Irish Music

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Introduction

This pamphlet is an attempt to provide as comprehensive an introduction as possible to the characteristics and history of Irish traditional music, song and dance, with a particular emphasis on change and development within this tradition. It focuses on some of what the authors regard as the most important issues surrounding this music and draws these diverse elements together wherever possible. However, it has not been possible to include every aspect of such a multifaceted area of Irish culture. It is hoped that this document will merely supplement any previous knowledge and give guidelines towards the future exploration of this material.

Part One

For the sake of clarity, there are four main divisions of material discussed at first: dance music; the harp; song; and dance.

1. Irish dance music tradition

The dance music tradition is what most people think of when they hear the words 'Irish traditional music'. Traditional musicians speak of these pieces as 'tunes', and invariably will play more than one tune at a time. These are known as 'sets of tunes'. Although many traditional musicians today can read music and some will learn new tunes from a book, many prefer to learn the tunes by ear, and this was always the way the music was learned. Certainly, music notation plays no part in the actual performance of the music: you would never see a traditional musician in a session reading from a printed score. In the past, this music was always associated with dancing: you wouldn't have one without the other. Today, however, the function of the music has changed, and many musicians play the music for its own sake, independent of the dance. However, the music has retained many of the characteristics associated with the dance. Some of these characteristics are:

(a) Structure

The vast majority of tunes in Irish traditional dance music have eight-bar sections, which are usually repeated. This structure is almost sacred to the tradition, and even newly-composed tunes adhere to it. The typical tune will have two parts which are often repeated, and can be summarised as 8 bars + 8 bars.

Although the most common (and also the minimum) number of parts is two, there can be as many as seven parts to a tune. The regularity of the structure is directly related to the dance, where the dancer dances a step for eight bars starting on the right foot and repeats it exactly starting on the left foot.

(b) Rhythm

Rhythm is one of the features of Irish traditional music that is most often commented on. There is an internal 'swing' and momentum that make the sound uniquely Irish. This, again, is obviously related to the dance, although it also seems to be something that is inherent in the music itself. This is one of the reasons that Irish tranditional music is impossible to learn without listening to it, as it would be impossible to convey this swing to the person reading the music.

(c) Dance Tune Types

The most popular and most common dance tune in the Irish tradition is the **reel**. The reel is in ∑time, so there are two beats in every bar, and if you watch a musician's feet as they are playing a reel you will see them tapping their feet to these two beats. Each beat of the reel is made up of four quaver notes, giving it this kind of a feel:

Although the tempo of the reel can vary from area to area and from player to player, it is always recognisable. You can hear reels played by Nomos ('The Scalloway Lasses' [track 9]) and also on the *Ceol Gan Amhras* CD ('Montis reel').

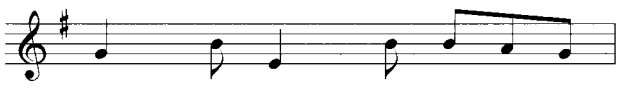
The **double jig** is the second most common tune type. This type of tune is also known quite simply as a 'jig', although there are three different kinds of jig. The double jig has a time signature of ∑ and has two main beats in a bar. Most bars consist of a running quaver rhythm:

Because the double jig is found more commonly than the other two, it is often merely referred to as a 'jig'. 'Teir Abhaile Riú' is an example of a double jig on the *Ceol Gan Amhras* CD.

The **single jig** or **slide** is a type of tune most commonly associated with the Sliabh Luachra area in counties Cork and Kerry. Its distinguishing rhythmical characteristic is the

movement and it has a time signature of ∑ It is normally played much faster than the double jig and is particularly associated with the set dancing of these two counties, as is the **polka**, a tune characterised by its ∑time signature and its driving, powerful rhythm.

The **slip jig** (less commonly known as the **hop jig**) has a time signature of ∑ and thus has three beats in a bar. This gives it quite a different feel to that of the other jig types. The rhythmic make-up of the bars uses a mixture of the rhythms of the other two types of jig. One example of a bar of a slip jig is:



The **hornpipe** has a time signature of ∑ and has a very deliberate and bouncy rhythm. This makes it easy to distinguish from a reel. It is also normally played more slowly than a reel. A very near relation to the hornpipe is the **barndance**, which has the same time signature and the same type of rhythmical emphasis. What makes the barndance distinguishable from the hornpipe is that it tends to have some longer notes and the tune itself tends to be of a more simple and attractive quality. Other members of this hornpipe family of tunes are **Scottisches**, **Germans**, and **Highland Flings** many which are peculiar to the music of Donegal and related to the Scottish music tradition (often incorporating Scotch snaps). You can listen to a hornpipe played by Ceoltóirí Corofinne [Track 8] and a barndance played by Michael Coleman on the enclosed compact disc. [Track 7]

2. Harping Tradition

You may wonder why the harp has not been included in the section dealing with Irish traditional instruments in general. This is because the harp and its music are different to that of the mainstream tradition. The old Irish harping tradition was an aristocratic art tradition, highly skilled and highly trained, unlike the music of the peasant classes, which is what we refer to as the mainstream tradition today. The patrons of the old Irish harp, until the sixteenth century ,were the old Irish and old English aristocracies (the latter group consisting of families who had been in Ireland for a number of generations, and like the old Irish, would have been Catholic and Irish-speaking). Normally, any member of note of the aristocracy had their own harper, poet and reacaire (someone who recited the poetry). Thus, the occupation was very prestigious and stable. It was also normally handed on from father to son.

