uncontaminated lineage of rural cultural practices was promoted to represent the new or anticipated nation. As related in Chapter Two, nineteenth-century Irish nationalists promoted indigenous culture to this end. The revival of older repertoires, together with reconstructed performance styles occurred in many other Western nations.[16] Ruth Finnegan has examined the 'folk world' as one among the diverse 'musical worlds' in one English town, and found that, despite stressing their 'classless' status by association with 'ordinary people', musicians in the 'folk world' were mostly highly educated professionals (1989: 68). Similarly, Robert Cantwell, in his critique of the American folk revival and its institutions, writes of the powerful 'idealized images of human life' to which intellectual elites link the cultural practices they seek to restore (1993: 234). Critics of American folk revival institutions such as Cantwell and David Whisnant (1983) portray revivalists as involved in an ideological mission quite alien to the musicians they manipulate and the music they transform by revising repertoires and performance styles and introducing it into new performance contexts.

---

[16] Other major studies of revival movements include Rosenberg 1993 (USA); McKay 1994 (Nova Scotia); Goertzen 1997 (Norway); *The World of Music* 38 (3) 1996 (Europe); and 41 (2) 1999 (Bavaria).

A distinguishing feature of mid-twentieth-century revivals was their focus on authentic (or, as Boyes views it, anachronistic) performance style, a project made possible by advances in recording technologies (Boyes 1993: 238). One problematic effect of this new emphasis was that the art-music aesthetic with which the predominantly urban, middle-class folk revivalists were familiar was now perceived as inadequate. Another was that revivalists' preservationist ethos and ideologically driven concept of 'authenticity' discouraged musical innovation, a concept foreign to musicians outside folk revival movements, who borrow freely from other musical genres and repertoires.

Folk revival in Australia shares much with revival movements elsewhere. In their historical account of the Australian 'folk community', Graeme Smith and Judith Brett document changes in performance style from the 1950s, when performers in the Australian folk revival sang 'bush' songs in a self-consciously Australian style, to the advent in the 1960s of folksingers, who, like revivalists in Britain and America, presented folk music as public, and often professional, urban entertainment in coffee lounges and in folk clubs with an ethos of participation and structured informality (Smith and Brett 2001).[17] Smith and Brett identify Australia's folk music movement as encompassing a diversity of musical styles that share a musical ideology of an ideal 'folk community', a 'folk process' of oral transmission, and a commitment to 'authentic performance and participatory cultural forms' (2001: 42–3). There are thus continuities between the participatory ethos of folk revival and Australians playing Irish traditional music in the late-twentieth century. Many of the young musicians in the present study had been introduced to folk music and festivals by their parents, while the older musicians had begun to play at a time when folk clubs were still operating, and had participated in many folk festivals (if only in the informal music sessions). They share with folk revivalists a notion of authenticity associated with face-to-face, acoustic performance, and while they do not regard themselves as part of a 'folk community' (and indeed, look down on 'folkies' as 'uncool'), their attraction to a notion of musical community is based on similar concepts of authenticity, while their efforts to learn Irish traditional music is influenced by revivalists' emphasis on performance aesthetic and an authentic sound and their valorization of an 'oral tradition' of informal, face-to-face transmission.

---

[17] Niall MacKinnon introduces the term 'structured informality' in *The British Folk Scene: Musical performance and social identity* (1994).

4.3   'Grabbing it': Learning to play Irish traditional music

The range of strategies that each age cohort of the Melbourne musicians in this study employed to learn to play Irish traditional music and gain entrance to the scene, and the kinds of obstacles they met and overcame, show more similarities than differences. For the younger Australian musicians, and the older musicians when they were young, learning to play Irish music was about 'getting it'— mainly getting a large repertoire of tunes. This is partly necessitated by the duration of pub sessions (generally three to four hours) during which time it is considered bad form to play a tune that has already been played.[18] Some had to acquire instruments and learn to play them. All learned tunes initially from transcriptions, either by consulting published collections or (the youngest in particular) by using the internet to sample recordings and to access websites offering ABC notation and sound files of tunes (Images 1–3[19]). They listened to recordings and while some took lessons from more experienced musicians, they also learned through playing with others and practising alone or with friends. In their early enthusiasm they were fanatical, almost desperate to 'grab' the music, 'get' it, 'nail' it, 'note by note', until eventually learning became easier and they were able to assimilate new tunes by ear.[20] Music to the younger musicians, as to the older musicians when they were starting out, was a 'thing' to be acquired in sequence: notes, then rhythm, the conventions for ornamentation and variation, a substantial repertoire, a fast tempo, and, finally, style.

---

[18] In 1977, Breandán Breathnach estimated the body of Irish dance music to comprise over 6000 tunes (Breathnach 1977: 56). Each of the musicians in this study can play between several hundred and a thousand tunes. As Ciarán Carson suggests, however, the concept of a quantifiable repertoire is not really applicable to Irish traditional music. 'The tunes [a traditional musician] plays are the tunes he [sic] plays at any given time. He will learn new tunes and forget others. He might find himself liking what he thinks is a new tune which the other musicians learned from him years ago' (Carson 1986: 9).

[19] Image 1 shows a standard transcription of 'The Morning Dew' of the kind found in tune books and on Irish music websites, giving the tune's basic outline without indicating options for ornamentation or melodic variation (rigel.csuchico.edu/~pubscout/tunes). Image 2, from the same website, shows the tune in ABC notation, which uses the names of the notes of the scale rather than five-line staves. Sound files on these websites give a simplified version of the tune quite lacking in rhythmic nuance. A MIDI file of 'The Morning Dew' can be accessed at trillian.mit.edu/~jc/music/abc/findtune.html. Image 3 shows a more complex transcription of Michael Coleman's playing of 'The Morning Dew' (heard on Musical Example 5), indicating his bowing style and rhythmic and melodic variations on each repetition of the tune (Lyth 1981: 31–2).

[20] Quotations from interviews with Matthew, Natalie and Simon, respectively. 'Getting' and 'having' a tune is also part of the discourse of Irish traditional music, within the session and in private musical exchanges, and it is related to the informal learning that takes place amongst musicians that is part of its appeal as a scene — one of the more generous aspects of musical interaction among Irish musicians, which at other times can be highly competitive.

Fiddle player Matthew's (b. 1977) learning followed a typical path.[21] He learned his first Irish tunes from books, but after listening to a recording of an Irish group, 'got the sense that what I was trying to do just didn't sound anything like what they were doing' (Matthew, interview, 9 November 1999). Another musician advised him to 'chuck the book away and get some tapes' but Matthew continued to learn tunes from a book, trying to adapt his playing to what he heard other musicians doing, before eventually making the transition to picking up new tunes by ear. When he gained access to a friend's recordings of individual Irish musicians (rather than bands), Matthew heard different versions of tunes and possibilities for interpreting them with ornamentation and variation. He began imitating the sounds he liked: 'I think, "Oh, man, that sounds fucking great", so then I try and mimic it' (Matthew, interview).

Having the repertoire and skill to play with others in a session opens up the social aspect of music-making. Matthew recognized the opportunity sessions offered to learn from more experienced players:

> That's where it's sort of alive, with different people doing it. And that's where it's good to play with people who are really experienced players, because there really is something to grab from it. (Matthew, interview)

The older Australian musicians had adopted similar strategies: learning from books, recordings or from older musicians and gradually acquiring the skills to learn and play by ear. When flute player Barbara (b. 1960) first heard Irish traditional music played on the tin whistle by a busker:

> I just thought, 'Wow, what is this? This is the most lovely music I've ever heard!'… and he said, 'The session's on tonight. Do you want to come down? I'll take you down'. So I went down and just thought, 'Wow, this is the most wonderful thing in the world!' And that was it: I went out and bought myself a tin whistle. I was seventeen. (Barbara, interview, 29 September 1999)

After struggling, first to read music notation, then to learn tunes, Barbara moved to London, shared a flat with other musicians and became a dedicated member of the London Irish traditional music scene. Inspired by hearing the wooden flute, Barbara replaced her tin whistle with a flute and would spend hours playing every day 'and

---

[21] Almost every musician consulted in this study reported a similar sequence in their attempts to learn Irish traditional music and to enter the session scene.

madly try to learn as many tunes as possible per week, so that I could actually play in the sessions' (Barbara, interview).

While each of the musicians in this study came from a family where music was played or sung, those musicians who had achieved high-level musical skills and qualifications in an institutional setting were all in the younger age group. Their musical progress had been marked out by examinations, competitions and qualifications. That understanding of music not as a social process but as a set of texts and techniques is the essence of musicological thinking that informs musical pedagogy in schools and universities.[22]

Once the younger musicians began to play in sessions, they discovered that much of their institutionalized cultural capital lacked currency there: that their music studies had 'indoctrinated' them into a way of hearing and learning music that they now had to *un*learn (Simon, interview, 13 November 1999). That process involved a change in musical values that encompassed not only objectified skills (such as learning to play their instrument) but also the development of aesthetic judgement, an embodied understanding of the music that would allow them to play in a style that sounded 'Irish' rather than 'classical'.

For 'Natalie' (b. 1975), a fiddle player, reflecting on the skills and values she had acquired as a violin student in a university music course was an important part of learning to play Irish traditional music. Natalie applied her lifelong training in analyzing musical texts and scrutinizing her own and others' instrumental technique: she stopped using vibrato and focused more on rhythm and less on tone production, even buying a new instrument with a grittier voice. Still she could not reproduce 'the rhythm and the feel, and the lilt and the style' of the Irish musicians she admired. 'I couldn't *hear* it, or figure it out, and I guess also that's because I was a classical musician, too. I guess there's no swing' (interview, 15 November 1999).

Natalie visited Ireland to learn more about the music by attending summer schools and playing in sessions. She concluded that her playing was comparable to that of her Irish contemporaries, but she was unable to reproduce the relaxed, unforced sound she heard in their playing. Natalie attributed this difference to the Irish

---

[22] During the past decade, Irish traditional music has shifted towards an institutionalized form of knowledge as it has entered the secondary school curriculum and specialized university programs in Ireland. These innovations are controversial among musicians, however, as evinced by fierce debate at a Willie Clancy Summer School forum in 2000 and at the University of Ulster's Crossroads Conference 2003 conference, devoted to the issue.

musicians' longer exposure to the music: they were 'really being on top of the tunes, so it's just like second nature' because 'over there, they're just brought up with it', while she has 'had to come to it afterwards, and learn the rhythm'. 'I guess maybe if you've come to Irish music later, like me,' Natalie reflects, 'you intellectualize it, whereas for them, they probably don't think about it at all like that, they just do it' (Natalie, interview). These comments indicate that Natalie has identified a difference between embodied knowledge and her self-conscious effort to acquire it, which for her also involves casting off inappropriate embodied knowledge.

Billy Moran understands the process of learning music rather differently. For him, playing Irish music is in part an act of retrieval as he replays the tunes he learned as a young man in the tune-sequences and tempo of the Aughrim Slopes Ceilidh Band. At the same time, he is continually learning new tunes and remembering old ones or letting some slip from his repertoire. His learning is generative, a set of musical dispositions that interacts with new material so that he plays new tunes through the embodied knowledge of his own developed style.[23] This contrasts with the learning of the young musicians, which involves a greater degree of self-consciousness, of focus on one's own technique, repertoire and style. Once these aspects of Irish music have become *embodied* knowledge and the common melodic motifs of many tunes are familiar, new tunes can be incorporated more easily.

All the musicians in this study spoke of the process of 'falling for' a tune, and the desire to 'have it'. To Billy, motivation is essential to learning: there must be an intense desire to 'have' a particular tune:

> It doesn't come from your head, it doesn't come from the book, it comes from the heart. There's some tunes there that you hate to play them, there's nor head nor tail on them, but if you get a tune that you like, and you find it hard to learn, then you learn it, you're thrilled with it. (Billy Moran, interview)

Nationality does not prevent someone from playing Irish music, he says, mentioning the musicians he met while working on the Snowy Mountains Scheme during the 1950s:

---

[23] This concept of learning has resonances with Catherine Ellis's study of *Aboriginal Music: Education for Living*, in which she identifies ways in which musical knowledge is structured with different levels of understanding that are explained in continuously more complex ways throughout life, beginning with repetition and oral learning of rhythm. In this scheme, for which a high degree of student motivation and respect is necessary, knowledge is a moving boundary (Ellis 1985).

> If they're interested in the music, they can still get it. I learnt a lot of Norwegian music up in the Snowy, there was a couple of great Norwegian players up there, with piano accordions. Jesus, they were great! Lovely people, too. And then if you played a jig or a reel, they wanted it right away. Their music is much the same as polkas and slides: there's great life in it, you know, and they dance with it, too. (Billy Moran, interview)

On the other hand, Billy finds that Australians who play Irish traditional music lack the qualities of 'life' and 'heart'. As he says of one Australian musician, 'She doesn't put any heart in her music … She's a great player, exact and everything, but no heart' (Billy Moran, interview).

This lack of 'heart' and 'life' may also be related to the sounds the Australians are emulating, rather than either a lack in sensibility or (as Natalie found) a lack of socialization in a musical sound and aesthetic. The sound that the younger musicians sought was the fast, harmonically and rhythmically complex style of such contemporary Irish bands as Lunasa, Altan and Nomos.[24] They did not include local players (either Irish- or Australian-born) among their role models. In this, they differed from the older 'Aussies', whose repertoire bridged the continually changing favourites of several generations.

The older musicians, once attracted by recordings of an earlier generation of Irish bands such as De Dannan, found their influences had changed. Looking back after about twenty years of playing, they include among their influences Melbourne Irish musicians including accordion virtuoso Joe Fitzgerald and his brother Paddy (in whose playing says Billy Moran hears the 'heart' that eludes the 'Aussies'), as well as solo performers heard on recordings. Barbara, for example, now never listens to recordings of bands nor attends concerts, preferring to listen to informal cassette tapes of individual musicians or sessions (Barbara, interview). Banjo player Mike (b. 1959) often buys CDs (but rarely of bands) and is continually adding to his repertoire from these (Mike, interview, 5 January 2000). The older musicians' tastes have followed a trajectory from an initial appreciation of an 'Irish' style that might encompass bands or soloists from many locations, to increasingly specialized preferences — Barbara, for example, has emulated the style of the Sligo flute players she admires.

---

[24] In interviews conducted in 1999–2000, younger musicians Simon, Matthew, Natalie and Oriel, mentioned as role models Irish bands (Nomos, Lunasa, Planxty, the Bothy Band, Altan) and individual performers (Nollaig Casey, Arty McGlynn, Kevin Burke, Donal Lunny, Frankie Gavin, Martin Hayes and Tommy Peoples).

4.4   The session: Playing with the rules

A fellow-student in Melbourne remarked that what she liked about Irish music sessions is the way everyone plays together and anyone can have a go. She liked the informality of musicians drinking and chatting between sets of tunes and the democratic flow of the evening in which even beginners get to play, while patrons are under no obligation to listen in silence. The fact that the tunes played are neither predetermined nor rehearsed, the duration of sets and breaks is variable, the composition of the group varies throughout the evening and from week to week and can include experienced players, beginners, and newcomers, all appear to confirm her impression that the session is spontaneous and egalitarian.

Within the circle of the session, however, the musician's experience is often less harmonious than it appears. Not only is the session hierarchical, but there are strict, if subtle, protocols governing who will play, what they play, when they play, how fast or loudly they play, or where they sit. These conventions vary from place to place and according to the degree to which a session is 'closed' (as when friends arrange to play together) or 'open' (a publicly advertised pub or festival session). Although the session as an event of social and musical communication has a relatively short 'tradition' of about fifty years, there is a growing body of writing about it, ranging from ethnomusicological description and analysis (Koning 1976; Hamilton 1978; Moloney 1992, Fairbairn 1994; Hamilton 1999) to somewhat tongue-in-cheek guides (Carson 1986; Ó hAllmurháin 1998; Foy 1999) and websites devoted to Irish traditional music. These guides, however, extrapolate from observations of social conventions in certain contexts to establish a set of rules that should govern behaviour in any new contexts (as discussed further in Chapter Six, Section 6.5).

Each of the Australian musicians had become aware that there was a code of etiquette governing the session, but, as Matthew points out:

> It was never spelt out, when you go to a session, you should do this and that, and never do this, or whatever. I always had a sense of treading a bit carefully. I didn't have the sense that there were big rules, but just that it was somewhere that you had to be a bit sensitive … And I think there's obviously clear things, there's things that I think now, how could anyone do that! … But I think it is a real feature of the session, there is a whole sort of code … But that whole thing, about the etiquette, is a long-term learning process. (Matthew, interview)

After the more easy-going atmosphere of Canberra's all-Australian Irish music sessions, where it was 'all personal expression, it's how you want to play the music… there's no sort of hierarchy', flute player Simon (b. 1979) found Melbourne sessions intimidating. Beginners were expected to follow rather than lead:

> almost having to get to a certain level before you can be awarded the honour of starting tunes! [At the session Billy Moran leads] it was *totally* Billy's show, which is not saying it's a bad thing, but it's like, you could not buck that hard and fast rule, which is a shock when you first experience it. (Simon, interview, 13 November 1999)

The young Australians did not feel comfortable in sessions led by Irish-born musicians in Melbourne. These large, 'open' sessions attracted many players who were less competent than themselves and whose presence inhibited their musical enjoyment, as did the repertoire of well-known tunes that the majority of musicians present could join in with. Just as important to the young Australians was the style of leadership. Rather than learning the standard repertoire and gradually earning the status to introduce tunes of their own preference (as the older Australian musicians had done), the younger players set up their own sessions, where they were not under such musical or social control and where they would receive the publican's payment. This decision also suggests that they did not regard the Irish ethnicity of session leaders like Billy Moran as necessary to the ability to play Irish traditional music; nor did they regard his session's apparent rules as necessary to its social performance. They understood both ethnicity and the notion of a fixed code of behaviour in the session as 'citational' — that is, deriving solely from convention — in that they recognized neither ethnicity nor etiquette as an essential part of performing Irish traditional music (although they were aware that others did).

The older Australian musicians were familiar with the strictly maintained leadership in Melbourne sessions, although it was not necessarily what they would have preferred. Barbara, for example, thought leadership should be passed around amongst musicians: 'I like somebody to lead to get the session warmed up. Once it's warmed up, really they can run away' (Barbara, interview). Mike, on the other hand, prefers tightly organized sessions, but at the same time observes that sessions take many different forms and that conventions change according to place, time, occasion and those present (Mike, interview). Different leadership styles and preferences in terms of repertoire and the place of solo performance also affect the flow and atmosphere of a session. Billy Moran believes the most important thing is that the musicians enjoy playing the music, and play with 'heart'. Although Billy says he would not expect to lead throughout a session, at the same time he criticizes

musicians who 'come along and want to play their own tune that other people don't know' (Billy Moran, interview).

Given these different understandings and preferences relating to leadership in a session, it is to be expected that a degree of disharmony might result when these musicians play together. As part of the research conducted among the Melbourne musicians several sessions were recorded on audio and videotape. The following is an account of one of those sessions. In locating and analyzing moments of crisis or disjuncture, I follow the method of 'scratching the itch' of which the work of social anthropologist Clifford Geertz provides a model.[25] At such moments of crisis, common-sense understandings are challenged, opening up opportunities to perceive more clearly the codes that at other times maintain the smooth workings of the session.

4.5   Contesting authority in the session

It is half-past eight on a Saturday night in September 1999. On the pavement outside Fibber McVey's, a recently opened inner-suburban bar, the blackboard advertises tonight's Irish music session. Inside, the dimly lit bar is well stocked with imported British beers and Scotch whiskies; the walls and ceiling beams are covered with enough bric-a-brac to furnish an antique shop. At Fibber's, the musicians have organized an unorthodox system, in which the responsibility for the session (and the publican's payment) circulate within a 'collective' of ten Australian musicians. Until a few weeks earlier, Billy had led his own session at the Normandy, a pub frequented by an Irish crowd, mainly men in the building sector. All the musicians present had played at Billy's session, but the younger musicians had organized this session to avoid the Normandy's rowdy patrons and the tyranny of a single leader. They invited Barbara, Mike and myself (their seniors by about twenty years) to join them. Tonight, Barbara and I are the paid musicians and have invited Billy to join us. Despite our hopes for a night of harmonious music-making, tension soon develops among the musicians.

---

[25] One instructive example is Geertz's 1959 essay on 'Ritual and social change: A Javanese example', in which he attributes disruptions to a funeral ritual to 'an incongruity between the cultural framework of meaning and the patterning of social interaction, an incongruity due to the persistence in an urban environment of a religious symbol system adjusted to peasant social structure' (Geertz 1973: 169). The analysis in this chapter concerns disjunctions in a musical and social event that is adapted (or 'translated') into new cultural, historical and economic frameworks.

The first jarring moment takes place early in the evening, during the first set (medley) of tunes (Musical example 27[26]). Flute player Barbara starts up a reel, 'The Maids of Mont Cisco'. She knows that everyone present plays this tune, including her student 'Collette', who sits next to her 'being babysat', as Barbara calls it; it is also a favourite tune of Billy's. Barbara starts off the reel at her usual steady pace and Billy joins in on accordion, I follow on fiddle, Collette on flute and Mike on banjo. 'Phil' strums chords on the guitar and 'Gary', a beginner, tries out the tune quietly on his fiddle. Billy always plays at the same tempo (a speed suitable for dancing) and always faster than we are playing now. He drives the tune forward, picking up a little pace at the beginning of each of the tune's three sections until we are all playing at his preferred tempo. Speed is often an issue in sessions, with beginners complaining about how fast everyone plays, for there is rarely any concession given to the novice. Establishing your preferred speed in the session is a sign of authority.

Agreeing on who should lead the tunes can be another source of friction. Generally we play each tune three times through before changing into the next tune, and generally the musician who leads the first tune takes the lead into the next one. Halfway into the third time through 'The Maids', Barbara stops for a few bars and tells Collette the name of the tune to follow, then resumes playing. But when we get to the change, Billy goes forcefully into 'The Green Groves of Erin', the tune he is in the habit of playing after 'The Maids'. Collette drops out (she does not know the tune) and Barbara stops playing, only starting up again as we move into the second part of 'The Green Groves'. Billy continues to push the speed and after three times through 'The Green Groves', changes strongly into 'The Boys of Ballisodare', as he always does.[27] Barbara has often said how she dislikes always playing the same

---

[26] Session musicians, Fibber McVey's, 'The Maids of Mont Cisco', 'The Green Groves of Erin' and 'The Boys of Ballisodare' (18 September 1999).

[27] The tunes in this set are all well-known, often-played tunes among older musicians, and feature on recordings of solo players and ceili bands from the 1960s as well as more recent recordings. 'The Boys of Ballisodare' and 'The Green Groves of Erin' were recorded by Michael Coleman in 1922 and 1924 respectively. 'The Maids of Mount Kisco' was first recorded in 1937 (in the USA) by Sligo fiddle player Paddy Killoran, who is believed to have composed the tune. The set features a practice I have noted among musicians from East Galway and East Clare in particular of putting together tunes that are similar in key, rhythm and melodic shape (as with 'The Maids of Mount Cisco' and 'The Green Groves of Erin', both in A Dorian mode), the pleasure for musicians and knowledgeable listeners being the subtlety of difference and the prolonged release to a new (in this case brighter) key. Revival musicians from the 1970s are more likely to construct medleys of tunes with more strongly contrasting keys and melodies, the pleasure being in the surprise and the greater lift of a key change.

sets: it's so predictable and controlled. As ethnomusicologist and Irish-born musician Mick Moloney writes:

> Almost all the Irish musicians I have ever met who regularly play in sessions talk about the absence of boredom or 'the same old thing' being crucial in providing an incentive for people to continue playing the music socially. (Moloney 1992: 190)

Barbara does not join in playing 'The Boys of Ballisodare' until the third time through. At the end of this repetition, the other musicians expect to finish the set, but Billy continues playing the tune a fourth time (and the other musicians follow). Whatever his motivation tonight, there is a practice among the Irish immigrant musicians that, if a player joins on the last time through, you play the tune again, let them enjoy playing it and save them from looking foolish by picking up their instrument and then having to put it down again: at least, this is how Barbara and I (the only Australians here who have adopted this practice) interpret it. By the end of our first set of tunes, Billy has taken over the lead.

Tonight, Barbara and I want Billy to feel welcome, but not to take control. What happens is both a struggle for dominance and a compromise. Billy leads ten of the first dozen tunes, which are played in sets of two or three tunes. After that, his lead gradually dwindles until eventually he has led only seventeen out of forty-nine tunes. At this stage, he leaves his seat and joins his friends at the back the bar. While he has led more tunes than any other musician,[28] Billy's leadership has been increasingly challenged. Throughout the evening, Billy has also had difficulty persuading others to take him up on the tunes he sketches, a non-verbal prompt that means 'let's play this'. In his own session, he would go ahead and play those tunes anyway, but tonight he is more circumspect. Eventually he also asks, 'do you know this one?' and when this doesn't work either, declares 'anything you like!' Seated next to Billy, I feel increasingly uncomfortable.

After he leaves, an hour passes and Billy has not returned to the session. I go to the back of the bar and ask him to play some more tunes with us. Half an hour later, he joins us for a few sets of tunes before he and his friends leave. What kept him out of the session for so long?

---

[28] The 'scores' at this stage of the session are: Mike 11, Barbara 10, Helen 7, Matthew 3, and single leads by three others.

We had been playing together for over an hour when Matthew, a highly skilled fiddle player and the leader of the younger musicians' band, arrived. There were no empty seats and the bar was getting crowded. For a while, Matthew stood just outside our circle, listening, talking to his friends, and leaning on his fiddle case. After about ten minutes, Matthew took the seat Simon offered, then moved to Gary's seat when he got up. Changing seats in a session is disruptive both socially and in terms of power relations. Barbara, Billy and I had the best seats, in the corner. Simon and Gary (less competent musicians) had the worst seats, near the door and adjacent to the drinkers. Matthew did not speak to Billy, with whom he had had a falling out some weeks earlier.[29] Billy praised the tunes Matthew played but did not play with him, as they were 'new' tunes gleaned from sources (mainly recordings of contemporary bands) that Billy was not familiar with. After Matthew's arrival, the lead was spread equally among the more experienced players until Billy put down his accordion and left the session. Within a few minutes, Matthew had taken Billy's seat. He then led twelve of the next eighteen tunes, often 'taking' the lead (as Billy had done) from musicians who had started a set of tunes, by asserting his own choice when the time came to change into a new tune. This was not the equable passing around of leadership that is Barbara's ideal, for Billy's absence from the session circle was an uncomfortable presence. The following is an attempt to locate some of the sources of the disharmony amongst the musicians.

Irish musician and ethnomusicologist Colin Hamilton observes that:

> The musical behaviour in a session is largely controlled by the relative status of the people playing, with the higher status musicians exercising more control over the way the session develops. (Hamilton 1999: 346)

Hamilton identifies status in the session as depending on the musician's age, competence, reputation, and instrument played (fiddle and flute have the highest status; accordions and banjos, being relatively new to the tradition, have less). Ethnomusicologist Mick Moloney perceives status to be conferred according to repertoire, gender, style, nationality, and 'whose' session it is (Moloney 1992: 192–7). According to these criteria, Billy deserves the highest status by virtue of his age, gender, reputation, playing style and Irish nationality, and we should defer to his choices. On the other hand, this is 'our' session. Leadership and status are out of

_____

[29] Matthew had come in late to Billy's session and sat listening. Billy had asked him to play, but he would not, as he was on his way to a gig at a nearby pub. When another person present accused Matthew of being 'too good for us now, you only go where the money is', he retorted (to his regret) that at least he was getting paid at the other pub (Matthew, pers. com., September 1999).

alignment in our session, and this disjuncture emerges in performance. While Hamilton's comments about the session appear prescriptive (his article aims to define the session), they are based on his observations and experiences in Ireland. The 'translation' of the session to Melbourne must take into account local understandings, which include (for the majority of musicians participating) an awareness of the status Billy would be accorded elsewhere, but not necessarily an acceptance of it. There are a number of possible explanations for this, most noticeably in the ways in which the musicians and their preferred social environments coincide with their differing positions in relation to the social categories of class, ethnicity, and gender.

This may well be the only occasion on which Billy has been invited to join a session led by two women; certainly, it is at odds with conventional representations of the Irish in Australia, the Irish musician, the pub, or the session. The Irish immigrant is generally represented as male: 'the Paddy'.[30] Irishness in the pub session is masculine in relation to both ethnicity and (working) class, but in addition, the Irish musician is always represented as male. Not surprisingly, leadership in the session is rarely a woman's role (and tonight there are two of us). Not only is a woman literally 'not at home' in a pub, but the pub session has, since its inception, been a particularly masculine gathering. Few women of Billy Moran's generation continued to play a musical instrument after marriage or had the opportunity to attend festivals, while playing in a band was frowned upon (unless a male relative was present) and going to bars was beyond the bounds of respectability. These social restrictions prevented all but a handful of women musicians from extending their repertoires and skills and establishing reputations as good musicians.[31] In this way, the Irish traditional music scene is masculinist, in that 'while claiming to be exhaustive, [it] forgets about women's existence and concerns itself only with the position of men' (Le Doeuff 1991: 18). This was evident in the reception of Irish women musicians visiting Irish music sessions in Melbourne in the 1990s. Young men, even if not brilliant musicians, were given the most prestigious seat in the

---

[30] In 'Irishness, gender, and place' (1995), Bronwen Walter contrasts the feminized Irish ethnicity deriving from Ireland's colonial relationship with Britain with the construction of a male ethnicity in respect of the Irish in contemporary Britain.

[31] Women with musical fathers, brothers or husbands — fiddler players Kathleen Harrington (c1903–84), Julia Clifford (1914–97) and Lucy Farr (b.1912) are examples — were in a better position to overcome these restrictions. This did not prevent them from feeling that they were interlopers in a man's world, however. Lucy Farr says, 'I never thought I was good enough. You see, when I started it was all men, there were so few lady fiddle players and you sort of felt that you shouldn't be there … And it gave you a sort of feeling of "What's wrong with us?"— and there was nothing wrong with us at all!' (Farr quoted in Vallely and Piggott 1998: 74).

session (next to the leader) and offered gigs or other kinds of work. Irish women musicians, although cordially welcomed, were musically virtually ignored. Inside the masculine space of the pub, bestowing favours of any kind on a woman has a sexual implication. Women were always positioned outside the expatriate Irish men's circle of friendship and informal labour exchange that operated in the working-men's pubs. Barbara and I are thus out of place and out of hand in leading tonight's session. In assuming leadership, Billy — older, louder, Irish and male — merely continues to act as he would in his own session.

Although Billy leads most tunes at the beginning of the night, he does not maintain leadership throughout the session. Contrary to what Hamilton and Moloney might expect, the younger and the less experienced musicians present indicate little respect for Billy's skill, style, musical experiences and repertoire (in which only two of the older Australians had shown any interest) and believe the reason for his authority at his own session is because it was 'his gig', because he plays a loud instrument, and because 'publicans like an Irish accent' (what Barbara calls the 'green stamp').[32]

The commercial aspect of the session also contributes to the tension among the musicians. Billy is in a delicate situation, for he is now 'between sessions', while we are being paid — a reversal of fortunes for all of us. Several of the younger musicians fear he might try to steal this gig. Ironically, Billy is soon to be asked to take over 'their' Sunday session at another pub where the publican is unhappy with their hostility to some musicians and their reluctance to comply with audience requests for songs. In Billy's view, 'they were playing for theirselves. Self-centred: "We're playing and stuff everybody else". The publicans don't want that' (Billy Moran, interview).

For Billy, Fibber's is an alien environment in which his status does not hold. For the Australian musicians, it is the place we have chosen, and in which we feel comfortable. In considering why this should be so, we need to look beyond the perceptions of the musicians present to the differing social meanings of the bars where sessions have been held. Fiske, Hodge and Turner (1987) identify the traditional Australian pub as a masculine refuge, a kind of 'half-way-home' between the workplace and the restraints of domesticity and feminine respectability. Although it is no longer illegal for women to drink there, the public bar remains largely a male preserve. Women, in this context, are the spoilers who limit men's

---

[32] From interviews with Melbourne musicians, 1999.

Helen O'Shea 2004

pleasures and freedoms. If they are enthusiastic drinkers, they are not respectable and assumed to be sexually available. Until the late 1990s, Melbourne's Irish music sessions took place mostly in such public bars. There, listeners (predominantly Irish building-industry workers) ignored women whose status as musicians allowed them a seat at the core of the session, and interacted only with the male musicians (they addressed musicians collectively as 'lads' or 'men'). Less capable players sat on the outer rim of the session, where the women among them were subject to continual harassment (also the fate of higher-status women musicians when they went to the bar). In this, the public bar belongs to what feminist geographer Gillian Rose refers to as 'the public space of Western hegemonic masculinities' (1993: 62), an arena in which neither women's bodies are legitimate nor their voices heard.

For many years, Melbourne's best-known session was held at the Normandy, a pub patronized by Irish working-men. Billy had been leading the weekend sessions for several years until a few weeks before the Fibber's session (described above) took place. The Albanian family who owned the Normandy sponsored Irish community events and sporting teams and supported an Irish traditional music session at weekends, with Irish ballad bands in their lounge bar. They were tolerant of behaviour that would not be permitted in other pubs — shouting, fighting, drunkenness. The young musicians in particular felt ill at ease there. To Simon, it was a bizarre world of 'pissed people picking fights all night … and that was scary' (Simon, interview).

The Irish theme pubs that opened in Melbourne during the 1990s catered for urban nostalgia for collectivity and community and the connection made between these and Ireland in the 'imagined community' of the Irish nation (Anderson 1991). Here, however, Irishness has been commodified and gentrified, in the process alienating the working-class (and less profitable) Irish. At the Quiet Man Irish theme pub (where Billy was about to take over the session) the musicians sat at one end of the lounge bar, also a successful restaurant where smoking was restricted and standards of dress and behaviour controlled by security guards. Women could feel relaxed in the café atmosphere of tables and chairs, tiled floors and an efficient air-conditioner that contrasted with the smoky atmosphere and beer-sodden carpets at the Normandy. Quieter, cleaner, more respectable (and more expensive), the Quiet Man had not been adopted by the Irish 'lads', although its clientele included some Irish families and occasionally members of the 'new Irish' whom historian Patrick O'Farrell identifies as belonging to the young, tertiary-educated, middle-class transnational global elite of the 1990s (O'Farrell 2000: Ch. 8). The phenomenon of

the Irish theme pub demonstrates a form of orientalism (Said 1978) in embracing Irishness while retaining the authority to censor, sentimentalize and revise what it does not find palatable.

Fibber McVey's was a different kind of bar, which catered to a broadly middle-class clientele that included gay men and lesbians. Not only was the aggressive masculinity of the Normandy absent, but Irishness was overwhelmed by artefacts from the owners' native England and Scotland — the bar manager called it 'British' (interview, Darren, 14 December 1999). It is little wonder that Billy did not feel at home beneath the Union Jack and the bobby's helmets hanging from the ceiling beams.

4.6   Rejecting Danny Boy

Before the night at Fibber's is over, another jarring incident challenges the conventions governing Billy Moran's musical world and demonstrates the Australian musicians' different conception of the session as a kind of musical community. It occurs at the end of the night, when most of the instruments have been packed away and the Australian musicians are chatting and drinking up before closing time. A man approaches the musicians' circle, his question muffled in an Irish accent we have difficulty in understanding:

> Do you know Danny…?
> Do I know Danny who?
> 'Danny Boy'!
> Oh! No. You'd have to get a classical player to play that. We just play this music, jigs and reels. Or you need a singer. Sing it!
> Oh, no, I can't do that.
> Are they going to play it? Billy's wife Eileen asks.
> Aaah, they're not. (from recording of Fibber's session, 18 September 1999)

If this is a test, we have failed. 'Danny Boy' is the one of the best loved of Irish songs, recorded by Irish singers from John McCormack to Sinead O'Connor.[33] Billy, like other Irish immigrant players in Melbourne, will always play it when asked, but Australian musicians usually find an excuse not to. Indeed, almost all the

_____

[33] Evidence for this is more anecdotal than scientific. A poll of Sydney Irish Radio Program listeners in 2000 showed it to be the clear favourite of Irish songs. A documentary on 'Danny Boy' makes similar claims (*Danny Boy* 1997). Also known as 'A Londonderry Air' after the county in which it was collected, it was first published by Petrie in his 1855 collection and was set to verse by numerous writers, the most well-known version being 'Danny Boy', written by Englishman Fred F. Weatherly (1848–1929).

Australian musicians agreed with Mike that the Irish songs requested at sessions were 'boring, crap' and spoiled the session (Mike, interview). Billy, on the other hand, explained that:

> If there's a crowd there that wants a song, you've got to play an auld bit of a song that they know. If they're happy then, they'll come back again […] You see [the 'Aussie' musicians] put down the instruments when you start a song. It's a lack of experience. (Billy Moran, interview)

In refusing to play 'Danny Boy', we have refused to identify with the expatriate's attachment to Ireland expressed in such songs, or with the Ireland 'bogged in a make-believe nineteenth century of thatched cottages' promoted by the Irish Tourist Board (O'Farrell 2000: 313) that are the images many Australians associate with Ireland.[34] Our refusal is more than bad form; it is a disagreement about how to define the session's musical community.

The song 'Danny Boy' performs the notion of Ireland as home, but also as a community of Irish people elsewhere. People sing together, gathering others in to sing with them, creating this sense of community in a way that dance music cannot. A number of the Australian musicians recognize this, but rarely join the singing because they dislike the songs and feel alienated from this kind of performance. Simon, for example, was impressed by the strong bond between Billy and his audience:

> That's one thing that you just *totally* noticed that time we went to the Quiet Man with Billy … there was a real identification with ex-pat Irish people there, with Billy, which would just never happen with us, because it's almost like, Billy's playing the music is only a part of what he represents to them … they're not there for the music, just by itself, in an abstract form … If it's the sort of session that we mostly play at, it is aural wallpaper; if it's the sort of session that Billy's at, then it's sort of massive communication going on between the audience and Billy, and about starting up certain tunes, and playing certain songs, and it's like a group experience, it's not just one guy playing … it's more of a performance though, that sort of style session, it's more playing for a group of people, and they sort of feeding back through singing along or clapping. Whereas the sort of sessions that I've been going to are more based around the tunes and around you … But it's one of the few times I've felt that Irish music in that context is something that I'm removed from, like that's not actually what I'm a part of, at all, 'cause it was very much this thing between these Irish ex-pat people and Billy and, just how they had families sitting at tables, singing along to the songs, and woofin' and cheerin' and screaming 'Go, Billy!' a lot. (Simon, interview)

---

[34] The role of tourism in creating this 'make-believe' Ireland will be discussed further in the following chapter.

The session provides for musicians and listeners a pathway for identification and the opportunity to form a musical community. As Simon recognizes, while 'the whole point of a session is to produce good music in a sort of community', the community of his musical peers is 'removed from' that of the expatriate Irish (Simon, interview). In Australian sessions, the Irish immigrant's remaking of 'home' in performing Irish music intersects with the Australian musician's search for a different kind of 'home' through playing Irish music, and in both cases the identity of Irishness needs to be negotiated. American ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin coins the term 'affinity groups' for 'charmed circles of like-minded music-makers drawn magnetically to a certain genre that creates strong expressive bonding' (Slobin 1993: 98). For the Australian musicians, however, and particularly the younger group, their affinity with Irish traditional music creates much stronger bonding among their own peers than with the Irish–born musicians.

4.7   The changing identity of the Irish in Australia

The introduction to this chapter raised questions about why a television program on Irish music in Australia conferred on Billy Moran the status of 'a living treasure of Irish music in Australia' yet extended the authority to speak about Irish music, not to Billy, but to young Australian musicians (*The Planet* 2001). Lucky Oceans' ambivalence about where authenticity in Irish music lies — whether it is linked to an Irish ethnicity and nationality and to a repertoire and style continuous with the past, or whether it is in the commodified sound of contemporary Irish band recordings that the young Australians emulate — is played out in Melbourne's Irish traditional music scene. As the analysis above suggests, moments of disjuncture in the session reveal conflicting understandings of where the 'Irish' in Irish traditional music resides and how important it is. In the pub session, these understandings are translated into social hierarchies in which authority shifts according to whose sense of Irishness and whose musical values prevail.

In addressing problems of writing about cultural difference, Homi Bhabha calls such disjunctive moments *interstices*, and urges us to focus on them when writing about cultural identity:

> What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the necessity of thinking beyond initial categories and initiatory subjects and focusing on those *interstitial* moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of 'differences'. These spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood and communal representations that generate new signs of cultural

difference and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation. It is at the level of the interstices that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated (Bhabha 1994a: 269).

Elsewhere, Bhabha employs the term 'third space' as a way of conceptualizing an '*inter*-national culture' based on 'the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity', for what carries the burden of the meaning of culture is 'the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between*' (Bhabha 1995: 209). For Bhabha, the importance of this hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges; rather, hybridity is 'the "third space" which enables other positions to emerge'. This space is not so much one of identity as of *identification*, that is, 'a process of identifying with and through another object, and object of otherness' (Bhabha 1990: 211).

This process of identification, together with the concept of a cultural translation that lets go of the notion of a fixed 'original', is one that seems best to describe the negotiations that the older Australians undertake in playing music with Irish-born musicians. The younger musicians, however, bring to the session a confidence that they are equal in all ways to the Irish musicians. As I propose below, this understanding of the equivalence of cultures, although attributable in part to their youthful optimism, is also related to the pluralist values of the multicultural society in which they had been educated. According to the social policy of multiculturalism as it was promoted in Australian schools during the 1980s, ethnic identities could be performed by dressing in 'national' costumes, eating 'ethnic' foods and performing 'folk dances' — or music; that is, by embracing diversity without having to negotiate the difference of immigrant lives.[35]

The focal points in Billy Moran's musical history relate to collective Irish identities: his family and village, the band he joined as a young man, and sessions among migrant workers in England and later in Australia. As an immigrant first in England and later in Australia, negotiating difference has been part of Billy's continually evolving Irish identity, one aspect of which is his interactions with Australian musicians and audiences in the commercial context of pub sessions. In Stuart Hall's formulation, his identity is 'not an essence but a positioning' (Hall, S. 1990: 226).

---

[35] This situation was much more extreme in Canberra (where four of the young musicians grew up) than in Melbourne, where the population includes a far greater proportion of residents born outside Australia.

In contrast, the young Australian musicians speak of their individual progress as musicians and their experience of musical community among their own age cohort. The older Australians were more mindful of musical history and the sensibilities of the past, through their exposure to immigrant Irish musicians and the social circle of the session pubs, as well as from reading the biographical and ethnomusicological essays accompanying reissues of classic Irish recordings.

Although the two age cohorts differed somewhat in their understandings of Irishness, none of the Australian musicians performing at Fibber's espoused any interest in their own ethnic origins; nor did their enthusiasm for Irish music extend to other areas of Irish culture. They did not learn Irish dancing or sports, join Irish community clubs or attend Irish community gatherings, cook Irish meals, research their Irish ancestry, wear Irish tweeds or learn to speak the Irish language. They saw themselves as producers of Irish traditional dance music — but not of Irishness. It was a musical, rather than ethnic, community that they sought to create. The younger musicians in particular were perplexed, even scornful, when audiences assumed they were Irish, or 'had some Irish in them' (Natalie, interview).

The older Australian musicians believed they had earned the label 'Irish musician', but on the grounds of musicianship rather than Irish ethnicity, which they regarded as irrelevant to their musical achievements. They identified with Irish music, and deferred to some degree to Irish musicians, but made no claim to be Irish, despite acknowledging some (unexplored) Irish ancestry. To banjo player Mike, who called Ireland and Australia 'almost like cousins', being Irish was very little different from being Australian. In Mike's view, 'anyone can learn to be an Irish musician' (Mike, interview). There was no conflict of identity involved: they could be Australians *and* Irish musicians. This understanding of an Australian identity subsuming an Irish identity is an established part of Australians' self-perception.

It is 'common knowledge' that one in three Australians have Irish ancestry, although, significantly, there is no comparable discussion of Australians' (presumably greater) degree of English heritage.[36] Similarly, both radical nationalist cultural critics and more conservative historians have identified a significant Irish component in Australia's national identity. The notion that Australian values had been formed by

---

[36] In June 2003 I received a (generic) letter from the director of Tourism Ireland Limited suggesting that I may be 'one of the 6.8 million Australians who can trace family history back to Ireland in a fascinating journey of discovery'. Such claims are by no means limited to the tourism industry, but are widespread among genealogists, historians and documentary makers.

the rugged, independent-thinking, hard-drinking, rural workers of earlier generations, of whom the Irish formed a significant proportion, finds its articulation in Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend* (1966). In T*he Fatal Shore*, Robert Hughes makes a parallel argument that the harsh punishment of Irish convicts, and an uprising instigated by Irish political prisoners in 1804, imprinted on subsequent generations of working-class Australians a belief in 'English oppression and Irish resistance' (1988: 195). Historian of the Irish in Australia, Patrick O'Farrell, like Hughes and Ward, maintains that Irish values — anti-British, anti-authoritarian and Catholic — were imprinted on Australian society in general (O'Farrell 2000).

Historian David Fitzpatrick, however, argues that the proportion of Irish–Australians has been greatly exaggerated:

> today there are few Australians of older vintages who could claim to be uniquely Irish, or indeed perfectly free of Irish forebears. Once intensive immigration from Ireland ceased around 1890, Irish–Australia gradually became a fiction sustained by Irish surnames and the profession of Catholicism. (Fitzpatrick 1984: 30)

It can further be argued that an Irish–Australian identity became an ethnic identification of convenience as the relationship with Britain weakened. While for many Australians, England remained 'home' into the 1960s, Australia (and particularly Melbourne) became home to 'New Australians' from post-war Europe. A government policy of assimilation responded to the perceived threat to national unity of large numbers of non-British migrants by encouraging migrants to adopt 'the Australian way of life' — English-speaking, masculinist and (despite the Irish influence) Protestant. Billy Moran arrived in Australia, and the older of the Australian musicians were born and educated, during this period.

During the 1970s, the more distant political relationship with Britain,[37] the emergence of a more secular and pluralist society and the imperative to define Australia against the increasing political, cultural and economic influence of the USA fostered nationalist feelings that emerged in cultural forms such as the bush

---

[37] The sense of betrayal felt towards Britain following the fall of Singapore in World War 2 and Britain's negotiations throughout the 1960s to join the European Economic Community, in addition to the need felt by Australians to define themselves against Englishness, first in a colonial and later in a postcolonial context, all weakened Australians' notion of England as 'home', as did the impact of the post-war immigration program and Australia's strengthened trade and military alliance with the USA, together with the diminished threat of a declining Catholic Church. At the same time, Irish–Australia was well integrated into Australian society, with later generations of Irish heritage absorbed into the suburban middle class and into political and commercial leadership.

band. In their analysis of 'folk' as a popular musical genre, Graeme Smith and Judith Brett importantly point out the congruence of the folk movement's understanding of culture (as emerging spontaneously from community) with theories of nationalism (which see nations as emerging from shared ethnicity, race or history). The folk-revival movement's musical openness and inclusivity have allowed it to move beyond 'ethnically-specific' nationalist discourse to become a model for the accommodation of cultural diversity as it responded to the development in the 1970s and 1980s of multiculturalism as a new national ideology (Smith and Brett 2001: 45–6).

Bush bands and folk festivals adapted to multiculturalism (and government funding criteria) during the 1980s by including dances and music from other cultures. These were more likely to include Anglo–Australian groups performing 'gypsy', 'Balkan' or 'multicultural' music, however, than musicians from Australia's dominant immigrant groups (from Greece, Turkey, or Vietnam, for example). Indeed, Smith and Brett estimate that sixty-five per cent of funds allocated to ethnic music in the late 1980s went to 'Anglo–Australian' musicians or administrators (2001: 49). Their interpretation of this phenomenon can be extended to 1990s radio programs featuring a range of ethnic musics, a 'music deli' approach of which Lucky Oceans' work is an example.[38]

The public performance of ethnic music can operate as a way of educating the public into accepting the more political implications of multiculturalism, as Smith and Brett point out. I further propose that such performances, by presenting a miscellany of ethnic musics in small, easily digestible (or assimilable) sound bites, imply that other cultures are insignificant and unthreatening. Just as Homi Bhabha has criticized multicultural policy in Britain (where it is more racially based) for its ability to silence cultural difference by disallowing political identities and antagonisms while institutionalizing cultural *diversity* (Bhabha 1988), so multicultural performances in Australia may be understood as silencing the music of immigrants while displaying the national ideal of unity in diversity.

In an essay on the connections between music, place and identity in a Melbourne multicultural street festival, Michelle Duffy (2000) notes that the musical acts are no longer described as the 'music of migration' but as 'world music'. She concludes that

---

[38] 'Music Deli' is the name of a long-running weekly Radio National (Australia) program presenting acoustic musicians from diverse backgrounds and genres. Lucky Oceans presents a daily program including 'world music', also on national radio.

in the 'aural hybridity' of a group performing a fusion of 'African' drumming and 'Middle Eastern' music, and more broadly in the festival, 'the performance of cultural identity is not a simple retelling of some authentic sound in an alien space. Instead, it becomes a reworking of music, and so identity, to accommodate a new context' (2000: 119). I would argue that in this context, difference is trivialized to a kind of generic diversity, similar in effect to what Kimberly J. Lau terms the 'serial logic' of 'feel-good multiculturalism', which operates by linking the marketing of commodities with that of cultures at folkloristic events in the USA (Lau 1999: 70).

Could it be that the authority to decide what and who is 'Irish' is being appropriated in a similarly insidious way? Irish music is now presented as 'the music of one of the ethnic streams that made up the rich tapestry of multicultural Australia rather than as the expression of a unified national character' (Smith, G. 2001: 10).

In an essay on 'Celtic Australia', Graeme Smith argues that one effect has been that 'Irish or Irish–Australian identity is "tried on" by groups of Anglo–Australians who are otherwise excluded from claiming an ethnic identity' (2001: 14).[39] Patrick O'Farrell similarly proposes that, while most Australians are indifferent about ethnicity, many of those who were interested 'chose to be "Irish"'. Australians' embrace of a collective identity more Irish than English, he suggests, might be:

> a case of capitulation to the implicit pressures of multiculturalism: every Australian ought really to be something else, from somewhere else, which has a *real* history and aboriginality. (O'Farrell 2000: 330)

By the 1990s, one-quarter of the Australian population had been born outside Australia (Daniel 1994: 233), and an Irish heritage had become:

> a fashionable asset, representing charm, sociability and conviviality, mild social radicalism, fun and entertainment, possessing some of the essential ingredients of the popular Australian self-image. By 1995 it was politically correct to call the Irish 'delightful'. (O'Farrell 2000: 330)

Also during the 1990s, the international music industry was promoting its 'world music' bands at folk festivals on what had become known as the Australian festival circuit. Groups like the younger musicians' band filled the 'Irish' slot, while

---

[39] This 'trying on' has parallels with the concept of an *elective ethnicity* proposed by Mary C. Waters in *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* in response to her research findings that white, suburban, American Catholics chose to express an adopted ethnicity through symbolic forms such as food and family celebrations (Waters 1990).

immigrant Irish musicians like Billy Moran were rarely offered stage gigs. The 1990s also saw Irishness become internationally 'cool' — that is, marketable — in a confluence of tourism promotion, celebratory media coverage of Ireland's 'Celtic Tiger' economy, *Riverdance* and similar stage shows, an increasing number of Irish backpackers arriving in Australia, and the success of Irish bands in the rock, pop and world music marketing categories. Perhaps the most influential marketing of Irish culture was undertaken by Guinness Brewing (as it was then known) in its highly successful campaign to become a dominant force in the Australian hotel industry.[40]

An important part of establishing Irish theme pubs was the display of Irish culture not only through the design and decoration of the pubs and their young Irish bar staff, but also in featuring Irish ballad bands, Irish dancing and traditional music sessions, meals featuring Irish dishes and, most prominently from a marketing viewpoint, the celebration of St Patrick's Day, once a display of strength by the Catholic Church, now a day of national dispensation for drunkenness and the celebration of Irishness promoted by the distributors of Guinness.

The change from a social policy of assimilation and a national identity that incorporates an Irish identity to a pluralist policy of multiculturalism in which Irishness is one among many diverse ethnicities is reflected in the attitudes of the two age cohorts of Australian musicians. Edward Said's distinction between filiation (cultural inheritance) and affiliation (cultural identification) articulates the difference between the two understandings of Irish ethnicity in Australian society (1983: 174–5).[41] This is of particular relevance to the younger group, whose schooling in the 1980s had featured 'multicultural' programs that de-politicized ethnic difference. Unlike Irish immigrants and their children, they had no lived experience of being 'ethnic' and assented to the ideological position of multiculturalism that all ethnicities are equal.

While both groups of Australian musicians were sceptical of a commodified Irishness, the younger musicians evinced scepticism about Irishness in general,

---

[40] *The Bulletin*, an Australian weekly political journal, reported in 1997 that in the previous five years Guinness Brewing had helped establish 1300 Irish pubs globally. The Australian campaign began in the mid-1990s and in 1996 the company had reported an annual 43% sales increase (Kyriakopoulos 1997).

[41] Said makes this distinction in the very different context of canonical, as opposed to 'worldly', readings of literature.

equating it with uncool Celtic-motif t-shirts and Irish theme pubs. Simon, for example, was 'totally turned off' by:

> Australian people who are, like, sixth generation Irish, who claim Irish heritage and talk about their spiritual right to drink Guinness … It's just this sad need to belong to another culture or something. It seems to me like a sort of backhanded cultural cringe towards Australian culture as well. (Simon, interview)

Irish ethnicity to them was a marketing ploy of Irish breweries or theme pubs, or a delusion they scorned in audiences for whom their music conjured up images of peat fires in Irish cottages (Natalie, interview).

Their understandings of who 'Irish people' were also differed from those of the older Australian musicians. In 1980, Irish musicians in Australia were migrants. In 2000, they were just as likely to be among the thousands of Irish backpackers working and partying their way around Australia. In their early years playing Irish music, the older generation of Australian musicians had encountered Irish musicians who were migrants from rural and working-class backgrounds, and whose music and musicianship they had emulated. The younger musicians had had little social or even musical contact with these older migrant musicians, but instead had met younger Irish musicians who resembled themselves in age, educational background, uncertainty of vocation, desire to travel the world, and appetite for music sessions that turned into all-night parties. Playing Irish traditional music was for them an activity associated with their own age group, and with the status attached to being a musician.

In his book on *Global Pop*, Timothy D. Taylor links the rise of interest in 'Celtic' music in America to an increasing consciousness of ethnicity and 'the concomitant *commodification* of ethnicity in music' (Taylor 1997: 7). A *commodified ethnicity* is one way of theorizing the younger musicians' performance of Irish music. Their aim was to 'sound Irish', a sound they accessed through recordings and reproduced by imitation, without having to be Irish, be in Ireland, or even play with Irish musicians. The Irishness in their music is a commodified ethnicity, something they consume and learn to reproduce as a style or a flavour, in much the same way that they can learn salsa dancing or Thai cooking, and which neither adds to, nor subtracts from, their identities as Australians. This does not mean that their music is inferior, either to that of other Australian musicians, or of Irish musicians. The success of their undertaking in learning Irish traditional music may be judged by comparing a set of tunes recorded by a band formed in Melbourne by four young Australians who were

part of the Fibber's session collective (Musical example 28[42]), with a similarly structured medley recorded by Irish band, Danú (Musical example 29[43]).

Australian musicians learn not only to sound 'Irish' by imitating the sounds of Irish musicians and recordings, but to perform Irishness by imitating Irish musicians in other ways: through foot-tapping and whooping or using expressions such as 'the crack'. Recent work in gender studies theorizes identity as *performativity*, a negotiated performance that is fluid, can take up multiple positions, and is in relationship with a material world (Butler 1990; 1993). But, as Derrida notes, the authority of this utterance derives from convention, is *citational* (Derrida 1988:18),[44] a term that nicely defines the nature of the 'Irishness' in their music. This is particularly noticeable in the case of those with a classical music education, who have suppressed or disinvested their institutional knowledge in the hope of gaining the embodied knowledge of the Irish musicians they have observed. They consciously change the way they hold their instruments and move their bodies in space in order to produce a different order of sound in their music, in this way

---

[42] Trouble in the Kitchen, 'The Beauty Spot', 'The Drummond Lassies, 'Return to Camden Town' and 'McFadden's Handsome Daughter' (2001). The band had been playing together for less than five years when this recording was made. The four-piece band played fiddle, flute, low whistle, bodhrán, guitar and bouzouki as well as vocals (four of the twelve tracks are songs). There is one woman in the band. The setting of these four reels includes: radical tempo changes (the first reel played slowly, then dramatically changing to a much faster speed), mood-altering key changes (A dorian to G dorian to A dorian to A major), rhythm driven by bodhrán, guitar and bouzouki, solo performance of a tune with other instruments joining on repeats, guitar providing rhythmic complexity with strong cross-beats, bouzouki filling out the harmonic texture and flute sometimes playing a harmonizing second part, or chords, to the fiddle.

[43] Danú, 'The Old Ruined Cottage in the Glen', 'The Morning Dew', 'Think Before You Think Before You Speak' and 'The First Month of Spring' (2000). Danú ('best overall traditional Irish band', 1999 Irish Music Awards) are a seven-piece band with a vocalist (five of the thirteen tracks are songs) and instrumentalists playing fiddle, viola, flute, low whistle, button accordion, bodhrán, uilleann pipes, guitar and bouzouki, with added mando-cello, keyboard and congos. There are no women in the band. The track features the first reel played slowly with only two melody instruments, the following reels at a fast pace; the second tune (Joe Cooley's version of 'The Morning Dew', slightly different from that heard in musical examples in the previous chapter) played on a different instrumental combination; key changes from tune to tune (D major to E dorian to A mixolydian to D major). Both albums were recorded by young musicians and include features common among contemporary Irish traditional music bands: in particular, introducing changing harmonic colour, instrumental texture and variation in key and tempo, to add excitement and a sense of newness to material that is still recognizably 'traditional' in rhythm and melody, and conventional in the constitution of sets. Both albums include tunes written by their (virtuosic) fiddle players and the album notes attribute tune sources to friends and recordings.

[44] This passage is quoted in a discussion of 'performativity as citationality' in Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (Butler 1993).

resignifying their musical identifications from 'classical' to 'traditional'.[45] The citational nature of performativity also goes some way towards explaining how Australian musicians can perform Irishness in their music without necessarily acknowledging the authority of Irish musicians. In this, their performance of Irishness is also a form of cultural translation, in which culture is imitated in such a way that the priority of the original is not reinforced, because it is never finished or complete in itself (Bhabha 1990: 210): the implication in the present case being that there is no essential and fixed Irishness which resides in Irish music.

While their learning strategies were similar, the older Australians had spent many more years playing with Irish musicians and now consumed Irish musical products within a much narrower taste band of specific styles, instruments, musicians and performance formats. Their pathway to Irish music had been both a pilgrimage (in their trips to Ireland) and a quest, with its physical and spiritual trials and an evolving understanding of their goal. The trajectory for the younger group may be similar, but they have not yet progressed far along it. Despite their reluctance to consider Irish ethnicity relevant to their ability to play Irish music, they believed that going to Ireland to visit or to take up residence would help them to become better Irish musicians. This question will be explored in Chapter Five.

---

[45] Roland Barthes's essay on 'The grain of the voice' (discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Seven) is instructive in distinguishing between two comparable orders of musical production (Barthes 1977).

CHAPTER FIVE

MUSICAL PILGRIMS

> I expected there to be music everywhere. I wouldn't have been surprised to see a session at the airport. I imagined that Ireland would be full of pubs, that there would be pubs all along the road to Galway, where people were playing music, and when I went in, they'd say, 'Oh, you play Irish music! Great! Come and join us!' And it wasn't like that at all! ('Rachel', pers. com., 14 July 2000)

> The world is not hospitable to the pilgrims any more. (Bauman 1996: 23)

The previous chapter explored the aspirations of musicians playing Irish traditional music in Melbourne, and found that those who had played for around twenty years, like banjo player Mike and flute player Barbara, confidently claimed to be 'Irish musicians'. They could recognize whether or not someone was an 'Irish musician' by the sound they produced, which had nothing to do with their ethnicity. An Irish sound, according to them, could be achieved by hard work (Mike, interview; Barbara, interview). The younger Australian musicians, in their twenties, neither claimed to be, nor did they aim to become, 'Irish musicians'. Irishness to them was a citational ethnicity encompassed by the pluralism of an Australian identity. Irish traditional music was something they could consume and then reproduce by imitating the sounds, not of older Irish musicians in Melbourne, but of bands and recordings. They believed that all they needed in order to sound Irish was a more intensive exposure to Irish music. Their main goal in visiting, or planning to visit, Ireland was to acquire an Irish sound — not to become Irish. This had also been the goal of Mike and Barbara when they had visited Ireland in the past.

This chapter follows a number of Australian musicians on their trips to Ireland. In examining their goals and experiences, I consider the implications of such journeys for understanding contemporary identity. In particular, I examine the modernist concept of identity as a quest — a pilgrimage — and consider alternative ways of theorizing processes of identity in relation to these musicians. I will argue that the optimistic trope of the pilgrim was the production of religious and later nationalist aspirations and that it formulated an understanding of life as a pathway that, like the pilgrim's, moves outwards, through trials and deprivations consoled by the fellowship of other pilgrims, towards a point of clarity. In several ways, these music

devotees travelled to Ireland as pilgrims:[1] in their journeying to a recognized centre (the west of Ireland) where they hoped to receive musical enlightenment, in their idealization of the community of musicians at these musical 'holy sites' and in the higher status that completion of the pilgrimage bestowed upon them. The trip to Ireland, like a pilgrimage, offered a liminal experience in which musicians temporarily crossed the boundaries of nationality and ethnicity that surround Irish traditional music.

Zygmunt Bauman argues that in postmodernity, selfhood can no longer be a life-long project of betterment with ultimate rewards (Bauman 1996). Representations of the individual's understanding of selfhood and strategies in forming identity have changed along with the individual's place in the world. The emergence in the social sciences of tropes of movement — travel, displacement, exile, migrancy — as indicative of the postmodern condition parallels the change from a modernist understanding of identity as a quest for the 'true self' to a globalized notion of identity as porous and unstable, in which the individual combines available elements opportunistically in a rapidly changing world. In such a world, flexibility is more important than continuity.

How, then, are we to understand the processes of identification of those who continue to seek out the stability of tradition, authenticity and place? This is the question that this chapter explores. Most of the Australian musicians whose journeys are the focus of this chapter proceeded as 'pilgrims', seeking by hard work and acquired behaviours and values to win their desired identities as musicians who would be recognized in Ireland. In other ways, however, they shifted between this long-term goal and more makeshift strategies consistent with a notion of identity as enacted on the boundary between self and other, moving opportunistically from one position to another. Other Australian musicians who stayed on in Ireland attempted to assimilate their identities with those of Irish musicians according to the various ways in which they imagined those musicians to live. In this, they were only partially successful, as the next chapter will discuss.

In focusing on Australian musicians and referring to others, this study is unable to offer insights into the goals and experiences of their counterparts from Ireland, in

---

[1] For a modernist understanding of the social processes of the pilgrimage and the concept of liminality, I draw on the work of Victor Turner (1969; 1974) and essays discussing and critiquing Turner in J. Eade and M.J. Sallnow (eds) (1991b) *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*.

particular the many Irish adults who take up Irish traditional music. Many of these undoubtedly encounter confusion and hostility as they try to earn a place in the traditional music scene. In many cases, being Irish has not given them the head start, the 'second nature' that some of the Australian musicians identified and envied in Irish musicians. There are many among them who will never become competent players, never be accepted in sessions or recognized as Irish musicians. This chapter does not concern them, although their experiences and their understandings of the Irishness of the music they are learning to play would perhaps make a fruitful study elsewhere.

Each year many thousands of musicians and music lovers travel to Ireland in search of 'the music'. Guide-books direct them to pub sessions in such places as Doolin, Co. Clare. Tourist offices give away Guinness-sponsored directories of free pub sessions and CCÉ tempts tourists to pay for programmed evenings of 'Irish music, song, dance and fun'.[2] For many visiting musicians, the summer's music-making begins in July with the Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy (Willie Clancy Summer School, known familiarly as 'Willie Week') at Miltown Malbay on the west coast of Clare. As the summer draws on, they may take in other summer schools such as those at Drumshanbo, Tubercurry and Galway, the Feakle Traditional Music Festival[3] and finally the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, CCÉ's national music competitions and associated festivities, held at the end of August. There are other festivals and schools throughout the year and no single itinerary to follow, but as the trails of summer music tourists and devotees cross and recross, they inscribe a circuit and a sphere of reputation and myth-making around the western counties of Ireland, where, as discussed below, cultural nationalism has located an imagined authentic Ireland.[4]

In a new nation, the need to establish cultural unity is met by representation of a national culture as having existed continuously and authentically since pre-modern times, despite the encounter with colonizers. The past is always imagined, but the forms in which it is imagined change over time, as demonstrated by the changing status of different forms of Irish music during the past two centuries (discussed in

---

[2] Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (2000) *Seisiún* (pamphlet) Dublin: CCÉ.

[3] In 2003 the Feakle Traditional Music Festival was renamed the Feakle International Traditional Music Festival.

[4] Vallely's *Companion to Irish Traditional Music* includes an (inexhaustive) list of twenty-one summer schools held between May and December. Of these, thirteen take place during the July–August school holiday period and fourteen are held in the western counties of Donegal, Roscommon, Sligo, Mayo, Galway, Clare and Limerick (Vallely 1999: 389).

Chapters Two and Three). The idea of a contemporary society that has retained its unique culture over centuries is a potent attraction for anyone who is unsettled in the present or anxious about the future — which seems to be the paramount condition of our times. In contemporary Ireland this idealization takes many forms: in nationalist rhetoric, in advertising, in tourism, and also in music. Drawing on the work of Michael Cronin and Barbara O'Connor (2000), who argue that the myth that the Irish belong to a pre-modern world has been translated into modernity as part of the state's process of modernization, through the development of tourism, the first part of this chapter develops the argument that such a sense of place derives from Irish cultural nationalism's symbolic vocabulary, which itself draws on colonial representations of Ireland.

5.1 Ireland of the welcomes

On a Co. Clare roadside in 1990, Australian novelist Thomas Keneally, researching a book about his trip around Ireland, encountered Rosita Boland, an Irish poet on a similar quest. He writes of their shared journey along 'penitentially narrow' roads he imagines were 'built for pilgrims and cattle' and:

> crammed with effusive foreigners, their brains a pastiche of bits of ballad, of folk and family memory, all of them determined not to associate Ireland with the future, but to rivet it to its past. (Keneally 1991: 36–7)

Although trying not to be like other 'dispersed Irish', who 'believe they are still of Ireland's whole cloth' (1991: 36), Keneally cannot resist regaling the Irish woman with sad stories of family connections to this land haunted by absences. In her version of their meeting, Rosita Boland quotes Keneally's recollection of the Ireland idealized by the Christian Brothers of his schooldays in Sydney:

> 'Ireland is portrayed as a sort of Northern Hemisphere heaven … we were taught about hedge schools and of all the suffering that our ancestors had had to endure. […] We ended up with a mixture of facts and a whole lot of romantic sentimentality. It makes it very difficult now for me to see Ireland as it really is.' (Keneally quoted in Boland 1992: 39)

Boland intimates that Keneally's view of the Irish in the rural West (whose faces he apparently believes substantiates their reputation as 'the last Stone Age people in Europe') differs little from that of English travellers in the nineteenth century (Boland 1992: 38). The colonial view of the Irish as primitives who dwell in a living past has also been adapted by the tourism industry in its promotion of Ireland's old-world charms. Indeed, one of the reasons Ireland is so attractive as a tourist

destination is that the pre-modern is seen to have survived there, miraculously, as if for our pleasure. Rural Ireland in particular lacks the population density, industry and modern townscapes of the industrialized world. In part, this is because what is today the Irish Republic did not undergo the massive reconstructions of the industrial revolution and even in the go-ahead decades of the 1960s and '70s did not experience widespread industrialization and urban growth outside Dublin. This allows the tourism industry and the tourist to focus on apparent remnants of a much older way of life. As a tourist, it is fun to pretend one is in the womb of pre-modernity or an unmediated traditional state. The electric blankets, ensuite bathrooms and freshly brewed morning coffee only add warmth to comfortable memories of a quaint old farmhouse, the effusive landlady's welcome, her taciturn farmer-husband and his manic dog, and an evening of 'craic'[5] in the local pub.

Images of tradition and the utopia of hospitality are mainstays of the tourist industry's mythologizing of Irish people and are affirmed in travellers' tales. A Tourism Ireland brochure in 2003 links these in representing (fictional) happy tourists: 'The landlady made us feel as though we were her own family'.[6] While Ireland is by no means the only country to promise tourists a warm welcome, the notion of Ireland as a kind of home has a particularly resonance for the millions of Americans, Australians and others with Irish ancestry. To quote another of Tourism Ireland's fictional tourists: 'There's a corner of Ireland with my name on it'. A visit to Ireland can thus be a homecoming, as Thomas Keneally found:

> The experience of Australians in Ireland, particularly in the West, is that first they are presumed to be English — probably Cockney, speaking not in the accents of the oppressor, but in the accents of the armies of the oppressor. Then it's discovered that you are Australian, and then that you have Irish connections. This is the daily estrangement and homecoming which an Australian experiences in Ireland. Suspicion replaced by regard, replaced then by warmth. (Keneally 1991: 53)

In Dean McCannell's influential *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, he argues that a tourist experience is always mystified as 'the vehicle that carries the

---

[5] 'Crack' is a term used in Ireland for 'a good time', usually involving drink and banter. Ciaran Carson claims that its spelling in promotional material in the tourist and hospitality industries as 'craic' is a neo-Gaelicism, its use in the English language dating back to the fifteenth century (Carson 1996: 83).

[6] Tourism Ireland is the promotional wing of Bord Fáilte ('Welcome Board'), recently renamed Fáilte Ireland. Its bi-monthly magazine is *Ireland of the Welcomes*. Tourist brochures, accommodation signs and souvenirs often bear the Irish saying, 'céad míle fáilte' (a hundred thousand welcomes). In the late 1990s the national airline, Aer Lingus, used the advertising slogan, 'Irish hospitality begins in the air'.

onlooker behind false fronts into reality' (1989: 102). In this, MacCannell's tourist resembles Bauman's pilgrim: 'For moderns, reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere: in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles (MacCannell 1989: 3). Indeed, for MacCannell, the tourist — the individual who masters otherness, and in doing so, subordinates other peoples — is a paradigm for 'modern-man-in-general' (1989: 1). Tourism celebrates difference but in reality is:

> [t]he sucking of difference out of difference, a movement to the still higher ground of the old arrogant Western Ego that wants to see it all, know it all, and take it all in. (MacCannell 1989: xiv–xv)

MacCannell adapts Erving Goffman's analysis of the 'front' and 'back' regions of modern societies (as opposed to conjectured 'authentic' societies in which there is no 'back') to argue that tourism creates 'staged authenticity', with the effect that the way of life on show becomes 'a kind of living museum' (Goffman 1969; MacCannell 1989: 99). In a more recent work, MacCannell rearticulates his views on tourism as:

> not just an aggregate of merely commercial activities; it is also an ideological framing of history, nature, and tradition; a framing that has the power to reshape culture and nature to its own needs. (MacCannell 1992: 1)

This 'ideological framing', I would argue, is closely linked to the nation–state's 'reshaping' of culture in the interests of establishing an historical, geographical and cultural unity that both justifies nationalist ideology and defines the national territory. Indeed, Michael Cronin and Barbara O'Connor have demonstrated that tourism has been central both to the Irish state's project of modernization and to the Irish experience of modernity, noting that since its inception in 1952, Ireland's state tourism board has had the task of:

> representing Ireland as simultaneously pre-modern and modern; on the one hand providing a culture and a people who are easy-going, garrulous and curious, and on the other capable of providing a clean, comfortable and efficient accommodation of tourist needs. (Cronin and O'Connor 2000: 170)

The 'pre-modern' part of this equation draws from a long history of colonial representations of Ireland and the Irish people — in songs and paintings, in political tracts, travel accounts and literature — as natural and wild. The symbolic landscape of Irish cultural nationalism is also rural (as indeed were the lives of the majority of Irish people until the 1960s). Places, whether localities or nations, are defined in order to differentiate them from what lies beyond their boundaries. After partition, the Irish Free State emphasized its predominantly rural economy in contrast to the industrialized, Protestant cities of Northern Ireland and its own

Anglicized, if not industrialized, cities. Industrial and trade development were neglected in favour of a self-sufficient economy of rural small-farmers and a moral economy also associated with rural life. In nativist discourse the mythical wild Irishman and the daunting wilderness were embraced and domesticated, as famously encapsulated in Éamon de Valera's vision of the nationalist utopia as:

> That Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit; a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forums of wisdom and serene old age. (De Valera cited in Brown 1981: 146)

This ideal draws on representations of Ireland by the intelligentsia of the 1890s Irish literary revival, self-appointed mythologists of an uncontaminated Gaelic 'peasantry' along Ireland's western seaboard. It also inverts colonial stereotypes of rural Irish as indigent and unenterprising. One reason why the cultural polemic of De Valera's government and the idealism of nationalist writers focused on the rural west as the source of Ireland's cultural and moral traditions was that in other parts of Ireland the population was largely English-speaking and living in or near the modernized commercial centres of small and medium towns (Brown 1981: 89).

Chapter Two referred to music historian Reg Hall's argument that despite popular assumptions of a much longer lineage, amateur music-making in Ireland became widespread only in the late nineteenth century (Hall, R. 1999). Luke Gibbons similarly disputes the view that the 'traditional' values espoused by De Valera — 'myths of community, the sanctity of the family, devotion to faith and fatherland' — derive from an ancient Gaelic order, arguing that they were in fact a result of post-Famine religious reforms and thus 'part of the first phase of modernization rather than an obstacle to it' (Gibbons 1996: 85–6).

This mythologizing of place, cultural practices and moral and political economy are typical of the way newly independent nations take on the image created by their colonizers, recasting it more positively. Edward Said, although sympathetic to the 'search for authenticity, for a more congenial national origin than that provided by colonial history', points out that in cases such as Ireland's, nativism reinforces the distinction between ruler and ruled, despite its revaluation of the colonized culture (Said 1993: 273–5). David Lloyd makes a similar point in a more nuanced way:

> On the side of the colonizer, it is the inauthenticity of the colonized culture, its falling short of the concept of the human, that legitimates the colonial project … From the nationalist perspective, hybridity is no less devalued; the perceived inauthenticity of the colonized culture is recast as the contamination of an original essence, the recovery of which is the crucial prerequisite to the culture's healthy and normative development. (Lloyd 1993: 112)

Since the early twentieth century, the West of Ireland has attracted individuals in pursuit of cultural authenticity — folklorists, anthropologists, students of Irish language, collectors of traditional music and song, musicians, artists, photographers, and tourists — drawn by, and in turn creating, a growing body of cultural representations of its symbolic landscape. In doing so, they reproduced the myth that an authentic Ireland resided in the West. This idealized Ireland is found, for example, in the paintings of Paul Henry in the 1920s and '30s (Image 4[7]): 'the perfect visual image for the political profile of Ireland, of Eamonn De Valera [sic], and the Catholic church' (Marshall 1994: 94).

Éamon de Valera envisioned an independent, self-sufficient people who would thrive on a moral and agricultural economy of small farms and large families, shunning industrial modernization. By 1943 (the year of his St Patrick's Day speech, quoted above), Ireland's economy had declined to the point of stagnation: a ruinous 'economic war' with Britain had exacerbated the effects of the 1930s depression and Ireland's neutrality in World War 2 had deepened the country's isolation and further impeded trade and industrial development. By the time the Irish Republic was established in 1949, rural Ireland had become synonymous with poverty, social and economic stagnation, and the double-edged guilt of mass emigration. Particularly in the western counties, depopulation and dependency on emigrant remittances were accompanied by high rates of alcoholism and mental illness, late marriages and enforced celibacy.[8] The imagined national type threatened once more to take on the negative values assigned in colonial times.

By promoting tourism as part of a modern economy using images of rural landscape and welcoming people, the state was able to bolster national pride while reassuring those nervous of moral contamination and political domination that modernization could be achieved without changing the essential (rural) nature of Irish life. In

---

[7] Paul Henry (c1929) 'Lakeside Cottages', oil on canvas, reproduced in Marshall 1994: 96.

[8] For accounts of the effects of Ireland's mid-twentieth century economic policies, political isolation and mass rural emigration, see, for example, Brody 1986 and Scheper-Hughes 2001.

encouraging both tourists and Irish people to believe in this mythical 'authentic' way of life, the tourist industry not only *expressed* cultural nationalist values, but *produced* a cultural nationalist version of Ireland. Thus today's visitors, including musicians seeking the tradition and its authentic sound, encounter an Ireland that has long since been transformed.

There are several ways in which tourism has been involved in producing this modern Ireland. Most obvious is through economic growth. As Bord Fáilte's report on *The Fáilte Business* (2000) states, not only does tourism represent 6.4 per cent of gross national product and provide employment for one-twelfth of the national workforce, but tourist facilities are also enjoyed by Irish people, while tourist[9] revenue contributes to their quality of life. Another significant change attributed to tourism is its positive influence on Irish self-perception by stimulating 'an awareness of what is good about Ireland' (2000: 5) Bord Fáilte hails this awareness as a product of cross-cultural encounters, which 'brought out the best in we [sic] Irish' (Bord Fáilte 2000: 7). An alternative interpretation is that such representations pressure Irish people to adapt to such expectations.[10]

The marketing of Ireland has remained remarkably consistent since the inception of the first state tourism board in 1939 (Bord Fáilte 2000: 10). Sixty years later, market research revealed that 'Ireland's core competitive advantage still lies in the ease of interaction with a friendly and engaging people, the accessibility of our culture and our unspoiled landscapes' (Bord Fáilte 2000: 8). With the growth of Irish incomes and modernized lifestyles (which include holidays — and holiday homes — in Ireland and abroad), international tourists and the more affluent of Irish citizens now share consumption patterns in seeking 'local' Irish culture along with international standards in food, drink and accommodation. Thus a paradox emerges in which, 'as tourists come to Ireland in pursuit of difference, the Irish themselves increasingly come to resemble the tourists in terms of life-style and cultural practices'. Tourism today is thus no longer part of the modernist project, but belongs instead to that of globalized post-industrial development (Cronin and

---

[9] The report uses the World Tourism Organization's definition of tourist as 'a person travelling to and staying at least one night in a country other than his or her country of usual residence for a period not exceeding 12 months, for leisure, business or other purposes' (Bord Fáilte 2000: 4).

[10] An example from the similarly commodified environment of the Irish theme pub is the expectation that session leaders will welcome all musicians, which (as observed in Billy Moran's session, discussed in the previous chapter) can result in a 'front stage' bonhomie and a 'back stage' resentment. This is one of many ways in which representations of the session as spontaneous expressions of musical community are shown to be false.

O'Connor 2000: 176–7). Any weekend in Dingle, Co. Kerry, or in Westport, Co. Mayo, international tourists mingle with Dublin professionals in the bars, restaurants and spas of expensive hotels, or mix with budget tourists in music pubs, sharing a taste for the trinity of lifestyle attractions in the West of Ireland: wild scenery, friendly people, and pub 'craic'.

Another aspect of the mythologizing and commodification of the West of Ireland relates to its continuing status as being in decline, evident in an abundance of both literary and populist works post-dating the economic and social reforms of the 1960s. American writer Leon Uris, for example, includes in *Ireland: A Terrible Beauty* an elegy to the people of Ireland's 'dying west', 'the last great peasantry of Western Europe' who, in Uris's contorted metaphors, are simultaneously the 'backbone of the race' and 'a millstone around the nation's neck' (Uris and Uris 1977: 60). His captions to Jill Uris's photographs reinforce the assumption that life in the West of Ireland is continuous with pre-modernity (Image 5[11]). Historical time and timelessness coalesce as his elegy moves from the present to the recent past to past centuries to the future, as if loss itself were the only constant in Irish culture:

> The country fairs and all their blazing color have all but vanished before the marketing co-operatives. Songs and dances that once filled a midsummer's night are mostly sung in tourist taverns. Gone is the wandering scholar who kept the old lore and language alive in hedge schools[12] […] In those savagely poor and humble little cottages the fires are going out all over the West and the voices of the gentle people will be heard no more. Surely it is a new day, but when the land loses its peasantry the beat of its heart is never the same again. (Uris 1977: 82)

This relegation of Irish people to the status of endangered species echoes the laments of Bunting and other harbingers of cultural nationalism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (discussed in Chapter Two).[13] The notion of the dying culture threatened by modernity is important to nationalist ideology. In Ireland, the dying West continues to provide evidence of a once-great native culture, while its perilous state calls for preservation or revival, memorialization or reproduction.

---

[11] Leon Uris's caption to this photograph: 'Timeless, the thatched, whitewashed cottage, mortarless stone wall, and hay drying portray a centuries-old lifestyle' (Uris and Uris 1977: 122).

[12] The hedge schools were a phenomenon of the eighteenth century. *The Hidden Ireland*, Daniel Corkery's account of the wandering scholars and poets of this period, first published in 1924 (Corkery 1967), quickly became a source of authority for Irish cultural nationalists and was highly influential on Irish writers in the mid-twentieth century.

[13] It also recalls the anxieties of folk revivalists and anthropologists throughout the twentieth century, also discussed in Chapter Two.

In a more recent (but far less reverential) work, *The Truth About the Irish*, literary critic Terry Eagleton debunks the myth of the West as a 'timeless peasant world' by reminding his readers that it was not permanently settled until the late-eighteenth century (1999: 173). At the same time, he perpetuates other myths, urging his reader to 'get out west as quick as you can before they plonk a supermarket on the cliffs of Moher' (1999: 173) while regretfully adding that:

> Behind the seductive appearances, the west of Ireland is in deep trouble, with parts of it dying on its feet. For some years, it has been emptying like a burning building, as its people flock into the cities from its infertile land and unprofitable farms. (Eagleton 1999: 172)

Eagleton's professed de-mythologizing exemplifies the ambivalence towards the West of Ireland of cultural commentators (notably writers from outside Ireland) who mourn the imminent passing of a noble (but unviable) way of life, while simultaneously fearing its modernization. One of the conditions of an urban, affluent life in postmodernity is the lack of connection with people who live differently, and one result of this lack of connectivity may be that their importance to us is largely as symbols of more authentic ways of living. The cultural tourist who, upon arriving in a remote, tribal village, is dismayed to discover that it has a satellite link is not so very different from the avid Irish-language student who is appalled when the 'natives' of a certain Gaeltacht speak in English — nor from the writers who elegize the disappearing way of life in the West of Ireland (which has been on the brink of extinction for hundreds of years according to commentators from Petrie onwards, indicating that pre-modernity is reimagined in each generation). In each of these cases, what is actually at risk is their own constructed myths.

Many musicians and audiences also persist in understanding contemporary Ireland through the discourse of tourism as a land of welcomes and pre-modern simplicity. The notion that music simply *expresses* an already bounded and organic culture and people is one that tourism actively promotes. According to this view, Ireland is a place where heritage is not only observable but may be *experienced* as a kind of living heritage in which tourists and locals interact. The scene of this 'staged authenticity' (MacCannell 1989) is the pub, where musicians perform and visitors feel welcome to join in by listening, dancing, singing or even playing.

The imagined place that is Ireland is the product not only of tourist industry promotion, but of tourists' consumption and reproduction. Which tourist did not

return from Ireland without a store of amusing stories about naïve country-folk with quaint sayings and peculiar logic? But such perceptions require a filtering of experiences, a filtering out of the signs of modernization in Irish rural life.