Irish society changed drastically as the effects of English rule and influence on the social and economic structures of this country became more pronounced. This of course affected the harpers, as it did all strata of Irish society. Many members of the old Irish and old English classes had lost power and influence, and of course land and money. Few could afford to patronise the arts in the way their predecessors had. The result of this was that the harpers were forced to become itinerant. They travelled the roads of Ireland, spending time in one big house before moving on to the next. From the sixteenth century onwards (i.e. from when the tradition began to decline) the harpers were almost all blind; harping was considered to be a suitable occupation for blind boys, as they would otherwise have found it very difficult to make a living at that time. The harpers travelled on horseback and were accompanied by young boys who acted as their guides. Their style of playing was still in that way peculiar to Ireland: they played on wire strings plucked with their fingernails, which created a sound that has often been described as being like bells. The sound also resonated more and lasted for a long time, so the player had to use quite a difficult system of 'stopping' (or damping) the strings so that the sound would not be completely muddied. This is in total contrast to the sound of the neo-Irish harp, which will be discussed later. (Listen to Paul Dooley's recording on the wire-strung harp [Track 1] and Laoise Kelly's on the neo-Irish harp. [Track 2]) At this stage the patrons of the harp were still the old Irish and old English aristocracy, but also, significantly, the new English aristocracies, families who had only settled in Ireland for a generation or two and who were English-speaking and Protestant.

The result of all this change was that, inevitably, the harping style itself changed drastically. The harpers now had to appeal to a much more diverse audience with probably very different tastes, much of it for foreign music. In seventeenth and eighteenth-century Ireland, Italian Baroque music was very popular, and it is thought that many Irish harpers were influenced by this style and incorporated elements of it into their music. The most famous example of one such harper is Turlough O'Carolan, who lived in the late seventeenth & early eighteenth centuries.

Turlough O'Carolan (1670–1738) is often referred to as 'the last of the great Irish bards'. He was born in Co. Meath but moved to Co. Roscommon at an early age, where his father worked for the MacDermott Roe family. Mrs MacDermott Roe took an interest in the boy and had him educated with her own children. Turlough was blinded by the common disease of the time, smallpox, sometime between the ages of 14 and 18. It was after this that Mrs MacDermott Roe took his education completely in hand. She arranged for harp tuition for O'Carolan, and he was taught for three years by a harper also by the name of MacDermott, who may have been a relation of her own. At the end of three years, she gave O'Carolan a horse, a young boy as a guide and a sum of money to help him on his way. Three years was a short time to spend learning a skill such as harping, and it is certain that O'Carolan was not a very accomplished performer, but a mixture of his winning personality and his appealing compositional style ensured his popularity and fame. There are many surviving anecdotes about his life and times which show him as a colourful and likeable character, fond of the drink and welcome wherever he stayed.

There are three Italian composers quoted as having influenced O'Carolan. All three were composers in the Baroque style, which was very popular in Ireland during his lifetime, as many concert records from that period show. The first two were Vivaldi and Corelli, two of the most famous of that period. The third was a man who lived in Dublin for a time and whom O'Carolan is reputed to have met, Geminiani. There are various versions of an anecdote surviving which tell of this meeting, one of which claims that Geminiani declared O'Carolan to be a genius. According to this story, the Italian composer played one of his own compositions for O'Carolan, deliberately making mistakes. O'Carolan stated that while the music wasn't bad, 'it limps and stumbles' in places. He picked up his harp and played the piece back to Geminiani with all mistakes corrected. He then stated that he could compose a piece in a similar style and proceeded to play what is possibly his most famous tune, *Carolan's Concerto*. It is unlikely that this story is true, however, as it is highly improbable that O'Carolan would have been trained in western art (or European 'classical') music, and would have been able to distinguish between mistakes in that musical tradition. The fact that these stories about the meeting of these two composers exists, however, is interesting, and as O'Carolan visited Dublin on occasion, it is possible that they met.

If you listen to O'Carolan's music, you will probably notice that it does indeed sound quite different to that of the dance music discussed earlier. First of all, the structure is not the same — harp music was never, as far as we can tell, related to dancing — and the structures of his tunes vary considerably. For example, can you hear how the material in Paul Dooley's rendition of 'Captain O'Kain' is 'spun out', in much the same way as Baroque music is. [Track 1] This type of music is very different to the dance music tradition.

O'Carolan's fame did not die with him. His compositions remained alive and are still played to the present day. Perhaps the main reason for this is that his music was published extensively in the eighteenth century, and even during his own lifetime, which was an extremely unusual situation for a blind, poor, itinerant harper to find himself in, and is a measure of how popular he was at the time. The collection published in his lifetime is a very important one for us today; it is the earliest surviving collection of Irish music published in this country. *A Collection of the Most Celebrated Irish Tunes proper for the Violin, German Flute or Hautboy* was published by John and William Neale in 1724. The Neale brothers worked from Christchurch yard in Dublin and were very well known in the Dublin music scene. Most of the pieces in this collection appear to be harp tunes, and very importantly, over 50% of them are by O'Carolan. It is interesting to note that O'Carolan's name is spelt in three different ways in this book — 'Carolan', 'Carrallan' and 'Signor Carollini' (the Italian connection in the last one is obvious!). A measure of O'Carolan's popularity in his own lifetime and beyond is the fact that his music continued to be published throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the audience for this music was far removed from its origins. The audience was the amateur classical musician, for which there was a big market. The collections containing O'Carolan's music varied from those for specific instruments to those for the voice to collections of dances. No other harp composer's music survives to anything like the extent of O'Carolan's. There are over 200 pieces in print attributed to him today, while the next most represented composer in print has only eleven. However, it must be remembered that even though he himself was quite famous, the harping tradition was in the last stages of decline in the eighteenth century and, although O'Carolan achieved fame during his travels, he did not achieve fortune; it was still a profession for the relatively poor. The last vestiges of this tradition were brought together at the end of the eighteenth century — in 1792 to be exact — at the very important Belfast Harp Festival.