The logic of tourism (discounting tourism to 'sacred sites' like Venice or Paris), like that of post-industrial capitalism, industrial and even agricultural development,[14] is its continual expansion in pursuit of virgin territory as each place is occupied, consumed and despoiled.[15] This logic is evident in the ways in which tourists and the tourism industry promote new areas as the old ones become too popular to sustain ideals of otherness. West Clare, for example, evolved from a destination for nineteenth-century travellers seeking natural wonders to a mid-twentieth-century summer destination for British and Irish holidaymakers to a centre for those seeking authentic Irish culture in the late twentieth century. In the boom of the 1990s, the Western counties became particularly popular because, unlike Dublin and the east, they had benefited relatively little from the so-called Celtic Tiger economy. With the growth of tourist numbers, formerly attractive cultural centres (including sites where musical pilgrims gathered) became passé. This is the case with Doolin, as the following guide-book assessments demonstrate:

> Doolin is the traditional music capital of Ireland […] at night the pubs are packed and buzzing to the sound of lightning-fast gigs [sic] and reels. (*Time Out: Dublin* 1998: 229–30)
>
> Miltown Malbay… is what Doolin was in the early 80s: the place to be for music. While Doolin moved from impromptu sessions to paid concerts long ago, Miltown is the real deal. (Weiss 1999: 269)
>
> Then, of course, there's always Doolin where music's possible any night of the year, though many musicians now avoid the influx of tourists. In the east of Clare, Feakle, Killaloe and Tulla might make a more authentic alternative. (Wallis and Wilson 2001: 563)

Musicians' evaluations of festivals and summer schools in conversations and internet discussion groups also follow this path (typical of tourism worldwide), as the frontiers of authenticity expand. For example, many musicians returning to summer schools in Ireland now regard the Willie Clancy Summer School (discussed

---

[14] This is Hugh Brody's thesis in relation to the growth of agriculture in *The Other Side of Eden: Hunter-Gatherers, Farmers, and the Shaping of the World* (Brody 2001).

[15] Alex Garland (1997) explores this corrupting trajectory in the subculture of Western backpackers in Thailand in his novel *The Beach*.

below) as too crowded, preferring the smaller Tubbercurry and Drumshanbo schools.[16]

In his *Global Pop*: *World Music, World Markets* (1997) Timothy D. Taylor identifies the basis of the trope of authenticity as 'the questionable assumption of an essential(ized), real, actual essence', which in music is produced by 'pre-modern, untainted' 'natives'. Yet Taylor confesses to retaining a remnant of authenticity in his closet for the times when:

> with my other hat on, that of a player of Irish traditional music, I have a firm, inflexible idea about what is 'authentic' in that music and attempt to play not merely in an authentic style but also seek out players with similar attitudes and pick as favourites bands that play in ways that conform to my conception of authenticity. (Taylor 1997: 22)

In playing Irish traditional music or in visiting Ireland, musicians are encouraged to suspend their scepticism about notions of authenticity and ethnic otherness. The commodified Ireland of tourism and the commodified music session are both places where even the sceptic may enjoy (as Taylor does when he plays Irish traditional music), 'the myths we know to be myths yet continue to cling to, cherish and dream' (Chambers 1990: 104).

5.2 Cultural pilgrimages

During the 1950s and '60s, thousands upon thousands of middle-class Australians sailed 'home' to London. In *Once an Australian*, Ian Britain traces the journeys and analyzes the careers of celebrated Australian expatriates. Britain demonstrates that for young Australian intellectuals of that generation, whose imaginations had been nurtured on predominantly English literature and British history, London was 'the distant centre of our universe' (novelist Christopher Koch cited in Britain 1997: 14–5). Ian Britain's subjects were the 'big fish' in a stream of Australian pilgrims who voyaged across the world in the belief that '[r]eal life happens elsewhere' (novelist David Malouf cited in Britain 1997: 13).

By the 1970s, the notion of England as mother to Australia's colonial children and London as Australia's cultural centre had dissipated. Young minds sought new

---

[16] One indication of how closely entwined the tourism and music industries have become is that the publishers of 'Rough Guides' to numerous tourist locations have introduced a series of 'Rough Guides' to music. There is a guide in each series on Ireland/Irish music.

cultural paradigms and Asia became the destination for a more affluent generation of youthful adventurers. By the 1980s, the notion of English sovereignty over Australia had been almost universally rejected, along with its corollary that Australians were second-rate Britons and Australian culture provincial. The shape of those 1970s journeys, however, appears strikingly similar to those of the Australian musicians travelling to Ireland in the 1990s: like the earlier cultural pilgrims, they leave their provincial life for the centre of their cultural world in order to uncover hidden knowledge and return home (if they do return) transformed by it.

In Melbourne's Irish traditional music scene, even a short trip to Ireland bestows a higher status on Australian musicians when they arrive home with new tunes and a more authentic Irish sound, and anecdotes about festivals and sessions and the famous musicians with whom they played. Pilgrims are expected to progress. Stories of failure, rejection, confusion, alienation, discomfort or misery are not part of the returning pilgrim's stock of tales, nor would they add 'stock' to their cultural capital. These individual success stories also reinforce idealized notions of the traditional music scene in Ireland like the one that transported flute player Rachel as far as Shannon airport in Co. Clare, but no further.[17]

The pilgrimage — a journey to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion — has been represented in contradictory ways, both in literature and in social theory. Pilgrimages have been regarded variously as supporting or subverting social order. Karl Marx, for example, regarded pilgrimages as cults that legitimized oppressive ideologies (Eade 1991a: 4–5). For Victor Turner, on the other hand, pilgrimage is a 'liminal' phenomenon that allows pilgrims to break free of secular roles and hierarchies. Turner defines the social bonding among bands of pilgrims as *communitas*, a modality of relationship that exists outside social structures, and which marks a transition to a new social position (1969; 1974).[18] I use Turner's model because, like the journeys recounted here, it is an ideal, for the reality of the pilgrim's journey is in fact often one of failure. In contrast, the postmodern traveller,

---

[17] See chapter epigraph and her account of subsequent experiences in Ireland, below.

[18] Although many subsequent studies of pilgrimages have rejected Turner's model, finding instead that pilgrimage maintains or even reinforces social distinctions, Turner does in fact consider the institutionalized nature of the pilgrimage and the 'thread of structure' in long-established cultural systems, where communitas 'has been thoroughly domesticated, even corralled' (Turner, V. 1974: 255). For a list of studies that have tested Turner's model in the field and found it unsupported, see Eade and Sallnow's introduction to *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (1991a: 4–5).

for whom the process rather than any destination is more significant, does not know failure.

When pilgrimages first became popular among European Christians in the Middle Ages, the status of pilgrims passing through foreign countries was ambiguous. In recognition of their quest for spiritual transformation they received the gift of *caritas* that, as Augustine teaches, is the love of the other: kindness to strangers. This was realized in the privileges of protection and hospitality provided at 'hotels' along the way — but only on the basis that the pilgrims remained in transit. Julia Kristeva, in exploring the history of the concept of 'stranger' (a word Irish country people use for an outsider, whether from the next parish or the farthest continent) writes that such meetings between wandering guests and settled hosts produce a physical and spiritual communion: 'the banquet of hospitality is the foreigners' utopia … the banquet is outside of time' (1991: 11). A scenario in which bands of transitory foreign pilgrims celebrating the bond of *communitas* and receiving the gift of *caritas* and its privileges of hospitality is an ideal shared by organizers and participants in summer schools of Irish traditional music, and on a smaller scale, in the session.[19]

Like the celebrations of *caritas* along the pilgrim's way, the destination or sacred centre has also been represented as existing outside the quotidian. For Victor Turner, it is 'a place and moment "in and out of time"' (1974: 197). This notion of timelessness, in which the past and the present coincide and the passage of time appears to cease, is reproduced in the discourses of nationalism, of tourism, and also in the idealization of Irish traditional music.

During the 1990s, postcolonial studies on the nature of the colonial encounter and anti-colonial movements stressed the *dialogic*[20] nature of the relationship between colonized and colonizing cultures in what Edward Said has called the 'co-operative

---

[19] The pilgrim feast, the music festival and the session share some aspects of what Michail Bakhtin (1965) has influentially theorized as the 'carnivalesque' in *Rabelais and His World* (trans H. Iwolsky), Bloomington: Indiana University Press. I refer in particular to the anti-hierarchical ideal attaching to these occasions in the dissolution of the everyday status of the foreigner of any class. In practice, however, the overriding of social distinctions is at best ambivalent, as demonstrated in the various analyses of sessions included in this thesis.

[20] Here I use the term both in its general sense of relating to a dialogue (as opposed to a monologue) to stress the mutuality of influences between colonizer and colonized. I also imply Bakhtin's sense of the term as indicating that neither verbal nor ideological discourse is singular and bounded but, in implying an audience, is interactional (Bakhtin 1981). In this sense, Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic is analogous both to the concept of overdetermination and to postmodern theories of identities as interactional, as discussed in Chapter One.

venture' of imperialism (Said 1993: 269). This interactive, two-way process (Trivedi 1993: 15) results in transculturation, 'the mutual contagion and subtle intimacies between coloniser and colonised' (Gandhi 1998: 129).[21] Aversion to the implications of such contagion has prompted new nations, among them Ireland, to assert a historically based, essential culture.

Nation building, not least in Ireland, is also a kind of pilgrimage, in which former social structures are rejected on the journey toward the utopian goal of nationhood. Eoghan Ó hAnluain has written that the Gaelic League in its prime sent 'large numbers on a pilgrimage of rediscovery of Irish music, customs, traditions, history and, above all, of the spoken Irish language' (Ó hAnluain 1991: 814). The purest forms of these markers of Irishness were located in the rural West, which had been relatively untouched by the pollutants of Englishness and modernity.[22]

Nationalist histories of Ireland have assumed that a unique Irish culture had somehow survived centuries of English occupation, a view that endures in the discourse surrounding Irish traditional music, in which it is represented as expressing characteristics that are essentially and exclusively Irish. While postcolonial historical writings in and about Ireland have troubled the assumptions of nativism, it remains a pervasive force in Irish politics and cultural life.

5.3 Musical pilgrims

If Ireland is 'no longer the polychrome Eden of turf-gatherers and elderly cyclists, but a land of gourmets and espresso drinkers' (Cronin and O'Connor 2000: 182), it is something that the musicians who visit the Willie Clancy Summer School in Miltown Malbay, West Clare, do not always want to know about (even those who drink espresso in the gourmet bakery). Each July, tens of thousands of visitors crowd the small town. The impact on the county's economy is significant,[23] particularly as many arrive from other countries and spend their dollars and euros following the music, often to several more of the twenty or more summer schools in Irish traditional music held in towns and villages, mostly in the rural west of Ireland.

---

[21] I was introduced to Trivedi's work by Leela Gandhi's helpful critical introduction to postcolonial theory (Gandhi 1998).

[22] A minimalist definition of modernity is 'the industrial–capitalist order, the nation–state, and secular rationalism' (Stokes 1994: 3).

[23] See articles in the *Clare Champion* in July of each year, accessible in the county newspaper's archive at www.clarechampion.com.

Tourism, as Cronin and O'Connor argue, has produced this Ireland of heritage buildings, music festivals and 'traditional' pubs. The Ireland encountered by tourists, and by musicians from Ireland and elsewhere seeking the tradition and its authentic sound, has already been transformed; yet musicians and audiences persist in viewing it as a land of welcomes, of pre-modern simplicity and authentic musical experiences.

The previous chapter concluded that the Australian musicians in this study generally rejected nativist assumptions about the essential and exclusive Irishness of Irish traditional music. They expected to be welcomed as equals by musicians in Ireland and, with application, learn to play Irish music as well as Irish musicians they had heard. The younger among them in particular regarded Irish ethnicity as having no more than a superficial bearing on the ability to play Irish music authentically. Those who recognized their lack of an Irish sound attributed it to their limited exposure to Irish music and opportunities to play with Irish musicians. Ireland to them is a centre of Irish music, as Nashville is the centre of country and western music, where one can hear and learn from the best musicians in an international genre, and where the more ambitious can test their abilities against the best in the field.

Matthew (b. 1977), for example, went to Ireland professing deference towards Irish musicians and an ambition to learn to play 'legitimately' but not professionally:

> I'm going over just to learn some more about the music, and I'm really …
> concerned to be very deferential … Oriel's gone over there and in two weeks
> had gigs and all the rest of it, that's really not what I want to do … I don't
> feel that that's how I'd get out of it what I want to get out of it. And also,
> you feel like you're, like, taking ice to Eskimos! Like, 'Hi, I'm from Australia!
> Look at me!' … I'm not interested in doing that… I'd like to go over there and
> show respect, but also be respected just as someone who's sincere […] I have
> no sense of being Irish. I love playing traditional music, and I want to try and
> do it legitimately, I guess, and well. (Matthew, interview, 9 November 1999)

Within a short time, in recognition of his musical talents and his ability to fit in socially, Matthew was invited to share gigs with other young men who played professionally in Ennis pubs. From that point, his musical experiences were largely circumscribed within a circle of young musicians whose repertoire and style were in line with contemporary bands in the West of Ireland — just as my own choice to settle in a rural village limited my musical experiences largely to playing with musicians possessing or seeking an 'East Clare style' and repertoire (the implications of which are examined in the following chapters). In each case, the

choice of a musical circle corresponded with similar age group and musical preferences. More importantly, Matthew's acceptance among this peer group and the recognition he received as a musician indicate that the goals he shared with other young Australian musicians were not impossible to achieve.

While Matthew had learned from his experiences in Australian sessions[24] that it was important 'to be very deferential' (Matthew, interview) to Irish musicians, he was aware of areas of Irish music where cultural difference was 'way beyond' what he might be able to perform. Just as his friend Simon (b. 1979), as discussed in the previous chapter, realized the cultural difference of Irish people when he saw how they responded to the Irish songs he disdained, for Matthew it was also singing that marked a boundary which he was uncertain he could cross:

> Like, when you hear a recording of someone playing, or hear someone singing sean-nós or whatever, that always shows me quite clearly that there's something just way beyond my culture. (Matthew, interview)

When fiddle player Natalie (b. 1975) made a short trip to Ireland, her goals were to learn more tunes and to get the 'lilt and the swing' of 'real' Irish musicians. She found that in Ireland the best musicians played with ease and confidence, producing a relaxed, unforced sound that allowed soul and feeling to come through. Natalie believed that for her teacher in the fiddle class at the Willie Clancy Summer School the achievement of style was 'like second nature':

> he doesn't have to think about it, he just does it, and it just comes straight from out of him, and he doesn't have to think about variations or anything like that … it was just so second-nature … That really made me feel like, wow, I've got a lot to work on and a lot to learn. And for me, I don't know how long I'll have to play for, before it becomes second nature to me. (Natalie, interview, 15 November 1999)

Natalie's new goal was to 'back off' in order to produce the relaxed sound she heard in the playing of her teacher in Miltown and in that of her friend 'Alastair's' playing since his return from a trip to Ireland, and which:

> didn't have that feeling of trying to prove something, he was just totally relaxed. And I remember saying to [a friend], 'Gee, you can tell he's been to Ireland, you can tell that he's really absorbed the style'. (Natalie, interview)

---

[24] See Chapter Four, note 26.

Australian flute player Rachel (b. 1979) arrived in Ireland expecting to find welcoming sessions everywhere but soon discovered that 'it wasn't like that all!' (Rachel, pers. com., 14 July 2000). Rachel found a job, rented a room in Galway city, attended classes at the Willie Clancy Summer School, took private flute lessons in Galway and went to sessions six nights a week. Her goals for her nine-month sojourn were to increase her repertoire of tunes, learn flute technique and play in sessions. Another priority was to understand pub culture (which in Australia she had found uncongenial) so that she could 'fit in'. Her ultimate goal was to feel confident playing Irish traditional music 'with *anyone!*' This certainly did not entail performing other modes of Irishness. Rachel spoke incredulously of an American woman who had moved to Galway, learned Irish language, dancing and music, dyed her hair red, spoke with a Galway accent and was now looking for an Irish husband (Rachel, pers. com., 14 July 2000).

As part of her goal to fit in, Rachel observed the behaviour at sessions and worked out what was expected and what was unacceptable. Within a few months of her arrival in Ireland, she was able to identify foreigners by their 'bad' behaviour in sessions:

> just the way they sit down, the way they present themselves. Like, if they just rush in and play loads of tunes, without knowing the musicians, you know that they really don't have any idea about sessions … there's no way you should just walk into a session you don't know, if you don't know anything about sessions, just walk in there and sit in and expect to play tunes. It doesn't work like that at all. Especially if all the musicians are Irish. If some of them are from different backgrounds, it's sort of more open … they can understand where you're at, probably, they can remember when they were in the same situation. (Rachel, interview, 27 July 2000)

Rachel's observation that musicians from other backgrounds were more accepting of newcomers was perhaps one reason why her friendships were almost exclusively with other foreigners who had moved to Galway to play Irish traditional music. Her favourite session was at Áras na nGael, one of the Gaelic League's Irish-speaking clubs,[25] where the session leader was an emigrant from Spain and almost all the participating musicians were from other countries — an irony that seemed lost both on the musicians and on the Irish speakers at the other end of the bar:

> People have been really friendly. Well, it's only been foreign people playing Irish music that have been *really* friendly. The Irish people are not so open, I

---

[25] Conradh na Gaeilge (the Gaelic League), one of the cornerstones of the cultural nationalist movement, continues to promote the Irish language through tuition and other cultural activities.

don't think. But because there are so many foreigners in Galway playing Irish music, it's a bit easier to fit in, whereas somewhere else, it could get much more difficult. (Rachel, interview)

For these young Australians, then, an understanding of Irish ethnicity as commodified and citational (as explored in the previous chapter) nevertheless leaves them with some ambivalence. Each of them recognizes an aspect of Irish music that is especially elusive: for Matthew, the sound of sean-nós (literally 'old-style') singing; for Natalie, the relaxed sound that she believed was 'second nature' to Irish musicians; for Rachel, a sense of belonging in sessions. Significantly, each of them believed they could overcome these differences with perseverance: 'cobbling something together' (Matthew); 'working on it' (Natalie); learning how to fit in at sessions (Rachel). The degree to which they pursued understanding of the cultural context of the music was limited to the sound they wanted to reproduce and a way of performing socially that was acceptable to Irish musicians. It also reveals that their musical identities are long-term projects that they believe will come to fruition through time and application.

This was not the case for an older Australian fiddle player, 'Terry' (b. 1947), whose experience in Ireland was similar to Natalie's, but his interpretation of it, and subsequent course of action, quite different. As a young man, Terry had searched for music connected with his father's Irish–Catholic background, and found it at the Melbourne branch of CCÉ, which was 'like running into a version of my family'. He 'wanted to be one of them, or to be accepted at least'. On his first trip to Ireland in 1988, Terry found a 'raw, peasant-based culture' and 'spectacular' musicians including a ten-year-old boy whose 'brilliant' fiddle playing he found 'disheartening'. Like Natalie, he realized that he would have to work on his playing for a long time before an 'Irish' sound became 'second nature':

> The thing about starting late is you just don't have those neural pathways that children have, it's not second nature, for a long, long, long time, it's not second nature. (Terry, interview, 23 November 2002)

A second trip to Ireland in 1995 was 'the complete watershed' and led Terry finally to abandon his goal of becoming an Irish musician:

> I was technically up to the best of them, and I would get constantly in sessions, somebody would come and say: 'You play wonderfully, where are you from? Are you from Scotland, or somewhere? Because you don't sound Irish.' And at the time it was very disturbing, because I couldn't figure out what the hell they were talking about. I thought I was sounding terrifically Irish, and nothing could have been further from the truth. Although even

today, I don't quite know what 'Irish' means. They weren't talking about the rolls or crans or cuts … The one that really got me was in Monaghan, which is not exactly a full-on Irish music place. I just found a session there, and a guy came up, and he was a *farmer*, and he came up and said, 'You play well, but you don't sound Irish.' And he *did*! He was a musician, he was a fiddle player, and he didn't have to do anything to sound Irish. He sounded Irish, and I didn't, and I couldn't figure out why. It was more to do with the real subtleties of the sounds, and to this day it eludes me. At this moment I lost any romantic notion of Ireland. (Terry, interview)

What was most frustrating for Terry was his perception that growing up in Ireland gave Irish musicians a head start that musicians from elsewhere could never make up:

You can study the *Book of Kells* and do whatever you like, you can immerse yourself in another culture till you be blue in the face, but what you experienced in the first fifteen years or so of your life will permeate everything. I tried to be an Irish musician, and failed. And I wondered *why* I failed, and the answer is, it's simply not possible. And it's taken thirty years to figure it out … [It's a process of] osmosis, just being there. You can try as hard as you can to learn a culture, but you can't deny who you were for the first ten or fifteen years of your life … if you're setting yourself up as the same, you'll be found out. (Terry, interview)

Rather than returning to Ireland to take in the sound of Irish music by 'osmosis', Terry abandoned his project altogether.

For other Australian musicians, however, the journey to Ireland was the beginning of a longer pilgrimage into Irish culture, the goal of which was belonging rather than acceptance as a temporary guest. Their understanding of the essentially Irish nature of Irish traditional music led them to make different choices. Each settled in Ireland and adopted a way of living that coincided with their ideal of how an Irish traditional musician would live. This is illustrated by the choices of three Australian musicians who have become permanent residents or citizens in Ireland.

Banjo player 'Robert' (b. 1962), whose musical role models had been farmers in East Clare, bought a farm and with his family settled in that area with the aim of playing music as an organic part of his life, as it had been in the remembered past of the area's oldest residents. He regarded 'a cultural understanding of what it means to be Irish' as most important to playing Irish traditional music, as well as an attitude of humility and deference (Robert, interview, 25 May 2000). Fiddle player Pauline (b. 1954) had wanted to develop her fiddle style and repertoire, to build musical friendships and absorb the sound of the music. Her broader goal, and her reason for leaving Australia, had been to find greater fulfilment in a life where music and art

could take prominence. To Pauline, such a way of life was unavailable in Australia. She settled in the centre of Galway, a city with a thriving arts scene and music sessions every night of the week, and developed musical friendships with other women (Pauline, interview, 27 June 2000). Guitarist 'James' (b. 1953) had wanted to discover the spirit of Irish music, and the culture of his own 'tribe' (his Irish forebears). Believing that Irish traditional music bears the rhythms of an agricultural society and the intonations of the Irish language, he lived among rural Irish-speakers so that he could learn the music in its most authentic environment (James, interview, 26 February 2001). In each case, the musician's move to Ireland was directed by an understanding of Irish traditional music as something that involved living a different kind of life, in which the social values they perceived as essential to Irish traditional music and their goals for personal fulfilment coincided.

For these musicians, permanent relocation in Ireland has involved the dissolution of their pasts and their personal origins in the 'river' of Irish culture, as they refocused their cultural identifications towards becoming Irish in certain ways. As the experience of migrants elsewhere (including Australia) might have foreshadowed, their strategies have only partially succeeded. Pauline developed friendships with other women musicians, most of them also foreigners, among whom her difference did not disqualify her from playing Irish traditional music, although, as she recounts in the next chapter, her acceptance was much more limited outside this circle. For Robert, playing East Clare music required of him the sensitivity and humility he had observed in the oldest local musicians. He demonstrated his respect by playing only when invited (which limited the possibilities considerably) and then always as a follower and never a leader (a reversal of his role in an Irish music circle in Canada, where he had lived before migrating to Ireland). He hoped that his children, who learn Irish traditional music at school, would have better opportunities to play music. When James, now highly respected in Ireland as an arranger, accompanist, composer, musician and producer, first arrived there, he was 'frozen out' of sessions: 'It was a closed shop' (James, interview). Now an Irish citizen, James has spent more than half his life in Ireland. Despite his Irish heritage, his Irish citizenship, his Irish-speaking rural life, and recognition in Ireland for his manifold musical abilities, despite his devotion to Irish music and humility towards other musicians, James remains aware of 'a fierce protectiveness that Irish people have of their culture: no matter how much you try, you'll never become an Irish person' (James, interview). In Ireland, he continues to be defined as 'an Australian musician'.

Each of these three musicians followed a path that involved re-aligning the trajectory of their quest for identity as a result of their desire to play Irish traditional music and with the aim of belonging inside a community of Irish musicians. In this, they sought something larger than themselves (an Irish cultural identity). They wanted to perform Irish music authentically by adopting a deeper identification with Irish music, language and cultural values and by developing a greater understanding of, as well as exposure to, Irish music. At the same time, their encounters with musicians in Ireland demonstrated that Irish musicians might not recognize or respect these identifications.

The younger musicians, on the other hand, wanted to produce the sound of Irish music authentically, and the difference is crucial. They move in and out of Ireland, coming to listen, to imitate and to acquire a more authentic Irish sound before returning to Australia. They believe that exposure to an authentic Irish sound is more available in Ireland (and in the congenial company of their own age-group) but, for them, producing an authentic sound does not involve living an 'Irish' life. There are aspects of the music-making or the music culture that challenge this understanding (sean-nós singing, a relaxed 'second-nature' style, the feeling of belonging) but, unlike fiddle player Terry, they are optimistic that none of them is unattainable. In this respect, they recognize cultural difference but are uncertain about whether they can negotiate a recognized identity as an Irish musician in relation to that difference. In the long-term, they are undertaking a modernist project of identity, trying to become like the Other, but in the short-term move strategically to achieve recognition as Irish musicians in ways that are achievable (such as being 'very deferential' towards Irish musicians). For them, Ireland is a useful place, but they do not need to stay there permanently in order to achieve their individual musical identities.

One of the attractions of Irish music to musicians from other cultural backgrounds is that it offers in the session a form of musical sociality that is difficult to find elsewhere. The session also offers a welcome (often with caveats that are misunderstood or ignored) to the amateur and the learner, as well as the perpetually mediocre player. Often, the tension between the welcome extended to outsiders and the barriers to being accepted in a session result in a struggle over musical territory. In order to explore some of the complications that arise, as when guests take advantage of the welcome they are extended, I will follow the pilgrim's way a little longer.

5.4 *Communitas* at Willie Week

For many Irish musicians the Willie Clancy Summer School has become a pilgrimage that they perform each year. Fintan Vallely writes that it has become 'something of a Mecca' (Vallely 1999: 331) while Martin Dowling (the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's traditional arts officer) sees it as an extension of earlier pilgrimages undertaken by members of the urban-based revival seeking out renowned regional musicians (Dowling 1999). Muiris Ó Róchain, Secretary of the summer school, speaks of the founders' ambition to keep alive the pilgrimages musicians had made to listen to and learn from the great piper Willie Clancy up to his death in 1973 (Muiris Ó Róchain, interview, 3 February 2001). In Miltown Malbay during Willie Clancy Week in 2000, over a thousand students attended the classes, a large proportion Irish schoolchildren and the remainder adult learners. Muiris Ó Róchain estimates that about fifty per cent of students are now foreigners, although in the beginning it was all Irish students. The school is very welcoming to foreigners, he says: fees are low and every effort is made to find accommodation for students. One of the reasons it has become an international phenomenon, Muiris believes, is its promotion by the Chieftains, whose members have also taught at the school. The school is special for foreigners, Muiris believes, because:

> they have never been in a natural situation. They can meet the musicians. It breaks down that barrier, it makes the thing more intimate. Because Irish music gets the heart going. (Muiris O Rócháin, interview)

Muiris Ó Róchain regards foreign musicians as differing in several ways from the Irish students: they are older; many come a long way and have to make a big effort to get there; and 'foreigners are very, very enthusiastic' (Muiris O Rócháin, interview).

The summer school is a liminal space in the sense that the 'masters' of Irish traditional music are accessible to students in numbers and proximity that are generally unavailable to them. For many Irish musicians, Willie Week is a renewal of vows, a reunion, a revival of memories, as Ciaran Carson eloquently celebrates in *Last Night's Fun* (Carson 1996: 135–42). Understandably, these musicians are keen to meet up with old pals and meet musicians they admire. They rarely seek out students from the summer school or the foreign musicians who flock to the sessions in Miltown. Crowded pubs and large sessions result in games of cat-and-mouse between musicians who want to play together without their session being 'invaded' and other musicians who seek out the best sessions and may try to join in.

Some musicians who travel to the summer school from outside Ireland have created their own community within the idealized but fragmented musical community at Willie Clancy Week. This is the case for those who belong to 'virtual' communities of Irish traditional musicians, such as the predominantly (but not exclusively) American participants in the Irish-moderated 'IRTRAD-L' internet discussion group, and the more European membership of the BBC-sponsored 'thesession.org'. Each (northern) spring, the chatter in these groups focuses on the coming season of summer schools, where many contributors arrange to meet to play music and socialize. When members of these virtual communities come to ground, they resemble other cohorts of musical friends at Miltown. As this small sample of posts[26] from May 2002 indicates, musicians attending Willie Week seek out legendary musicians as well as one other:

> Some of the 'great ones' played in sessions in a village about 5–7 miles away in the evening so if you can get your own transport and stay off the drink (I had no transport and couldn't on the second point), you could be in for a treat. ('A')

> I started going in the early 1980s, and stopped for a few years for the very reasons stated by some of the previous contributors – ie, too many people there for the wrong reasons, and in particular, lack of respect for the music and the musicians. […] P.S. – the tune everyone was playing last year was 'Lucy Campbell' – start practicing now! ('B')

> Great!! I'll pull down Lucy Campbell[27] and have it under my fingers for Willie Week but I don't plan on doing much sleeping myself. I'll leave you a message on the board and we'll have some tunes! Wow! Can't wait!! ('C')

> I'll be wearing black clothes. Not because I'm incredibly arty, or of an intellectual bent, prone to discussing Sarte, but all the better to hide the guinness and ketchup stains which I shall undoubtably acquire during my sojourn on the Emerald Isle. I'll have my pipes crammed into a small wooden case when not terrorising the locals with my renditions of the 'South wind' and 'The Kesh jig', the only tunes I know by heart. Otherwise you'll surely recognise me by my music stand and spiral bound copy of Ceol rince vol 2, shouting in the middle of a set, 'Excuse me chaps, are you playing a reel now, or a jig?' 'Oh right, now just hold on a minute while I find the page'. 'Good Lord, why can't they write the titles in English, half the tunes are called Gan anim'. ('D')

These musicians show their intention of enjoying the music and fellowship of Willie Week, but are also aware of how outsiders (a category in which they do not include

---

[26] Posts on www.thesession.org relating to Willie Clancy Summer School, 2002.

[27] This refers to the practice of learning tunes from the many internet sites that provide 'ABCs' or standard notation, and sometimes audio files, of tunes from the Irish traditional music repertoire.

themselves) can spoil the fun through 'lack of respect', ignorance of 'session etiquette' or simply by their large numbers. Discussion groups continually return to such topics as session etiquette (discussed further in the next chapter), including whether it is permissible to read from sheet music. Here, 'D' parodies novices who unwittingly sabotage sessions.

Musicians and media commentators continue to hail the summer school as a showcase for the older traditions of Irish music (despite the fact that each summer sees fewer of them still alive) and an opportunity to learn from the masters (when an increasing number of teachers are in their twenties). Cormac McConnell, a popular broadcaster on Clare FM and columnist for the Irish–American newspaper the *Irish Emigrant*, draws on a nativist rhetoric in urging his readers to join the pilgrimage to Miltown Malbay to learn from and pay homage to the older musicians and traditions of Irish music:

> What is beautiful, and beautiful indeed, and maybe I mentioned this to ye before, are the workshops, both formal and informal, in which the old gift of the music is handed on from the masters to the pupils. (Cormac McConnell, *Irish Emigrant* 6 July 2001)

McConnell suggests that an 'earthy note' is produced exclusively by 'the Old Ones', a reflection of the view that took Robert, the banjo player from Australia, to live in a quiet corner of East Clare:

> You will see the real folk musicians there as well. You will see the Old Ones, men and women, whose music is just one element of their lives on farms, on the sea, wherever. They cannot play as well as the globetrotters and the famous ones. Their instruments are not so precious. Their fingers are slower, older, sometimes warped by age and toil. But they join the sessions and they bring to them that earthy note of reality and maybe mortality. Their music, a part of where they have come from, is, truly, the purest drop in a pool of audio gold. (Cormac McConnell, *Irish Emigrant* 5 July 2002)

The experience of revelation and spiritual fulfilment is one that an American musician and blogger recalls:

> I was standing on a West Clare roadside 24 years ago today. A series of hitch-hiked lifts had brought me from Dublin to Limerick to Ennis and, then, of all places, Inagh. The goal of the trip, Milltown Malbay, was just over the horizon and one could feel the Atlantic in the air. Inagh is not a great place to be stranded, but the sun shone and as I had learned 'The Ravelled Hank of Yarn' earlier in the week from Tommy Keane, out came the tin whistle and those long 'B' rolls were worked on until, to my ear, anyway, they sounded like those that had spilled so effortlessly from Willie Clancy's hands for 40 years. Eventually, a car stopped and I got to Milltown. Memories include awe in Friels at seeing an emaciated Seamus Ennis wrap those prehensile

> fingers of his around the Coyne chanter; envy in Hillary's while listening to Jimmy O'Brien-Moran playing Clancy's repertoire, note for note on a most mellow flat set of pipes; ecstasy in Queally's as Liam O'Flynn and Sean Keane followed a set that included 'The West Wind' and 'Gilbert Clancy's reel' with a setting of 'The Gold Ring' that presented those fortunate enough to be there with one of those rare moments in life when everything — the people, the setting, the drink, the smoke, the music, the passion — made sense. (*Eamonn Fitzgerald's Rainy Day <blog>* 7 July 2002)[28]

This ecstatic experience, when 'everything … made sense', is the kind of revelation a pilgrim seeks. Fitzgerald represents the music as spilling 'effortlessly from the "master"' [sic]. The effortless sound of Irish musicians (what Australians Natalie and Terry called 'second nature') in contrast to the 'effort' of foreign musicians emphasizes the assumption that the true sound of Irish music belongs to the Irish. This is not, however, a natural dichotomy. Irish musicians work at their craft, to which the life of Willie Clancy[29] and the efforts of Irish students at the Willie Clancy school attest.

Having examined the anticipation and excitement of musicians who travel to Ireland to attend Willie Clancy Week and the enthusiasm they share with Irish musicians and listeners for the music of the 'great ones' and the 'old ones', I now turn to instances of ambivalence and even hostility that mitigate the generosity and hospitality — the *caritas* — that marks meetings between Irish hosts and foreign guests. Raymond Williams usefully distinguishes two clusters of meaning of the word 'community': those that refer to social groups (such as the people of a particular district) and those that refer to a quality of relationship (such as the sense of a common identity). He also points to the potential for conflict when these two kinds of understanding come up against one another: that is, when a sense of commonality interacts with a form of social organization that does not express this commonality (Williams 1983: 75–6). In pub sessions in Miltown during Willie Clancy Week 2000, encounters took place that revealed an inversion of this conflicted understanding of musical community, in which the apparent inclusiveness implied by the social organization of the session was revealed as ambiguous.

---

[28] This extract from Eamonn Fitzgerald's blog can be found at www.eamonn.com/archives. 'The Rainy Day' is an Irish reel popularized by the Bothy Band in the 1970s.

[29] See Pat Mitchell's introduction to his *The Dance Music of Willie Clancy* (Mitchell 1976).

5.5 *Caritas* at Willie Week

The back room of a Miltown hotel has for many years been the meeting place during Willie Week for West Clare musicians such as John Kelly (a son of Miltown and one of the 'great ones') and his musical friends. In 2000 I was invited inside and sat with my friends anticipating a night of great music. While the musicians (most of whom had just finished playing at the summer school's fiddle concert) found seats and chatted, a young American student moved her chair into their circle and brought out her fiddle. Despite the muttered disapproval of the gathering listeners, the musicians welcomed her. This was consistent with the courtesy of older musicians towards learners and the pleasure of older men in the company of young women. At the same time, there were many among the listeners who were angry with the young woman for treating this musical performance (of which the listeners were an important part) with disrespect. This was one among of numerous encounters during Willie Week that prompted a reconsideration of the spirit of *caritas* for which the summer school is renowned.

A spirit of *caritas* largely prevails in the classrooms and streets of Miltown during Willie Week and is evident in the hospitality and generosity of spirit of more experienced musicians, and particularly the older musicians. Sometimes, however, it is met by ignorance, opportunism or the fanatic need to play that appears to seize musicians in the presence of music they love. I became involved in one such moment when a musician I knew and had played with several times before, came into the pub where I was meeting some IRTRAD-L contributors after the morning classes. This is what I wrote in my journal that night:

> 'Pat' and 'Colm' came into Marrinan's with 'Heidi' from my class and sat down in the corner and immediately unpacked to play. I figured that if it was OK for Heidi to play it should be OK for me to, so I went over and Pat welcomed me. I may have misread that, though, because when we began to play, Heidi joined in loudly and raced ahead of the time a bit, quite off-putting, and I soon sensed that the pair had hoped for a quiet session on their own, as they began to play their own special sets. (Field notes, 3 July 2000)

Some weeks later (to my shame) a concertina player in Ennis mentioned that the two musicians had told her that they had sat down for a B♭ session at Miltown but got swamped by fiddle players who pushed the pace instead of waiting a while to get into that lovely mellow ambience (of the 'flat'-pitched or B♭ pipes).

Another afternoon during Willie Week, I found my classmate Heidi, an American fiddle player of about fifty, in another pub. I wrote in my journal:

> The next pub I went into was across the road, where 'Mattie' was playing
> wonderful Sliabh Luachra music. Heidi was playing with him […] When I
> told Heidi in the class next morning that I'd seen her with Mattie, she said,
> yes, she'd learned a lot from him, and later referred to him as a friend she'd
> visit after Miltown. (Field notes, 4 July 2000)

The following day I went to listen to Mattie playing in the same pub and Heidi was
there again. A friend of Mattie's pointed out 'that American woman' and said she
was a 'terrible nuisance', that she had been tormenting Mattie at Miltown for the
past ten years, and even visiting him at home. Everywhere he went, she'd be there,
she'd go in and sit next to him and block the way for musicians he might want to
play with (field notes, 5 July 2000).

In each of these cases, ambiguity arises when the spirit of *caritas* is overwhelmed by
ignorance (even if that ignorance is inspired by enthusiasm and admiration) and all
that remain are the conventions of hospitality. This is confusing to those new to this
milieu, who are inclined to take at face value the welcome they are extended. At
other times, the convention of hospitality is abandoned and hostility breaks out.

On another afternoon during Willie Clancy Week, I met a friend in a crowded bar
where a trio of teenage fiddlers were speeding through their shared repertoire of
tunes. My friend introduced me to 'Sean', a fiddle player renowned for his brilliant
performance of Donegal music, and 'Niall', an American-born musician and music
administrator. As I wrote in my journal that evening, when I was identified as an
Australian doing research on foreigners playing Irish music:

> Niall said he didn't like the academic study of traditional music because
> there's nothing in it to study … He said academics bring a huge arsenal of
> theory — deconstruction and sociology and so on — and smash it down on
> 'our poor wee music'. He said there was nothing interesting in the sociology
> of the session and the people writing it wouldn't even be able to play a tune
> … He said they (the thesis writers) just want to write the rules so that people
> can get instant access to the session[30] when you should have to stick around
> for twenty years and earn your stripes. Sean said they ought to put a ring-
> lock fence around the music and charge people a licence fee. At this point he
> got up abruptly and went down to play with the young fiddlers. (Field
> notes, 1 July 2000)

This protectiveness towards Irish traditional music and its social settings is not
uncommon among Irish musicians when they encounter foreigners avaricious to 'get'

---

[30] Sean's conjecture about thesis-writers who 'write the rules' to ensure their own access to
sessions is considered in Chapter Six, Section 6.5.

Irish traditional music. Because there are no 'ring-lock fences' around Irish traditional music, no system of 'earning your stripes' and no 'licence fee', there is no definitive line between authentic and inauthentic music — or musicians — although there is continual debate and antagonism. The role of tourism and the music and hospitality industries in promoting Irish traditional music as participatory and accessible, but at the same time essentially and historically Irish, makes any such notional boundaries, at the least, ambiguous. More importantly, Sean's attitude is a reminder that cultural identity in Ireland remains highly politicized and even as a postcolonial nation, its cultural unity is under threat (from Europeanization, from refugees and immigrants). In the same way, the 'river' that is Irish traditional music may be diluted, or polluted, if the streams of musicians from elsewhere proliferate, or the thesis writers manage to redefine it beyond recognition.

This series of encounters between foreign students at the Willie Clancy Summer School and Irish musicians troubles the concept of an 'Ireland of the welcomes' that tourists, including music tourists, are encouraged to experience. It reveals an ambivalent attitude on the part of Irish musicians who want to promote their musical traditions and invite others to celebrate it with them, but who at the same time do not want those they invite to take an equal part (which parallels the way Ireland encourages tourists but is fearful of immigrants). This is perhaps because they perceive foreigners as ignorant of musicians' real intentions (which is often the case, given the split between the spirit and the conventions of hospitality), as less competent (which is also often the case) and as greedy to 'get' Irish music (in which case it would no longer be exclusively Irish). This last is the greatest threat to those Irish musicians who understand Irish traditional music as being an expression of Irishness, an understanding that is at odds with the fact that Irish traditional music is now a globalized commodity played in every continent by musicians who are not Irish.

5.6   Seeking identity in postmodernity

While short-term musical pilgrims may return home with increased status and perhaps the perception that they have been accepted as Irish musicians, those who seek to construct new lives as musicians in Ireland are less able to sustain such an illusion. The cases of Australian musicians Robert, Pauline and James indicate that the goal of becoming an Irish musician by adopting what they perceive to be the values, way of life and creative expression of Irish people is ultimately unattainable.

Zygmunt Bauman represents the project of the modern self as a pilgrimage, a search for identity that in the end is illusory: 'To be rational in the *modern* world meant to be a pilgrim and to live one's life as a pilgrimage' (Bauman 1996: 51). Under conditions of postmodernity, however, the problem for individuals is:

> not so much how to obtain the identities of their choice and how to have them recognised by others, but *which* identity to choose, and how best to keep alert and vigilant so that *another* choice can be made. (Bauman 2001: 126)

This process of identification is 'a never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity in which we all, by necessity or by choice, are engaged' (Bauman 2001: 129). While ambivalence and ambiguity are anathema to the modern search for self-mastery, the postmodern activity of identification is untroubled by inconsistency or uncertainty.

Bauman does not claim a historical cut-off point for modernity, a point at which strategies of identification suddenly change from one of progressive accretion towards the goal of selfhood to one of keeping the multiple fragments of identity constantly and opportunistically in play. Rather, he argues that we use both modern and postmodern strategies simultaneously. This was evident in the way the younger musicians utilized several strategies in adopting the long-term goal of becoming an Irish (sounding) musician through hard work, but in the meantime adopting short-term strategies in order to continue to play Irish music in sessions, even if this meant that their acceptance was limited to a circle of peers.

The younger Australian musicians in this study kept in play both the essentialized understandings of Irishness they encountered in musical style and which influenced their own ideals of musical identity, and at the same time a pragmatic and fluid notion of identity, including ethnic identity. Their aim to play Irish traditional music and sound as if they were Irish indicates that they recognized that in some way (whether by long exposure or 'second nature') Irish musicians have a more authentic sound; it is also to Irish musicians that they accord the authority to decide who sounds Irish and who does not. Yet none of the younger musicians believed that 'becoming Irish' (by moving to Ireland, adopting an Irish way of life, learning the Irish language) was necessary to achieving their goal.

The strategies adopted by young Australian musicians travelling to summer schools in Ireland in order to obtain a more Irish sound indicate a view of Irish traditional music and its 'master' musicians that is somewhere 'in-between' cultural diversity

and cultural difference. Rather, it moves between these two positions, sometimes according authority to Irish musicians because of their Irishness and sometimes acting in accordance with a belief that ethnicity is superficial, that in playing music they can encompass Irishness (or all the Irishness they need) just as their Australian identities encompass the various ethnicities under the umbrella of multiculturalism. In this, they display the strategic flexibility that Stuart Hall theorizes as 'positionality' (Hall, S. 1990: 226).

Bauman's assertion that in the postmodern world the pilgrim's delay of immediate gratification in the interest of achieving life-long goals no longer makes sense, is at odds with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital — indeed, one of Bauman's 'rules of thumb', in a world where the long-term is always uncertain, is that 'the once-vaunted "cultural capital" tends to turn in no time into cultural *liability*' (Bauman 1996: 25). Cultural capital, as conceived of by Bourdieu, is an investment in the self and an indicator of social power (Bourdieu 1986). Although Bourdieu's research into the relationship between taste and class (Bourdieu 1984) is culturally specific,[31] his concept of cultural capital was usefully deployed in the previous chapter to indicate the variety of ways in which Australian musicians and Irish immigrant musicians differed in their understandings and evaluations of Irish traditional music.

Bauman's work on postmodern identity, however, suggests that a lifelong or even short-term investment in acquiring cultural capital is not a 'rational' strategy in a world of rapid cultural change. In the case of musicians who make musical pilgrimages to Ireland, however, there are ways in which it does prove to be a good investment. An aura of authenticity clings to Australian musicians returning from Ireland and attracts greater respect and attention in Irish music sessions in Australia, particularly if musicians return with a repertoire of new tunes and stories that indicate they have been to the heart of Irish traditional music and have received some recognition there.[32]

---

[31] I would predict very different results had Bourdieu's research project been undertaken in a less stratified and less 'cultivated' society such as Australia's.

[32] Melbourne banjo player Mike frequently mentions musicians he met in Ireland and the tunes they played, as well stories demonstrating that 'the best musicians in Ireland' play at the steady pace he prefers. Barbara often recounts her meeting with the flute player she most admires, who invited her to play in a concert and scolded his audience because here was a foreigner 'playing better than any of youse'.

This chapter has argued that, in pursuing their interest in Irish traditional music, Australians journeyed to Ireland in search of musical community and authenticity, but their strategies in negotiating with Irish musicians and institutions revealed a less idealistic project than might be expected. Their passion for Irish traditional music was tempered by a pragmatic approach in selecting those aspects of Irish traditional music from which they were not excluded by nativist definitions. Those who did seek identities as Irish musicians outside the liminal spaces of the summer schools and certain pub sessions have been able to fit in, but do not have an organic, naturally bestowed place within the circle of Irish musicians. For Irishness, and the performance of Irishness, become more loosely defined and more generously conferred with distance from Ireland. The next chapter focuses on musicians from elsewhere for whom playing Irish traditional music is at the heart of a new life in Ireland.

CHAPTER SIX

MUSICAL COMMUNITIES:
PLAYING UP IN THE SESSION

In the previous chapter it was argued that musicians visiting Ireland encountered an Irish music culture constructed as part of an Irish cultural heritage that co-existed with a rapidly changing society. The musicians discussed in this chapter had moved to Ireland hoping to be assimilated into a community of musicians. In order to do so, they negotiated positions close to those they perceived as authentic bearers of the musical tradition. When they moved beyond the discursively constructed space of summer schools and music festivals, however, they were impeded both by their change in status from 'welcome guest' to 'stranger'[1] and by their idealization of musical process and codification of social conventions at the music sessions they attended.

As Madan Sarup observes in *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*, strangers blur the boundary line between the inside and the outside of a cultural territory, leading insiders to defend it by stigmatizing strangers, marking them as inherently different, and so justifying their permanent exclusion. From my seat as a participating musician, I was able to observe and directly experience the social and musical processes of group playing, and to examine the tactics outsiders used in attempting to assimilate. The interactions I witnessed and took part in, as well as my discussions with the musicians concerned,[2] have led me to conclude with Sarup that although strangers may try to erase the stigma by trying to assimilate, 'The harder they try, however, the faster the finishing-line recedes' (1996: 10–11). It also led me to question, not only the idealizations of musical community that surround the Irish traditional music session, but the adequacy of available theories of collective musical identities to account for difference and conflict.

---

[1] *Strangers* is the term older people in East Clare use for outsiders, a category that may include tourists, residents not born into a local family, tourists and anyone from outside their district.

[2] The research findings discussed below draw on the reflections of musicians who from spring 2000 to spring 2001 played regularly in pub sessions in Feakle, Co. Clare and elsewhere in Clare and Galway.

6.1   Theorizing collective musical identities

As the focus of ethnomusicology shifted during the 1970s from the study of music in culture towards the study of music *as* culture, innovative theoretical work posited not only a structural correspondence between musical performance and social values and organization, but the socially formative role of music. Music came to be understood not as determined by society, but as determining of it. This change in thinking is evident in the work of John Blacking, who concludes from his study of South African Venda society in the 1960s that music is 'a metaphorical expression of feelings associated with the way society really is' (1976: 104). Subsequently, however, Blacking develops the view that musical practices and aesthetics have the capacity to *produce* social values, that 'music may precede and forecast other changes in society' (1977: 22–3).[3] In a more recent study drawing together concepts of a socially constructed and relational identity (Clifford 1988), the 'imagining' of new nations (Anderson 1991) and the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), Christopher Waterman similarly argues that West African *jùjú* music *enacts* an ideal society, effectively *predicating* the structure and ethos of a coming social order (Waterman 1990). Such approaches are problematic, however, in assuming homogeneity within the cultural group studied and in overlooking its relationship with an outside world. As Richard Middleton has noted in *Studying Popular Music*, this approach appears to work in relatively homogeneous, stable cultures by eliding the gap between 'culture' and 'society' but is inapplicable to more highly differentiated and dynamic societies (1990: 150).

Studies of late-twentieth-century western popular music, influenced more by social theory than anthropology, also locate correspondences between musical performance and socio-cultural identity. These studies similarly underplay the ambiguities and differences that are present within any social group performing music, despite reference to post-structural theories of identity including Stuart Hall's conception of identification as a *positioning*, a point of 'temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us' (1990; 1996).

---

[3] Blacking's view of the transformative role of music in society is analogous to Jacques Attali's phase of 'composition' of music as prophetic of coming social forms. Although published in France in 1977, Attali's work was not available in English until 1985 (Attali 1985).

In his seminal essay on music and identity,[4] Simon Frith takes this idea of a mobile self and attempts to conceptualize the *process* of identification, the experience of moving between one subject position and another. He uses music as a 'key' to understanding identity, because 'it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective' (Frith 1996b: 110). For Frith (like Blacking and Waterman), musical performance neither represents nor expresses the common attributes of a particular group but 'articulates *in itself* an understanding of both group relations and individuality, on the basis of which ethical codes and social ideologies are understood' (111). Music *embodies* values, thus giving us 'a real experience of what the ideal could be' (117; 123).[5] Frith asserts that 'the self is always an imagined self but can only be imagined as a particular organization of social, physical and material forces' (109–10); at the same time, he agrees with ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin that the 'enactment of musical fellowship' largely transcends discourse (Slobin 1993: 41),[6] an apparent contradiction.

What is problematic in all of these discussions is the tendency to idealize musical performance (as if it always produced a transcendent experience) and to elide the experiences of participants (as if everyone had the same experience). Despite their production within different disciplines across a number of decades and continents, these conceptualizations of collective musical identities all focus on a relationship between 'culture' and 'society' that produces an embodied, transcendent experience of an ideal society. If musical performance *always* produced these ideal societies,

---

[4] The essay is included in an abbreviated form in *Performing Rites*, Frith's influential work on value in popular music (Frith 1996a: ch. 13).

[5] In *Music of the Common Tongue*, a study of Afro–American music, musicologist Christopher Small similarly argues that participants in a musical performance unconsciously explore, affirm and celebrate a sense of identity, taking part in an ideal society that they have created within the performance (Small 1987: 74).

[6] The passage Frith quotes reads in its entirety: 'Music seems to have an odd quality that even passionate activities like gardening or dog-raising lack: the simultaneous projecting and dissolving of the self in *performance*. Individual, family, gender, age, supercultural givens, and other factors hover around the musical space but can penetrate only very partially the moment of enactment of musical fellowship. Visible to the observer, these constraints remain unseen by the musicians, who are instead working out a shared vision that involves both the assertion of pride, even ambition, and the simultaneous disappearance of the ego.' (Slobin 1993: 41). The concept of 'superculture' in Slobin's work is related to Marx's ideological *superstructure*, to Gramsci's *hegemony* and to Althusser's *social formation* and refers to the overarching structure present in ideology, practice, concept and performance. Examples of 'supercultural givens' would include the music industry and formal music education, but also 'intangibles' such as stereotypes, styles, repertoires and performance contexts.

however, one would have expected the human race to have 'musicked'[7] its way to utopia long ago.

Scholars who have written about the group performance of Irish traditional music also share the view that collective musical performance enacts an ideal community. Anthony McCann, for example, represents the Irish traditional music session as a 'gift-cycle' in which gifts of 'the risk of self, the tunes, the songs, the chat, the shared experience, the history of personal endeavor' produce 'music as community, community as music' (2001: 93; 97). McCann's musical community resembles Henry Glassie's definition of community as reciprocal engagement or 'neighborliness' in his ethnography based in an Ulster district, *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* (Glassie 1982). Crucially, Glassie's 'neighborliness' recognizes that community is constructed through a process of dialogic engagement with (political, religious and class) *difference*. In a relatively stable social group, this stability, as Middleton has noted (1990: 150), is open to representation as 'sameness'. What Glassie observes in a divided and volatile society, however, is a dialogue, a process of negotiation that moves between rejection and acceptance, individual and group priorities. Individuals may share the pursuit of an ideal community, but this does not mean that their ideal communities will be the same.

Like individual identities, collective identities are produced through the marking of difference and exclusion, an exercising of power. No matter how homogeneous these collectivities may appear from the outside, the nearer one approaches, the more highly differentiated they are perceived to be. Anthropologist Marilyn Strathern found this in her struggle to identify genuine 'insiders' in an English village, an objective she represents as a mirage (recalling the receding finishing line for Madan Sarup's strangers) (Strathern 1981; Sarup 1996). 'Community' is an equally illusory concept when examined at close quarters, as it is always an ideal, one that Iris Marion Young (among others) rejects as 'undesirably utopian' in denying difference (Young 1990: 301).[8] I propose a less pessimistic view of community as an ideal that takes multiple forms that are constantly being negotiated. Community, then, is a *process* of dialogue.

---

[7] Christopher Small coined this inelegant neologism in order to counteract the tendency to think of music as a thing (implied by the noun), rather than a social process (expressed by the verb) (Small 1987).

[8] This is not to deny that the concept of community (as a component of social structure) has been useful as an intervention in the discourses of global capital, class, civil society and the nation, as Homi Bhabha discusses in relation to the work of Jameson and Chatterjee (Bhabha 1994b: 230–1).

By assuming either a homological relationship between the group producing music and the wider social formation, or an ideal state of communication and community outside the ambit of discourse, the experience of musicians and listeners is idealized and simplified as harmonious (at one) and homogeneous (as one). Both underplay the importance of engaging with difference, which is integral to the process of *identification*: the process of 'identifying with and through another object, and object of otherness' (Bhabha 1990: 211).

In this chapter, I argue that, despite its discursive construction as organic and essentially Irish and despite the willingness of participants (both musicians and listeners) to experience it as an ideal community, group performance of Irish traditional music is as much about engaging with difference (through acceptance or rejection) as it is about the pursuit of sameness. The musicians do not form a homogeneous group, either socially or musically. In the musical encounters that are the subject of this chapter, the focus (as in Chapter Four) is on moments of disharmony evident in protestations of bad behaviour or bad music because, as Bhabha points out, it is in these disjunctures that differences are articulated and in which 'the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated' (Bhabha 1994a: 269).

My own experience as a foreigner playing Irish traditional music in sessions necessarily served as a filter for my subsequent analyses and interpretations. In adopting the twin roles of participant and observer, I shared with other incoming musicians the goals of acceptance and understanding, but also reflected upon these goals and the extent to which our situations varied. The 'new ethnography' has promoted dialogic relationships with the researcher's subjects, or collaborators (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Rabinow 1986; Marcus 1992). The ability to establish such relationships with other participants in this musical scene was crucial to my project in East Clare where, unlike the Melbourne music scene that was the subject of Chapter Four, I was indeed 'a stranger'.

As a performer of Irish traditional music for some thirty years, I was familiar with many kinds of sessions in Australia and Ireland. Like other musicians, I felt uncomfortable joining a session without a specific invitation. When musicians from other countries arrive in Ireland for the first time, however, they are unlikely to

receive such an invitation,[9] although it is not difficult to find out where sessions are held. Both the sessions described below were listed in guides distributed by the tourist office and music stores in Ennis (the commercial and administrative centre of Co. Clare), as well as in an Irish music magazine. Pepper's bar in Feakle[10] was promoted as a place to hear authentic East Clare music. This was the background knowledge I took with me when I went, uninvited, to the Wednesday night session there.

6.2   Romancing the session

Each of the following accounts of the session at Pepper's illustrates a tendency when writing about music to idealize, to romanticize, and to project onto others the emotions aroused by the music, whether it is imagined as the father's welcome, the stranger becoming part of 'one big family' or the creation of community. The first passage, a version of my field notes, describes my second visit to Pepper's (the first is recounted in the following section) and is quoted at length as an introduction to this musical scene.

> Sitting beneath the plaque, 'PJoe's Place', that marks his seat by the fire, P. J. Hayes plays almost inaudibly, his old fingers barely lifting above the fingerboard of his fiddle while his bowing arm beats out the rhythm that the other musicians follow. PJoe's crooked smile is welcoming. Another veteran of the Tulla Ceili Band beams across from his seat next to him. Francie drives thirty miles every week to play music here.
>
> The bar is packed with drinkers, most of them talking above the music and loudly enjoying each others' jokes. A handbag sits on a stool in the musician's circle; a jacket lies across another. I suppose that these are saved for musicians who might come in later (although they don't). When the musicians stop playing, I take my place outside their circle. 'Pull in closer!' one of the fiddle players tells me. She and her friend are learning the fiddle and drive the hour from Shannon because the music here is slow and easier to pick up than at sessions in Ennis.
>
> I seem to know most of the tunes from a long way back, and although I can't put a name to them all, I find myself changing into the next tune in a set, the same one everyone else plays. Maybe the sets are from recordings of the Tulla Ceili Band that I learned to dance to years ago, or from the band's new CD, recorded here in Pepper's. Other tunes are new to me, put together in perfect sets, the change into the second tune introducing a piquant key change or a variation in rhythm, the third tune (when there is one) always

---

[9] While many of the posts on internet discussion groups such as thesession.org and IRTRAD-L ask for information about sessions in Ireland, few invitations are issued in these forums, as the majority of list members are from outside Ireland. On the other hand, open invitations to sessions elsewhere, particularly in the USA, are frequently posted.

[10] An East Clare village, population 159 (Republic of Ireland Census, 1996).

with a strong ending. The sound when we play together is exciting: the sweet, ringing tone of so many fiddles. The rhythm has a gentle swing that reminds me of elderly couples dancing, their grace and economy of movement. From outside, the music sounded like a string orchestra in unison, with that famous Tulla Ceili Band swing that lifts dancers feet from the floor. Now, from my seat on the edge of the session I can hear the concertina missing notes or playing just off the beat, a fiddle out of tune, and sometimes my notes clash with theirs and I wonder whether, on the journey from East Clare to Australia and back again, the tune has grown in a different direction, or whether I simply misheard it in the first place.

 In a break between sets, the musicians shuffle themselves to the bar and back, while I look for a better seat. At home I always sat at the centre of the session. It is awkward on the outside, difficult to hear when the tune changes because of the noise from the bar. Last week I was exposed to tourists wondering whether they might take photographs or use their tape recorders. Who was I to say?

 'Aren't you going to sit next to me?' Francie asks as I warm myself at the fire. Without waiting for anyone else's permission I squash my stool in next to him, right on the hearth. The concertina player throws me a haughty look when she returns from the bar. My face burns and the fire warms the varnish on my fiddle, but I feel pleased with my seat in the shelter of Francie's goodwill. Last week he told me, 'You play the same style as me' and I was delighted. But what I hear tonight is a revelation. As I get used to the broad deviations of Francie's intonation, I begin to hear his phrasing, how he hears the tune in his head and translates it through his bow in a way that is intricate and lyrical, a foil to the regular chop of PJoe's beat. His playing reveals tunes I have played half my life in a way that makes me fall in love with them all over again. (Edited field notes, 10 May 2000)

This passage reveals desire for approval, gratitude for kindness, respect for the gentler ways of older musicians and dancers, and love for music and for playing music. Edited and rewritten over a year after the event, after both the named musicians had died, the writing has grown more elegiac in tone since its genesis in field notes. The text draws on representations of musical community — its old men, an ideal of musical continuity and communication, of shared values, generosity — drawn from a discourse of authenticity around Irish traditional music and revealing an idealization of musical community not unlike that interrogated in the previous section.

Another account, on the East Clare Musicians homepage compiled by fiddle player Vince, displays a more intense idealization of the session:

> … musicians are keen to pass on their tunes from one to another in the friendly atmosphere of the local pub session. Visitors from outside the area, including overseas, are always made very welcome to either play in the session, or just listen to the music.
> The pub session is a very weird and wonderful affair not always understood by non-players. There are a few local regular players or anchor men, usually three or four, and then the visitors. Sessions have been known to contain more than 20 musicians in summertime. Visitors come from all

over the world (even the far east) to play. Total strangers come into the session, are introduced around, play for a while and leave, sometimes never to be seen again. But, while they are there, they are part of one big family, sharing their innermost feelings through the music.[11]

Journalist Rosita Boland's account of the session reveals a third viewpoint and another set of values, which also have much in common with those of the musical outsiders who frequented Pepper's on Wednesday nights:

> That evening, it's the weekly session in Pepper's, which has been running for years now.
> There is a little wooden plaque on the wall near the fire, PJoe's place. The PJoe is PJ Hayes, the famous fiddler, father of Martin and Helen. His wife, Peggy Hayes, says he never misses the Wednesday night session. The tradition of giving the honoured guest the best seat by the fire is entirely appropriate here; a small gesture of respect to a superb musician.
> The musicians come in twos and threes, with fiddles, concertinas, and accordions. The session grows. The fire is bright orange. Feet tap on the Liscannor flags. There's talk, too. These musicians do not insist on undivided attention, as can occur elsewhere. The music creates the talk; the talk fuels the music.
> The only time there is pure silence is when Helen Hayes sings; her unaccompanied voice a presence in the silence like something physical, elemental. Hairs stir. The moon is full. I'm proud to be a Clarewoman. (Boland 2001)[12]

Rosita Boland depicts an intimate evening around the midwinter fireside of a country pub, where music has an integral part in creating community ('the music creates the talk; the talk fuels the music'). She writes admiringly of a musical tradition that is both continuous ('for years now') and organic ('the session grows'), embedded within an Irish tradition of hospitality ('the honoured guest') and informality ('the musicians do not insist on undivided attention'). She also invokes the idea that Irish music performs a deeply felt sense of identity that is simultaneously physical ('hairs stir') and spiritual ('the moon is full') and of a particular place ('I'm proud to be a Clarewoman'). But can this musical community be as 'pure' as the silence that falls over it?

---

[11] From the home page of the East Clare Musicians website, claremusic.tripod.com.

[12] The author is the same Rosita Boland whose meeting with Australian writer Thomas Keneally prompted a discussion in the previous chapter of how visitors perceive Ireland. The *Irish Times* article quoted here was a background piece for the January 2001 national tour of musicians from East Clare: fiddle player Martin Hayes, his sister, singer Helen Hayes, concertina player Mary MacNamara and bouzouki player Pat Marsh. Although my presence was (understandably) excised from Boland's account, I had spent the day with Mary, Helen and Rosita, partly because Mary, knowing my interest in the idea of an East Clare musical tradition, had invited me along and partly because I had an interest in the tour's publicity since I had agreed to organize an additional concert in Tulla, East Clare.

It is worth noting that my recollection of that evening (as recorded in field notes) differs in several important ways, for the session at Pepper's that night was neither as one (homogeneous), nor at one (harmonious). East Clare was the destination rather than the origin for most of the performers present, including myself. In a photograph illustrating Boland's article (Image 6[13]) I recognize the dancer as a visitor from Canada and six of the nine musicians pictured as 'blow-ins'[14] or visitors from England, Australia, and other parts of Ireland. Two of the musicians were not on speaking terms; another (not only a 'blow-in' but an 'alternative') was ignored by the other musicians; and the noise from the 'punters'[15] in the small bar was too loud for the musicians' comfort, inhibiting rather than fuelling their music.

If, as Rosita Boland points out in her article, the seat by the fire is customarily given to the honoured guest, why should a plaque have been necessary? The answer lies partly in the conjunction of the 'public house', the tourism industry and the musicians. Pepper's pub is situated at a crossroads half a mile outside the village of Feakle. Compared to the village pubs, its clientele was eclectic and included a greater proportion of 'blow-ins' and the tourists who came for the fishing, walking and music. The publican encouraged the weekly session, organized occasional concerts and took part in promoting Feakle's annual traditional music festival. He maintained that a lot of English people came to his pub because others wouldn't have them. Pepper's was cosy, its newly refurbished lounge–restaurant decorated in a colourful, 'rustic' style. The publican's enterprise ensured a regular influx of new customers, who often included musicians keen to play in the session, and who might arrive early and take a musician's seat,[16] rather than waiting to be asked (in which case, they might wait all night). By putting up PJoe's plaque, the publican had anticipated such intrusions, just as the 'reserved for musicians' cards on the

---

[13] Photo by Frank Miller, *The Irish Times*, 15 January 2001, p. 9. The caption read: '"The fiddlers in East Clare use the top of their bow a lot more" — a session in progress in Pepper's Pub, Feakle, Co. Clare'.

[14] A 'blow-in' was someone not locally born who had settled in the district. It is a term from the days of sailing ships and refers to the flotsam and jetsam from shipwrecks. In Ireland and Australia, long-term residents of a rural district use the term to refer to newcomers. The term *alternative* is used in East Clare to refer to those people, mainly from England and European countries, who have settled in Ireland in order to live an 'alternative' lifestyle that might include a commitment to self-sufficiency and environmental issues, underpinned by a rejection of consumerism.

[15] *Punters* is a term workers in the hospitality trade use for customers, its use by musicians indicating that they are insiders, or 'backstage' in the pub scene, indicating a claim to status similar to that of tourists who identify themselves as 'travellers'.

[16] As Ciarán Carson warns, 'Woe betide the naïve yellow-anoraked German who takes a musician's seat…' (Carson 1996: 114).

musicians' tables during the busy summer months averted territorial disputes. As the following account indicates, this was not enough to prevent other disputes over seating, between those who felt they had earned their place at the centre of the session and newcomers who wanted to join them.

6.3   Musical chairs at Pepper's

On my first night at Pepper's, I was one of the newcomers who was looking for a place in the session:

> Arriving early, I found a bearded, bespectacled man wearing the kind of checked shirt and baggy trousers I associated with 'folkies', sitting alone at the table reserved for musicians. I introduced myself. He nodded.
> 'Would it be all right if I joined in the session?' I had already asked the publican, but his view of things would not necessarily be that of the musicians.
> 'You'll have to get yourself a stool,' he replied in a North of England accent.
> I took a stool from a pile by the door and sat down just outside the circle of empty stools. The man ('Vince', a fiddle player) made a fuss of finding a stool to replace the one I'd taken. Those, he pointed out, were in case musicians came in later.
> 'But I'm a musician, and I'm here now!' I wanted to protest.[17]

Over the following nine months, I often played in the Wednesday night session at Pepper's. Sometimes I was invited into the inner circle, but only if regular musicians and their friends were already catered for. At other times, when the reserved stools remained empty all night, I went home feeling dejected. One night I sat in one of the saved seats, just to see what would happen. Within moments another stool was lifted over my head and thumped down in front of me and a handbag placed on it. On several occasions other musicians challenged the seating arrangement: one man sat on a 'saved' stool and simply grinned back at the scowls and protests directed at him; another musician took a reserved chair and refused to move, annoyed that the teenager it was saved for should be thought to have higher status than himself. Those who instituted this game of musical chairs were the middle rung of players: not the musicians who were regarded as playing in an East Clare style, not those on the lowest rung, like the beginners on the fiddle who drove up from Shannon or any newcomer, and not the publican, who was annoyed at this alienation of P. J. Hayes' authority (and his own) and often fielded complaints from visiting musicians who had failed to get a seat in the session.

---

[17] Edited field notes, 19 April 2000.

At Pepper's, P. J. Hayes (1921–2001) was indisputably the session's centre of authority, and was the main attraction for most of the musicians present. He had been playing there (unpaid) on Wednesday nights for about five years — the first time in his life that he had played in a regular session. For P. J. Hayes, playing at Pepper's was a hobby and, although he would not have said so, an act of generosity to the musicians who sought him out. Constrained by old age and illness, PJoe (as he was called) was now unable to play strongly and had to pass on his intentions to those around him by telling the musician next to him the name of the tunes he wanted to play, or by whistling or playing a bar or two. When he wanted someone else to begin a tune, he gestured to them with his bow, but more often one of the regular 'middling' musicians would start up one of the 'sets' or medleys PJoe had put together for the Tulla Ceili Band (Musical example 30)[18]. I wondered whether PJoe's fragile health in some part allowed others to exert their unauthorized power over the space and the sound of the session.

To 'Vince' (b. 1941), the fiddle player who had introduced me to the serious game of musical chairs on my first night at Pepper's, policing the seating arrangements was 'custom', 'the way it's always been':

> Anybody who's new has to sit by the fire, and you earn your place away from it! (Vince laughs) I sit next to PJoe on the other side, unless somebody like Dermot come in. You know, it's custom, that's just observed. There's usually a seat under the table, there's usually one or two still there, for anybody who comes in. Angela's always got one with her concertina, puts her concertina case and her bag, for anybody who's not a regular, but who's known.[19] (Vince, interview, 23 November 2000*)*

For flute player 'Kim' (b. 1958), however, the 'business with the chairs' was 'plain rude':

> You could never get a seat, because all the seats were saved for somebody else. So you were stuck out on the outside, so you were never part of the session, ever … That's how you treat somebody who you actually don't really want to play with … It was just ridiculous! And there'd be a row of seats there! All these empty seats! That's exactly when you start to feel

---

[18] Session musicians, Pepper's Bar, Feakle, 'Johnny Allen's', 'Sporting Nell' and 'Toss the Feathers' (22 November 2000). Instruments played are six fiddles, concertina and mandocello. Note the sounds from the audience and the ragged rhythm in the first tune especially. My field notes from that evening refer to this as 'the most dreadful, lifeless session'. This set of tunes was played every week I attended the session.

[19] Vince refers here to Tulla concertina player Mary MacNamara and her brother, an acclaimed accordion player, both of whom played occasionally at Pepper's.

humiliated. At Pepper's, nobody looks at you, nobody turns to say anything to you, you're facing everybody's backs … it just seems plain rude. (Kim, interview, 3 December 2000)

Despite their differences, Kim and Vince had much in common. From the North-west and North of England respectively (Kim a freelance professional, Vince a retired tradesman), they had first encountered Irish traditional music in pubs at home and had spent numerous holidays playing music in Ireland before moving permanently with their spouse to East Clare. Not only were the West of Ireland's attractions similar for each of them, but so was their disillusion with the political climate in England. Both had taken up their instruments as adults and learned tunes from cassette recordings they had made at sessions, and both had learned about musical style from older Irish musicians.

Vince had attended P. J. Hayes's classes at the Willie Clancy Summer School. After moving to Ireland in 1997, 'PJoe sort of took me into his, under his wing … he just seemed to take a liking to me' (Vince, interview). Vince took up PJoe's invitation to attend the Pepper's session and was proud of having attended almost every week since. Kim's mentor had been an elderly Donegal fiddle player from her local session in England, who 'took me under his wing, if you like, because he liked my playing' (Kim, interview). 'Under the wing' of a senior musician, both Kim and Vince had begun to learn a particular style and repertoire. In Pepper's, however, not only was Kim without her mentor, but the style and repertoire she had learned were unacceptable in this new context.

Vince's position in the seat he had 'earned' next to PJoe secured both status and access to PJoe's rhythm and repertoire. Both were threatened when visiting musicians took seats reserved for 'regular' or 'known' musicians. During the busiest weeks of summer, however, after tourists, locals and visiting musicians had complained about the dullness of the music, the publican discreetly employed a local accordion player to liven things up. As a result, the pace increased, there was less downtime between sets and the volume and clarity of the accordion ('box') kept the musicians together. The box player consulted PJoe, but also introduced his own sets of tunes and invited along musician friends from Ennis. This influx of talent made the session more interesting for listeners and undermined the authority of the seat-savers. For Vince and other middling musicians, the session was 'ruined' because the 'Pepper's sound' — PJoe's rhythm and the 'swirl' of the many fiddles — had 'gone missing'. Vince attributed this to the box player, who to him was 'not an

East Clare player, even though he's from East Clare'[20] (Vince, interview), demonstrating once again the paradoxical relationships between place, music and identity. As well as introducing tunes he could not play, the accordion player and the visiting musicians prevented Vince from hearing PJoe's rhythm, which was the key to the musical style he passionately wanted to acquire.

Vince was so focused on acquiring P. J. Hayes's repertoire that for him, PJoe's sets were 'correct' and tunes put together in any other combination were 'wrong'. One of the East Clare musicians who occasionally played at Pepper's (and at other times played professionally on international circuits) gave an illustration of this inflexibility. One night while playing in the session, they reached the end of a tune and he went into the tune he normally would, 'not thinking, like' but all the other musicians went into a different tune and stayed in it (rather than 'going over' to his tune). Vince, who was sitting next to him, leaned over and said, 'WRONG!' (Andrew, pers. com., 3 Jan 2001)

The two fiddle players, 'Joan' (b. 1955) and 'Eilis' (b. 1955) who lived in Shannon, Co. Clare (but originally came from Co. Cavan) had been learning the fiddle for five or six years and had met at Willie Clancy Week. Playing music was a shared interest that took them out of the house once or twice a week. They loved the 'homely' atmosphere at Pepper's where 'they've a lovely rhythm, and it's a slow pace'. Compared to some of the sessions in Ennis, where professionals played very fast and beginners were not welcome, they found Pepper's 'very open'. At Pepper's they were content to sit in the outer circle and play along with tunes they knew, record those they didn't, and never put themselves forward by leading a tune. Like most beginners, they found large sessions (like those at the Feakle festival) 'heaven'. Their goal was to feel 'comfortable', 'confident' and 'welcome' and at this stage in their learning, the session that best facilitated these feelings was at Brandon's pub in Ennis, where from ten to thirty musicians met: predominantly beginners, many foreigners, and including players of instruments that might not be accepted in other sessions: bongo drums, a drum kit, several guitars and bodhráns. That session, Eilis said, was 'brilliant for us, because [the leader] is very open and you will get a

---

[20] Following the Feakle music festival in August 2000, I observed that the paid accordion player had displaced Vince from his seat next to PJoe, from where he transmitted PJoe's *sotto voce* suggestions for tunes and sets to the other players. His playing was quiet for an accordion player, but his presence, and that of another box player from the Tulla Ceili Band, as well as a large influx of musicians from Ennis, and visitors from France, Germany, South Africa, Japan, the Netherlands, Australia, Canada, the USA, and other parts of Ireland — up to twenty on some evenings — contributed to a difference in the sound produced, due in part to a much smaller proportion of fiddles.

chance to start a tune, he's very encouraging' (Joan and Eilis, interview, 5 February 2001).

'Dermot' (b.1959), who was recognized in Pepper's as an 'East Clare musician', often went to Brandon's (where a friend was session leader) and liked the fact that 'anyone could start a tune' there (Dermot, interview, 14 December 2000). A fiddle player from Ennis, he had been playing at Pepper's since moving to the Feakle district in 1993 in search of opportunities to play East Clare music. He no longer enjoyed the session there and attributed its having 'gone down' to the fact that the regular musicians there were unhappy and therefore unwelcoming to newcomers. This malaise he believed was the result of an influx of loud, disrespectful 'blow-ins' who:

> sit down, right beside the musicians, and they have a few drinks, and start roaring their heads off, like, talking to each other … It all comes back to people from outside. It's the blow-in thing you get … When they come to live in Ireland, they feel that it's nearly a necessity that they are interested in Irish music. And you know, even in Ireland, Irish music is a minority interest. It seems a bit silly that people that come from abroad should want to like it so badly, you know. I can understand why you'd want to like it, but in reality, they've no real affinity with it, or understanding, or even no feeling … and that's one of the things that has ruined Peppers. (Dermot, interview)

The gatekeepers at the Pepper's session were under siege from several directions: from the noisy disruption of new residents and short-term visitors, from the rhythmic disruption of new musicians, from the social disruption of outsiders who might upset the fragile balance of deferential 'tuning in' to PJoe's rhythm and repertoire and the spatial organization of status around 'PJoe's Place'. Although Vince believed the 'feedback' of an appreciative audience made musicians play better, he was more concerned about those who wanted to join in by singing a song. This, he felt, disrupted the flow of tunes so that musicians lost their 'thread' and their rhythm (Vince, interview). In the session at Lena's, one of the pubs in Feakle village, the opposite was the case: diversions were welcomed as part of the evening's entertainment.

6.4   Being in the centre at Lena's

The following is an edited version of my notes on my first visit to the session at Lena's session, which, in contrast to the notes on the session at Pepper's on the preceding night (quoted in the previous section), convey a more vivid sense of the various musicians and listeners and their interactions.

Outside in the quiet village street, only a dim light shows through the window blind. A surge of music, with the accordion predominant, greets me as I step into the warmth of the crowded bar. I prop my fiddle against the wall and stow my jacket under a stool stacked with instrument cases. To get to the bar I have to sidle past two old men with battered farmers' faces, who are standing in front of the fire. The musicians sit around a table and along the corner benches near the street window. Apart from the musicians, the only people under fifty are the lads playing pool in the big, open space of the lounge, visible through the open bar. The room is cosy, the walls papered in faded green and pink stripes and hung with photographs of local identities.

I stand and listen to the music, feeling a little awkward. The box player seated at the window changes the tune with an authoritative glance at the others. At the end of the set, he looks over and calls out, 'Here's a fiddle player — come over and join us! Make room, there!' then moves along the bench seat himself. 'Come on over here!' I sit down beside Seamus and he introduces me around the circle: Dermot the fiddle player who was at Pepper's, Jimmy, a little man with flyaway grey hair, and his teenaged daughter, both playing wooden flute; Will the 'alternative', who hunches over the fiddle but can't play a tune, and Robbie, a young piper with dark curls and a big smile. Between the musicians and the bar several older women sit in their own circle, chatting vivaciously and drinking from small glasses.

I feel welcome and at ease. Seamus asks me to start something off and I notice that he takes over the lead at the change into the next tune. Between sets, Seamus asks where I'm from and where I got my music, and I tell him, as I told PJoe, about my Irish mentors in Australia. He remembers playing with my friend Joe before he left Ireland in the 1960s. It's no wonder that Seamus's repertoire is familiar to me, although quite different from PJoe's, with many more modern tunes.

After an hour or so, one of the older women asks Seamus to get Brendan to sing a song 'to embarrass' a couple on their wedding anniversary. Seamus teases the man until he begins a ballad in a high, sweet voice with a country-and-western swing. The bar is silent until he finishes, then there is great applause. When I'm asked to play a tune, I hardly feel nervous. The musicians shush the crowd as I begin. I am still in their rhythm as I play the two Paddy Fahy's reels I love. As I come to the change, I lean towards Dermot, urging him with my eyebrows to play with me. I feel elated when he joins in and don't mind that he speeds up. At the end, people call out, 'Good girl!' and 'Well done!' I turn to acknowledge the listeners and notice Lena, whom I met last week when I was asking around for a place to rent.

'I told you it was that girl!' she says to her neighbour as I take the hands she holds out to me. 'The next time you come down you must call up to see me!' and I promise I will. (Edited field notes, 20 April 2000)

In Lena's, accordion player Seamus, the (paid) leader, was constantly engaged in shaping the evening's event, ensuring everyone was welcome, inviting participation from singers and storytellers as well as musicians, starting up tunes, giving out sheet music or tapes of his favourite tunes for Kim and her husband Tommy to learn. He began most of the sets, and led the changes unless another musicians indicated that they had a tune to go into. When musician friends of Seamus came in, however, the lead passed among them, making for a more relaxed and varied evening of music. Although Seamus took the same seat at most sessions, it was not strictly 'saved' for

him and a variety of musicians sat on the bench next to him. When one very large man came to the session, Seamus always moved to a smaller seat so this musician could sit comfortably. In conversations between sets, Seamus often included the outer circle of drinkers, drawing the two groups together. Unlike in Pepper's, the musicians did not complain about others. If a storyteller criticized someone who was not present, the story always finished with a positive remark, while the butt of a joke was invariably generic ('Paddy' or 'the Tipp [Co. Tipperary] man'). Tourists were numerous in Lena's only in the summer season, when the session shifted to the lounge to accommodate them; nor were there many 'blow-ins', apart from several of the musicians.

When flute player Kim gave up on the 'closed' session at Pepper's, she 'tried out' Lena's. Few among the tight circle of regular session-goers at Pepper's went there, regarding the music as less authentic:

> We got the idea that it was rubbish, you know, it wasn't like Pepper's. And the first time we went down there it was a revelation, because people were enjoying themselves! And the music was great! There was a great lift to it, there's great joy in there, and all the people standing around were, they were talking, but you could tell they appreciated the whole thing, not just the sound, but the whole session, and people would sing a song, or somebody might tell a story, you know, that kind of thing was going on. It was just lovely! … And the crack that was going on between [Seamus] and Paddy especially, just the stories and jokes and innuendo, and Paddy'd have all the women in stitches. Just great fun! (Kim, interview)

Kim was also delighted to find herself immediately welcomed into the centre of the session, where both her confidence and her playing improved. Being 'in the centre' of the session signified the social inclusion that very few of the women who participated in this study experienced in pub sessions (as discussed in Section Six). In Lena's, however:

> If any musician comes in, everybody makes an effort to include them, even if it means turning your chair a small way, so that you're half on to somebody who's out in the back row. And they welcome you: 'It's nice to see you! Come and play!' (Kim, interview)

While Dermot was widely considered to have an East Clare fiddle style,[21] this did not make him a 'local' in the eyes of the district's long-term residents and landowners. Aware of his outsider status, Dermot had been too intimidated to go to Lena's until he had been living in the district for several years:

---

[21] Dermot was often included in concerts featuring 'East Clare music': for example, at the annual Feakle festival.

> They were much more local than Pepper's. For the locals, it would be their stronghold! (Dermot laughs) But I just went in anyway, and, you know, I found them nice in there. I always found it fine in Lena's. Although I did find it intimidating enough, like, I wouldn't have been as relaxed going in there in the beginning as I would have been going into Pepper's, because I thought it was more of a local place, and … I just didn't feel comfortable going in there. Like, I'm, being from Ennis, would be considered an outsider. (Dermot, interview)

Lena's had a much more 'local' clientele than Pepper's and the music played there was also different. Lena's reputation as a 'music house' for over thirty years, and the session leaders'[22] wide musical acquaintance, meant that 'people'd come from Limerick, and from Galway, and from all around within a fifty-mile radius of here' (Dermot, interview) (Musical example 31)[23]. The music played varied accordingly, and might include 'standard' session tunes, Paddy O'Brien's modern accordion compositions, tunes flute player Paddy O'Donoghue had written the week before, the 'lonesome' tunes of South Galway's Paddy Fahy or Paddy Kelly, or whatever entertainment that might be offered by a visiting West Clare banjo player, an Englishman with a psaltery, the Canadian step dancer, or any other musician who came through the door. This openness to a variety of musical styles and repertoires (and abilities) may be partly attributed to Seamus's musical eclecticism — 'He'd have a world of music, like, and it wouldn't be considered East Clare music' (Dermot, interview) — but also to a social openness and desire for amusement shared by musicians and listeners. Every newcomer in Lena's was welcomed, and every musician asked to play.