The Belfast Harp Festival was the initiative of a group of businessman in that city, the vast majority of whom, interestingly, were Protestant. The purpose of the festival was to revive interest in the music of the old harp, and also to promote harping as an occupation as harpers were, at this stage, a dying breed. Despite their best efforts, however, only eleven harpers attended the festival and competed for the cash prizes; ten of these were Irish, and one was Welsh (we know very little about the latter). By far the most significant thing about the festival was that a young man named Edward Bunting, then nineteen years of age, was employed to write down the music of the harpers. This he did with such enthusiasm that he dedicated the rest of his life to the collecting and preserving of the traditional music of Ireland. He published three volumes of music that both he and others collected, collectively known as the *Ancient Music of Ireland*, each with extensive notes not only on the music, but on terminology used by the old harpers to describe the harp and its techniques, as well as observations on many aspects of the music and musicians. However, it is worth noting that Bunting was a classically trained musician, and his approach to the music he collected would have been heavily influenced by this training. He often thought it necessary to change the music he collected before publishing it, which means that the printed version is often Bunting's own and not that of the musician he collected it from. He also, in his published collections, arranged the music for piano accompaniment, no doubt because this would make it easier to sell. It is important to note that the audience for the published music was the amateur classical musician, and in order to make the work sell, it had to conform to certain expectations. However, despite the fact that Bunting's approach to the music may not have been ideal by modern standards, his contribution to the Irish harp music repertoire and indeed to Irish music in general should not be underestimated. Were it not for Bunting's work there would be very little harp music in existence today.

However, there were also musical reasons why the old Irish harping tradition had declined. The instrument itself was incapable of keeping up with the increasing chromaticism of western Art music. The old Irish harp was capable of playing in one key only, as it had no system of raising the pitch of the strings. This made the instrument incapable of embracing more modern musical influences and therefore impractical. As a result, it fell into increasing disuse towards the end of the eighteenth century and by the nineteenth had completely died out.

With the death of the old harping tradition, another was born. What is sometimes known as the neo-Irish harp, and what we today usually refer to as simply the Irish harp, is the invention of a man called John Egan. This new harp was modelled on the concert harp but it did not have pedals like its classical counterpart. Instead, it is possible to raise the pitch of the strings a semitone by the use of levers at the tops of the strings. The new harp differed from the old in a number of ways. Firstly, it was played with the fleshy part of the fingertips on gut strings instead of with the fingernails on wire strings. This immediately changed the whole sound and the playing technique. Since the sound was not as prolonged, the player did not have to employ the same damping technique, or at least not to the same extent. The player was also capable of changing key, albeit to a more limited degree than that of other instruments. Socially, the position of the harp changed from that played by itinerant musicians for the aristocracy, to the realm of the middle classes, who were both audience and performer. The instrument also became almost exclusively associated with females, whereas in the past it was played almost exclusively by males. It is this image of the harp, its music and its performers which, to a large extent, has persisted to the present day.

Seán Ó Riada was an extremely important figure in the context of late twentieth-century developments in Irish traditional music. One of the contributions he made was the revival of interest in the music and sounds of the old Irish harp. Ó Riada did not like the sound of the neo-Irish harp and, since at the time there was nobody playing in the older style, he decided instead to use the harpsichord which he himself played, in the context of his group, Ceoltóirí Cualann. He considered

that the sound of the harpsichord was closer than the neo-Irish harp to the sound of the old Irish harp, as the action of the harpsichord involves the plucking of the strings with quills (in his eyes equivalent to fingernails) on metal strings.

Today, most traditional musicians would still regard harp music as different to the mainstream tradition. It is played mainly in the context of competitions for groups such as those organised by Gael Linn and Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. Because of the sheer volume of O'Carolan's music that survives, the vast majority of harp pieces played today are by him. It is worth noting that it is rare enough to hear this music played in the context of a traditional session, which to a certain extent proves that the music is still regarded as separate and of a different nature to that of the dance music tradition. This is changing, however, and there are many young harpists playing dance music as well as the more standard harp repertoire. Listen to Laoise Kelly's tunes on the enclosed compact disc, for example; she plays three jigs. [Track 2]

3. Song Tradition

Generally speaking, singing in Ireland can classified by language; we often hear references to the English language singing tradition and the Irish language singing tradition. Of course, it is difficult to generalise about something as diverse as singing, as there will always be an exception to the rule. For example, there are songs in English which are in the style normally associated with Irish language song, and vice versa. There are also songs which mix both languages without necessarily mixing both styles.

There are many different terms used to describe singing. These include traditional song, folk song, ballad, etc. There is often confusion as to what particular style these terms are referring to. The point is that these terms are often interchangeable, and their meaning varies, so that there is no fixed definition that everyone would agree with. However, the terms may suggest a certain type of song more than another: for example, folk song could be said to refer (in the Irish context) to a more modern type of song, probably newly composed, and with a range of accompanying instruments, which may include some electric instruments and a variety of percussion. Mary Black could be regarded as a singer in this mould, and two examples of her songs are included on the *Ceol Gan Amhras* CD: 'Wall of Tears' and 'Leaving the Land'.

A ballad, on the other hand, is today often thought to represent a song that may or may not be newly composed, but is also sung with accompaniment. However, the type of accompaniment normally associated with ballad singing is more conservative than that of folk singing and almost always includes a guitar; groups like The Dubliners are typical of this style. The problem of definition becomes apparent, however, when you take into consideration that the term ballad is also used to describe a type of unaccompanied singing that has its origins in eleventh-century England! (This will be discussed later.)

When the term 'traditional song' is used it normally refers to the singing of older songs (that is, songs that are not newly composed, but are traditional). The author/composer of the song is almost always anonymous. These songs may or may not be accompanied, but when they are accompanied by instruments, these tend to be even more conservative than those associated with ballad singing. Accompaniment in these types of songs also tends to be quite sparse. You can hear a ballad of this type sung by Sandra Joyce on the accompanying compact disc [Track 4].

If you are now confused as to the different terms and their meanings, you are probably close to understanding the diverse nature of singing in Ireland, which incorporates many different elements. The next section will describe the two main types of traditional song, sean nós and the traditional ballad.