Unpredictability and variety are important for musicians who play frequently. As Ciaran Carson notes in *Last Night's Fun*, the session at its best is often an exercise in digression, where one of a myriad serendipitous factors can determine the sequence of tunes, in contrast to the weekly rehearsal of a set repertoire, as at Pepper's. While

_____

[22] Paddy O'Donoghue, flute player (formerly with the Tulla Ceili Band), fiddle player and composer of many tunes, was absent from Lena's for much of 2000 due to ill health, but re-joined the session later in the year.

[23] Session musicians, Lena's Bar, Feakle, 'Willie Coleman's ', 'Sixpenny Money', 'Kesh Jig' (23 November 2000). Instruments played are three fiddles, two accordions, banjo and flute (including three musicians visiting from other parts of Clare). Note the way the lead accordion suggests a set of tunes to be played, then the other accordion tries out the first tune and is helped to find the correct notes, before the musicians begin the tune together. When the set proposed by the first accordion player comes to an end, the flute player begins another jig, 'Gillian's Apples', which goes well after the 'Kesh Jig', and the musicians who know it (two of the fiddles and the banjo player) join in. In my field notes that evening I remarked on the session's 'good feeling' and that there was 'as usual good crack amongst the locals sitting around us'.

the session at Pepper's was ideal for Vince and others who wanted to learn what in their estimation was a 'pure' East Clare style (Dermot defined it more accurately as a 'Tulla Ceili Band style'), their protective and defensive tactics made it difficult for 'the crack' to happen except on the occasions when 'known' musicians were made welcome and took the music (and the socializing) in new directions. At Pepper's, local listeners, including musicians (and the publican) criticized the monotony of the same sets of tunes being played each week, the lack of 'lift' or life or any sense of fun: to them it was 'boring', 'vegetarian', 'dead' and had 'no beans' and 'no crack'.[24]

Another difference between the two sessions was in the musicians' social orientation. At Pepper's, they were inwardly directed, towards PJoe, ignoring both listeners (if indeed they were listening) and the lower-status musicians behind them. At Lena's, on the other hand, there was frequent communication (through jokes, praise, teasing, chat) between musicians and audience and the expressed enjoyment of musicians and listeners was infectious (Musical example 32[25]). Dermot enjoyed 'the attitude they had towards the music' at Lena's:

> They just love the music: they really, really love music, and they love playing it. And when Paddy and Seamus would be there, I used to come in, and Paddy's so excited, you know, when he's playing, when he really gets going, and he's full of vim and joy, and he's just bursting to play music. And that's what I liked about it. It was great! And jeez, there've been some great nights in Lena's. I think the music there is every bit as good as Pepper's in it's heyday, like. (Dermot, interview)

Dermot found the involvement of listeners who were 'in tune with what's happening' a key ingredient of the musicians' enjoyment, which was articulated in the 'lift' of their music:

> They can be sitting up at the corner of the bar, two of them, or three of them, chatting away, and yet they're listening to the music with one ear as well, you know. So they're always in tune with what's happening, so you'd hear this roar of encouragement coming down from one of them at some stage, and you know that they're listening, like … The best sessions I've ever been at are the sessions where the people that are listening have been involved, really involved, in the music. And that's what makes the musicians go and play

---

[24] These comments were recorded in field notes.

[25] Brendan, 'The Low Lands of Holland', Lena's Bar, Feakle (18 January 2001). Brendan is asked for, and begins, a song, amid laughter, teasing and encouragement. Note that he pitches the song a little too high and is uncertain of the words, but others help him by singing along, while the accordion plays the melody softly behind him. In comparison to the two previous examples of dance music sets, the audience keeps very quiet for the song's duration. When Brendan finishes the song he is applauded and congratulated and the session leader immediately begins to cajole another singer to perform.

that little bit better, so that you get to the stage when you're floating on music, like. And then it really takes off. (Dermot, interview)

In Lena's the music was renewed each week in a flexible and changing repertoire as newcomers and old friends came and went. The relationship between the session leader and others present, and particularly Lena herself (who, although no longer publican, was an influential presence), encouraged the participation of everyone in the room. To play music at Lena's was to be included in this small social group of middle-aged and elderly villagers, farming couples and bachelor farmers, for the duration of the session. While the listeners there appreciated the variety of entertainment foreigners provided, they were also knowledgeable about local music.[26]

At Pepper's, on the other hand, the music played was local in style and repertoire and the fiddle sound dominated, but the drinkers were not 'in tune with' the music, often overpowering it with their loud conversation. The middling musicians there formed a tight circle around P. J. Hayes and kept newcomers outside it. They ignored their audience, partly because they were often not listening but also because they did not want them to participate, for example, by singing. At Pepper's, traditional music was presented and consumed by outsiders as local and authentic. The music at Lena's was also a commodity provided to customers in an informal transaction that depended on locals spending their money in the pub.

At this point, it is important to emphasize that, while the clientele at Lena's (as Dermot observed) was more 'local' and more engaged with the music than those at Pepper's, the regular musicians at each of the Feakle sessions were equally diverse and probably only P. J. Hayes would have been regarded in the district as 'local'. Each of the sessions was experienced by some participants as a musical community, but there was little overlap with other forms of collective identification. The musicians at both sessions travelled up to thirty miles to attend and none lived in Feakle itself. Apart from their differing musical abilities, they also varied in terms of age, occupation, education, class and political affiliation and very few friendships extended to activities outside playing music.

---

[26] At one session in Lena's, for example, a man leaned over and said to me, 'Bill Malley played that tune. I remember Bill Malley sitting in that corner over there and playing that tune' (field notes, 14 September 2000).

Among the musicians who have spoken about the Feakle sessions, Vince preferred what to him was the 'real' session at Pepper's while Kim and Dermot (and I) enjoyed the more convivial atmosphere at Lena's. As more experienced players, we were better able to broaden our focus from an intense awareness of our own playing and that of a mentor, in order to engage with other musicians and listeners. Although in part a product of confidence and musical competence, this preference for process over product was also what attracted the Irish women, Joan and Eilis, to the 'learners'' session at Brandon's. Perhaps the most telling difference between the two Feakle sessions and the different kinds of musical experience they offered is that between seeking sameness and engaging with difference. The first establishes a notion of community based on exclusion; the second, one in which difference is acknowledged and celebrated and where willingness to participate — what McCann calls 'the risk of self' (McCann 2001: 93) — is more highly valued than any musical product achieved.

6.5   Codifying the session

Sometimes the 'risk of self' was not welcomed in the session. Dermot made the following observations about foreigners' behaviour at sessions:

> A lot of them don't know how to behave, or they have ideas how they should behave, and they've heard that when you go to a session you can do whatever you like. Or everyone is expected to play — this is the one that especially Americans, it's a way of thinking, that everyone's expected to play in a session in Ireland: everyone has to do their bit. They have their piece ready, like! [Dermot laughs] And if they're not asked, then they think that something terrible has happened, or they've done something wrong. Like, it's different countries have different ways, like. English people, then, are very direct. They'll come in and they'll play along and they're [he laughs again] if there isn't a big thing made out of them, then they get the hump! [laughs] They need to think that they're leading the session, like. (Dermot, interview)

In Chapter Four it was noted that newcomers to the Irish traditional music scene in Melbourne found they needed to learn the 'etiquette' of sessions in order to be accepted and that these rules, and ways of enforcing them, varied according to the type of session and who was participating. The questions that remain are why these rules need to be articulated, how they are circulated, where they come from and who benefits.

Irish fiddle player and composer Charlie Lennon defines the session by juxtaposing two apparently contradictory statements:

> A session by its nature is unrehearsed and spontaneous and it is not possible to say in advance whether it will be very good, fair or mediocre. There are also certain unwritten rules which everybody should respect. (Lennon 1993: 9)

The tension between spontaneity and 'unwritten rules which everybody should respect' suggests a possible cause of the misunderstanding and conflict often played out in sessions. Niall MacKinnon, in his study of *The British Folk Scene,* suggests that a session is vulnerable to disruption because these 'rules' are not spelt out, leading musicians to respond indirectly, for example by 'freezing out' newcomers who break them. MacKinnon contrasts this with the 'structured informality' of folk club nights, where rules about repertoire and style and silence during performances are strictly policed (1994: Chs 6, 9). It is perhaps significant that the musicians most involved in policing the Pepper's session were familiar with the English folk scene and Vince, after organizing several folk clubs in England, was now helping to run a Co. Clare folk club.

There is a widely held conviction that, as the most common context in which Irish traditional music is now publicly performed, the session is its most important and most authentic context. While it is not surprising to find such claims in tourist guides aimed at consumers of Irish culture, guides that are written by musicians (usually not Irish) for musicians (usually not Irish) also overstate their case, feeding the fantasies of newcomers to Irish traditional music that in participating in their local session (whether it is in Melbourne, Florida or Melbourne, England or Melbourne, Australia) they are gaining access to 'the wellspring of Irish music, its beating heart', as American Barry Foy advises in his *Field Guide to the Irish Music Session* (1999: 65). In Ireland, however, many of the highest-status musicians rarely play in public sessions, and if they do so, emphasize that they go for 'the crack' rather than to seek musical enjoyment.[27] Indeed, some musicians deplore the 'musical brawl' of the large session (Tony MacMahon quoted in Fairbairn 1993: 215) while numerous commentators, notably Breathnach, regard it as weakening the tradition of solo performance (Breathnach 1983: 122).

Ethnomusicologists researching Irish traditional music sessions are frequently of the view that 'the session is a participatory event and experience that provides its own community and makes audience redundant' (Fairbairn 1993: 120). This view is

---

[27] Personal communications with Mary MacNamara, Martin Hayes, Tony MacMahon, Mary Bergin.

apparently supported by 'the fact that the musicians are facing *each other*, usually in a circle, not an audience or a group of dancers' (Fair 1992: 7). Not everyone in a circle can be facing away from the audience, however. I suggest that this perception more likely reflects the fact that the researchers, as visitors to the session, may have been seated facing the leading musicians, who look outwards at other musicians and beyond them to the bar patrons.

In earlier chapters I have resisted using the term 'invention of tradition'[28] for the ways in which Irish traditional music has been constructed over the past two hundred years. In part, this is because of its overuse in referring to *any* recently adopted formalized cultural practice, but equally because the construction of Irish cultural traditions in the service of cultural nationalism was confined to urban inventions such as the ceili dance, while the adoption of amateur musical performance by a rising rural class at the end of the nineteenth century had a more complex genesis and continuity. The session is similarly complicated, for in Eric Hobsbawm's terms it sits between custom (formalized but flexible practices in 'traditional' societies) and tradition (invariant, normative, formal, ritual practices implying continuity with the past) (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 2–4). Or more accurately, it has moved from custom into tradition. Over the past thirty years, the Irish traditional music session, like an 'invented tradition', has acquired an implicit continuity with a much longer history of Irish music practices and has become formalized as a set of rules while remaining flexible in its social practice.

Fairbairn, in her study of group playing in Irish traditional music, participates in this process of invention by drawing a line of continuity between the sociality of the house dance and the new social context of the pub session (Fairbairn 1993; 1994). This continuity is exaggerated, however. The majority of musicians who played together in mid-twentieth-century emigrant communities or in the sessions around the early *fleadhanna* had no need of formal rules for their social and musical engagement. The regular pub session in Ireland, however, was an urban phenomenon dating from the 1960s and its most enthusiastic and numerous participants have been young, urban revivalists, born after the house dances had disappeared in rural Ireland. By the 1980s, the weekly session led by paid musicians had become the

_____

[28] In his introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm defines the term as 'a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 1).

norm. The session flourished on both economic expansion (which brought about both lounge bars and a stay-at-home generation of Irish youth who patronized them) and the self-consciousness of revival (in which 'tradition' had to be studied and reproduced, rather than acquired as part of socialization). It became the subject of informal negotiation and later academic research, with the consequent formulation of a set of (variable) rules.[29] Hammy Hamilton's 1978 thesis on 'The Session: A Socio-Musical Phenomenon in Irish Traditional Music' was perhaps the earliest formulation of the session and became a benchmark for subsequent projects (Hamilton 1978). Such work, although acknowledging the recent origin of the session, focuses on defining its associated social behaviours in terms of a continuous musical tradition.

One of the observable characteristics of traditional music revival in the late twentieth century has been a change in focus from musical text (as exemplified by tune collections) to musical process, including performance contexts and styles.[30] The idea of authenticity in Irish traditional music had changed in ways that were particularly demanding of the urban revivalists, demanding authenticity not only in repertoire but in instrumentation, performance style and (in the context of the pub session) the performance of social values. For the many who aspire to become 'Irish musicians' in distant locations, part of the cultural capital they now need to acquire relates to the social context of performance.

A survey of popular guides to the session[31] indicates that codifying the session as a set of rules, even when leavened with humour, has the serious purpose of socializing

---

[29] My recollections of Ireland in 1978 include going to sessions with a musician friend who instructed me on when to take my fiddle to a session, when to take it out, where to sit, when to play and when not to play.

[30] Georgina Boyes attributes this change in the priorities of revivalists in post-World War 2 England to the greater availability of performance models through radio and recordings, and through the Working Men's Association and the proliferation of folk clubs that brought performers from an oral tradition in close contact with revivalists (in contrast to the performance of 'folk' texts by an urban elite separated from the rural working-class whose songs were collected by Cecil Sharp and others in the early twentieth century) (Boyes 1993). Neil Rosenberg notes a similar change in this period in the American folk revival, when the notion of authenticity broadened from texts and sources to performance style and an emphasis on immersion in the music-culture (Rosenberg 1993: Introduction and chapter forewords).

[31] Those surveyed included four books (Carson 1986; Ó hAllmurháin 1998; Foy 1999; Wallis and Wilson 2001), an archive of the discussion group thesession.org (posts on the topic 'Session etiquette: what to do when a guitar-player just won't keep quiet?' found at www.thesession.org/ discussions/display.php/339comments) and the following articles posted on ten websites, accessed in March 2004: 'Session etiquette: Some reflections on sessions' at www.oblique-design.demon.co.uk/musicbook/sessions.html; Jack Gilder, 'Seisiún' at pweb.jps.net/~jgilder/sessiun.html; 'The small circle tune learning session:

newcomers by prescribing those behaviours that will lead to acceptance in a session and the enjoyment of all, and proscribing those that will spoil it for other musicians and result in a newcomer being shunned. These rules vary somewhat, especially on such contentious issues as whether certain instruments, or multiples of instruments, should be allowed. Some guides also include instructions for listeners (Image 7[32]).

The term 'etiquette' betrays something of the nature of session behaviour as cultural capital in its more conventional reference to class-related behaviours, particularly among the upper-middle class, or rather, among those who wish to appear to belong to that class. Books on social etiquette have been consumed voraciously in times of social change, particularly among the rising English and American middle classes during the nineteenth century. Analogously, it is for those 'upwardly mobile' musicians seeking entry to the inner circle of Irish traditional musicians in sessions that these codifications are of greatest value. This perhaps vindicates Niall's outburst in the previous chapter (Section 5.5) accusing those who 'write the rules' so they can get 'instant access to the session' (field notes, 1 July 2000).

My observations suggest that, while there are some rewards for more competent musicians (status, reputation, payment, the ability to influence repertoire) it is the novice and improving players who show more enthusiasm for sessions and have more to gain from them. They can 'sit in' and play along with skilled musicians, acquiring repertoire and style while concealing their deficiencies. From inside the session they can experience the uplifting sound of group performance while temporarily elevated to the status of 'musician' that they would be less likely to earn by their individual performances.

When foreigners follow the guidelines of session etiquette 'by the book' rather than responding to the social situation in which they find themselves, misunderstandings

---

Etiquette' at www.slowplayers.org/ SCTLS.html; Martin Doering, 'Session etiquette' at www.mucl.de/~mdoering/konzertina/en/learn/playing/sessions.htm; 'The good session etiquette guide' at www.pressbar.freeserve.co.uk/sessions/etiquet.htm; 'Folk session etiquette' at www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/alabaster/A432127; Vivian T. Williams, 'Jam session etiquette' at www.voyagerecords.com/arjam.htm; Phil Rubenzer, 'Session etiquette…' at www.c7r.com/sessionbook/etiquette.html; Chris Smith, 'How to start and run and Irish slow session' at members.cox.net/eskin/sessiondynamics.html; George Keith, 'What is a "session"' at groups.msn.com/TraditionalIrishMusic/sessionsetiquette.msnw. Note that all of these websites are located outside Ireland. Numerous threads on session etiquette are archived by Irish-moderated discussion group, IRTRAD-L, accessed by sending an 'INDEX IRTRAD-L' command to LISTSERV@LISTSERV.HEANET.IE.

[32] Ó hAllmhuráin 1998: 160. Note that Ó hAllmhuráin assumes that the 'oldest player' will have the social and musical capacity to lead.

and conflict may result. When they add new rules, this is almost inevitable. The 'custom' of excluding newcomers from the Pepper's session resulted in a very different atmosphere from the welcome they received at Lena's. Both sessions were highly structured events, however, with control exercised over the musicians' behaviour. At Pepper's, the overt control of musicians with notions of their status that exceeded the estimation of insiders, resulted in conflict and resentment. At Lena's, the leader, a high-status musician who played a loud instrument and communicated effectively with both musicians and listeners, did not have to 'spell out' the unwritten code by which that session operated. It was not the absence of unwritten rules that made the session in Lena's more sociable and welcoming, but the leader's ability to facilitate engagement among the different participants that resulted in a lack of conflict there between informality and structure.

Contrary to assumptions that sessions where one or more musicians are paid are 'commercial' and set up a dynamic that is inhibiting to musical expression, the Feakle sessions at Pepper's (where the leader was unpaid) and at Lena's (where the leading musician was paid) demonstrate that this is not always the case. Musicians who complain that sessions have become 'commercial' and now reflect the requirements of publicans overlook the fact that a public house has always been a commercial venue.[33] The pub session, regardless of whether any musician is paid to play, is deeply enmeshed in the commodification of Irish traditional music that now extends to the publishing, tourism and music industries, beverage manufacturers and such influential organizations as the Irish Vintners' Federation. Although a comparison of the two Feakle sessions suggests that a predominantly local audience may be more 'in tune' with the musicians and facilitate their music by their informed appreciation and encouragement, it does not follow that the presence of tourists results in a less enjoyable session for musicians, for it should be emphasized that traditional music is a minority interest in Ireland and that most publicans do not allow music sessions. Although these issues need to be studied further, the view that Irish traditional music is a 'gift' that should not be exploited commercially is historically inaccurate (amateur music-making in Ireland having been a product of modernity, as discussed in Chapter Two). It also assents to the bourgeois evaluation of music as culturally most valuable when practised for its own sake rather than

---

[33] See for example Billy Moran's comments (quoted in Chapter Four) on money 'ruining' the session; see also Fairbairn 1993.

professionally.[34] A further objection that commentators frequently make is that the payment of one or several musicians goes against the democratic nature of the session, straining the relationships among musicians.[35] Those relationships are not democratic, however. A hierarchy operates in the session that, according to the situation, may place more or less emphasis on such factors as age, nationality, ethnicity, repertoire, style, reputation or instrument played, as well as ability. Gender is also a significant factor in determining a musician's place in the session.

6.6   Lovely girls: Negotiating the gendered space of the session

If the pub session is a site of struggle for symbolic power among musicians, this struggle has been especially problematic for most of the women in this study, who found the gendered space of the pub[36] a barrier to their musical participation and enjoyment. For them, participation in the session involved employing tactics that worked towards balancing what they perceived as men's advantages. There was a point, however, at which their willingness to do this was outweighed by their loss of enjoyment in playing music.

In the previous chapter, twenty-one year old Australian flute player Rachel spoke of her expectations of Ireland and her disappointment at not receiving a welcome from the 'cliques' of musicians she encountered in Galway pub sessions. She found the sessions 'really unrewarding, really boring. [The men] just totally dominate' (Rachel, interview, 27 July 2000). Her tactics for achieving her goal of learning more tunes and playing as much as possible included mixing almost exclusively with musicians from outside Ireland who had come to Galway with similar goals to her own. With an older Australian musician, Pauline, Rachel went to sessions at the Áras na nGael (an Irish-speaking club where a gregarious Spanish piper led the session) and the Crane (a haunt of backpackers and European students, where the middle-aged men who led the session encouraged newcomers).

---

[34] Bourdieu uses this notion of a 'pure' art, as opposed to art contaminated by economic necessity, as the basis for proposing an inverse relationship between cultural capital and economic capital (Bourdieu 1993).

[35] Examples are to be found in Fair 1992 and Fairbairn 1993: 313.

[36] I refer to my argument in Chapter Four that the pub is a masculine space. Anthony McCann, in his assertion following Freie (1998) that the pub, as an informal meeting-place between family and work, is 'a typical "third space"' (McCann 2001: 91; 99n8) overlooks two factors: that historically this has been true only for men and that, despite recent changes, pubs remain predominantly for men's use.

Another less successful tactic was to join with other women musicians to set up their own pub session:

> There's been cases of myself and a few other girls starting up a session, and a few old boys come along and take over. They've hardly given any respect to us. Like, it was our session, we started it, just playing a few tunes in a pub. We asked the people if we could just play a few tunes, and it's happened on several occasions. We just packed up and left after a while, because they just, not even introduced themselves, just sat down and took over, like we had no right to be playing, and if there was music, it was theirs. (Rachel, interview)

Eventually, Rachel was invited to join a group of women who held a private session in the home of a different musician each week. I found this 'kitchen session' just as Rachel had described it: tunes played slowly, lots of conversation and cups of tea, new tunes introduced and learned together.[37] There was none of the hyped-up speed of the 'lads' sessions' in the pubs, the cliques or the 'ego', the noise and cigarette smoke and drunkenness that the women identified as reasons for setting up their own 'supportive' session away from the pub. Fiddle player Pauline, whose relocation from Sydney to Galway was discussed in the previous chapter, valued this weekly kitchen session with 'the girls' as 'a sharing and giving thing' where 'you feel welcome and encouraged and you're invited to play with others'. Although for Pauline the kitchen session did not replace the excitement of playing in public, the musical friendships formed there allowed the women to join forces in pub sessions, 'whereas we wouldn't go on our own, individually' (Pauline, interview).

A kitchen session for women was not an option for Oriel (b. 1972), an Australian fiddle player who for eighteen months lived in the West Clare village of Doolin[38] and played session gigs in the tourist pubs there. A professional musician since the age of seventeen, Oriel had performed in various genres, as well as playing Irish traditional music 'recreationally' in pub sessions, before she moved to Ireland in 1998. At first, she was 'getting into the music and having a good time, and playing, and just being me, basically'. Once she began playing professionally, however, she quickly became disillusioned with the Doolin sessions:

---

[37] The evening I joined their session, we were three Australian women, and one each from Japan, Brittany, the Netherlands and Ireland, and our musical skills ranged from learners to competitors in national competitions (field notes, 7 June 2000)

[38] Doolin enjoyed a reputation as a centre of traditional music, song and folklore until, from the 1960s onwards, it became progressively popular, first among Dublin musicians, and later among international musicians and tourists. Now, as noted in the previous chapter, it is considered degraded by tourism and contaminated by the number of foreigners who have moved there to play Irish traditional music.

> where you are supposed to pretend you're not getting paid, that you are
> sitting in the corner of a packed and noisy pub and playing tunes you can't
> hear for fun and that the tourists are having an 'authentic Irish' experience —
> just like it would be if there were no tourists! (Oriel, pers. com., 28 Feb 2000)

Despite playing as a professional, Oriel found it almost as difficult as Rachel and Pauline to enter the 'inner sanctum' of the session and to influence its musical direction:

> You're not going to get to start a tune, you know, it just doesn't happen … to
> get any kind of notice whatsoever in a positive musical sense is a very
> difficult sort of a thing … And you could be heaps better than anyone who's
> in the session, but because they're natives, and they're men, they'll play
> whatever horrible tunes, badly, and you have to play with them. (Oriel,
> interview, 2 February 2000)

Oriel suggested that women were partly to blame if they were left on the margins of sessions, because in general they were too deferential, giving their seat to a better player, while men assumed it was their right to have the best seats. Oriel had observed that when a woman is learning she sits on the outside (as Joan and Eilis had at Pepper's), whereas a young man often goes straight to the centre of the session, either because he is invited or as if he had been. This made learning the music and becoming accepted and respected as a musician a longer and more difficult process for women (Oriel, pers. com., 12 December 1999).

The Irish pub is a masculine space where women's presence has not been permitted in the past, and even now the pub remains a place where women are accepted on restricted terms, without authority and frequently as the object of unwanted sexual attention. In Doolin, Oriel found that in addition to being paid twenty-five per cent less than the male musicians (who were also foreigners):

> the men would try and stick their hands up your skirt, literally or
> metaphorically, and the women would be over in the corner, saying, 'Look at
> your one!' because I was getting all the attention from the men. So you can't
> win. (Oriel, interview)

Oriel perceived that 'if you follow the rules of being a lovely girl, you're probably not going to get into trouble, you're not going to get anyone trying to hassle you'. This meant, however, that she had to change and monitor her behaviour in ways she found unacceptable:

> You have to be non-assertive, for a start. You have to be able to take a joke,
> which means that if someone decides to put their hand up your skirt, you

don't turn around and say, 'Fuck off, you fucking bastard! Before I punch you in the face!' You laugh about it, and say, 'Oh, he's such a funny fellow!' You're supposed to basically let them walk all over you, from what I can see … but for me to do that, it just felt like I was betraying myself. (Oriel, interview)

Learning to perform the role of what she sarcastically called a 'lovely girl' involved circumscribing her gestures and not making eye contact or smiling at anyone. For Oriel, to do this:

was actually quite painful, because I don't naturally do that, naturally I just engage with everybody. But that changed, because now I do it different. Now I have cultivated that 'feet, knees together, tap'… Have you ever noticed that? That all those Irish women musicians, they do that thing where they tap their feet together, they can't even put their legs apart so far that they might tap their feet individually! (Oriel, interview)

Oriel, for whom playing with 'heart' was all-important, when 'you connect with your emotions, and express something through the music that makes it more than just notes' (Oriel, pers. com., 28 January 2000), found that these adaptive behaviours set up a barrier between 'being herself' and playing music:

Now I can't just play. Now, there's all these other things in between … you have to sort of think, 'Don't look at that person, and don't move too much', and it wasn't natural for me to do that … I found it quite a strain. It made me quite depressed for a while, because I just thought, 'I'm not the one with the problem here, I'm not the one acting like a complete idiot, I'm not the one that can't handle the fact that someone of the opposite sex is there enjoying themselves playing music. So why am I the one that has to do everything differently?' And the answer to that is, because I'm in a foreign country. (Oriel, interview)

Disillusioned, but clear that the problem was one of cultural difference and that she was not interested in having to 'do everything different', Oriel moved to France, where she continues to work as a musician.

6.7   Sounding different

The examples in the sections above demonstrate how insiders perceived foreigners as spoiling sessions by their 'wrong' behaviours as musicians or as listeners and by taking authority over music that was not 'theirs'. What appears to be at stake is a model of authenticity within Irish traditional music that is fused to nationality and ethnicity. Irish traditional music is 'our music', just as Ireland is 'our nation'. Musicians can learn to behave 'correctly', or, as the example of Lena's session shows, can be encouraged to do so by welcoming rather than shunning them. A

further problem for foreigners is their difficulty in achieving an acceptable style of playing. In Chapter Five, Australian fiddle player Terry discovered on a trip to Ireland that, despite his belief that he sounded 'terrifically Irish', Irish musicians heard his playing as 'not Irish' (Terry, interview), as *sounding different*.

Playing in the 'right' rhythm has long been recognized as the sign of an authentic Irish style. As early as 1910, Francis O'Neill, compiler of canonical collections of Irish dance music, wrote that:

> Few musicians of any nationality find difficulty in playing Irish airs, but many appear to have little conception of that peculiar rhythm or swing without which Irish dance tunes lose their charm and spirit. The jig and reel, at their hands, become a mere jumble of sounds, disappointing to the ear and disqualified for the dancer. (O'Neill 1973 [1910]: 291–2)[39]

Fiddle player Vince was equally aware that 'the real business is getting the rhythm … it's got to be absolutely right […] I'd like to be able to just sit down, like Dermot does, and set it off, and the rhythm is pure Pepper's' (Vince, interview). At Pepper's, Vince followed PJoe's rhythm, but 'lost' it when he played solo. His method of learning how to play in this rhythm was the same as the older generation of Irish players, who had listened to music and copied what they heard until it was embodied in the activity of playing. This embodied knowledge or cultural capital was the final, not the first, stage, however, for relative newcomers to the music (many of whom, as discussed in Chapter Four, needed also to *un*learn previously embodied musical knowledge, particularly if they had been classically trained).

Keeping in mind that there is a spectrum of rhythms across various regions, instruments and personal preferences in Ireland that might be accepted as 'right', the difficulty in acquiring the 'right' rhythm appears to have more to do with the process of learning than with the origin of the student. Learning Irish traditional music at a distance means that a musician is less likely to be surrounded by others playing in a 'right' rhythm, while many musicians (as documented in Chapter Four) begin to learn Irish traditional music from books, whereas Breandan Breathnach recommends that:

> *Initially*, all attention should be directed to the basic rhythm of the music, as according each note in the phrase its due length and strength is the basic

---

[39] O'Neill may not have heard the German–American accordion player John Kimmel (1866–1942) who made immensely popular recordings of Irish dance music in New York from 1906 in a style said to be 'still admired for its flamboyant virtuosity' (Vallely 1999: 208).

feature which distinguishes the traditional from the non-traditional player. (Breathnach 1983: 122–3, my italics)

Significantly, it is not the 'foreigner' to whom Breathnach opposes the 'traditional' player, but the 'non-traditional' player. Most foreigners will initially fit into the latter category, but there is no reason why they may not learn to play in the 'right' rhythm, given ability, access to traditional players, application and the number of years necessary to learn. Irish musicians in this study, however, were inclined to overlook problems that could be remedied and look instead at the differences that defined foreigners, leading them to suggest that it was *because* they were foreigners, they could not play Irish music in the 'right' rhythm.

Ennis-based musician and broadcaster 'Therese' (b. 1968) believed she could always identify a foreign musician by the sound they produced: 'It's the sound that they're bringing out, really that you can detect that they're foreigners'. She attributed this difference to foreigners' lack of 'enculturation':

> I think, even if you haven't had parents that are musicians, it's so important to be listening to it, to be kind of enculturated in that respect, that the music is constantly there, even if it's recorded material, it's radio or whatever, that you don't just get to twenty and then decide, OK, I'm going to Ireland on a holiday and hear Irish music for the first time … and buy an instrument and decide to learn it. (Therese, interview, 22 November 2000)

At the same time, Therese was equally scornful of Irish musicians who 'think they can improve the music' with experimentation. She also acknowledged that:

> there's foreigners that can play better than some Irish people, that's a fact. But they never come near that inner sanctum, if you like, or that sacred few who will shape the music, you know, or even your average musician who would be playing frequently in pubs. (Therese, interview)

In recognizing foreigners who can play Irish traditional music better than the worst Irish musicians, however, Therese reinforces her view that there is an 'inner sanctum' of Irish music that foreigners can 'never come near'.

In a radio interview with Therese, fiddle player Joe Ryan (b. 1929) recalled teaching at the Willie Clancy Summer School with fellow West Clare fiddle and concertina player John Kelly (1912–87), where a German musician demonstrated that he could play the notes, but had no 'style':[40]

---

[40] John Kelly and Joe Ryan, both from West Clare, were leading figures in the revival of interest in Irish traditional music in Dublin, where John Kelly's shop in Capel Street

'Now silence!' says John. 'We're going to do a lovely jig now called the Frieze Britches. Can anybody play it?'
So this big tall German fella, he put up his hand. So John let him play. (Joe laughs) Oh, poor fellow! Oh, 'twas terrible! (Joe and Therese laugh)
So John says, 'Stop!' (they both laugh)
He had the bones all right, but (laughs) it was very funny.
(Therese: 'Did the German man take offence?')
Oh, no, no, no, he did not. He was a lovely character. He was good, you know, but the style wasn't in it. (Joe Ryan, interview, Clare-FM, 1 January 2001.)

Fiddle player Dermot was more inclined than Therese to attribute foreigners' difference to the fact that they were still learning, still focused on imitating what they heard, as well as impeded by earlier musical education:

They do sound different. You'd know, like, if you hear a German playing a violin, playing Irish music, you'd nearly know, that it was a European, anyway, at least, that was playing it […] It's kind of a preciseness that they have about what they're doing, you know, because they're trying to emulate or copy something, but they're obviously people that have, maybe most of their training is by notes, or written notes, it could be that, as well. But they have this kind of way of playing, that everything is precise, and there's no 'go' in it at all, there's no sort of lift in it, there's no swing, or anything. (Dermot, interview)

Like Therese, Dermot believed that Irish music sounded right only if it was 'in you' since childhood and suggests that even twenty years spent listening to Irish music cannot make up for that lack:

They haven't heard it from childhood. And, you know, like, a lot of Irish music, it's just because you hear it so much, when you're growing up, you're hearing it all the time […] But they don't have that, because they've only been listening to it for maybe a year, two years, three years, maybe some of them would have been listening to it for ten years. Or twenty, even. I don't know, but it sounds different, anyway. (Dermot, interview)

Both Therese and Dermot overlooked the many Irish adult learners who have great difficulty in playing in the 'right' rhythm, despite having been exposed to Irish traditional music since childhood. There are also many musicians from outside Ireland who have access to Irish musicians as well as recordings. I suggest that while most musicians learning outside Ireland have great difficulty in reproducing the rhythm they hear, others do not — and these musicians are not always the children of Irish emigrants.

---

became a focus for musicians. The two men played together in pub sessions and in the renowned Castle Ceili Band.

There are also cases when an Irish musician is unable to identify the sound of the foreigner as different. Joe Ryan (in the interview quoted above) continued his anecdotes from the Willie Clancy School:

> (Therese: What do you think about foreigners generally playing Irish music? Do you think it's an uphill battle?)
> Joe: Oh, they're very good, some of them, though, there's no question about it. They are. Again now, as you ask me that question, when we were after finishing we'll say at the classes we used to adjourn to, we were in Cleary's [pub]. And we were just sitting down, we hadn't started playing, John Kelly, Bobby Casey and myself were down there talking, and these musicians passed. I remember there was an accordion, a banjo and a guitar. And they went into the little lounge. So they opened up, anyway, and they started, and they were absolutely outstanding, now.
> 'By God,' says John Kelly, 'but they're great! Go in, Bobby, and see where they're from!'
> Bobby wouldn't go.
> 'I'll go in,' I said. So I walked in, the toilets were on the way.
> 'That's lovely music,' I said.
> 'Oh, t'ank you!' he says.
> 'Where are you from?'
> 'I'm from Paris,' he says. And the man was from Paris! Outstanding music, and they played three of the reels that the Kilfenora [ceili] band have. Great!

Those who stigmatized foreigners for their inability to achieve the 'right' rhythm were often among a musical elite, and reserved their criticisms for foreigners rather than the considerable number of Irish players who were still learning, or would never learn, to play in the 'right' rhythm.

6.8 Musical community in the pub session

This chapter began by arguing that the various ways in which collective musical experiences and identifications have been theorized are idealized and utopian. The following sections gave examples of various kinds of musical and social disunity and disharmony present in particular examples of the Irish music session, which itself has been represented as an ideal musical community in both the scholarly and popular literature. The experiences of foreigners playing music in East Clare indicated that the construction of Irish traditional music, the session and the pub within discourses of gender, ethnicity and nationality erected barriers that prevented them from assimilating musically and socially.

Musicians at the Feakle sessions claimed cultural capital that they hoped would legitimate their participation in the session: Vince had been mentored by PJoe,[41] Angela's uncle was a famous musician, Dermot's mother was from East Clare, my musical mentors were from the area. These claims contributed to the status of individual musicians, but could not make them 'local'. Irishness was also important for those who were, or were perceived to be, foreigners.[42] English-born musicians in particular stressed their Irish connections and their acceptance by individual neighbours and musicians. Given longstanding Republican allegiance in the area and its fast-growing population of disaffected English emigrants, hostility to the English was not surprising.[43]

When Irish musicians rejected the legitimacy of foreigners playing Irish music, they focused on other kinds of difference. When they pointed to foreigners' bad behaviour in sessions, they attributed it to a lack of exposure to Irish culture in general; when they spoke of foreigners' inability to play with the 'right' sound, they attributed it to the fact that they had not grown up listening to Irish music. In other words, foreigners were both socially and musically incapable of playing Irish music *because* they were foreigners.

Where Sarup sees 'strangers' as 'blurring the boundaries' around a particular cultural territory and insiders reacting by stigmatizing them, Bourdieu offers what is perhaps a more useful interpretive framework. In developing the concept of *cultural capital*, Bourdieu argues that cultural resources act as a system of transferring power from one generation to the next through social institutions, particularly the education system. He found that while the most successful lower-class students achieved results comparable to upper-class students on 'scholastic' tasks due to their ability, application and circumstance, they were less successful in areas requiring the broader cultural knowledge that membership of the upper class provided but which was difficult to attain through effort. In interpreting these

_____

[41] Irish musicians make similar claims in their tune introductions at concerts and in sleeve-notes to recordings. If a musician cannot claim musical pedigree via a parent, they claim other kinds of filiation (through relatives, teachers, living in a musical district) or affiliation (the influence of high-status musicians either personally or, as a last resort, via recordings).

[42] Kim's husband, a Dubliner, had lived in England for many years before moving to East Clare. People who did not know him well assumed he was English, possibly because of his accent and his marriage to Kim but perhaps also because he was learning to play Irish traditional music.

[43] Kim, for example, remarked that 'you would notice that English visitors would often not be made as welcome by certain people as visitors from other countries' (Kim, interview).

differences, academics elide social classifications with academic classifications, constituting social distinctions as academic distinctions, thus enabling the reproduction of power and privilege. (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Swartz 1997: Ch. 8)

This situation is comparable to that of foreigners playing Irish traditional music. Irish musicians view foreign musicians as *lacking* in aspects of music-making that they themselves take for granted: judgement about the right way to behave in sessions; playing as if spontaneously rather than revealing effort; playing in the 'right' rhythm: that is, performing 'in time' with local musicians and 'in tune' with their tastes and preferences. In this way, Irish musicians' judgements have a *legitimating* function in focusing on those aspects of musical and social processes that favour Irish musicians over foreigners.

As this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, musical community is an ideal that is discursively constructed and collective musical identification a fleeting experience of transcendence that may occur when music has 'heart' and 'lift'. In representing the experience of playing music in sessions I have been influenced by my own ideals of musical community. In Lena's, the comfortable atmosphere and the enjoyment of the musicians sometimes inspired me to play less self-consciously, more openly. In certain moments, I experienced 'so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective' (Frith 1996b: 110) that I felt something … a collective musical identity perhaps? Here, I must conclude inconclusively, because there is a limit to reflexivity, and to omniscience, and I cannot say whether we were 'the same' in any other way than in our shared enjoyment of playing music together.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FINDING A PLACE IN IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC

In Chapter Four it was observed that the older Australians who had learned to play Irish traditional music had developed increasingly specialized taste preferences both in listening and in playing. Beginning with an attraction to Irish dance music generally, they eventually selected particular styles and repertoires to emulate. They had highly educated tastes in Irish traditional music as a result of their passionate consumption of recordings and their accompanying sleeve-notes. Similarly, many of the foreigners, discussed in Chapter Six, who relocated to Ireland were drawn to areas like East Clare because of their attraction to a regional style. There they sought out the better-known musicians, rather than joining groups of learners, and were thus playing 'out of their league'. Ironically, this only made their difference more conspicuous and their goal of musical assimilation more difficult to achieve.

This increasingly specialized taste preference follows Bourdieu's model of the process of differentiation within the market of symbolic goods (1993: ch. 3). In the market of Irish traditional music recordings, for example, musicians in this study progressively developed tastes indicating that they understood the finer points of Irish traditional music, its history, its great artists and their personal and regional styles. The development of a highly particularized preference in musical style is an indication of what Bourdieu refers to as the bourgeois aesthetic disposition, which distances itself from the functionality of popular taste in favour of the 'pure aesthetic' that eschews commercial values. This aesthetic philosophy, distilled in the works of Kant and adopted by the Romantic movement in the nineteenth century, fostered the belief that art was the work of the creative individual 'outside' social structure.

This model helps to clarify some of the differences between the values and practices of insiders and outsiders as well as differences in the processes involved in their becoming musicians. To insiders, like Mary MacNamara and Martin Hayes (discussed later in this chapter), Irish traditional music, its social meaning and aesthetic were introduced early in life, while mastering the techniques of playing their instruments followed later. This sequence was inverted in the learning process of the Australians and other outsider-musicians, who invariably came to Irish

traditional music as adults, so that for them, the aesthetic that is embodied as style was perceived as the final stage of learning, rather than its foundation. That they saw style as an accumulation of technique and repertoire and repetition in imitation of particular musicians was a barrier to their better understanding of style as aesthetic, as involving the expression of an ethos.[1]

Earlier chapters have considered the cultural boundaries around Irish traditional music largely from the point of view of outsiders who want to be accepted as musicians playing this music. The present chapter looks at Irish traditional music from inside those boundaries. It reflects on the significance of place in the construction of Irish traditional music and explores the relationships of music, place and identity. Drawing particularly on the insights and performances of two renowned musicians from East Clare, concertina player Mary MacNamara and fiddle player Martin Hayes, I consider the permeability of cultural boundaries and the possibilities for cultural translation from the 'inside'. Each of the musicians defines 'East Clare music' in a way that retains its identification with an older generation and their sense of loss and loneliness in the face of rural decline and depopulation. An analysis of recent literary works that celebrate the relationship between place and music is used to distinguish between nostalgia in this context as either an empty or a productive emotion. Arguing that nostalgia can function as a platform for musical transcendence, as evident in the work of both Mary MacNamara and Martin Hayes, I consider whether this transcendent musical performance is accessible to outsiders as performers or listeners. In performance and through teaching, both musicians attempt to convey its social and aesthetic meanings, in this way exhibiting an understanding of their music as open and accessible to musicians and listeners from elsewhere, as simultaneously local and global, contemporary and continuous with the past. Ultimately, however, their authority derives from a sense of place as bounded and organic.

7.1   Recognizing regional style in Irish traditional music

Irish traditional music, as argued in Chapter Five, is an increasingly important component of the tourism industry in Ireland, through which it has been represented and commodified as one aspect of a discursively constructed 'pre-modern' national

---

[1] Simon Frith cites Ruth Finnegan's study of musicians in an English town, *The Hidden Musicians* (Finnegan 1989), among whom she found that 'it was in their aesthetic judgements that they expressed their most deep-seated ethical views' (Frith 1996b: 125).

culture. Here it will be argued that the relatively recent recognition and revival of regional styles, including the music of East Clare, is informed by the nativist discourse within which a unique, unspoiled native culture is represented as at the point of extinction and in need of revival. At the same time, this revival is propelled by regional, national and global economic imperatives.

Style in Irish traditional music can refer to that of the Irish musical tradition as distinct from others, to that of a particular region or period, of a particular instrument, to the influence of particular recordings, or the 'idiolect' of an individual musician (Keegan 1992). The elements of style include ornamentation, melodic and rhythmic variation, phrasing and articulation. Style is a flexible and cumulative process, influenced by other musicians, by fashion, the media, competitions and recordings and is thus in a continual process of change (McCullough 1977). According to this view, style is ultimately a matter of individual choice and is continually changing.

Alternatively, style can be understood as an evolutionary process, 'a series of interconnected stylistic lineages traceable to different locales and master players within those locales' (Vallely 1999: 387) and thus as a matter of inheritance: that part of the musician's pedigree acquired through face-to-face musical transmission from a recognized tradition-bearer. According to this view, style, like Ó Riada's 'river' of tradition, absorbs outside influences without its flow being diverted (Ó Riada 1982: 20): it '*re*appropriates in a type of *à la carte* fashion, making outside influences sit readily in a communal dialect' (Keville 2000: 50).

Distinctive regional styles in Irish traditional music date back only as far as the second half of the nineteenth century, an effect of the significant decrease in population and in movement around Ireland following the Famine of the mid-nineteenth century, as Sally K. Sommers Smith (1997) has argued persuasively. Regional playing styles have been distinguished according to the sound produced by particular instrumental techniques and conventions for variation and embellishment and by the choice of repertoire in terms of tune type, tempo and rhythmic emphasis (Vallely 1999: 308–9). The recognition and classification of regional styles (particularly fiddle styles) and their newly acquired reputation as 'islands' (Feldman and O'Doherty 1979: 17) of purity in the increasingly contaminated 'river' of Irish traditional music are phenomena of the post-1950s revival.

A case in point is that of Donegal fiddle styles.[2] In *The Northern Fiddler: Music and Musicians of Donegal and Tyrone*, Allen Feldman and Éamon O'Doherty attribute the region's unique styles and repertoire to its geographical and cultural isolation from the rest of Ireland and to longstanding seasonal labour migrations to parts of Scotland (1979: 15; 47). Like other collectors, Feldman and O'Doherty saw themselves as recording a dying tradition (1979: 18). At the same time, they recognized that, in social terms, that tradition had already died:

> With the erosion of communal values and activities [the musicians they visited had been] forced to make the adjustment from music as a social practice and, in part, other-directed, to music as a purely personalised and solitary art form. (Feldman and O'Doherty 1979: 25)

Like collectors of earlier generations, Feldman and O'Doherty were selective about the kind of music they sought. In Co. Tyrone, they excluded from their project fiddle-players they judged as having been influenced by Michael Coleman's recordings or by ceili bands, even though these were 'the vast majority' of players in that region (1979: 197). Yet, as Caoimhín Mac Aoidh notes in his monograph on the Donegal fiddle tradition, John Doherty (c1895–1980), the most highly regarded of the musicians Feldman and O'Doherty visited and whose playing is widely considered to be the hallmark of Donegal fiddle style, was strongly influenced by musicians from outside the region through commercial recordings by musicians including Scottish composer and fiddle virtuoso James Scott Skinner and the American recordings of Sligo fiddler Paddy Killoran and others (Mac Aoidh 1994: 236).

The standardization of style and repertoire in Irish traditional music has been an increasing concern of the post-1950s revival. Standardization has been attributed to numerous factors including recordings, increased availability and use of printed notation, CCÉ competitions, the rise of group performance, the preferences of influential broadcasters, personal audio-recorders, institutionalization of musical transmission, and increased mobility of musicians. Some of these processes have been in play for over two centuries, but with the increasing commodification of Irish music and the greater pace of change, a distinctive regional style, as acquired through the process of aural transmission, has become relatively rare. As a result, it has acquired the status of 'threatened species' that was accorded Irish traditional

---

[2] Feldman and O'Doherty distinguish four separate styles in Donegal, each consistent with a topographically defined area (1979: 248–50).

music generally in the 1950s, as Irish harp music was in the late-eighteenth century and Irish dance music in the mid-nineteenth century.

Anxiety about the loss of regional styles is evident in the work of ethnomusicologists and is consistent with the discipline's preoccupation with locating culturally integrated and enclosed musical communities. Seán Ó Riada's view of the assimilative power of cultural practices, which overlooks the greater power of social change, is one that is firmly entrenched in the ethnomusicological literature. As American ethnomusicologist Charles Keil writes:

> The presence of style indicates strong community, an intense sociability that has been given shape through time, an assertion of control over collective feelings so powerful that any expressive innovator will necessarily put his or her content into that shaping continuum and no other. (Keil 1985: 22)

This *a posteriori* logic — that style is indicative of community, rather than the inverse — is the rationale implicit in the revival of regional style (and in earlier revival efforts such as Bunting's) and encourages the belief that playing in a regional style aligns a musician with, and indeed, gives them access to, an older, idealized form of sociality.

A similar understanding of style is apparent in uilleann piper Tomás Ó Canainn's *Traditional Music in Ireland* (1978). Drawing on T. S. Eliot's essay 'Tradition and the individual talent' (Eliot 1932), Ó Canainn argues that having an 'historical sense' is a prerequisite for the traditional musician in Ireland, who 'sees his [sic] performance in relation to that of other musicians who have gone before him':

> His place is among the past generations of musicians as well as among his contemporaries. His performance only has its full meaning when measured against theirs, not necessarily in a spirit of competition: their contribution, though past, is to some extent affected by his. (Ó Canainn 1978: 41)

Like T. S. Eliot, Ó Canainn writes from the standpoint of the critic, the intellectual 'legislator' of taste and artistic judgment in modernity (Bauman 1987: ch. 4). He projects onto traditional musicians the critic's historical perspective, the revivalist's valorization of tradition for its own sake. Yet the great stylists now regarded as representative of regional styles — for example, John Doherty in Donegal, Paddy Canny in East Clare and Pádraig O'Keeffe in Sliabh Luachra — reveal in their playing a far less reverential attitude toward tradition. These musicians pushed out the boundaries of local style, absorbed and reworked outside influences and were more concerned about their standing in relation to contemporary musicians and

recordings than to musicians of the generation preceding theirs, whom they had long surpassed in the breadth of their repertoires of tunes and techniques.

Like Ó Canainn, writer and media producer Nuala O'Connor, in *Bringing It All Back Home* (2001) takes an historicist approach in representing the past as a continuous sequence of events unmediated by the present, and the present as evolving from the past (Benjamin 1985). O'Connor expresses a widely held view in regretting that one effect of the early-twentieth-century American recordings was to 'impose' standardization with the resulting eclipse of the regional styles and tunes 'which made for diversity and variety in the tradition', while in some remote areas of Ireland musicians were able 'resist' this influence and keep 'musical identity' intact (O'Connor 2001: 72). This analysis, however, imposes contemporary ideals and viewpoints upon the past and the musicians who lived through those times. For individual musicians in the 1920s and '30s, the situation was in fact the reverse of what O'Connor claims. Musicians in relatively isolated areas could have no way of perceiving the sum of the diverse styles, tune types and tunes existing in Ireland. Local repertoire and style were limited and, to any musician whose ambition exceeded the local standard, limiting. The American recordings offered a treasure trove of diversity and variety, which musicians hungrily consumed and incorporated into their own playing, as evident in the repertoires of John Doherty and Paddy Canny, for example. The ambition of musicians of this period to extend their repertoires and skills is amply documented. West Clare piper Willy Clancy, for example, cycled miles to hear Johnny Doran play whenever he was near Miltown Malbay. Conversely, many musicians jealously guarded their music: East Clare fiddler and piper Martin Rochford recalled musicians' ploys to protect their store of music, 'but there would always be the one or two with a quick ear who would listen outside the door and carry away a tune'. For, as P. J. Hayes observed, 'new tunes were scarce back then' and musicians eager to find them.[3]

In ethnomusicologist Hazel Fairbairn's essay on group performance in Irish traditional music, it becomes clear that anxiety about the loss of regional styles is an extension of earlier anxieties about the loss of cultural identity in Ireland. This, too, is an historicist view suggesting that regional styles are 'further back' along the

---

[3] These accounts are recorded in Mitchell (1976: 10) (Willie Clancy); Hughes and Ó Róchain (1978: 113–4) (Martin Rochford) and Anick (1996: 1) (P. J. Hayes). In his introductory notes to *The Floating Bow: Traditional Fiddle Music from Donegal: John Doherty* (1996), Alun Evans, who recorded this compilation between 1968 and 1974, suggests that 'In common with many of the older generation of musicians [Doherty] disliked being recorded, partly because he didn't want people to learn his tunes' (1996: np).

tunnel of history, more deeply embedded in tradition, than hybrid styles of playing. Fairbairn fears that '[r]egional styles are in danger of extinction, eroded along with the traditional lifestyle with which they are integrated' (1994: 577) when that 'traditional lifestyle' had in fact disappeared long before her research project began. Regional styles are drawn into the mythology of a national cultural identity through this elision of 'traditional lifestyle' and 'regional style':

> The intimate relationship between music, dance and social gathering, and their high profile in rural lifestyle, is the source of regional styles. There is an integrity about the practitioners of these styles, who employ a form of musical expression inherited from and evolved among local musicians and players in the family. It is the exclusivity of this relationship between an individual and the music of his or her area which imparts the great value of the resulting musical styles, and the respect and regard they command today. (Fairbairn 1994: 577)

In Fairbairn's writing, regional style is closely related to the nativist utopia of a unified national culture, with its rural lifestyle, integrity, intimacy, inheritance and evolution, and in the 'exclusivity' that command respect and regard. The 'exclusivity' of the individual and the local musical style ignores the impact of recordings, radio and mobile musicians (who included Travellers like Johnny Doran and those returning from working in emigrant centres such as London).

Fairbairn holds that while regional styles may be imitated by revival players via recordings, they cannot survive once the social conditions in which they had flourished have changed. Nuala O'Connor, on the other hand, observes that, as the interest in regional music styles amongst revival players intensified, 'it became possible for regional styles to flourish at a geographical distance from their source' with players from outside an area choosing to acquire a regional style. Musicians from Cork city, for example, adopted the style of the Sliabh Luachra area around the Cork/Kerry border, resulting in a redefinition of the region as 'the musical map expanded' (O'Connor 2001: 73). O'Connor suggests that, even when separated by social and geographical distance, the music 'itself' retains its original social meaning, spiritual power and identification with a particular place and community:

> These styles, after all, are strongly rooted, crafted by generations of living musicians deeply attached to community and landscape, and are heavily encoded with a sense of place and identity. (O'Connor 2001: 73)

O'Connor's logic here is the same that allowed Bunting's transcriptions and arrangements to be played by Cork's middle-class in the early-nineteenth century in the belief that such performances were equivalent in social meaning to their

performance by Bunting's sources. The important point here is the imputation of 'sameness', that by performing a repertoire and style in one context, it will have the same meaning as in another. According to this view, regional style is transferable and in the process the qualities most valued by revivalists are retained. Paradoxically, this is because the music is so 'heavily encoded with a sense of place and identity' (2001: 73).

The acceptance of this mythologizing and the attribution of innate and transferable values to regional styles has led other commentators to take up similarly contradictory positions. An essay by scholar and flute player Fintan Vallely (b. 1949) demonstrates his ambivalence about the 'outsider's' relationship with regional style. Recalling his own musical self-education in the 1960s, Vallely recounts the process by which he learned a repertoire (mainly from books) and developed a style (from imitating selected musicians) ending up, along with '95% of our musicians', with the hybrid style 'reflective of the variety of paths by which we came upon our music' (Vallely 1997: 114; 107). Against this hybrid style, Vallely contrasts local styles, which he likens to local accents in speech and suggests that adopting a regional style not one's own may be socially equivalent to mimicking an accent:

> Apart from the academic, a regional style is of real meaning only to local identity, because only therein is it invested with the experience of its people's earlier lives. 'Outsiders' specializing in it — those not brought up in its locality and tradition — are at their best migrants, at worst voyeurs and sometimes leprechauns. Outsiders whose playing in regional styles is accepted are very often just well-thought-of tourists. (Vallely 1997: 113–4)

The antagonism Vallely expresses here towards 'outsiders' appears directed less at their inclination to imitate — which, after all, is the process by which musicians learn — than at their trespass, which threatens authenticity. Contradicting this view, in the same essay Vallely refers to 'outsiders' who have successfully assimilated. Fiddle player Seamus Creagh grew up near Mullingar before moving to Dublin and in the 1970s to Co. Cork, but is now accepted as an exponent of the Sliabh Luachra style, and as Vallely pronounces, has 'finished up with local accent and song/music style' (1997: 109). The implication is that some 'outsiders' are more acceptable than others, as borne out in East Clare, where some musicians from outside the area have been accepted as 'East Clare musicians' (although not universally).[4]

---

[4] Examples are Pat O'Connor, a fiddle player from Ennis, Co. Clare who has lived in the Feakle area for some years and has made two solo albums that are marketed as 'music from East Clare'. Another is Limerick fiddle player Kevin Carey, who has been playing with East Clare musicians for about twenty years. The East Clare Musicians website states that

Anxiety over the loss of regional styles is also evident in the efforts made to revive them. A prominent example is the work of Donegal fiddle player Caoimhín Mac Aoidh, who regards traditional music in Donegal as both a cultural resource and an economic resource that requires development (Mac Aoidh 1997: 69). As a founding member of Cairdeas na bhFidléirí, established in the early 1980s to promote the Donegal fiddle tradition through teaching, recordings and publications, Mac Aoidh has assisted in the cultural and economic development of Donegal music. The performance group Altan, with its repertoire of Irish-language songs and Donegal dance tunes adapted for group performance, leader Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh's commitment to teaching and the band's promotion by international recording and entertainment industries, has also contributed to the revival of Donegal (particularly fiddle) style and its widespread performance and consumption.

One effect of this global consumption has been to attract 'outsiders', including many from other countries, seeking to acquire a Donegal style: 'the techniques and repertoire are being readily absorbed outside the county and even in the international arena' (Mac Aoidh 1997: 312). To Mac Aoidh, this does not present the kind of problem that it might for Fintan Vallely, because to him:

> Donegal fiddle playing can easily be thought of as a fully fleshed out tradition where the wedded traditions of music, history and folklore remain not only intact, but, are being actively reshaped and passed on. (Mac Aoidh 1997: 312)

The important aspects of the tradition, which are also those that can be 'transferred' to outsiders through teaching, are 'the quality of the music and the depth of understanding and appreciation of where the music came from' (1997: 311). In this, Mac Aoidh is in agreement with Nuala O'Connor that a musical tradition can be transferred elsewhere with its 'wedded traditions' intact because these are so strongly 'encoded' within the music.

The regional stylists whom Feldman and O'Doherty visited in the 1970s were no longer involved in communal music-making, but were isolated individuals who practised a 'solitary art form' (Feldman and O'Doherty 1976: 25). The musical styles and repertoires of musicians who had taken part in that intimate social world were recorded and imitated, but the social meanings of music-making in that context

---

'[a]lthough Kevin is a Limerick man his style and playing are very definitely East Clare' (www.claremusic.tripod.com).

could not be reconstructed in a changed world. In this way, the value of authenticity that is ascribed to regional stylists of past generations and those who have learned from them in the recent revival is an illusory one.

It is inconsistent, too, to suppose that musicians have inherited their style intact from earlier generations, when the musician's art is one of hybridity and eclecticism. This is particularly the case with musicians of earlier generations now revered for their strong regional style — Donegal's John Doherty or East Clare's Paddy Canny (b. 1919), for example — who acknowledged influences from outside their own area, as noted above. Caoimhín Mac Aoidh appears puzzled by the fact that, while John Doherty's style 'may be considered as the archetypal Donegal fiddling, it is, however, curiously unique' (Mac Aoidh 1999: 107). For each of these musicians, the 'tradition' passed down to them was the foundation upon which they built a unique *personal* style that far exceeded the repertoires, skills or imaginative boundaries of their teachers. Although from areas where dancing was popular, these musicians developed their art as individual projects, played for listeners as well as for dancing and their reputations were established in this second activity and through recordings, and by musical authorities whose appreciation was not that of dancers but of bourgeois critics and interpreters, the arbiters of taste for a coming generation of revival musicians and consumers.[5]

Regional style has been identified and promoted in two complementary but very different fields: in the categories of scholars and collectors seeking an ever more elusive authenticity as 'the "islands" of musical tradition are all but rendered extinct' (Feldman and O'Doherty 1979: 17) and as an economic resource, both as part of the state's project of regional development and within the tourism, recording and entertainment industries at local, national and international levels. In both fields, regional style is valued as much for what it signifies as for the way it sounds. Regional musical styles may be promoted as eloquent evidence of the authenticity of Irish culture. Like the remnants of national culture that were sought by earlier revivalists, they are regarded as the remains of a living 'pre-modern' culture in which

---

[5] These musical authorities included, in the case of Paddy Canny, Ráidió Éireann's Ciarán MacMathúna whose traditional music program 'The Job of Journeywork' ran from 1957 to c1969 and often featured Paddy Canny's performances, including his playing of 'Trim the Velvet' as the program's signature tune for several years (Vallely 1999: 51; 204). John Doherty became the most influential of Donegal fiddlers after he was recorded and filmed by revivalists from the 1950s and his recordings commercially released. The fiddle-playing Glackin family of Dublin (formerly Donegal) were influential in promoting Doherty's work through recording and teaching (Tom Glackin) and in performing and recording his repertoire (Paddy, Seamus and Kevin Glackin) and promoting it in radio and television programs (Paddy Glackin).

music, community and place were inextricably bound. Revivalists in the late-twentieth century believed that these bonds, because they have been so strongly forged over generations, remain unbroken when the musical practices are transferred to new social contexts — provided that those outsiders who adopt these practices have the capacity to assimilate, to adopt the 'local accent'. Who has that capacity, however, remains ambiguous, as Vallely's remarks about migrants, voyeurs, leprechauns and tourists indicate (Vallely 1997: 113–4).

In a paper on regional style, Caoimhín Mac Aoidh complains of a hierarchy that positions Donegal at the bottom and Clare at the top, a situation he attributes largely to Irish radio and television producers who favoured Clare music (Mac Aoidh 1997).[6] While this situation has been true until the recent past, the over-development of tourism in West Clare and the passing of the last of that area's great stylists (Bobby Casey, John Kelly, Junior Crehan) have sent those seeking a regional style to other areas, including East Clare.

Music-making in East Clare was first identified as a regional style by the ethnomusicologist Jos Koning, who conducted fieldwork there around 1975.[7] The term was not widely adopted, however, until the 1990s,[8] with the release of the albums *Mary MacNamara: Traditional Music from East Clare* (1994) and *Paddy Canny: Traditional Music from the Legendary East Clare Fiddler* (1997). Martin Hayes also refers to East Clare's 'regional style' in the notes to his recording with Dennis Cahill, *Live in Seattle* (1999), while in his introduction to the reissue in 2001 of the seminal recording featuring his father P. J. Hayes and uncle Paddy Canny, he holds it to be 'the definitive recording of the east Clare style of music'.[9] At the time of its release in 1959, this recording was presented within a national rather than a regional context, its title referring to the musicians' status as All-Ireland Champions (in CCÉ competitions) and its cover photograph of Glendalough (Co. Wicklow) representing

---

[6] Upon moving from Dublin to live in Co.Clare, I found Mac Aoidh's complaint, if not his analysis, collaborated when several people congratulated me on moving to 'the centre of the music', the place 'where the real music is' (field notes, 20 May 2000).

[7] 'We talked about the East Clare style and he said that before Jos Koning there wasn't any such thing' (Martin Hayes, pers. com., 10 August 2000, recorded in field notes). See also Koning 1976; 1978; 1980.

[8] A cassette recording of Martin and P. J. Hayes, *The Shores of Lough Graney: Fiddle Music from East Clare* (1990) (Ice Nine Productions Ice 003, out of print) is perhaps the earliest published use of the category.

[9] The title of the re-release, *An Historic Recording of Irish Traditional Music from County Clare and East Galway*, is somewhat curious as the performers come from East Clare, West Clare and Dublin, but not East Galway. Other aspects of this recording are discussed in Chapter Three.

the beauty of a national landscape. This change from what was considered new and modern and representative of Irish cultural creativity generally, to representations of an 'historic' and particular (if vaguely defined) area, is suggestive of the historicist view in which regional style is associated with a particular place and time, from which the present version of East Clare style is derived and to which it is seamlessly attached, despite major changes in the music's social meaning and the fact that scarcely any of the area's young people continued to play music from the late 1970s to the late 1990s.

'East Clare music' and 'East Clare style' are useful categories with which to promote that music to the increasingly specialized tastes of international consumers of recordings, to compete for tourists and funding from state institutions, or to market performance and teaching programs for concert tours, festivals or local schools. All are incentives for musicians to define their music in relation to a regional style. Mary MacNamara (b. 1959) and Martin Hayes (b. 1961) link their understanding of East Clare music to a particular topography, time and aesthetic as well as to stylistic features, while at the same time expressing ambivalence about the accuracy and usefulness of the term. According to Martin Hayes:

> There were many local players, but they played in very different styles, with different influences. [...] It was more a label of convenience to distinguish the local playing from that of West Clare. (Martin Hayes, pers. com., 10 August 2000)

East Clare style is a contemporary category for musical performance related to a particular topographical landscape and to an earlier, idealized social landscape and thus can only be shared in the performance of the very few survivors among the older musicians, or recordings of their playing, or through musicians like Mary and Martin who learned from that generation of players. As a musical category it is also ambiguous in the geographical area it covers and in the style it refers to (Hayes 2001: 3). Nevertheless, it allows both musicians to identify their music in a national and international market. The concept of place is crucial to this process and to their understanding of their music's origins and characteristics.

7.2   Locating home in East Clare

> All week, window boxes of brightly coloured flowers have been appearing in Main Street, giving Tulla a picture-book quaintness. Summer is officially in, season of school holidays, festivals and tourists. Workmen have been disembowelling the wall outside the library and stuffing it with soil.

Yesterday a large rock arrived on the back of a truck and the men cemented it in place and swathed it in polythene. Marina from the garden shop planted seedlings around the base. The Englishman who works on the [work for the dole] scheme has been zapping weeds and mowing the grass on the fair green next to the library, while other men have hung bunting in blue and gold or gold and maroon diagonally across the street. This morning I found the rock had been gift-wrapped in a white sheet tied with maroon and gold ribbons that match the colours of Marina's flowers. In the evening, the gardaí — both wearing uniforms, for a change — planted 'no parking' cones along the street as a van drew up and more men set up a microphone and speakers. People appeared from doorways and out of cars and stood along the street, huddling against the northwest wind that cut straight from the Arctic to 'The Windswept Hill'.[10]

The Tulla Pipe Band,[11] uniformed in spats, kilts, blazers and pom-pommed hats in colours that matched the flowers and the ribbons and the bunting, straggled up the street from the chip shop, 'Scotland the Brave' unravelling ahead of them. Once the official cavalcade had disgorged its politicians, the priest, the politicians and the school principal made speeches. Minister Síle de Valera cut the ribbons to reveal the Millennium Stone engraved with Tulla's newly designed coat of arms: shield charged with lion rampant, supported by man with hurley (dexter) and woman with concertina (sinister), Hill of Tulla and cross ensigned. As soon as the official cars departed, the spectators packed into Doran's pub for warmth and refreshment, music and set dancing provided by Tulla's Millennium Committee. (Edited field notes, June 2000)

The unveiling of the Tulla Millennium Stone in June 2000 celebrated a sense of place using emblems of national, regional and local cultural identity. The maroon (more correctly 'claret') and gold of the ribbons and flowers represented Tulla's strongly supported Gaelic Athletics Association (GAA),[12] while some of the bunting hanging across the street (like the water pump and the hardware shop's window display) were in the gold and blue county colours. Síle de Valera, like her grandfather Éamon de Valera, was the TD (member of parliament) for Clare and a member of the

[10] 'Tulla: The windswept hill' was the caption on signs that appeared in spring, 2000 on the three main roads into Tulla, Co. Clare, where (with the help of musician Mary MacNamara and her family) I had made my temporary home at the top of that windy hill. The phrase derives from a well-known song ('On the windswept hill of Tulla, where the Claremen place their dead') commemorating legendary Clare hurler, Dr Thomas Daly, who was buried in the Tulla graveyard on the crown of the hill (the name Tulla derives from the Irish word for hill, the full name thought to have been Hill of the Apostles or Hill of the Bishops, after the seventh-century monastery from which the settlement grew). Tulla's primary school bears the name of the settlement's founder, St Mochulla (www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/places/tulla_history.htm).

[11] The bagpipes played by pipe bands are known as the war pipes and are similar to Scottish highland pipes. In 1971 they were much more popular than the uilleann pipes in Ireland, with over 250 bands and 3000 players (Breathnach 1977: 78).

[12] Tulla's Gaelic Athletics Association (GAA) was founded within months of the national organization's establishment in 1884 (Moloney, T. 1987). The game of hurling, promoted by the GAA as an Irish alternative to English games, inspires fervent support in Co. Clare. At the school gate of the Tulla National School I observed many of the children carrying a hurley or a musical instrument, or both.

governing Fianna Fáil party that he founded. The symbols of church and state, nation and county, men and women, sport and music, suggest a stable community integrated within a national culture (Images 8–15).

At moments when community is celebrated, it seems inclusive and representative; indeed, such ceremonies act 'like batteries which store and recharge the sense of communality' (Featherstone 1996: 52). The process of defining community, however, is necessarily one of exclusion. In Tulla, now a fast-growing dormitory town after 150 years of decline,[13] there were many 'strangers' whose presence was not registered in these celebrations and who did not participate in them: the Englishman who fixed computers, the commuters to Ennis, Shannon and Limerick who lived in expensive new houses on the outskirts of the village, the Italian family in the chip shop, the retired German woman who had renovated a cottage opposite the school, the English 'alternatives' who lived in caravans by the lake, the Dutch woman who sold home-baked rye bread, and many others, including myself. Those regarded as Tulla's ' locals' were also connected to other worlds, many travelling daily to urban workplaces or having returned from working in America or England or Dublin. There was also the long line of emigrants who had never come back and whose numbers vastly exceeded any living generation or even those lying in the hilltop graveyard.

In the 'spatial turn' that currently informs much theoretical work in the social sciences, the assumption that place can be regarded as static and exclusive has been challenged by persuasive arguments that, as socially meaningful space, place is always *already* socially constructed and represented, always in relationship with an external world and thus always hybrid rather than bounded and pure.[14]

Social theorist Mike Featherstone, in questioning the imputed stable, homogeneous and integrated cultural identity of a locality, considers the motivations that prompt people to make such assumptions. He suggests that 'localism' — the desire to return home — has been strongest in times of intense globalization, including the period from 1880 to 1920 (which saw, among other phenomena, the English folk revival, the Irish literary revival and the forging of an independent Irish nation) and the

---

[13] Like most rural areas in the West of Ireland, Tulla had experienced continual population decline, now reversed. In 1996, the village had 716 inhabitants, in a parish of 5,294 (Republic of Ireland Census 1996). It has yet to regain the population of 6,700 it had in 1851, let alone the estimated 9,000 at the onset of the devastating famine in 1845 (Moloney, T. 1987).

[14] Here I draw on the work of Harvey 1989; Massey 1992; Massey 1994; Chambers 1994; Massey and Jess 1995; Hall, R. 1995; Thomas 1996; Rapport and Dawson 1998.

period from 1960 associated with postmodernism, which saw a re-emergence of the vernacular combined with the use of pastiche (as found in Irish theme pub) (Featherstone 1996; 1993).

Featherstone identifies a range of responses to this loss of a sense of place: the 'immersion' in local culture that forms barriers to cultural flows, the retreat to local cultures by middle-class 'refugees from modernization', the rediscovery within the nation–state of regional cultures in a 'refurbished imagined community', tourists and expatriates who take their culture with them, mobile professionals who live in a bridging 'third culture', and 'cosmopolitan intellectuals and cultural intermediaries' (Featherstone 1993: 181–2). These categories are not exhaustive, nor are they mutually exclusive. Many of the musicians encountered in Chapter Six, for example, were 'refugees from modernization' in the sense that they had left urban lives for rural East Clare, but some (like Vince) were not middle class and others (like Kim and Robert) were also professionals whose working lives took place in the 'third culture' Featherstone identifies.

Concertina player Mary MacNamara was a refugee from a middle-class life in Dublin, but in returning to her original home in Tulla experienced a double sense of loss, for the local music culture that had sustained her through years in the city had been depleted in her absence. The following examines Mary's endeavour to rebuild that culture and considers the ways in which her immersion in local culture forms barriers to cultural flows that are inconsistent with her commitment to teach outsiders.

7.3 'The music is of the land and of the people': Mary MacNamara

The landscape of East Clare, with its enfolding green hills, fertile lakes and hidden-away farmhouses, typifies what Catherine Nash identifies as a symbolically feminine Irish landscape, constructed within nationalist discourse as passive, organic and maternal (Nash 1993). Unlike the bare, open country of West Clare, with its seaside resort towns and holiday-houses, East Clare was relatively neglected by tourists until the 1990s. As tourism grows, however, the area increasingly attracts those convinced (or persuaded) that the 'authentic' Ireland is to be found in a less 'spoilt' rural environment. The tourism industry encourages visitors to experience the 'back regions' of Irish culture in bars where traditional music sessions are held. According to the logic of tourism discussed in Chapter Five,

the industry also caters for the more specialized music tourist, promising access to the 'back region' of Irish traditional music. While the tourism and music industries still promote Co. Clare as 'the home of traditional music',[15] East Clare has become the 'back region' of that home. In this process, East Clare music serves the converging interests of a regional economy and national music and tourism industries. The area is now promoted as part of the 'hidden Ireland' that cultural nationalists — most influentially Daniel Corkery in *The Hidden Ireland* (Corkery 1967) — have mythologized as a repository for a pure native culture that allegedly had managed to resist contamination by colonial culture.[16] The area has also become synonymous with a musical style that is promoted as less contaminated and thus more authentic than that of other areas.

> The music is of the land and of the people and the interrelationship between them. It is an expression of a unique place and a flow of history … [Mary MacNamara's] body, through her fingers and through to her concertina, becomes the voice of a tribe or people. (Ó Riada, P. 2000)

This passage from the sleeve-notes to Mary MacNamara's second solo concertina album *The Blackberry Blossom* (MacNamara 2000) invokes the nationalist trinity of a distinct people, their land, and their culture as embodied in woman. Music has played an important emblematic role in Irish nationalist ideology (as argued in Chapter Two) and has also been linked organically with the Irish land and people, as in George Petrie's claim that the cloud patterns and colours of the Irish landscape 'stamped the character of our people with the contrasting lights and shades which are so well exhibited in our exquisite and strongly-marked national music' (Stokes 1868). The perception of a musical style generated by the landscape, illustrated above by Peadar Ó Riada, has also entered the scholarly discourse:

> Anyone who has ever visited east Clare will be struck by the undulating hills of the rich rolling countryside. The correlation between the landscape and the lilting nature of the music is paramount and is frequently cited. (Keville 2000: 50)

---

[15] In an essay on regional fiddle styles, Donegal fiddle player Caoimhín Mac Aoidh complains that 'all persons of my generation learned by well managed Bord Fáilte-ish PR machine rote — CLARE IS THE HOME OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC' (1997: 67).

[16] An example is from the home page of the East Clare Way walking track: 'East Clare is a beautiful and hidden corner of the West of Ireland with a landscape of rugged hills and picturesque valleys […] The region has a rich heritage of historic sites, folklore, traditional music, song and dance' (clare.local.ie/content/32071.shtml/tourism_and_ travel/actuvutues/walking 7 November 2003).

For Mary MacNamara, the musical style she learned to play is 'moulded by the environment of East Clare':[17]

> I think our music very much is a representation of the surroundings. [...] It has that sweep in it. If you go up around Lough Graney, the trees are very wild, the wind is blowing all the trees in one direction … and the music is like that, it has that lovely sweep in it. (Mary MacNamara, interview, 16 January 2001)

This is the 'home' of Mary MacNamara's music. According to this interpretation, the characteristic swing and bounce of Mary's music reflect the mountains and drumlin[18] hills of East Clare, as compared to the 'openness' of West Clare that is represented in music of that area: ''tis a much flatter type of music, but it's a beautiful music' (Mary MacNamara, interview) (Musical examples 33 and 34[19]). Place in this context is a metaphor for musical style. It is more than a bounded geographical area or a particular landscape, however. For Mary, 'East Clare' is delineated as the spatial coordinates of the set of social relations that informed her childhood and her musical education.

Mary MacNamara (Image 16) grew up in the East Clare village of Tulla, where her parents ran a small grocery business with two facets: a shop behind and above which the family lived and a mobile shop, a van in which Mary's father Andy travelled to outlying areas. Like many other relatively isolated corners of Western Europe, East Clare during the 1960s was still a frontier of modernization, for Ireland's economic development at this time was uneven, and the western counties continued to experience a stagnant economy and population decline. Most of Andy MacNamara's rural customers lived simply in houses without telephone or electricity. They dug fuel from the bog and raised water from wells and unmarried or widowed householders outnumbered families. In the intervening decades, many of their houses (now called 'cottages') have been bought and renovated by 'middle-class refugees' from towns and cities in Ireland and elsewhere.

---

[17] From Mary MacNamara's website, www.marymacnamara.com.

[18] Drumlins (hillocks formed by glacial movement about 25,000 years ago) cover some 10,000 kilometres of Ireland including parts of counties Cork, Mayo, Sligo, Fermanagh, Monaghan, Down, Derry and Antrim (Orme 1979: 18–9). Musical styles vary considerably across these regions.

[19] Mary Macnamara's claim is difficult to substantiate, but a comparison of Mary's playing to West Clare concertina player Elizabeth Crotty's (1885–1960) playing of the same tune, the reel 'Sporting Nell', gives some indication of the rhythmic difference she refers to.

Mary MacNamara's parents played music and ensured their children had opportunities to listen to older musicians. Her father drove the family to meet musicians in their homes, in pubs or at gatherings in Lena's pub in Feakle after Sunday mass. From them, Mary learned to love music and to enjoy playing her concertina for others' pleasure; she also learned the rhythms of Irish dance music played at the steady pace that set dancers of that generation preferred. The local style of playing for dancers was unadorned, especially on the concertina and whistle (fiddle players being more inclined to use ornamentation and to experiment with the styles they heard on recordings). Mary recalled the sweetness of the music, the full and informed focus of listeners, and the kindness of their words. It is not surprising, then, that when Mary played as an adult the tunes she learned as a child, her associations were with the hospitality of country people and the landscape of East Clare's back-roads. Mary also preferred to play in a softly lit 'homely' atmosphere of rustic furniture set before an open hearth, and recorded her second album in her own kitchen (Mary MacNamara, interview).

The source of Mary's music was a remembered landscape peopled with musicians from the past.[20] When Mary MacNamara played a tune, she pictured the musician who gave it to her and the surroundings in which they lived. Mary also heard the landscape brought out in others' music, such as that of East Clare flute player Paddy O'Donoghue, whose music:

> reminded me of a stream of water, just running, and when it met the rocks, it just went gently around the rocks, and it just went on for ever … I could visualize Fortane, the area he came from, and the house, and the area where there's a lovely lake at the back of his house […] I had a whole picture of the area, of maybe thirty years ago, the beauty of the area, I could see it, and hear it in his music.[21] (Mary MacNamara, interview)

Mary MacNamara's identification with a generation now largely gone was expressed as nostalgia for the moral and musical values she associated with their way of life. Nostalgia, in its original sense of homesickness, is available only to those who in some way have become outsiders, viewing their place of origin through the lens of distance in space and time: those dispossessed by colonization, for

---

[20] This conception of place as already inhabited has a precedent in the Gaelic lore of place-names, or *dinnseanchas*, which identifies topographical features with historical, legendary and mythological people, animals and events (Evans 1981: 68).

[21] In this passage, Mary MacNamara is describing the 'openness' of Paddy O'Donoghue's flute playing, in which, rather than coming to a full stop at the end of an eight-bar section, as a dance band would, he rolls the tune around seamlessly with an innovated joining phrase or 'lift' (Mary MacNamara, interview).

example, or exiled in the city.[22] Indeed, this was the case for Mary, who had come to identify her music as 'local' only after she had moved to Dublin upon leaving school. At pub sessions there, Mary had been amazed to find musicians playing unfamiliar tunes at a faster pace, in new keys and in what she described as a hybrid 'no style at all'. 'I had to concentrate on holding my own style', Mary recalled.[23] Mary had also refused to change her accent to become a 'Dublin Mary Mac' (Mary MacNamara, interview). Her home in East Clare became an idealized place that she carried with her in memory and performed in her music and speech, but was able to do this only by a conscious effort and by 'recharging' her style with trips home to Tulla.[24]

When Mary MacNamara left Tulla at the end of the 1970s, there had been a thriving traditional music scene among her contemporaries. Returning after eighteen years in the city, she found little musical activity. Mary resolved (as Caoimhín Mac Aoidh had in Donegal) to revive and pass on the music of East Clare with as little change as possible, setting the music back on the path of a continuing tradition. In 2000, Mary MacNamara was teaching hundreds of children from around East Clare (including the children of foreigners who had settled there), instructing them in how to use their instruments and play her tunes and telling them the story behind each one: who had given it to her and where she had heard it played.[25]

In an example of what Martin Jay terms the 'scopic regime' of modernity, which privileges the visual (Jay 1992), place is usually represented as a landscape and

---

[22] Although now regarded as arising from the self-reflexivity of modernity and from the disjunctures resulting from globalization, this longing for origins, I would argue, has been a feature of other eras (at least as long ago as Theocritus's *Idylls* in the third century BC) when population movements produced similar idealizations of the place of origin, particularly in contrast to urban corruption. Historical studies of this binary opposition include Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* and William Empson's *Some Versions of Pastoral* (Williams 1973; Empson 1950).

[23] '[After a few years in Dublin] I noticed that my style was affected a little bit and I had to concentrate on holding my own style and my own tunes together. But I did so by coming back to Clare at week-ends and I played a lot with Martin Hayes from Maghera up until last year. Now at the moment, Dublin has no effect on me' (Mary MacNamara, quoted in Ó hAllmhuráin 1990: 375).

[24] As a mark of her success in retaining her style, Mary was proud that a music authority in Dublin had commented that 'she had the exact same style as when he first heard her twenty years ago' (pers. com., 1 August 2000).

[25] Knowing and relating the genealogy of the tune is important not only in terms of remaining 'grounded' while playing, but as evidence of the musician's own musical inheritance. Accounts of musical pedigree, as noted in the previous chapter, are a continuing feature of live performance of Irish traditional music and in the sleeve-notes to revival recordings and reissues of early recordings.

cultural identities as 'landscapes of the mind' (Said 1990 cited in S. Hall 1995: 181; see also Rose 1986). There are many reasons to visualize and materialize the past. First, because the visual sense, to our print-reliant minds, is the easiest to retain and communicate; secondly, because the visual, unlike the other senses, can be made material and thus fixed. A tune can be heard and mentally rehearsed, but a musical performance cannot be remembered in its embodied entirety. Its resonance in memory, however, can be recalled in visual imagery. In teaching and performing their music to others, Mary MacNamara attempts to contextualize it by referring to the people and places with which they associate the music. By painting word pictures for her students, she gives them visual images that may also act as mnemonics.

Mary MacNamara also encouraged the children to listen respectfully to one another,[26] hoping to pass on to them a musical ethos (aesthetic) that combined individuality and sociality, expressed in the musician's pleasure in playing for others' enjoyment. Through a process of repeating one tune many times over, the strong rhythm and simple, pared-down melodies that are hallmarks of Mary's musical style became embodied so that eventually her students were capable of generating the same stylistic approach to new melodic material. Repetition of thoroughly familiar material also allowed students the mental freedom to experience the tune as a platform for contemplation and emotional expression: through trance-like focus on melody, to go beyond 'material places' to the mind's 'luminous spaces' (Heaney 1988: 5). In this, Mary's teaching style contrasts strongly with some others. Clare-born Londoner Brendan Mulkere, for example, teaches even beginners the techniques and conventions of melodic variation and embellishment, so that a performance becomes an intellectual engagement with melody that produces endless variety. This restless and exciting musical aesthetic is evident in the playing of many of Brendan Mulkere's former pupils, including John Carty (Musical examples 35 and 36[27]).

In performance, Mary used her memories as a means to achieving musical transcendence. In her teaching, she focused on a musical process by which her pupils

---

[26] Mary achieved this by asking one pupil to begin a tune the class knew well, then, at an unexpected moment (somewhat like the game of musical chairs) indicating to another student to take up the tune without a break in rhythm (field notes, January 2001).