(a) Irish Language or Sean Nós Singing

The term sean nós literally means 'old style'. This term was applied to a type of singing peculiar to Ireland only in the early part of this century, although it is certain that this type of singing had already existed in Ireland for centuries. The following are some of the main features of this style:

- sean nós songs are usually sung in the Irish language. Traditionally, they have survived in the Gaeltacht areas
- they are almost always sung unaccompanied
- the singer is emotionally involved with the words of the song
- words and music are equally important
- the singer will almost always use ornamentation. The extent to which ornamentation is used depends on the singer's individual style or the region they are from

(Listen to Lillis Ó Laoire's song on the enclosed CD. [Track 3] Lillis is from the Donegal Gaeltacht)

When people speak of regional styles of *sean nós* singing, they usual refer to three main stylistic regions:

- Donegal
- Connemara
- Munster

Because the history of sean nós is integrally caught up with the history of the Irish language, the dialects of the different areas are of course features of the singing of the people from those areas. Therefore, the dialect of the language of the song is perhaps the most distinguishing feature. However, there are other features peculiar to the three main stylistic areas of sean nós singing:

Donegal

Donegal singing is said to be characterised by using very little ornamentation in comparison to the singing styles of the other Gaeltacht areas.

Connemara

The Connemara singing style, in total contrast to the Donegal style, is said to have a lot of ornamentation, i.e. it is very melismatic.

Munster

The Munster style of sean nós singing is described as using more ornamentation than Donegal, less than Connemara. The style is also described as being the closest to 'classical' singing, with many singers using vibrato.

(b) English Language Song

Traditional singing in the English language is generally considered to use much less ornamentation than its Irish counterpart, although this is a generalisation and there are many exceptions to this rule. The **traditional ballad** is a distinctive type of traditional song that has many unique characteristics.

Some of these are:

- the narrator remains anonymous to the plot, and makes no comment on the action
- the language is sparse and economical, unlike many sean nós songs
- the characters associated with traditional balladry are frequently of noble birth
- in general, the words are regarded as being more important than the music because they tell a definite story, and tunes are often interchangeable. The music of the traditional ballad also tends to be of a less complex nature than that of a typical sean nós song
- the singer uses very little ornamentation and like sean nós, the songs are sung solo and unaccompanied

(You can hear these characteristics in the traditional ballad sung by Sandra Joyce on the accompanying CD, 'The Thresher'. [Track 4])

Traditional singing should not be thought of merely in the context of ballads or sean nós, however. Like any aspect of the Irish tradition, it has been subject to experimentation and change, although these two forms still remain the most prominent expression of the song tradition. Examples of some successful experimentation include Seán Ó Riada's two masses in the Irish language (the Ár nAthair which is frequently heard in masses all over the country is an example of a newly-composed air in a sean nós style) and Nóirín Ní Riain's recordings with the Monks of Glenstal Abbey. The basis of these styles, however, is still very much in traditional singing.

4. Dancing

Although traditional music today exists independently of the dance, the mainstream tradition consists exclusively of dance forms and therefore it is necessary to have a brief knowledge of the history of Irish dance and how it relates to the musical tradition. Generally speaking, dancing in Ireland can be divided into two parts: group dancing and solo dancing.

(a) Group Dance

There are two types of group dances in Ireland, **set dancing** and **céilí dancing**. Although most people think it is the other way around, set dancing is the oldest form of the two. Set dancing is a direct descendant of the courtly dances of Europe and is also related to American square dancing, among others. A full set is made up of eight people making four couples, forming a diamond shape. They then dance around in a circle, performing different movements according to the set that is being danced, but the shape and the circular movement is always returned to.

Set dancing was the type of group dancing that was danced at the crossroads by the common people at the turn of the century. However, members of the Gaelic League, an organisation whose aim was to promote Irish culture, decided that this form of dancing was not 'Irish' enough, as its origins were European, and instead invented their own dances which they could promote as truly 'Irish'. These dances were called céilí dances, and were commissioned by the Gaelic League from established dancing masters. Modelled on the Scottish dances of the same name, they were seen as an activity suitable for the respectable middle classes and were also thought to have been a suitable manner for people to socialise. Some of the most popular of these dances today are the 'Siege of Ennis', the 'Walls of Limerick' and the 'Haymakers' Jig'. Although it is easy for us today to be cynical of the manner in which the Gaelic League took the liberty of inventing this cultural activity, it should be remembered that the context of the time was very different. Cultural nationalism was very strong and the Gaelic League was trying to create a deeper awareness of Irishness in the Irish people as well as a sense of pride in their own cultural inheritance. Creating these dances was one of the ways they saw as promoting this awareness and pride.

Despite the fact that they were deemed unsuitable, set dances continued to be danced by the common people. They survived to a greater extent in certain parts of the country, such as Co. Clare which had, and continues to have, a strong set dance tradition. Recently there has been a huge revival in set dancing and it is enjoyed by a considerable number of people. At a typical céilí today you will normally see a mixture of set and céilí dancing, which is an indication of the health of the group dancing traditions of this country.

(b) Solo Step Dance

Like group dancing, solo dancing can also be divided into two styles: sean nós (or old style) and contemporary step dance. (By contemporary step dance I am referring to the type of dance promoted by the dancing competitions.) As its name suggests, sean nós dancing is the older of the two, and is actually the origin of the contemporary style. In the past, when rural areas were relatively isolated, regional styles of dance, like music, were very prevalent. However, today it is more difficult to identify regional styles, as outside influences and ease of communication and travel mean that there is much more contact between people from different areas.

Despite this fact, and the fact that even today sean nós dancers get relatively little media attention, some regional styles of dancing have survived. However, it is important to note that today there are relatively few dancers dancing in the style associated with their own region.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature that distinguishes sean nós dance from contemporary step dance is the body stance. In sean nós dance this is much more relaxed than its contemporary counterpart. The hands are normally loosely hanging from the sides and in some styles, for example, the Connemara style, the hands are sometimes raised to waist or head level. In contrast to this, contemporary step dancers do not use their hands, which are rigidly by the sides at all times. The body stance of the contemporary dancer is also much more rigid, the dancer adopting a proud and upright stance, with all concentration on the complexity of the footwork, and the costume is an important part of the overall presentation of the dancer. The steps of sean nós dancing are generally not as complex as those of contemporary, although this is not to say that one is better than the other: they are merely different. The type of dance also affects the music that is being played for it: contemporary dancers in competition usually prefer music of a slow, straightforward nature, with little ornamentation. This is because they can then execute more complex steps per beat. A sean nós dancer may ask the player to adjust the speed of the tune slightly according to the dance, but it is usually not necessary for the player to alter his/her playing very much to accompany a sean nós dancer. However, those characteristics just listed are generalisations, and it must be remembered that there are exceptions to these rules. For example, regional variations in style must also be accounted for.

Irish dance shows like *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance* deserve a special mention in the context of Irish traditional dance. This is because they are part of a unique modern phenomenon. The staging of *Riverdance* as part of the *Eurovision* was possibly the first time that Irish step dancing had been presented to such a large audience in a new and modern way, and immediately caught the imagination of, initially, the Irish people and, later, the world. The type of dance that is seen in *Riverdance*, particularly by the solo dancers, is a mixture of many different elements: ballet, jazz dance, flamenco dance, etc. The interesting thing is that during Michael Flatley's first ever solo during the *Eurovision* interval act, he used his arms in a way normally associated with the sean nós dance tradition of Connemara. Therefore, as well as mixing more modern and outside influences, he seems to have been including more traditional elements, which is an interesting aspect of this new and dynamic artistic expression.

Part Two

Many people involved with traditional music today speak of the tension between 'innovation' and 'tradition', that is, change and development on the one hand, and maintaining stability and contact with the past on the other. We will now look at some of the important factors that have caused change.

1. Change from within and without the tradition: change from what?

Before we begin to speak about how the tradition has changed we first must attempt to come to conclusions about what it has changed from. To some extent this is an impossible process as the tradition has been in a constant state of flux and indeed some would argue that change is an essential component of tradition of any kind. This argument proposes that in order for cultural practices (musical or otherwise) to survive through history they must adapt to new and changing contexts and environments, matching new needs and playing new roles in different contexts. In other words: change is essential for survival.

This can be observed in what we know of the history of traditional dance music. For example, the uilleann pipes are believed to be descended from a now-extinct Irish war pipes, probably similar to the Scottish bagpipes. Perhaps a reason for this development, and the demise of the Irish war pipe, was that, according to the Penal Laws enforced from the sixteenth century on, they were considered an instrument of war as much as a pike, sword or gun by the British authorities! The pipes were a loud outdoors instrument which could not be played without attracting attention so a quieter, indoors pipe, pitched in B or B flat quite literally could save the life of a musician. Of course a major factor in the demise of the warpipe was the eventual subjugation of Ireland and the destruction and dissolution of its armies which were the major performance context for that instrument. So the change in political context may well have been important in the development of the uilleann pipes and led to the end of the warpipes. The accordion was patented in its simplest form, the single row melodeon, by the Austrian Cyril Demien in 1829. Its popularity in Ireland, which was assured by the beginning of the twentieth century, was due partly because it was very suitable for the accompaniment of the new set dances, and partly because of the huge amount of migration, and particularly seasonal migration (i.e. where people would leave home for a certain period of the year to work in England and Scotland). When workers returned, they often brought instruments home with them to Ireland. This last point provided a route for many instruments, including the flute, into the Irish tradition.

However, we do know that little of what is now considered as defining aspects of Irish music would have been considered so in the past: the flutes played in Irish tradition are English nineteenth-century instruments originally built for the performance of classical music; our fiddles are Italian instruments which probably arrived in the eighteenth century; jigs and reels are probably imported dance tune types; much of our social, group dancing is either descended from European court dances (the set dances) or invented at the beginning of this century (the céilí dances). There is very little of our music and dance tradition which can be considered truly native. What makes this music and dance tradition Irish is the way we have adapted this foreign material and the way we present it in its new environment.

So it is essentially impossible to point at the music of one era and say that the music of that time was truly traditional, as it has been constantly changing. But what is regarded now as traditional music was formed by the second half of the nineteenth century. It is undeniable that pressures from outside the tradition, whether musical, social, economic, political or technological in the last century, and especially over the last forty years, have accelerated change, change which has historically occurred at a much slower pace. So what were the main features of traditional music performance in the last half of the last century?

Firstly, it was a tradition rooted in rural communities, the music of the peasantry. It was not the music of the populations of the towns, or the growing business and middle classes, or the aristocracy; these classes had their own musics. Indeed, the music of the Irish and Anglo-Irish aristocracy until the eighteenth century was harp music. Today harp music is often considered to be part of the dance music tradition but in the past it was considered as an art music (or a 'classical' music): the music of the aristocracy and separate to the music of the peasantry. Traditional Irish music was played by farmers and itinerant, semi-professional musicians who would earn part of their income from music performance at house dances and fair days (the time when traditional music did reach the towns, but was still played for the country people). The rest of their income was from their traditional modes of employment such as tinsmithing and as agricultural labourers. Apart from the musicians of the itinerant community, traditional musicians by and large were complete amateurs. Music performance was primarily in the home for house dances and later at the crossroads dances which were larger social occasions occurring on days of community gatherings such as fairs and pattern days. Traditional music was rarely played in public houses like today and would never appear in a concert setting.

The music itself was very much a dance music. Music and dance performance would occur in the same performance contexts and happen together, and music would have been more often danced to than listened to. This means that the music was listened to not with the ears but with the feet. How good a music performance was judged by how good the music was for dancing to.

(a) Regional Styles

The Irish music tradition was locked into local, rural communities, the members of which would rarely move beyond their own Parish boundaries unless they were emigrating, and in many cases they would never return from abroad. Because there was little or no national interaction (that is, musicians would rarely meet musicians from anywhere but their own or neighbouring parishes) the tradition was divided into distinct regional styles held together in general by the travelling musicians. This fragmentation of a national music practice led to the creation of regional styles of dance music and Irish language song performance. These local styles or dialects of music performance still exist today in regions such as Donegal, Clare, Sliabh Luachra, East Galway and Sligo, among others. These styles are distinguishable by which stylistic techniques they use, or don't use (in the categories of variation, phrasing, articulation, ornamentation, tone, speed and, to some small extent, dynamics) and by their repertoire. On the enclosed CD we can hear two tunes being played on the flute by Niall Keegan in two very different styles. The first tune is a reel from East Galway and played in an East Galway style [Track 5]. The second tune, 'The Boys of Ballisodare' is a Sligo/North West Connaught tune played in a style of that region [Track 6]. Essentially these styles are being mimicked and some may say that these regions have not one, but many different styles and approaches, but despite the generalisation I hope that the contrast is obvious.