[27] A comparison of Mary MacNamara and John Carty each playing the reel 'Paddy Lynn's Delight' demonstrates their stylistic differences. Mary's playing is relatively steady, with subtle embellishments and variations and she emphasizes each of the four beats in a bar. John Carty's playing (of a slightly different version of the tune) is faster and the rhythm smoother (emphasizing the first and fifth quavers in each bar). He uses a range of embellishments and constantly varies both rhythm and melody.

might also access this 'someplace else'.[28] By defining her music as inextricably bound with a particular place and an idealized social life as well as with a set of values associated with survivors of an older way of life, Mary MacNamara hoped to restore the traditional music of East Clare through her own performance and through teaching local children. As suggested in the previous section, however, the 'localness' of these pupils is in a sense illusory, for they include the children of foreigners and other new residents whose presence was glossed over in formal celebrations of Tulla.

Mary also gave workshops at international festivals and a number of the concertina players who attended her classes at the Feakle Festival in 2000 came from outside Ireland (most from England). When she spoke about this, it became evident that there was a tension between Mary's understanding of her music as local and the musical aesthetic that she believed knew no such boundary. Mary worked to overcome this tension by contextualizing her music in concerts, at festival workshops, in sleeve-notes and on her website, again using stories of people and landscapes. In teaching foreigners, she emphasized rhythm and unadorned melody as a path to personal expression and advised those wanting to learn to play Irish traditional music to go to 'small little areas of local music where they're playing their own styles of music' (Mary MacNamara, interview). While sympathetic to outsiders' desire to assimilate musically, Mary was, however, also concerned about the need to preserve the authenticity of local musical style from outside influences, which included that of the foreigners and 'blow-ins' whose efforts to acquire an East Clare style were discussed in the previous chapter:

> people are moving into the area now, and there is the small, little chance that they could affect [the music]. For instance, if you would just think of Feakle on a Wednesday night, that's supposed to be an East Clare session; it's the furthest thing from it, really, you know, because you've too many mixtures of styles in there. (Mary MacNamara, interview)

As with her desire to preserve her accent and her playing style when in Dublin, Mary's desire to retain the aesthetic of 'East Clare music' reveals an anxiety about the durability of identity, a permanence that is unachievable in a postmodern world (Bauman 1996: 18). For Mary MacNamara the confluence of music, landscape and people was located in the East Clare of her childhood. The musical style and aesthetic she received as a gift from her family and from older musicians, Mary now

---

[28] In a paper on 'The singing body' Mícheál Ó Suilleabháin also refers to the 'transcendence which moves the performer into another place' in the creative process and to his own experience in performing 'a sensation of "going somewhere else"' (Ó Suilleabháin 2000: 7).

passed on to others, a project that has become the centre of her life, and her livelihood. At the same time, the demand for Mary to perform and teach her music were inextricably bound to the economies of tourism, regional development, state promotion of cultural initiatives and the national and international recording and entertainment industries. Like the notions of a shared race, land and history that define the nation's boundaries from the inside, the authority to define a local musical style remains with those who according to that definition belong within those boundaries — an argument that is irrefutable in its circularity. The following section seeks to clarify this contradictory notion of place by looking at other ways in which Irish traditional music has been constructed within a discourse of nostalgia.

7.4 Nostalgia and the lonesome touch

The myth of a pre-modern rural Ireland has attracted not only musicians but also writers from outside Ireland. Musicians are central figures in Timothy O'Grady and Steve Pyke's *I Could Read the Sky* (1997), and in Peter Woods and Christy MacNamara's *The Living Note: Heartbeat of Irish Music* (1997) and both texts propose that music is a means of simultaneously expressing and assuaging feelings of failure and loneliness. Like the works of John Berger,[29] who writes of 'peasants' and migrant workers in a losing conflict with the contemporary world, each of these books evokes the alienation and homesickness of mid-century emigrants, as O'Grady highlights when he uses as an epigraph a reader's response: 'You have put down that feeling of terrible longing that I didn't think anyone but me remembered' (O'Grady and Pyke 1997: iii).

These are, however, contemporary works, drawing on the mythology of a deprived Irish peasantry to evoke feelings of nostalgia in their fictional protagonists. What results in each case is an anti-revisionist arousal of nativist imaginings of a once-whole Irish culture, rather than a revisionist dismantling of that myth. In Mike Featherstone's scheme (see Section 7.2), these works exhibit a form of localism that correlates with the concerns of 'middle-class refugees from modernization' to dwell in an imagined rural past, here in the pages of these books (1993: 181).

---

[29] There is also some creative synergy among this group of writers and photographers. Berger writes a preface for O'Grady's book. O'Grady quotes a poem by Woods. One of Pyke's photographs is of accordion player Joe McNamara, father of Christy and author of the prologue to *The Living Note*. O'Grady features in Woods' acknowledgements, and Woods reciprocates in his book.

The genesis of these narratives in ethnographic encounters, which in *The Living Note* were 'subsumed' (Woods 1997: iv) into composite first-person accounts, would appear to confirm their authenticity, but this appearance is carefully wrought. The language in both books is highly poeticized and, like Synge's early twentieth-century Gaelicisms, draws the world of the text into that of nativist mythology. Unlike tourist-industry representations of a pre-modern culture located in a modernized Ireland (the white-washed cottage with ensuites in every guestroom), the accompanying photographs are styled to match the period of the narratives. Their effect, as Susan Sontag (1979) argues of photography in general, is to promote nostalgia.[30] In *I Could Read the Sky*, brooding black-and-white photographs appear to authenticate both the plangent prose and the imagined past of the narratives — Pyke's inky photograph of a placard warning of 'WET. PAIN' is one of the least subtle (Image 17). In fact, the photographs were taken in the 1980s and 1990s and are only obliquely related to the text. Pyke's subjects — harsh, uninhabited landscapes, faces worn by hard labour, ritual objects worn out and broken — resemble those of generations of photographers in Ireland.[31]

Similarly, in *The Living Note*, Christy McNamara's full-frame, sepia-toned portraits visually blend unrelated musicians into one 'family'. It is disconcerting to a reader familiar with McNamara's territory to recognize friends and acquaintances rendered old and worn by under-exposed images (and only one smiling musician) (Images 18 and 19). Threads of stories are half-recognized, the narrative's ambiguously fictional lives revealing the *mis*representation of the whole text as *the* story of mid-century Ireland, in which the social changes of seventy years are blended into one story of emigration. It is a man's story, too: women appear mainly in the photographs.[32]

---

[30] In a chapter of *On Photography* concerning 'Melancholy objects', Sontag writes: 'As the fascination that photographs exercise is a reminder of death, it is also an invitation to sentimentality. Photographs turn the past into an object of tender regard, scrambling moral distinctions and disarming historical judgments by the generalized pathos of looking at time past' (1979: 71). This, I would argue, is the narrative strategy of the photographs in the two books discussed here.

[31] Photographic representations of Ireland, especially the work of photographers with artistic aspirations, have focused on images evoking pre-modernity in rural scenes and lives. Since the 1970s, when such images became more difficult to find, photographers have achieved similar results by means of unreferenced juxtapositions of contemporary and historical photographers, as in Liam Mac Con Iomaire's *Proverbs of Ireland* (Mac Con Iomaire 1988), or grainy black-and-white images of poverty, isolation and ritual, as in Fergus Bourke's photographs in Edna O'Brien's *Mother Ireland* (O'Brien 1976).

[32] This representation of women provides some support for Lucy Green's argument that women musicians are accepted largely in terms of their 'bodily display' (Green 1997: 50) as do Oriel's comments, quoted in Chapter Six, Section 6.6.

In *The Living Note*, this gathering of many stories into the strands of a single narrative replicates the continuity of an organic oral tradition that is one of the enduring myths of Irish traditional music. Woods distinguishes between the process of music-making within an oral tradition and inferior versions played by foreigners, whose inauthenticity is apparent in the space they occupy (the lounge, a place for women), their versions of tunes (learned from recordings) and their mimicry (demonstrating their inability to generate a local or personal style):

> There was a crowd of Germans in the lounge, playing 'The Morning Star', 'The Fisherman's Lilt' and 'The Drunken Landlady' in the settings they'd lifted from a Bothy Band recording, behind them a bodhrán rattling like calf nuts in a bucket. (Woods 1997: 150)

When 'the [real, Irish] musicians' begin to play, the audience tunes in, indicating music's role in cementing and performing community:

> They sat down and immediately went from tune to tune in an unending stream of playing … Outside there were faces pressed up against the window. People were banging on the locked doors to get in. Those inside were calling for tunes, yelping encouragement. (Woods 1997: 150)

Woods also suggests continuity with the house dances of an earlier generation, which is probably anachronistic, although it is difficult to establish the period of which he is writing at any particular time. In fact, this episode (minus the Germans) appears to be a re-telling of events on the night, shortly before his death in 1973, when the legendary East Galway accordion player Joe Cooley was recorded by Tony MacMahon for an audience of 'people who had followed the wild call of his music through many a night down the years' and had gathered to hear his 'strong, lonely sound … a heartbeat of the past', while 'those who couldn't get in pressed their faces to the dripping November window panes' (MacMahon 1975). Woods also shares MacMahon's elegiac tone:

> All our friends came back and people I didn't even know. They took turns at playing music, then the floor in the kitchen was cleared and the dancers rose sparks from the flags. (Woods 1997: 151)

The night's music, and Woods' and McNamara's book, end with music seeping into the landscape:

> I laid down the fiddle and listened to him drag the air out into a hornpipe and slow it into a lament that seemed to settle over the countryside, beyond the open door, like a camphorous mist. (Woods 1997: 150)

This circular movement of the narrative naturalizes the ideas of continuity and the correspondence of people, place and music, with which the book begins:

> There was music before me and after me — on both sides of my family they could play. There was music in nearly every house where we came from, up in the humps and hollows, wet, bad land, all bog and lake […] But in the music you didn't rely on anyone else — it was within you and you could take it with you wherever you went in life […] The music was always there. (Woods 1997: 1)

The Living Note has many pleasures for the reader interested in Irish traditional music, especially in its account of technical and aesthetic aspects of the music that have rarely been discussed elsewhere. Contradicting historical evidence, however, Woods nourishes the myth that 'the music was always there', analogous to the way that modern nationalist movements have sought to establish cultural continuity retrospectively (Hobsbawm 1990; Smith, A. D. 1991).

As music historian Reg Hall argues, '[m]usic-making and dancing, seen in the light of the complexities of rural family and rural community life, could not have been the generalised social activity implied by romantic literary sources and reiterated now in popular writing' (1999: 77). Hall's account of the unevenness of participation due to differences between and within communities according to complex status hierarchies and social taboos is borne out by Jos Koning's research in East Clare during the 1970s. Koning notes, for example, that 'strong farmers' did not drink in pubs along with 'small farmers' and that paid gigs invariably went to musicians belonging to their social group. Nor were traditional music or musicians during the period of his informants' youth (the 1920s to the 1940s) universally respected, according to Martin Hayes who, along with his father PJoe, was one of Koning's informants:

> … the music had come to represent a past of both ignorance and poverty. It was looked down upon and was seen to symbolize the lack of progress from which the nation was seeking to emerge […] there was very little recognition and a lot of ridicule. (Hayes 2001: 3).

It is also notable that the most widely regarded musicians in that area all belonged to the class of 'strong' farmers (who owned larger, more productive properties) and had opportunities for musical leadership (P. J. Hayes), international performance (Paddy Canny), teaching (Vincent Griffin) and recordings of their solo performance (all three). Indeed, these were the only musicians from that social category whom Koning encountered in his study (1976: 106–58).

Both O'Grady and Woods attempt to historicize Irish traditional music within the context of cultural nationalism's failed project, each evoking the emotional and psychic damage to individual lives wrought by that failure. What they produce, however, is a further mythologizing through the lens of nostalgia. Cultural nationalist ideology had converted an earlier generation's nostalgia into an aspiration — the hope of a national territory and unified culture, the creation of an Ireland in which emigration was no longer necessary, nor desirable — which was invalidated by the failure of that aspiration in the years of self-sufficient poverty between the 1930s and the 1960s. In these most recent literary and visual representations of that period, this aspiration has been replaced by a longing for that longing, for the presumed authenticity of that emotion. This, according to Susan Stewart's influential analysis, is the paradigm of nostalgia:

> Nostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience. Rather, it remains behind and before that experience. Nostalgia, like any form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack […] This point of desire which the nostalgic seeks is in fact the absence that is the very generating mechanism of desire … nostalgia is the desire for desire. (Stewart 1984: 23)

Most accounts of modernist nostalgia interpret it, like Stewart, as a 'kind of useless' form of memory that cannot illuminate or transform the present (hooks 1990: 147); but all nostalgic narratives are not equivalent. Narratives of the past differ in the nature of their omissions, in whether they seek continuity through retreat or retrieval (the latter opening up possibilities for productive action) and in where they locate the cause of discontinuity (Tannock 1995).

The term 'nostalgia' in its contemporary usage covers several different kinds of emotional and cognitive process. The first draws upon the ideal of an organic, unified national community. In a chapter of *The Living Note* devoted to the period between the 1920s to the 1950s, Peter Woods explores the aesthetic of lonesomeness. 'Lonesome' music is experienced as simultaneously happy and sad, is the province of solo performance and, like any aesthetic, is socially constructed. As discussed in Chapter Two, this aesthetic in Irish traditional music has been identified with qualities of the Irish people since the eighteenth century and earlier. Collectors and preservers of Irish music believed these qualities to be a direct expression of an essential Irish character, representing a high-spirited earthiness and a spiritual melancholy that coincided with qualities identified by the English as justifying colonial aggression and paternalism. Nationalists inverted these values,

interpreting the same qualities as evidence of the natural cheerfulness of the Irish and their legitimate grief in response to colonization. In this context, the melancholy aesthetic becomes an extension of that grief, rather than an engagement with the political processes involved in the failures of the Irish state in its early decades.

In the late-twentieth century, the dualism of earthiness and spirituality was retrieved as part of the most recent phase in the revival of Irish traditional music. In each of the texts discussed above, the narrative explicates these twin qualities, which are reinforced in the graininess of photographs and the plangent tone of the narrative voice. Like some of the musicians introduced in the previous chapter, both authors came from elsewhere to live in Ireland — Woods from England and O'Grady from the USA — and their writing has focused on exhuming and recreating the lives of Irish men like those they had met (Woods through managing a London-Irish music pub, O'Grady during a sojourn in rural Donegal). These stories are retold within a framework that fits the nostalgic claims of nativism. In the retelling, I would suggest, they resemble orientalist narratives that, in valorizing and romanticizing the East, as cultural theorist Rey Chow argues, present the reverse side of nativism or nationalism (1993: 6).[33] Such narratives display all the signs of nostalgia or melancholia as defined by Freud, in which the melancholic, unable to recover from the loss of a loved object, disavows that sense of loss and directs it inward, there to grow as a sense of worthlessness at being abandoned (Freud 1957). The narratives discussed above exhibit just this kind of mourning and blaming: the longing for the dream that their subjects' lives have shown is illusory, and the inability to seek answers for the failure of that dream and the suffering its failure has caused, outside that nativist vision. Thus the writing remains depoliticized, claustrophobic, within the cocoon of a nativist ideology and consequently, 'kind of useless' (hooks 1990: 147).

Nostalgia can be understood and experienced in more productive ways, however. In 'A Note on Nostalgia' (1987), Bryan S. Turner explores the concept of nostalgia and its synonym of melancholy as a metaphor for modernity and modern consciousness that precedes its negative meaning in contemporary culture. Of particular relevance to the present discussion are the positive aspects of nostalgia associated with moral virtues and, in the European literary tradition, with 'the catharsis of human suffering brought about by music as a response to personal grief and isolation'. In

---

[33] In *Writing Diaspora*, Rey Chow argues that Western academics, rather than introjecting their anger at the loss of the 'innocent' East of their fantasies, project it onto the East, which they blame for exploiting their suffering by 'trading' it with the West (1993: 1–10).

his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1981) [1764] Kant integrated the associations of melancholy, nostalgia and awareness into a notion of 'the complex interaction of joy and sorrow'. In possessing 'a sense of moral freedom, an acute awareness of the human condition and sensitivity to the dilemmas of human life', the melancholic could experience the sublime.[34] Turner concludes that, while in contemporary writing nostalgia is assumed to be conservative and backward looking, the concept offers opportunities for 'a radical critique of the modern as a departure from authenticity' (Turner, B. S. 1987: 154) located in an imagined past.

This second and more active kind of nostalgia, like Kant's ideal, provides a transition between cognition and desire which results in the synonymous experiences of beauty and the sublime (Matthews 1997). In this case, I would suggest that the musical equivalent is not the catharsis referred to by Bryan Turner, but a more productive moral freedom and commitment. An essay by Seamus Heaney on Patrick Kavanagh's poetry illustrates this point. Heaney begins with an anecdote about a tree planted in his birth-year at his childhood home. Years after it has been cut down, he re-imagines that tree, not as the material tree of memory, but as 'a kind of luminous emptiness' (1988: 3). Heaney draws on this distinction to contrast Kavanagh's early poetry, grounded in the material, with his later work, in which places are no longer 'documentary geography' but have become 'luminous spaces within his mind' (1988: 4–5). This displacement allows the poet to re-establish 'the authenticity of personal experience', as indeed Heaney has done in his own mature work. This kind of nostalgia is productive and uplifting: rather than a wallowing in personal unhappiness, it produces a transforming awareness of the sorrows of the human condition.[35] In this case, nostalgia transcends the ties that bind it to a particular time, place and experience.

In East Clare, this transformative nostalgia is called 'lonesomeness': the spiritual awakening that grows from an awareness of absence (and by implication, an acknowledgement of the changes wrought by the passing of time). Older East Clare musicians who formed a constellation of mentors around Mary MacNamara and Martin Hayes in their youth had this 'lonesome touch'. The 'lonesome touch' produced *draíocht*, the musician's power of enchantment over an audience that

---

[34] This spiritual and ethical transformation through suffering was the subject of John Keats's 'Ode on Melancholy' and 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', both published in 1819 (Turner, B. S. 1987: 149).

[35] This paradigm is also suggestive of the intellectual and spiritual practices of Buddhism.

draws out of them intense feelings that might be happy or sad, or drives them inwards to meditate upon the memories with which the music was so closely entwined. At house dances up until the 1940s musicians were valued not only for their ability to play for dancing but also for their artistic capacities in solo performance. Some musicians, notably the Tulla Ceili Band's leader, P. J. Hayes, were sought after for their sensitivity to the dancers' rhythmic demands. Others, like Paddy Canny, were appreciated more for their artistry and virtuosity and for the 'lonesome touch' (refer to Musical examples 14 and 15).

Nostalgia, in this second sense, is a reflection of concerns about the relationship between contemporary lives and narratives of the past. Cultural identities do not arrive in pristine packages from the past but are constructed in relation to present anxieties. As Stuart Hall writes:

> Far from being grounded in the mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (Hall, S. 1990: 225)

In *The Living Note*, Peter Woods suggests that the musical aesthetic of lonesomeness is innate and indigenous: 'you could be born with the lonesome music in you' (Woods 1997: 18). I argue that, on the contrary, a musical aesthetic is a social construction; it may be passed on to children as part of their upbringing, but it will not retain the same meanings from one generation to the next because, as social, it responds to contemporary concerns.

7.5   Music at home and away: Martin Hayes

For Martin Hayes, the home of his music was rooted in East Clare, but his sense of place has expanded to encompass a much wider geographical and social area. During his childhood in Magherabaun, near Feakle, Martin had received a few rudimentary lessons and much encouragement from his father P. J. Hayes and, like Mary MacNamara, had learned from listening to musicians of his parents' generation or older, whose musical ethos Martin has identified as playing with 'honesty and humility' (Hayes 1997) and 'with the desire to give rather than to get' (Hayes quoted in Parrish 1999).

Access to this older generation for the teenage musicians was dependent on their parents' values, connections and mobility. The 'place' of East Clare in which Mary and Martin acquired their musical education was a product of a wider set of social relations than had been the case for the musicians they visited in Magherabawn, Ballinahinch, Fortane or Glendree. There was also a wealth of different styles and approaches to learning and playing, from the vast repertoire garnered from books, recordings and meetings with a wide circle of musicians who influenced piper and fiddle player Martin Rochford (1914–2000), to the retiring whistle and flute player Joe Bane (1921–92). A shy man, Joe Bane had not joined the Tulla Ceili Band and had few opportunities to play except when radio recordings were made in the area during the 1950s and when he performed in a Tulla pub in the 1970s (Koning 1976: 164–5). Mary and Martin's musical network was much wider and even as teenagers their connections extended to national competition circuits, in which they had many successes in solo events and playing as a duo.

Unlike most Irish musicians today, Mary and Martin had learned their musicianship with very little formal tuition.[36] Martin's upbringing had other similarities with Mary's, including a school environment hostile to musical sensitivities and a dearth of local employment opportunities — experiences that align them with their musical mentors, whose music was also widely undervalued (Mary MacNamara, pers. com., January 2001). Martin took a different course from Mary when in 1985 he boarded the plane for America. There, after performing in Irish pub bands and experimenting in other musical genres, he experienced a kind of homecoming in returning to the repertoire and style of his place of origin in rural East Clare. His emotional, virtuosic interpretations of tunes he learned as a child[37] encapsulate the paradox of musical tradition: the push and pull of innovation and conservatism (Musical Example 37[38]).

---

[36] Martin Hayes told his students about his early struggles with the fiddle in workshops at the Feakle Festival (field notes, August 2000).

[37] Martin draws almost solely on the repertoire he learned in his youth.

[38] A comparison of Martin's playing of 'The Morning Dew' with any of the versions discussed in Chapter Three reveals his stylistic divergence from the mainstreams of Irish traditional music in his greater range of dynamic, melodic and rhythmic variation and his greater syncopation and use of melismatic sliding. Although the sets played on this recording are generally of three to five minutes' duration, and comprise tunes of the same type, Martin Hayes has gone on to develop sets comprising an array of tune types with links (and changes) of mood and melodic shape, one track on *Live in Seattle* (1999) Green Linnet, GLCD1195 lasting 27.39 minutes. In this, Martin defies the convention established by the limitations of 78 rpm recordings. Longer sets help generate the musical transcendence (by both musician and listener) discussed below.

Martin Hayes has achieved international acclaim as a performer of Irish traditional music, and is widely recognized as one of its greatest contemporary interpreters. Although based in the USA, studio albums, radio and television recordings, concert performances and festival appearances keep him almost constantly on the move. Martin regarded himself more as a global commuter or cosmopolitan than a migrant or an expatriate[39]:

> My postal address is in Seattle right now, but my emotional home is probably Clare… One night in Seattle — I'd just come back from Ireland — and all of a sudden I had this impulse, 'I must go down and visit my brother Pat'…and then I realized, 'You're actually about seven thousand miles from his house!' (Hayes in *From Clare to Here* 1999)

Martin's 'emotional home' was in Clare, but his place in the world was more complex (Image 20[40]):

> [P]lace has become less of a factor in my life, I feel I am part of a community of friends that is spread across the world, but at the same time I feel very close to my roots in Clare. (Hayes quoted in Nolan 1997: 6)

Like Mary MacNamara, Martin perceived a link between the topography of East Clare and its impact on musicians:

> The flowing hills, the lakes, the bogland, woods and rocks, in their subjective impact, have woven themselves into the music and the expression of the musicians. (Hayes 2001: 4)

At the same time, he was reluctant to draw geographical boundaries around East Clare music, which he defined as a 'shared aesthetic sense' rather than in terms of repertoire or technique (Hayes 2001: 4). He also rejected the concept of a single 'East Clare style', pointing to 'a huge variety of individual accents' in the area (Martin Hayes, interview, 12 August 2000). Nor did he harbour illusions about East Clare's cultural authenticity deriving from the way of life of an earlier generation:

> When I go home to Clare these days I see people surfing the internet, watching *Friends* on television and ordering pizza on a Wednesday night. They are as far removed from the culture that produced the music as the people living in Chicago. (Hayes quoted in Rogers 1999)

---

[39] Martin Hayes' case demonstrates the difficulty of making definitive categories relating localism to identity in displaying aspects of each category in Mike Featherstone's scheme (Featherstone 1993: 181–2): immersed in local culture, he was also an expatriate who took his culture with him, a mobile professional, a cultural intermediary and an intellectual.

[40] Catharine Kingcome's painting (Image 20) juxtaposes the various musical, geographical and emotional worlds within which Martin Hayes moves.

Martin was conscious that from 'a cultural nationalist point of view, it was very important for people in this country to claim their identity on their music and culture', and that 'people tend to say that, if you're not from here, you can't learn it, and you don't understand it' (Martin Hayes, interview). Martin did not accept this, suspecting that the fault might lie equally with locals who could not communicate their music effectively. His expanded sense of place and community as comprising musicians and listeners in many parts of the world was reflected in the breadth of his interpretations of Irish dance tunes. While maintaining a fidelity to dance rhythms and the authority of the melody, Martin's performance incorporates an often exaggerated syncopation (owing as much to Count Basie's swing as to the preferences of East Clare dancers) and an ability to extrapolate from melody without losing it (a characteristic of Dublin fiddle player Tommy Potts (1912–88), whose extravagant melodic variations have inspired Martin's playing).[41] Like Tommy Potts, Martin Hayes has been criticized by some critics and musicians for moving outside the boundaries of the tradition.

We all inhabit a diversity of communities (Mouffe 1988: 44), but whereas Mary MacNamara has chosen to focus her musical performance and identifications on a particular set of social relations in East Clare, Martin Hayes's sense of place is mobile and fluid, encompassing a much broader set of social relations and of musical expression.[42] Consequently, the two musicians sound very different (Musical example 38[43]). At the same time, the two musicians' shared aesthetic and musical sources allow them to play together empathetically (Musical example 39).

Martin's definition of music and its accessibility both to players and listeners was, like Mary's, open and inclusive. In introducing his music to international audiences and musicians, he was:

---

[41] The influence of Tommy Potts and Count Basie are quoted on the East Clare Musicians website and authorized by Martin Hayes (www.claremusic.tripod.com/martin_hayes.htm).

[42] The cultural identity of the Irish outside Ireland is now almost universally represented as diasporic in both scholarly and popular writing, yet this term, despite its more nuanced theorization by Avtah Brah as 'diaspora space' (Brah 1996), remains tied in the popular imagination to an essentialist understanding of Irishness as linked to the nation — and I include here Kearney's idea of the 'fifth province' of Ireland representing a cosmopolitan Irishness (Kearney 1997: Ch. 6). Because of this connotation I have avoided using the term in discussions of theories of identity and place in relation to Irishness.

[43] In comparison to Martin Hayes' version of 'Rolling in the Barrel', Mary MacNamara's style features much less rhythmic, dynamic and melodic variation and less embellishment of the melody. Note also that while Mary reproduces in its entirety the set of tunes from Paddy Canny and P. J. Hayes' 1958 recording, *All-Ireland Champions — Violin*, Martin creates his own set.

trying to develop a language around it, that helps translate meaning and feeling and expression, and allows people to be inside the music without the benefit of the social context, that fosters it in the first place […] it would be very important for me to explain the thought process and the place that music occupies in peoples' lives here, so that people can understand it. (Martin Hayes, interview)

Like Mary MacNamara, Martin Hayes endeavoured to open up his music to 'outsider' musicians, a category to which almost all his students (at summer schools and workshops in Ireland, the USA, Europe and Australia) belonged. Like Mary, he focused on the unadorned melody as the authoritative source and the vehicle for personal expression. Expressiveness was valued by listeners of his father's generation: 'it had to be played from the heart, they wanted tunes that spoke to their feelings … it was often spoken of, and when music did not have feeling it was criticized' (Hayes 2001: 4).

A musician's ability to play with feeling was a *shared* aesthetic through which a musician could take the listener 'someplace else'. The aesthetic of lonesome*s* emphasizes the music's spiritual or magical qualities (draíocht).[44] In the notes to his 1997 album *The Lonesome Touch*, Martin Hayes writes:

> The word lonesome expresses a sadness, a blue note, a sour note. Even though the music bears the trace of struggle and of pain, it is also the means of uplift, transcendence to joy and celebration. Meeting and experiencing sadness or tragedy in art, literature or music is very often the transformation of that experience to its corresponding opposite, the release of joy and freedom. (Hayes 1997)

On the fiddle, the lonesome touch is closely related to the use of changing dynamics (unusual in Irish traditional music generally) and the melismatic sliding on to notes that, as suggested in Chapter Three, may be related to jazz-based genres and to feelings of loss and loneliness during the decades when rural Ireland was continually depleted by poverty and emigration, and when musicians' social role had diminished. This aesthetic was not necessarily one that had been passed down from preceding generations, however: Paddy Canny, whose music is renowned for this lonesome touch, has said that his father did not play in that way (Canny quoted in Vallely 1999: 51). The lonesome touch can also be heard in gentle, unembellished

---

[44] This aesthetic has been identified in other regional musical styles in Ireland — Feldman mentions the 'lonely remote quality' of John Doherty's playing (1976: 48) — and elsewhere, as in the 'high lonesome sound' of 'old timey' fiddle playing and Cajun music in the USA (see Emoff 1998), an aesthetic associated with cultural isolation and a sense of loss and valued for its emotional expressiveness. It is also a quality often referred to in Afro–American musical genres (Small 1987).

melody played at a steady pace, with space (that is, time) between the notes, silences in which absences can be felt, inspiring listeners to feel sadness or joy, or both. Mary MacNamara's concertina music is widely praised for these qualities.

In teaching, Martin Hayes, like Mary MacNamara, warned his students against placing too much emphasis on technique and embellishment. He believed that if you listened carefully enough to the music and sang the melody repeatedly, you would find how you want the music to sound. Then, technique would be the means rather than the end of playing music:

> You can idealize a piece of music in your mind without playing it, instead of having your mind endlessly concerned with what it is you should do on the fiddle in order to make a better sound. You need to short-circuit that a little bit and just step out and start creating in your own mind the piece of music in a way that you like to hear it, and then simply setting about reproducing it. (Martin Hayes, Feakle Festival, 10 August 2000)

Like Mary MacNamara, Martin led students in a steady repetition of the tune until melody and rhythm were embodied. Only then would the mind, free of the business of monitoring and directing the performance, open up to allow the personality to be expressed.[45] The process of playing with draíocht, like the process of teaching, involved acknowledging the different experience of others, which might also be expressed through the music. The process was not one of imitation, although that was an early and necessary stage in the musician's journey: '[y]ou can play somebody's music, but it will not be the same or as good, unless you do an equal journey' (Martin Hayes quoted in Vallely and Piggott 1998: 92).

Irish music authorities Mícheál Ó Suilleabháin (Director of the Irish World Music Centre, University of Limerick) and (radio and television producer) Tony MacMahon, who in 1996 engaged in fierce public debate over the role of innovation in Irish traditional music, agreed that outsiders, whether listeners or musicians, may access the spirituality that is communicated in Irish music when it is in the hands of musicians who have both a foundation in a truly traditional 'source' and a receptivity to its spirit, or draíocht (Mícheál Ó Suilleabháin, interview, 20 June 2000; Tony MacMahon, interview, 23 November 2000). What they are less willing to agree upon, however, is the inverse proposition: that, if outsiders may access the draíocht of Irish music, they may also be able to produce it themselves.

---

[45] From Martin Hayes's workshops at the Feakle Festival, August 2000, in which I participated.

Both Mary MacNamara and Martin Hayes appear optimistic about the possibility that outsiders might access their musical aesthetic and experience it as a vehicle for achieving transcendence, not only as listeners but also in their own performance. Theirs are by no means the first attempts to translate Irish traditional music for the benefit of cultural outsiders, although their aims and methods are very different from those discussed in Chapters Two and Three. Collectors from Bunting onwards tried to make the music of rural Irish people accessible to those in towns and cities through the medium of transcribed texts. Writers in the Anglo–Irish Literary Revival translated the myths, folklore and songs of the Irish-speaking West into the English of urban dwellers, aiming to build a national literature 'which shall be none the less Irish in spirit from being English in language' (W. B. Yeats cited in Kiberd 1995: 155). Both projects were imbued with a nostalgic discourse that mourned the loss, or imminent loss, of a native Irish culture and both in turn projected that sense of loss onto the musicians or Irish-speaking peasants. This melancholy was also central to the colonialist discourse of Celticism that represented the Irish as gifted losers, whose spiritual and musical qualities were tied to their irresponsibility and inefficacy and thus disqualified them for leadership of the proposed Irish nation.

Mary MacNamara and Martin Hayes, acting on both altruistic motives and commercial incentives, have endeavoured to open up their music so that 'outsiders' can experience it as a vehicle for personal expression and spiritual transcendence. Paradoxically, their authority as teachers and performers (a status also accorded them by outsiders) derived from a cultural identity that was static and bounded. The appeal for many foreigners and middle-class Irish emigrants to rural Ireland was the ideal of community and performing music socially, as well as the (ambivalent) extension of permission to newcomers to join in. The tension between the welcome extended to outsiders and the barriers to joining in, and the resulting struggle over musical territory, is ongoing. Musicians may cultivate a repertoire, style and performance values that in many ways resemble those of local musicians, but their relationship with them would always be one of affiliation rather than filiation. They could not acquire the authority to play 'East Clare music' nor the status of authenticity, a situation that infantilized the outsiders, keeping them in the subordinate position of learners.

Mary MacNamara said that when she plays music, or listens to Martin playing (for example), it takes her 'someplace else'. This place — whether considered from the inside or the outside, whether as the still-incomplete national homeland, a country in which to begin a new life, a territory within which one can move and set up camp

freely, or as a home to return to at the end of a working life — is one from which we are all in some way separated and estranged. The place we call home is more imaginary than real: more like that Other we desire, that we believe will make us whole. At the deepest level, it's not where you come from, but where you long to be,[46] that motivates us most strongly. What remains of that ideal is a way of 'being at home' that incorporates 'the myths that we know to be myths yet continue to cling to, cherish and dream' (Chambers 1990: 104) rather than a nostalgic dream of 'going home' to an idealized but unattainable place.

I have shown how two musicians perform their music in relation to their sense of place and their relationships with outsiders, one as a returned emigrant, the other as a cosmopolitan whose territory includes his original home. The contradiction between their openness to outsiders and the nostalgic, nativist view of Irish culture that contributes to this understanding — and which in different ways they question — corresponds to tensions in contemporary Irish society. While successive Irish governments since the 1970s have opened national political boundaries to become part of Europe, they have simultaneously promoted an exclusive Irish culture as a brand in the global marketplace. This defensiveness is reflected in national and county politics, where definitions of *whose* place Ireland is have narrowed to the extent that asylum seekers are rejected, Travellers continue to be moved on, and 'outsiders' including returned emigrants are prevented from making their homes in rural Ireland.[47] Such exclusions are a reminder that the way in which place is defined has implications for the kind of society the nation promotes and its relations with the world outside it. Materially grounded national cultures, because of the way in which they are defined ideologically according to specific geographical, social and cultural features, erect boundaries that are difficult to cross over into, despite the warmest of welcomes**.**

---

[46] Here I adapt a line from London hip-hop artist Rakim that Paul Gilroy uses in the title of his essay, 'It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at … The dialectics of diasporic identification' (Gilroy 1991).

[47] The ongoing debate about treatment of asylum seekers can be followed in the *Irish Times* at www.ireland.com. The controversy over Travellers' halting sites in County Clare can be followed in the archives of the *Clare Champion* at www.clarechampion.ie where the Clare County Council's policy of banning 'outsiders' (including returned emigrants) from building homes in the open countryside was also reported on 8 September 2000.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has investigated how musicians who play Irish traditional music but do not identify themselves as Irish understand their relationship to Irishness, an exploration and analysis of processes not previously studied or theorized. The research was designed to interrogate frameworks for theorizing the articulation of music, identity and nation. The first chapter positioned the research in relation to contemporary theoretical models and emphasized the need to understand both music and identity as socially constituted imaginative processes. This diverged from earlier theories and continuing popular understandings of music as a thing that can easily be translated from one cultural context to another via printed texts, and of identity as an individual's progress towards and fidelity to 'one true self'.

Written from the viewpoint that knowledge is embedded in discourse, Chapters Two and Three provided a long-overdue reinterpretation of the history of Irish traditional music from the end of the eighteenth century, arguing that certain repertoires and styles have been naturalized as 'Irish'. Irish music has been regarded as symbolically representing and expressing certain essentially Irish characteristics mythologized within colonial discourse and inverted within nationalist discourse. In this way, a limited repertoire of Irish dance music was thought of as expressing the supposed vigorous masculinity and the feminine spirituality of the Irish people, despite the fact that musical practice in Ireland and among Irish emigrants was not always consistent with nationalist orthodoxies.

What became clear during the research undertaking was the persistence of essentialist conceptions of personal identity and of music-making as they relate to ethnicity, nationality, gender and place. In particular, the concept of a pure Irish culture that discounts any influence of colonial culture thrives, despite evidence of its historical and continuing hybridity. This study has argued that these understandings have been extended into the present and reinforced through the commodification of Irish culture by regional, national and global culture industries (tourism, hospitality, entertainment) and disseminated through recording and internet technologies. Scholarly and popular studies of Irish traditional music to this point have not taken up a more critical position in relation to Irish traditional music or sought to analyze its discursive construction. This is understandable in the case of musicians and scholars who are committed to the 'revival' of Irish traditional

music, a project strongly linked with the politics of cultural nationalism, which has sought to establish Irish traditional music as essentially and uniquely of the Irish people. Nor is it surprising to find that foreigners who are drawn to Ireland by their desire to play Irish traditional music 'authentically' negotiate musical and personal identifications that accord with these nativist views, even when this works against their personal interests.

Acceptance of a nativist definition of Irish music was not universal among the musicians who took part in this study, however, and was notably absent among the youngest musicians. Chapter Four analyzed the musical practices of a group of Australian musicians who did not identify as 'Irish' or 'Irish–Australian' and found critical generational differences in their understandings of nationality and ethnicity. While musicians born before 1970 accorded a high status to Irish immigrant musicians for their musical and social values, younger musicians regarded Irishness as a depoliticized, citational ethnicity, in keeping with their experience of Irish music as a commodified global practice. Studies among this age group in Ireland would produce valuable data indicating whether conceptions of Irishness among young musicians are reflecting the shift in authority from external structures to the individual that have been identified in the debate over 'detraditionalization', or whether, on the contrary, the rejuvenation of traditions has extended the life of nativist conceptions of Irish culture and identity into yet another generation.

Chapter Five followed Australian musicians who had made 'pilgrimages' to Ireland and argued that their identifications as musicians playing Irish traditional music were informed more by nativist discourse than had been the case in Australia. This greater influence was attributed in part to the fact that their status as visitors made them welcome in a relatively confined world of summer schools and pub sessions that was closely tied to the tourism industry and its mythologizing of an 'Ireland of the welcomes' for the consumption of outsiders.

Chapter Six explored some of the difficulties musicians from elsewhere encountered when they settled in Ireland and attempted to assimilate musically and socially. Data gathered during a ten-month period of fieldwork among musicians in East Clare and Galway focused on the experiences, attitudes and behaviours of foreigners playing Irish traditional music. Most of the women musicians interviewed believed that it was more difficult for women to gain musical and social access to the session, especially in the masculine environment of the pub. In one of the pub sessions in the East Clare village of Feakle, foreign musicians were welcomed. It was

argued that, in this case, the musical and social experiences of foreigners benefited from the patrons' embracing of their cultural difference as a part of the entertainment provided for their pleasure. In this, their response resembles what Homi Bhabha's dismisses as 'the exoticism or multi-culturalism of the *diversity* of cultures' (Bhabha 1995). At a second session in Feakle, outsiders intent upon accessing and reproducing the music of a revered older musician acted as gatekeepers to prevent newcomers from entering their circle. Although hostile to more recent arrivals, they were not themselves accepted by Irish musicians and in this their position reflects the often-observed phenomenon in which migrants who have settled in a new country vilify more recent migrants.[1] It was further argued that currently available theorizations of musical community are idealized and utopian and do not account for these kinds of difference within a group performing music together.

This chapter also analyzed the ways in which local musicians perceived outsiders and found that the notion of a 'local' musician was relative to a musician's place of origin and musical mentors. This inverted the situation for Australian musicians who returned home, where it was observed that Irishness (in terms of musical style, repertoire and musical associates) was more generously attributed. Irish musicians who took part in this study felt that foreign musicians were *lacking* in aspects of music-making that they themselves took for granted: the ability to judge the correct way to behave in sessions, to play as if spontaneously or by 'second nature' rather than revealing effort, to play in the 'right' rhythm: that is, performing 'in time' with local musicians and 'in tune' with their tastes and preferences. These judgements had a *legitimating* function that focused on those aspects of musical and social processes that favoured Irish musicians over foreigners. The chapter concluded that Irish traditional music as performed in pub sessions is discursively constructed in ways that inhibit foreign musicians from assimilating musically or socially.

The final chapter attempted to discover what lay inside the discursive boundaries around the performance of Irish traditional music. It focused on the musical histories and performances of two famed East Clare musicians and their efforts to communicate and pass on their musical values and skills across those boundaries. In examining the nostalgic musical aesthetic of 'lonesomeness' with which East Clare

---

[1] An instructive example of this phenomenon is the way in which Irish immigrants in the USA differentiated themselves from African–Americans and became assimilated as 'white' by promoting racial hatred and violence, as argued by Noel Ignatiev in *How the Irish Became White* (Ignatiev 1995).

music is identified, it was argued that nostalgia takes one of two forms: one that longs for a vanished past and another that transforms the idealized values of that past into a means of achieving transcendence. It was suggested that, since this transcendence is accessible to outsiders (as proclaimed by musicians and music authorities in Ireland) then it may also be possible for outsiders to reproduce it.