East Galway [Track 5]

This tune is played with little articulation; the phrasing (which on the flute is where the player takes a breath) tends to follow the natural phrasing of the tune (that is, every four or eight bars); and the speed, in comparison to the next piece, is slower. The melody of the piece itself is more complex than the next.

Sligo [Track 6]

This reel is played very differently, with a lot more emphasis on rhythm (produced through variation in over-blowing, the use of throat articulation, and in the short, irregular phrases). The tone is also a lot woodier, and is breathy in comparison to the last.

It would be impossible to say that there is a definitive version of a regional style which everyone would agree with and under no circumstance should the examples here be understood to be so. However, they do illustrate how regional style can make what is basically the same material (in this instance, reels) sound very different. These regional distinctions are also very important for Irish language song where three main styles can be still be identified in Munster, Conamara and Donegal. The important thing to note about regional styles is that they do not have to be pinned to specific techniques but rather to certain sounds. For instance, the sound produced by an East Galway musician is usually that of an uninterrupted melody, with little rhythmical accentuation beyond that which is necessary to distinguish the dance tune type: in other words, the overall sound is very smooth and flowing. The sound produced by a Sligo musician, on the other hand, is usually much more rhythmical.

(b) Aural Tradition

A very important aspect of traditional Irish music is that it is an aural tradition. Transmission or the passing on of repertoire and technique was, and still is to a large extent, by ear. The traditional setting for learning would be in a 'one-on-one' teaching situation, probably with a parent or older member of the family, or sometimes with a travelling music teacher (Padraig O'Keeffe, the great Sliabh Luachra fiddle master would be a prominent example of this type of teacher). Composition of tunes is still, to the present day, almost always without the aid of pen and paper. Collections of Irish music which have been published since 1724 have been initially for an audience of classical musicians and only in this century has music publishing had an impact on the tradition with the collections of Capt. Francis O'Neill at the beginning of this century in the United States, and shortly afterwards Francis Roche's collections for the Gaelic League in Ireland. Still today a musician can learn and become proficient without ever having to learn to read music and many exceptional younger musicians don't. In fact, for the spread of tunes the portable tape recorder has perhaps been more important in the transmission of tunes by making them more accessible than the music publishing industry. However, the aurality of the tradition does have an impact on the study of the Irish music tradition. Traditional Irish musicians never wrote their music down before this century. There was no need to do so and very few possessed the skills anyway. Notation skills became more common because of the Temperance and general marching band movement of the nineteenth century as well as the introduction of national primary school education in the 1830s with a growing element of music education. Because we have no physical evidence from the musicians themselves as to the type of music they were playing at that time we have to depend on what evidence we can glean from those groups of people who wrote about music. These people, the middle and upper classes, were invariably not interested in what was a peasant music and many thought it unworthy of comment. Thus, most of what we know about traditional Irish music has to come from living memory and aural tradition, stories and accounts handed down from generation to generation. This is one reason for all the 'perhaps's and 'probablys' of this particular section!

Thus, to sum up, probably the most important aspects of traditional music culture in the past, as far as we can determine, were that the tradition was rural and performed and enjoyed by peasants. Performance of the music would also occur most often in the context of the dance and would in all probability be judged in accordance to its suitability for the dance. The tradition was regional but at the same time had national characteristics that allowed it to be recognised as 'Irish'. It was also a completely aural tradtion in every way (notation played no part in performance or learning and musicians have left no literary accounts of it). These factors guided the traditions of Irish music into this century and it is the disappearance of some and the addition and development of others which have transformed the tradition into what we have today.

2. Perspectives on Change & Historical Precedents

The development of traditional Irish music in this century is obviously a product of the modernisation of Irish society in general. Urbanisation, the movement of the people from the country into town and cities, and the development of technology, especially in the media (radio, television, recordings etc.) and in transport, have been important factors in the processes of modernisation which have transformed the performance of Irish traditional music.