After deconstructing those discourses in which Irish traditional music is embedded, it appears finally that it is possible for a musician from outside Ireland to achieve the ability to perform music that is not only recognizable as Irish traditional music, but also has the 'heart' that transforms it into a transcendent social and musical practice. For this to occur, however, musicians wanting to become part of this musical tradition must be aware of the self-defeating tactics they often employ and the disadvantages they need to overcome. For adult learners, the process of acquiring aural and technical skills is longer and more difficult than it is for children. A formal musical education is a further disadvantage, particularly if the musician is unaware of this and regards Irish traditional music as a series of simple texts and techniques. By confining their musical learning and performance to pub sessions, musicians limit their ability to develop the solo performance skills that are most highly valued in Ireland. They must also deal with the exclusions and hostilities of both insiders and other would-be Irish musicians, particularly if they are women. Finally, the self-conscious monitoring of one's own performance that marks the initial phase of learning needs to be outgrown, because it inhibits the experience of identification through musical performance, the 'fusion of imaginative fantasy and bodily practice' that occurs at moments when self-consciousness is transcended (Frith 1996b: 124),

There is no material barrier to foreigners playing Irish traditional music, however, and summer schools and university courses in Ireland in fact encourage their participation. The main barrier, apart from time and application, is a product of the imagination: the belief, shared by many Irish musicians and many of those whose origins lie outside Ireland, that Irish traditional music is exclusively expressive and representative of Ireland, and its corollary that only the Irish have the ability to play it in this way: a frustratingly circular argument.

This thesis began by speculating about whether Seán Ó Riada's conception of Irish culture as capable of assimilating foreign influences might extend to foreigners playing Irish traditional music. This power to assimilate cultural difference was not seriously challenged until the economic boom of the 1990s made Ireland a more

desirable destination for those caught in the global population flows of workers, migrants, tourists, asylum seekers and returning emigrants. To maintain the view that Irish culture is to be defined by the nation, the island and the 'Irish people' is increasingly challenged by these movements. The critical question now for Irish people is how to deal with the ethnic and cultural difference that undeniably has become a part of their lives. Simon Frith concludes his essay on music and identity by restating his argument that '[m]usic constructs our sense of identity through … experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives' (1996b: 124). The cultural narratives about Irish traditional music, which influence today's musicians in their thinking about musical performance and identity, need to be transcended in order to experience Irish traditional music with 'heart'.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Althusser, L. (1979) 'Contradiction and overdetermination' in L. Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, pp. 87–128. London. Verso Editions.

Althusser, L. (1971) 'Ideology and ideological state apparatuses' in L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, pp. 160–70. London: New Left Books.

Anderson, B. (1991) *Imagined Communities*. London and New York: Verso.

Ang, I. (1985) *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London: Methuen.

Anick, P. (1994) 'P. J. Hayes: Fifty years with the Tulla Ceili Band', www.irishfiddle.com/pj_hayes_interview.html.

Anick, P. (1996) 'P. J. Hayes: Fifty years with the Tulla Ceili Band', www.irishfiddle.com/martin_hayes_interview.html.

Appadurai, A. (1990) 'Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy' in M. Featherstone (ed.) *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, pp. 295–311. London: Sage.

Arensberg, C. M. (1959) *The Irish Countryman: An Anthropological Study*. Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith.

Arnold, M. (1973) [1866] 'On the study of Celtic literature' in *English Literature and Irish Politics* (ed. R. H. Super), pp. 291–395. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Attali, J. (1985) *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Austin, V. A. (1993) 'The ceili and the Public Dance Halls Act, 1935', *Eire-Ireland* 28 (3): 7–16.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981) [1934–41] *The Dialogic Imagination* (ed. M. Holquist, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Barrett, J. (1996) 'World music, nation and postcolonialism', *Cultural Studies* 10 (2): 237–47.

Barth, F. (1989) 'The analysis of culture in complex societies', *Ethnos* 54: 120–42.

Barthes, R. (1977) 'The grain of the voice' in R. Barthes, *Image Music Text*, pp. 179–89. London: Fontana Press.

Barz, G. F. and T. J. Cooley (eds) (1997) *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1988) *Selected Writings*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bauman, Z. (1987) *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-modernity and Intellectuals*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bauman, Z. (1996) 'From pilgrim to tourist — or a short history of identity' in S. Hall and P. du Gay (eds) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, pp. 18–36. London: Sage.

Bauman, Z. (2001) 'Identity in the globalising world', *Social Anthropology* 9 (2): 121–9.

Bayton, M. (1990) 'How women become musicians' in S. Frith and A. Goodwin (eds) *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, pp. 240–57. London:

Routledge.

Beaumont, C. (1999) 'Gender, citizenship and the state in Ireland, 1922–1990' in S. Brewster, V. Crossman, F. Becket and D. Alderson (eds) *Ireland in Proximity: History, Gender, Space*, pp. 94–108. London and New York: Routledge.

Becker, H. (1982) *Art Worlds*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Benjamin, W. (1985) 'Theses on the philosophy of history' in *Illuminations* (ed. H. Arendt), pp. 253–64. New York: Schocken.

Bhabha, H. K. (1988) 'The commitment to theory', *New Formations* 5: 5–23.

Bhabha, H. K. (1990) 'The third space' in J. Rutherford (ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, pp. 207–21. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994a) 'Frontlines/borderposts' in A. Bammer (ed.) *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*, pp. 269–72. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994b) *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.

Bhabha, H. K. (1995) 'Cultural diversity and cultural differences' in B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin (eds) *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, pp. 206–9. London and New York: Routledge.

Bhabha, H. K. (1996) 'Culture's in-between' in S. Hall and P. du Gay (eds) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, pp. 53–60. London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage.

Bishop, P. (1999) *The Irish Empire*. London: Boxtree (Macmillan).

Blacking, J. (1976) *How Musical is Man?* London: Faber and Faber.

Blacking, J. (1977) 'Some problems of theory and method in the study of musical change', *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council* 9: 27–37.

Boland, R. (1992) *Sea Legs: Hitch-hiking the Irish Coast Alone*. Dublin: New Island Books.

Boland, R. (2001) 'From here to Clare', *Irish Times,* 15 January 2001, p. 9.

Bord Fáilte (2000) *The Fáilte Business.* Dublin.

Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (1986) 'The forms of capital' in J. G. Richardson (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, pp. 241–58. New York: Greenwood Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Bourdieu, P. and J. Passeron (1977) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London: Sage.

Boyes, G. (1993) *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Bradshaw, H. (1998) *Michael Coleman 1891–1945*. Dublin: Gael Linn Viva Voce.

Bradshaw, H. (1999) 'Michael Coleman' in F. Vallely (ed.) *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, p. 75. Cork: Cork University Press.

Brah, A. (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities.* London and New York: Routledge.

Breathnach, B. (1977) [1971] *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland*. Dublin: The Talbot Press.

Breathnach, B. (1983) 'The traditional music scene in Ireland' in T. Coogan (ed.) *Ireland and the Arts*, pp. 170–5. London: Namara Press.

Bringing It All Back Home: The Influence of Irish Music (video recording) (1990) written and directed P. King, Hummingbird Productions. Broadcast in five parts, BBC/RTÉ 1991.

Brody, H. (1986) [1973] *Inishkillane: Change and Decline in the West of Ireland*. London: Faber & Faber.

Brody, H. (2001) *The Other Side of Eden: Hunter-Gatherers, Farmers, and the Shaping of the World*. London: Faber & Faber.

Brooke, C. (1789) *Reliques of Irish Poetry*. London.

Brooker, P. (1999) *A Concise Glossary of Cultural Theory*. London, Sydney and Auckland: Arnold.

Brown, M. (1997) 'Mozart and after: The revolution in musical consciousness' in M. Brown, *Turning Points: Essays in the History of Cultural Expressions*, pp. 138–55. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Brown, T. (1981) *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*. Glasgow: Fontana.

Bunting, E. (c1969) [1796. 1809, 1840] *The Ancient Music of Ireland: An edition comprising the three collections by Edward Bunting originally published in 1796, 1809 and 1840*. Dublin: Waltons.

Burke, P. (1978) *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*. London: Temple Smith.

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York and London: Routledge.

Cairns, D. and S. Richards (1988) *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Campbell, J. (1968) *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cantwell, R. (1993) *Ethnomimesis: Folklife and the Representation of Culture*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press.

Carney, J. (1987) [1967] *Medieval Irish Lyrics with The Irish Bardic Poet*. Dublin: The Dolmen Press.

Carson, C. (1986) *Pocket Guide to Irish Traditional Music*. Belfast: Appletree Press.

Carson, C. (1996) *Last Night's Fun: A Book About Irish Traditional Music*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Carter, E., J. Donald and J. Squires (eds) (1993) *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Chambers, I. (1990) *Border Dialogues: Journeys in Postmodernity*. London and New York: Routledge.

Chow, R. (1993) *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*. Bloomington and Indianapolous: Indiana University Press.

Citron, M. J. (1994) 'Feminist approaches to musicology' in S. Cook and J. Tsou (eds) *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music*, pp. 15–34. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Clarke, G. (1990) 'Defending ski jumpers: A critique of theories of youth subcultures' in S. Frith and A. Goodwin (eds) *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, pp. 81–96. London: Routledge.

Clifford, J. (1988) *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.

Clifford, J. and G. E. Marcus (eds) (1986) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.

Cohen, S. (1991) *Rock Culture in Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making*. Oxford: Clarendon/Oxford University Press.

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (2000) 'Seisiún' (leaflet). Dublin: CCÉ.

Connolly, S. J. (1997) 'Culture, identity and tradition: Changing definitions of Irishness' in B. Graham (ed.) *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, pp. 43–63. London and New York: Routledge.

Coohill, J. (2000) *Ireland: A Short History*. Oxford: Oneworld.

Corkery, D. (1967) [1924] *The Hidden Ireland*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.

Crehan, J. (1977) 'Junior Crehan Remembers' in *Dal gCais* 3: 72–5.

Crehan, K. (2003) 'Bobby Casey: Virtuoso of West Clare', www.irishfiddle.com/caseyessay.html

Cronin, M. and B. O'Connor (2000) 'From gombeen to Gubeen: Tourism, identity and class in Ireland, 1949–99' in R. Ryan (ed.) *Writing in the Irish Republic: Literature, Culture, Politics 1949–99*, pp. 165–84. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hamps. and London: Macmillan Press.

Daniel, A. (1994) 'Values' in S. Bambrick (ed.) *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Australia*, pp. 232–3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Danny Boy: In Sunshine or in Shadow (1997) (documentary film) dir. B. Smeaton, screenplay J. Lloyd, prod. C. Chipperfield and G. Wanifor.

de Certeau, M. (1984) *A Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Deane, S. (1985) *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880–1980*. London: Faber & Faber.

Deane, S. (ed.) (1991) *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*. Derry: Field Day Publications.

Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Derrida, J. (1988) 'Signature, event, context' in G. Graff (ed.) *Limited, Inc.* Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Dowling, M. W. (1999) 'Communities, places, the traditions of Irish dance music' in F. Vallely, H. Hamilton, E. Vallely and L. Doherty (eds) *Crosbhealach an Cheoil 1996 The Crossroads Conference: Tradition and Change in Irish Traditional Music*, pp. 64–71. Dublin: Whinstone Music.

Duffy, M. (2000) 'Australian soundscapes: Yhe connections between music, place and identity', *Australian Studies* 15 (1): 111–22.

Eade, J. and M. J. Sallnow (1991a) 'Introduction' in J. Eade and M. J. Sallnow (eds) *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*, pp. 1–27. London and New York: Routledge.

Eade, J. and M. J. Sallnow (eds) (1991b) *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*. London and New York: Routledge.

Eagleton, T. (1999) *The Truth about the Irish*. Dublin: New Island Books.

Eliot, T. S. (1932) 'Tradition and the individual talent' in *Selected Essays*, pp. 13–22. London: Faber.

Ellis, C. J. (1985) *Aboriginal Music: Education for Living*. St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press.

Emoff, R. (1998) 'A Cajun poetics of loss and longing', *Ethnomusicology* 42 (2): 283–302.

Empson, W. (1950) *Some Versions of Pastoral*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Evans, E. (1981) *The Personality of Ireland*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press.

Fair, D. (1992) 'Irish music: Sessions and session etiquette', *Australian Folk* (Spring): 6–10.

Fairbairn, H. (1993) Group Playing in Traditional Irish Music: Interaction and Heterophony in the Session, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge.

Fairbairn, H. (1994) 'Changing contexts for traditional dance music in Ireland: The rise of group performance practice', *Folk Music Journal* 6 (5): 566–99.

Featherstone, M. (1993) 'Global and local cultures' in J. Bird, B. Curtis, T. Putman, G. Robertson and L. Tickner (eds) *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, pp. 169–87. London and New York: Routledge.

Featherstone, M. (1996) 'Localism, globalism, and cultural identity' in R. Wilsom and W. Dissanayake (eds) *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, pp. 46–77. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Feld, S. (1990) *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Feld, S. (2001) 'A sweet lullaby for world music' in A. Appadurai (ed.) *Globalization*, pp. 189–216. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Feldman, A. and E. O'Doherty (1979) *The Northern Fiddler: Music and Musicians of Donegal and Tyrone*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press.

Finnegan, R. (1989) *The Hidden Musicians: Music-making in an English Town*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fischer, M. M. J. (1986) 'Ethnicity and the post-modern arts of memory' in J. Clifford and G. E. Marcus (eds) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, pp. 194–233. Berkeley, London and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Fiske, J., B. Hodge and G. Turner (1987) *Myths of Oz: Reading Australian Popular Culture*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Fitzpatrick, D. (1984) ''The settlers: Immigration from Ireland in the nineteenth century'' in C. Kiernan (ed.) *Ireland and Australia*, pp. 23–33. Sydney and London: Angus & Robertson.

Fleming, R. (2000) The Future of 'The Tradition': The Influence of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann on Traditional Music and Irish National Identity, BA (Hons) thesis. Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH.

Foucault, M. (1970) *The Order of Things*. London: Tavistock Publications.

Foy, B. (1999) *Field Guide to the Irish Music Session*. Boulder, CO: Roberts Rinehart Publishers.

Freud, S. (1957) 'Mourning and melancholia' in S. Freud (ed.) *Standard Edition*, pp. 243–58. London: Hogarth Press.

Friedman, J. (1994) *Cultural Identity and Global Process*. London: Sage.

Frith, S. (1992) 'The cultural study of popular music' in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P. A. Treichler (eds) *Cultural Studies*, pp. 174–82. New York and London: Routledge.

Frith, S. (1996a) *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Frith, S. (1996b) 'Music and identity' in S. Hall and P. du Gay (eds) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, pp. 108–27. London: Sage.

From Clare to Here (1999) (documentary film) written and directed E. McElwee, produced Gallowglass Pictures, Dublin.

Garland, A. (1997) *The Beach*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gellner, E. (1983) *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Ghandi, L. (1998) *A Critical Introduction to Postcolonial Theory*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Gibbons, L. (1996) *Transformations in Irish Culture*. Notre Dame and Cork: University of Notre Dame Press and Cork University Press.

Giddens, A. (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gilroy, P. (1991) 'It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at … The dialectics of diasporic identification', *Third Text* 13 (Winter): 3–16.

Glassie, H. (1982) *Passing the Time in Ballymenone*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Gmelch, S. (1979) 'Fairs and pilgrimages' in S. Gmelch (ed.) *Irish Life*, pp. 162–87. Dublin: The O'Brien Press.

Goertzen, C. (1997) *Fiddling for Noway: Revival and Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Goldring, M. (1993) *Pleasant the Scholar's Life: Irish Intellectuals and the Construction of the Nation State*. London: Serif.

Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York: International Publishers.

Green, L. (1997) *Music, Gender, Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Grenier, L. (1989) 'From "diversity" to "difference": The case of socio-cultural studies of music', *New Formations* 9 (Winter): 125–42.

Guilbault, J. (1993) *Zouk: World Music in the West Indies*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Hall, R. (1995) sleeve-notes, *Irish Dance Music* (CD recording*)*. London: Topic Records TSCD602.

Hall, R. (1997) sleeve-notes, *Paddy in the Smoke: Irish Dance Music from a London Pub*

(CD recording), no page numbers. London: Topic Records TSCD603.

Hall, R. (1999) 'Heydays are short lived: Change in music-making practice in rural Ireland 1850–1950' in F. Vallely, H. Hamilton, E. Vallely and L. Doherty (eds) *Crosbhealach an Cheoil 1996 The Crossroads Conference: Tradition and Change in Irish Traditional Music*, pp. 77–81. Dublin: Whinstone Music.

Hall, S. (1990) 'Cultural identity and diaspora' in J. Rutherford (ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, pp. 222–37. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Hall, S. (1995) 'New cultures for old' in D. Massey and P. Jess (eds) *A Place in the World? Place, Culture and Globalization*, ch. 5. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hall, S. (1996) ' Introduction: Who needs "identity"?' in S. Hall and P. du Gay (eds) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, pp. 1–17. London: Sage.

Hamilton, C. (1978) The session: A socio-musical phenomenon in Irish traditional music, MA thesis, Queen's University, Belfast.

Hamilton, C. (1999) 'Session' in F. Vallely (ed.) *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, pp. 345–6. Cork: Cork University Press.

Harker, D. (1987) *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British 'Folksong' 1700 to the Present Day*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Harvey, D. (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hastings, G. (1997) '*Ag Ciceáill Leis an Dá Chos* (Kickin' with Both Feet)' in T. Smith and M. Ó Súilleabháin (eds) *Blas: The Local Accent in Irish Traditional Music*, pp. 100–6. Limerick: Irish World Music Centre, University of Limerick.

Hayes, M. (1997) sleeve-notes, *The Lonesome Touch* (CD recording). Danbury, CT: Green Linnet GLCD1181.

Hayes, M. (2000) 'The lonesome touch' in A. Jones and R. Conway (eds) *The Scattering: Images of Emigrants from an Irish County*, pp. 56. Dublin: A. & A. Farmar.

Hayes, M. (2001) sleeve-notes, *An Historic Recording of Irish Traditional Music from County Clare and East Galway* (CD recording). New York: Shanachie Entertainment Corp. 76001.

Heaney, S. (1988) 'The placeless heaven: Another look at Kavanagh' in S. Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue*, pp. 3–14. London and Boston: Faber & Faber.

Hebdige, D. (1979) *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London and New York: Methuen.

Heelas, P., S. Lash and P. Morris (eds) (1996) *Detraditionalization: Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity*. Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell.

Henry, E. O. (1989) 'Institutions for the promotion of indigenous music: The case for Ireland's Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann', *Ethnomusicology* 33 (1): 67–95.

Herder, J. G. (1966) *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*. New York: Bergman.

Hobsbawm, E. and T. Ranger (eds) (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hobsbawm, E. J. (1990) *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hood, M. (1960) 'The challenge of "bi-musicality"', *Ethnomusicology* 4 (2): 55–9.

hooks, bell (1990) *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. Boston, MA: South End Press.

Hughes, H. and M. Ó Róchain (1978) 'Talking with Martin Rochford', *Dal gCais* (4): 112–7.

Hughes, R. (1988) *The Fatal Shore*. London: Pan Books.

Hutchinson, J. (1987) *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Jackson, A. (ed.) (1987) *Anthropology at Home*. London and New York: Tavistock Publications.

Jameson, F. (1991) *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Jameson, F. and M. Miyoshi (eds) (1998) *The Cultures of Globalization*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Jay, M. (1992) 'Scopic regimes of modernity' in S. Lash and J. Friedman (eds) *Modernity and Identity*, pp. 178–95. Oxford, UK Cambridge, USA: Blackwell.

Jones, A. R. and P. Stallybrass (1992) 'Dismantling Irena: The sexualising of Ireland in early modern England' in A. Parker et al (eds) *Nationalities and Sexualities*, pp. 157–71. New York and London: Routledge, Chapman & Hall.

Kant, I. (1929) *Critique of Pure Reason*. London: Macmillan.

Kant, I. (1981) [1764] *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kartomi, M. J. (1981) 'The processes and results of musical culture contact: A discussion of terminology and concepts', *Ethnomusicology* 25 (2): 227–49.

Keane, C. (c1996) *The Tulla Ceili Band*. Shannon, Co. Clare: Chris Keane.

Kearney, R. (1997) *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge.

Keegan, N. S. (1996) 'Literacy as a transmission tool in Irish traditional music' in P. F. Devine and H. White (eds) *Irish Musical Studies*, vol. 4. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Keegan, N. S. (1992) The Words of Traditional Flute Style, MA thesis, University College, Cork.

Keil, C. (1978) 'Who needs "the folk"?', *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 15 (3): 263–66.

Keil, C. (1985) 'People's music comparatively: Style and stereotype, class and hegemony', *Dialectical Anthropology* 10: 119–30.

Keil, C. and A. V. Keil (1992) *Polka Happiness*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Keneally, T. (1991) *Now and in Time to Be: Ireland and the Irish*. London: Ryan Publishing.

Kennelly, B. (ed.) (1981) *The Penguin Book of Irish Verse*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Keville, C. (2000) A Style Recorded: A Sense of Time and Place, MA thesis, University of Limerick.

Kiberd, D. (1995) *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kiberd, D. (2000) *Irish Classics*. London: Granta Books.

Kirschner, T. (1998) 'Studying rock: Towards a materialist ethnography' in T. Swiss,

J. Sloop and A. Herman (eds) *Mapping the Beat: Popular Music and Contemporary Theory*, pp. 247–68. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell.

Koning, J. (1976) Irish Traditional Dance Music: A Sociological Study of its Structure, Development and Functions in the Past and at Present, PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam.

Koning, J. (1978) '"That old plaintive touch": On the relation between tonality in Irish traditional dance-music and the left hand technique of fiddlers in east Co. Clare, Ireland', *Studia Instrumentorum Musicae Popularis* 6: 80–4.

Koning, J. (1980) 'The fieldworker as performer: Fieldwork objectives and social roles in County Clare, Ireland', *Ethnomusicology* 24 (3): 417–29.

Kramer, J. C. (1994) The acquisition of bi-musicality: A journal of studies in traditional Korean music, PhD thesis, Union Institute and University, Cincinnatti, OH.

Kristeva, J. (1991) *Strangers to Ourselves*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kuhn, T. S. (1962) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago and London: Chicago University Press.

Kyriakopoulos, V. (1997) 'Pint-sized revolution: Why Irish publicans are smiling', *The Bulletin,* 11 November: 34–7.

Lau, K. J. (1999) 'Serial logic: Folklore and difference in the age of feel-good multiculturalism', *Journal of American Folklore* (113 [447]): 70–82.

Le Doeuff, M. (1991) *Hipparchia's Choice: An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, etc.* Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Lee, J. J. (1989) *Ireland, 1912–1985: Politics and Society*. Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lennon, C. (1993) *Musical Memories: Traditional Irish Music Volume 1*. Dublin: Worldmusic Publications.

Lloyd, D. (1992) 'Violence and the constitution of the novel', *Meanjin* 51 (4): 751–65.

Lloyd, D. (1993) *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment*. Dublin: Lilliput.

Lloyd, D. (1999) *Ireland after History*. Cork: Cork University Press.

Lyth, D. (1981) *Bowing Styles in Irish Fiddle Playing Vol. 1*. Dublin: Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

Mac Aoidh, C. (1994) *Between the Jigs and the Reels*. Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim: Drumlin Publications.

Mac Aoidh, C. (1997). 'Donegal: A voice in the wilderness, or the voice of reason?' in T. Smith and M. Ó Súilleabháin (eds) *Blas: The Local Accent in Irish Traditional Music*. Limerick: Irish World Music Centre and Folk Music Society of Ireland.

Mac Aoidh, C. (1999) 'John Doherty' in F. Vallely (ed.) *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, pp. 106–7. Cork: Cork University Press.

Mac Con Iomaire, L. (1988) *Ireland of the Proverb*. Dublin: Town House.

Mac Laughlin, J. (1996) 'The evolution of anti-Traveller racism in Ireland', *Race and Class* 37 (3): 47–63.

MacCannell, D. (1989) *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken Books.

MacKinnon, N. (1994) *The British Folk Scene: Musical Performance and Social Identity*. Buckingham, UK and Philadelphia: Open University Press.

MacMahon, T. (1975) sleeve-notes, *Joe Cooley* (LP recording*)*. Dublin: Gael Linn.

Marcus, G. (1992) 'Past, present and emergent identities: requirements for ethnographies of late twentieth-century modernity worldwide' in S. Lash and J. Friedman (eds) *Modernity and Identity*, pp. 309–30. Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell.

Marshall, C. (1994) *Irish Art Masterpieces*. Westport, CT: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, Inc.

Massey, D. (1992) 'A place called home?', *New Formations* (17): 3–15.

Massey, D. (1994) 'Double articulation: A place in the world' in A. Bammer (ed.) *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*, pp. 110–21. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Massey, D. and P. Jess (eds) (1995) *A Place in the World? Places, Cultures and Globalization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Matthews, P. M. (1997) *The Significance of Beauty: Kant on Feeling and the System of the Mind*. Dordrecht and Boston: Kuwer Academic Publishers.

McCann, A. (2001) 'All that is not given is lost: Irish traditional music, copyright, and common property', *Ethnomusicology* 45 (1): 89–106.

McCarthy, M. (1998) 'Music education in the emergent nation state' in R. Pine (ed.) *Music in Ireland 1848–1998*, pp. 65–75. Cork: Mercier Press.

McCarthy, M. (1999) *Passing it On: The Transmission of Music in Irish Culture*. Cork: Cork University Press.

McClary, S. (1987) 'The blasphemy of talking politics during Bach Year' in R. Leppert and S. McClary (eds) *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, pp. 13–62. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McClary, S. (1991) *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minnesota and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press.

McCullough, L. E. (1977) 'Style in traditional Irish music', *Ethnomusicology* 21 (1): 85–97.

McKay, I. (1994) *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press.

McNamara, C. and P. Woods (1997) *The Living Note: Heartbeat of Irish Music*. Dublin: The O'Brien Press.

McRobbie, A. (1981) 'Settling accounts with subcultures: A feminist critique' in T. Bennett, G. Martin, C. Mercer and J. Woollacott (eds) *Culture, Ideology and Social Process: A Reader*, pp. 113–23. London: Batsford Academic and Education.

McVeigh, R. (1992) 'The specificity of Irish racism', *Race and Class* 33 (4): 31–45.

Meade, D. (2001) sleeve-notes, Paddy Canny, P. J. Hayes, Peadar O'Loughlin and Bridie Lafferty, *An Historic Recording of Irish Traditional Music from County Clare and East Galway*. Newton, NJ: Shanachie Entertainment Corp. 76001.

Meek, B. (1987) *Paddy Moloney and the Chieftains*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.

Merriam, A. P. (1964) *The Anthropology of Music*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Middleton, R. (1990) *Studying Popular Music*. Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Mitchell, P. (1976) *The Dance Music of Willie Clancy*. Dublin and Cork: The Mercier Press.

Mitchell, T. (1996) *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop and Rap in Europe and Oceania*. London and New York: Leicester University Press.

Moloney, M. (1982) 'Irish ethnic recordings and the Irish-American imagination' in American Folklife Center, *Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage*, pp. 85–101. Washington, DC: American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

Moloney, M. (1992) Irish Music in America: Continuity and Change, PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Moloney, T. (1987) *The Claret and Gold: A History of the Tulla Hurling Club 1887–1987*. Tulla, Co. Clare: Tulla Hurling Club.

Moore, T. (1891) [1879] *Irish Melodies with Symphonies and Accompaniments by Sir John Stevenson, Mus. Doc. An Sir Henry Bishop*. Dublin: M. H. Gill & Son.

Moran, D. P. (1905) *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland*. Dublin: James Duffy and Co., Ltd and M.H. Gill and Son Ltd.

Mouffe, C. (1988) 'Radical democracy: Modern or postmodern?' in A. Ross (ed.) *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism*, pp. 31–45. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Mulkere, B. (1988) 'A heritage abroad: Bobby Casey and traditional music in London', *Dal gCais* (9): 87–93.

Mulkere, B. (1997) sleeve-notes, *Across the Waters: Irish Traditional Music from England* (CD recording). Charlottesville, VA: Nimbus Records NI5415.

Nairn, T. (1988) *The Enchanted Glass: Britain and its Monarchy*. London: Hutchinson Radius.

Nash, C. (1993) 'Remapping and renaming: New cartographies of identity, gender and landscape in Ireland', *Feminist Review* 44 (Summer): 39–57.

Ní Chathasaigh, M. (1999) 'Modes' in F. Vallely (ed.) *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, pp. 243–4. Cork: Cork University Press.

Nolan, R. (1997) 'Getting to the heart of the music', *Irish Music* 2 (10): 6–8.

Ó Canainn, T. (1978) *Traditional Music in Ireland*. London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Ó hAllmurháin, G. (1990) The Concertina in the Traditional Music of Clare, PhD thesis, Queen's University, Belfast.

Ó hAllmurháin, G. (1998) *A Pocket History of Irish Traditional Music*. Dublin: The O'Brien Press.

Ó hAnluain, E. (1991) 'Irish writing: Prose fiction and poetry 1900–1988' in S. Deane (ed.) *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, III, pp. 814–7. Derry: Field Day Publications.

Ó Riada, P. (2000) sleeve-notes, *The Blackberry Blossom* (CD recording). Dublin: Claddagh Records Ltd. CCF32CD.

Ó Riada, S. (1982) *Our Musical Heritage*. Portlaoise, Ireland: The Dolmen Press.

Ó Súilleabháin, M. (1981) 'Irish music defined', *The Crane Bag* 5 (2): 915–9.

Ó Súilleabháin, M. (1982) 'The art of listening', *The Crane Bag* 6 (1): 59–62.

Ó Súilleabháin, M. (1994) '"All our central fire": Music, mediation and the Irish psyche', *Irish Journal of Psychology* 15 (2 & 3): 331–53.

Ó Súilleabháin, M. (1998) '"Around the house and mind the cosmos": Music, dance and identity in contemporary Ireland' in R. Pine (ed.) *Music in Ireland 1848–1998*, pp. 76–86. Cork: Mercier Press.

Ó Súilleabháin, M. (2000) The singing body: Mind, spirit, and creativity, unpublished paper, University of Limerick.

O'Brien, E. (1976) *Mother Ireland*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

O'Connor, N. (2001) *Bringing it All Back Home: The Influence of Irish Music at Home and Overseas* (second edition). Dublin: Merlin Publishing.

O'Farrell, P. (2000) *The Irish in Australia*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.

O'Grady, T. and S. Pyke (1997) *I Could Read the Sky*. London: The Harvill Press.

O'Neill, F. (ed.) (1903) *O'Neill's Music of Ireland*. Reprinted Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, n.d.

O'Neill, F. (ed.) (1965) [1907] *The Dance Music of Ireland: 1001 Gems*. Dublin: Waltons.

O'Neill, F. (1973) [1910] *Irish Folk Music: A Fascinating Hobby*. Darby, PA: Norwood Press.

O'Neill, F. (1987) [1913] *Irish Minstrels and Musicians*. Cork and Dublin: The Mercier Press.

Ong, W. J. (1988) *Orality and Literacy*. London and New York: Routledge.

Orme, A. (1979) 'Land and sea' in S. Gmelch (ed.) *Irish Life*, pp. 10–35. Dublin: The O'Brien Press.

Outsiders: Irish Music in Melbourne (video recording) (2000) written and directed B. Stephenson; produced Victorian College of the Arts.

Parrish, M. (1999) 'New tradition', *Chicago Tribune,* 7 November.

Petrie, G. (ed.) (1967) [1855] *The Petrie Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland*. Westmead, UK: Gregg International Publishers.

Pringle, D. (1989) 'Partition, politics and social conflict' in R. W. G. Carter and A. J. Parkers (eds) *Ireland: A Contemporary Geographical Perspective*. London: Routledge.

Probyn, E. (1996) *Outside Belongings*. New York & London: Routledge.

Rabinow, P. (1986) 'Representations are social facts: Modernity and post-modernity in anthropology' in J. Clifford and G. E. Marcus (eds) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, pp. 262–6. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.

Radway, J. A. (1984) *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Rapport, N. and A. Dawson (eds) (1998) *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement*. Oxford and New York: Berg.

River of Sound (video recording) (1995) written N. O'Connor, presented M. Ó Súilleabháin, directed and produced P. King, Hummingbird Productions. Broadcast in seven parts, BBC, RTÉ 1995.

Robertson, R. (1992) *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. London: Sage.

Rogers, M. (1999) 'The fiddle prince', *Irish Post*, 30 October: 1.

Rose, G. (1993) *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Rose, J. (1986) *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*. London: Verso.

Rosenberg, N. V. (ed.) (1993) *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Ryan, J. J. (1995) 'Nationalism and Irish music' in G. Gillen and H. White (eds) *Irish Musical Studies 3: Music and Irish Cultural History*, pp. 101–15. Dublin: Irish Academic Press.

Said, E. W. (1978) *Orientalism*. London: Routledge.

Said, E. W. (1983) *The World, the Text and the Critic*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Said, E. W. (1990) 'Narrative and geography', *New Left Review* 180: 81–100.

Said, E. W. (1991) *Musical Elaborations*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Said, E. W. (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Sarup, M. (1996) *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Scheper-Hughes, N. (2001) *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics: Mental Illness in Rural Ireland* (second edition: original edition 1977). Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London, UK: University of California Press.

Sharma, S., J. Hutnyk and A. Sharma (eds) (1996) *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: The Politics of the New Asian Dance Music*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books.

Shepherd, J. and P. Wicke (1997) *Music and Cultural Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Shuker, R. (1994) *Understanding Popular Music*. London: Routledge.

Slawek, S. M. (1994) 'The study of performance practice as a research method: A South Asian example', *International Journal of Musicology* 3: 9–22.

Slobin, M. (1993) *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press.

Slobin, M. (2000) *Fiddler on the Move: Exploring the Klezmer World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Small, C. (1987) *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in Afro–American Music*. London and New York: John Calder/Riverrun Press.

Small, C. (1987) 'Performance as ritual: Sketch for an enquiry into the true nature of a symphony concert' in A. L. White (ed.) *Lost in Music: Culture, Style and the Musical Event*, pp. 6–32. London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Small, C. (1996) *Music, Society, Education*. Hanover, NH and London: Wesleyan University Press.

Smith, A. D. (1990) 'Towards a global culture?' in M. Featherstone (ed.) *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, pp. 171–91. London: Sage.

Smith, A. D. (1991) *Nationalism and Modernism*. London and New York: Routledge.

Smith, G. (1985) 'Making folk music', *Meanjin* 44 (4): 477–90.

Smith, G. (1990) 'Irish music in Melbourne, 1950–1980' in P. Bull (ed.) *Papers from the Sixth Irish–Australian Conference*. Melbourne: Department of History, Latrobe University.

Smith, G. (1994a) 'Irish meets folk: The genesis of the bush band' in M. Kartomi and S. Blum (eds) *Music-Cultures in Contact: Convergences and Collisions*, pp. 186–203. Sydney: Currency Press.

Smith, G. (1994b) 'My love is in America: migration and Irish music' in P. O'Sullivan (ed.) *The Creative Migrant*, pp. 221–36. Leicester: Leicester University Press.

Smith, G. (1997) 'Modern-style Irish accordion playing: History, biography, and class', *Ethnomusicology* 41 (3): 433–63.

Smith, G. (2001) 'Celtic Australia: Bush bands, Irish music and the nation', *Perfect Beat* 5 (2): 3–18.

Smith, G. and J. Brett (2001) 'Nation, authenticity and social difference in Australian popular music: Folk, country, multicultural' in B. Levy and F. Murphy (eds) *Story/telling*, pp. 39–60. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press.

Sommers Smith, S. (1997) 'The origin of style: The famine and Irish traditional music', *Eire–Ireland* 32 (1): 121–35.

Sontag, S. (1979) *On Photography*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books.

Steier, F. (1991) *Research and Reflexivity*. London: Sage.

Stewart, S. (1984) *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Stokes, M. (ed.) (1994) *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*. Oxford and Providence, RI: Berg.

Stokes, W. (1868) *The Life of George Petrie*. London: publisher unknown.

Strathern, M. (1981) *Kinship at the Core*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Strauss, A. and J. Corbin (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Strauss, A. L. (1987) *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

Swartz, D. (1997) *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Swiss, T., J. Sloop and A. Herman (eds) (1998) *Mapping the Beat: Popular Music and Contemporary Theory*. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell.

Taaffe, B. (2002) 'Séamus Connolly: Beneath the surface', www.fiddle.com/spr02.html

Tannock, S. (1995) 'Nostalgia critique' in *Cultural Studies* 9 (3): 453–64.

Tansey, S. (1999). 'Irish traditional music — the melody of Ireland's soul; It's [sic] evolution from the environment, and land' in F. Vallely, H. Hamilton. E. Vallely and L. Doherty (eds) *Crosbhealach an Cheoil 1996 The Crossroads Conference: Tradition and Change in Irish Traditional Music*. Dublin: Whinstone Music.

Tansey, S. (2001) 'The history of the Coleman Traditional Society' pamphlet accompanying *Music from The Coleman Country — Revisited* (CD recording). UK: Leader Records.

Taruskin, R. (1995) *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Taylor, B. (1988) 'The Tulla Ceili Band', *Dal gCais* (9): 51–64.

Taylor, T. D. (1997) *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets*. New York and London: Routledge.

The Irish Empire (video recording) (1995) directed A. Gilsenan, D. Walsh and D. Roberts, script F. O'Toole, Produced J. Mitchell and R. Coogan for RTÉ/BBC/SBS. Broadcast in five parts 1995.

The Planet: Ireland (video recording) (2001) directed K. Long and W. Harding, presented L. Oceans, produced L. Oceans and J. Nicholas, broadcast SBS Television, 25 October.

Thomas, J. (1996) *Time, Culture and Identity: An Interpretive Archaeology*. London and New York: Routledge.

Time Out Magazine Ltd (ed.) (1998) *Time Out Dublin Guide*. Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.

Titanic (motion picture) (1997) written and directed J. Cameron, produced J. Cameron and J. Landau, music J. Fox. Paramount Pictures, Twentieth Century Fox.

Titon, J. T. (ed.) (1984) *Worlds of Music: An Introduction to the Music of the World's Peoples*. New York and London: Schirmer/Collier Macmillan.

Tonkiss, F. (1998) 'Analysing discourse' in C. Seale (ed.) *Researching Society and Culture*, pp. 245–60. London: Sage.

Treoir (1983) editorial, 15: 5–6.

Trivedi, H. (1993) *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India*. Calcutta: Papyrus.

Turino, T. (1990) 'Structure, context, and strategy in musical ethnography', *Ethnomusicology* 34 (3): 399–412.

Turino, T. (1993) *Moving Away from Silence: Music of the Peruvian Altiplano and the Experience of Urban Migration*. Chicago and London: Chicago University Press.

Turner, B. S. (1987) 'A note on nostalgia', *Theory, Culture & Society* 4: 147–56.

Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process*. Chicago: Aldine.

Turner, V. (1974) *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Uris, J. and L. Uris (1977) *Ireland: A Terrible Beauty*. London: Corgi Books.

Vallely, F. (ed.) (1999) *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*. Cork: Cork University Press.

Vallely, F. (2003) 'The Apollos of shamrockery: Traditional musics in the modern age' in M. Stokes and P. V. Bohlman (eds) *Celtic Modern: Music at the Global Fringe*, pp. 201–17. Lanham, MD and Oxford, UK: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Vallely, F., H. Hamilton, E. Vallely and L. Doherty (eds) (1999) *Crosbhealach an Cheoil: The Crossroads Conference 1996: Tradition and Change in Irish Traditional Music*. Dublin: Whinstone Music.

Vallely, F. and C. Piggott (1998) *Blooming Meadows: The World of Irish Traditional Musicians*. Dublin: Town House.

Varlet, P. (1992) sleeve-notes, *From Galway to Dublin: Early Recordings of Traditional Irish Music* (CD recording) Cambridge, MA: Rounder Records Corp. CD1087.

Wallerstein, I. (1974) *The Modern World System*. New York: Academic Press.

Wallis, G. and S. Wilson (2001) *The Rough Guide to Irish Music*. London: Rough Guides.

Walter, B. (1995) 'Irishness, gender, and place', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13: 35–50.

Ward, R. (1966) [1958] *The Australian Legend*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Waterman, C. (1990) '"Our tradition is a very modern tradition": Popular music and the construction of pan-Yoruba identity', *Ethnomusicology* 34 (3): 367–79.

Waters, M. C. (1990) *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press.

Weber, M. (1958) *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*: Southern Illinois University Press.

Weiss, J. (ed.) (1999) *Let's Go Ireland 1999*. London: Macmillan.

Whisnant, D. (1983) *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

White, H. (1998a) *The Keeper's Recital: Music and Cultural History in Ireland, 1770–1970*. Cork: Cork University Press.

White, H. (1998b) 'Music, politics and the Irish imagination' in R. Pine (ed.) *Music in Ireland 1848–1998*, pp. 27–36. Cork: Mercier Press.

White, H. (2001) 'Nationalism, colonialism and the cultural stasis of music in Ireland' in H. White and M. Murphy (eds) *Musical Constructions of Nationalism: Essays on the History and Ideology of European Musical Culture 1800–1945*, pp. 257–71. Cork: Cork University Press.

Whiteoak, J. (1995) 'Hawaiian music and jazzing: Some comments on "Aloha Australia — Hawaiian music in Australia (1920–55)"', *Perfect Beat* 2 (3): 115–8.

Whiteoak, J. (1999) *Playing Ad Lib: Improvisatory Music in Australia 1836–1970*. Sydney: Currency Press.

Williams, R. (1965) *The Long Revolution*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Williams, R. (1973) *The Country and the City*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Williams, R. (1983) *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. London: Fontana Paperbacks.

Wolff, J. (1987) 'The ideology of autonomous art' in R. Leppert and S. McClary (eds) *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, pp. 1–12. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Woods, P. and C. McNamara (1997) *The Living Note: Heartbeat of Irish Music*. Dublin: The O'Brien Press.

Wositzky, J. and D. Newton (1980) *The Bushwackers Band Dance Book*. Melbourne: Greenhouse Publications Pty. Ltd.

Yeats, W. B. (1967) *Collected Poems*. London and Toronto: MacMillan.

Young, I. M. (1990) 'The ideal of community and the politics of difference' in L. J. Nicholson (ed.) *Feminism/Postmodernism*, pp. 300–23. London: Routledge.