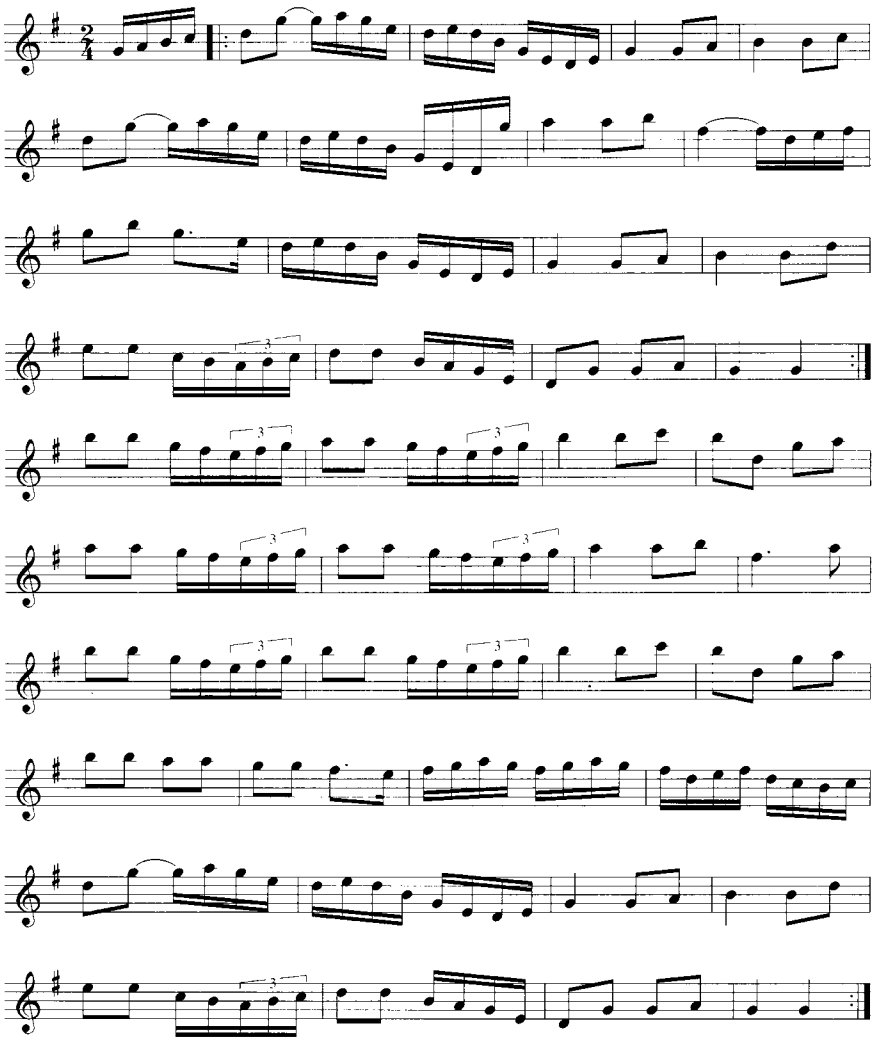
Although it is these extra-musical factors that have enabled the change in performance practice at a musical level, the changes in traditional Irish music performance can be seen from two perspectives: change from within the tradition and change from without the tradition. Some of these factors have caused the nature of the music to develop without any or with very little musical influence from another culture's music. However these same forces have enabled a cross-fertilisation of musical cultures, and this has not only influenced traditional Irish music but other musical traditions as well.

The influence of one music culture on another is not a modern phenomenon, as we saw earlier. Historically, Irish music has been formed by the influence of many neighbouring traditions (the Scottish, English and classical traditions mostly). These processes have in some instances reversed and Irish music has influenced other music traditions. For example, classical composers (even Beethoven) have taken Irish folk themes for their compositions and in Scotland the performance of jigs may well be due to an Irish influence. However, the most obvious effect of traditional Irish music culture has been on what has become the dominant music culture (or rather group of cultures) in the world, overshadowing and some think threatening all others: American music culture. One hundred years before the famine, migration from Ireland to the United States was not generally of the native, Catholic, Irish but of the newly arrived, Protestant, Scots-Irish who, over the previous centuries, had migrated to Ireland from Scotland. These people brought over their own music culture, and this must have been a Scots-Irish music. (It is worth noting here that until the nineteenth century Protestants and Catholics would have had basically the same musical traditions.) Probably between 200,000 and 300,000 Protestants emigrated in the first seventy-five years of the eighteenth century. These people and their music have had a profound effect on the music culture of the United States and Canada. Not only can this influence be seen in traditional music culture, namely in the fiddle traditions of many areas of Canada (for example, Newfoundland, the Ottawa Valley, etc.) and North America (in what is called Bluegrass and Old Time American fiddling) but also in the more widely known musical practices of Country and popular musics. There are still examples of shared repertoires of songs and tunes which have lasted despite nearly three hundred years isolation. The great American folk song researcher, Jean Ritchie, has accounted for many of the songs which have survived in both traditions and observed that though the words would often change (speaking of American places and situations rather than Irish) the tunes are often still recognisably Irish. An good example of this is the song 'Rose Connolly' sung by the great icons of 1950s American popular culture, The Everly Brothers, on the CD *Bringing It All Back Back Home*, a version of which was collected as 'Rosey Connolly' in Derry by Edward Bunting in 1811.

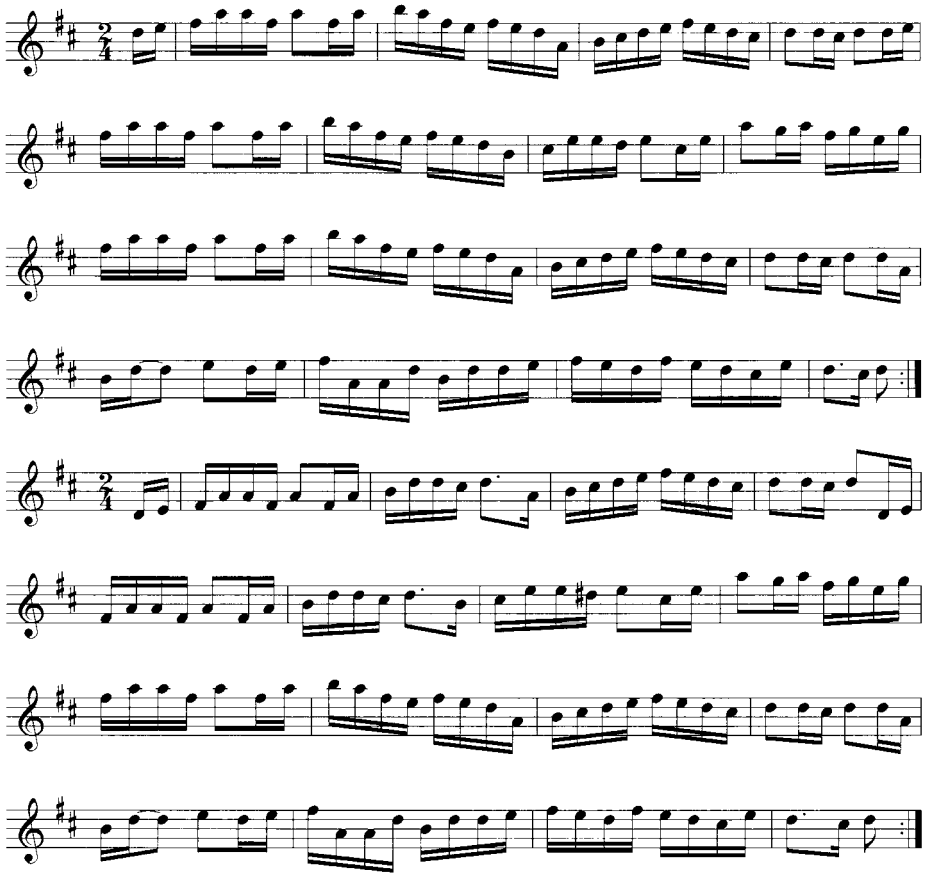
The traditional music of North America bears many of the structural hallmarks of traditional music in Ireland (although many of these are not particularly Irish): songs have the same characteristics as English language ballads everywhere, and the dance tunes retain many of the forms (jigs, reels etc.) and structures common in Irish traditional music. Versions of tunes played in Ireland can be found amongst the American fiddling traditions (for example 'St. Anne's Reel') and many American tunes are now played in Ireland, something made possible through the similarity of the traditions. Below are two tunes, the first, 'Fred Finn's Polka' was played by the legendary Sligo fiddler of the same name and is thought by many to have a North American origin. The second, 'Dixon County Blues', is an example of an American tune played in Ireland because an Irish traditional musician learned it from a record of Appalachian fiddling. Both tunes have similar structures, and are similar to a style of

polka associated with North Connaught. They are symmetrical like all Irish traditional dance tunes and melodically are put together in very similar ways. This illustrates an exchange of repertoire to and fro across the Atlantic which, although more and more common today, has for the last three hundred years been an important aspect of Irish and American traditions.

Fred Finn's Polka:



Dixon County Blues:



One of the most prominent influences of the Irish tradition on North American music is through the song tradition. Many songs of Irish origin popularised by Irish immigrants became part of American popular culture, 'Rose Connolly' being one such example. The arrival of the Scots Irish (to rural America) and later the Catholic Irish (to urban America) had a profound influence on the development of popular American music mixing with the other musical traditions, not just the similar British traditions but also the music of the blacks who would have shared the bottom of the social pile with the newly arrived Irish. Popular American musical taste in the mid-nineteenth century can be summed up in the title of the collection, published in 1854, called *Marsh's Selection, or, Singing for the Million, Containing the Choicest and Best Collection of Admired Patriotic, Comic, Irish, Negro, Temperance and Sentimental Songs Ever Embodied in One Work.*

The text of the song 'No Irish Wanted Here', collected in North America from American tradition, sums up many of the most negative experiences of the immigrant Irish.

No Irish Wanted Here
(written approximately 1880)

I am an Irish labourer both hearty stout and strong.
Idleness I never loved, to our race it don't belong.
I have still the strength and will to toil for the wants of life are dear,
But I'm told where ever I ask for work, 'No Irish wanted here'.

CHORUS:

Then you may think it's a misfortune to be christened Pat or Dan,
But to me it is a blessing to be called an Irishman;
I may live to see the day, it will come, oh never fear,
When ignorance gives way to sense and you'll welcome Irish here.

When your country was in danger a few short years ago,
You were not so particular then who would go and fight the foe;
When men were wanted in the ranks to reserve her rights so dear,
Among the bravest of the brave was our Irish volunteers.

CHORUS

For generous hearts and charity you could search this wide world round,
For Paddy's hospitality its like was never found,
He'd give the clothes from off his back, his blood for friends so dear,
But for justice and for envy vile there's no Irish wanted here.

CHORUS

Oh, let your hearts be generous, help Paddy from the wall,
For there's but one God above us who knows and loves us all;
I may live to see the day, it will come, oh never fear,
When ignorance gives way to sense and you'll welcome Irish here.

CHORUS

(a) Change From Within

First we will examine changes which have occurred without the influence of other musical cultures. An important change which has occurred within the last century has been a breakdown in the regional nature of the tradition. With the growth of modern media (radio; television; recordings: wax cylinders, 78rpm discs, albums, cassettes and CDs; tape recording machines) and communications (roads and travel generally which, along with growing wealth, allows people to travel more widely and for recreational purposes), regional styles have started to disappear, leaving today, as the main vestiges of regional style for traditional dance music, Sligo-Leitrim-Roscommon, Clare, East Galway, Sliabh Luachra and Donegal. All of these regional styles, however, are believed by many to be under threat from modernity. Regional styles are thought to have been replaced by national styles, evidence of a great levelling or 'cultural greyout', transforming the tradition into one that is much more bland and less interesting than previously existed, with only one style prevailing.

This process began with the popularity of 78rpm recordings issued on the East coast of the United States, mainly in the 1920s. The American recording industry began to sell 'ethnic' Irish records to the huge numbers of Irish who had emigrated to urban centres such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago. These recordings were predominantly of musicians from the counties of North-West Connaught, mostly Sligo and Leitrim, such as Michael Coleman (fiddle), James Morrisson (fiddle), Paddy Killoran (fiddle), and John McKenna (flute). As these records were posted back to Ireland and were even distributed here by some record companies, the music of these musicians became influential throughout the country, creating what some see as a hegemony or superiority of Sligo-Leitrim music. The musical environment provided by the urban centres of the U.S. (such as the huge dance halls which had to be filled with sound without the aid of amplification before 1926) must have, however, affected the performance of these musicians, perhaps creating an American style out of an adapted native style of performance. In other words, the music as it was presented in its American environment had again adapted itself to suit its new surroundings.

One musician stands out in particular in influencing the rural musicians throughout Ireland from the United States. This musician is the fiddle player Michael Coleman who originally hailed from Killalvil, Co. Sligo. Sean Ó Riada writes of this musician:

> Undoubtedly the strongest influence on fiddle players so far was that brilliant virtuoso of traditional music, the late Michael Coleman. Coleman was born in Sligo, but while his style stems from the Sligo style, it developed into something on its own. The tragedy is that so many fiddle players are imitating that personal style of his instead of developing the styles of their own areas to suit themselves. An imitation is only an imitation no matter how good it is.
>
> Sean Ó Riada, 1982

Thus, one virtuoso musician with a particular regional style has influenced a nation and several generations of fiddle players because he migrated to the urban centres of the United States where new technology allowed for the spread of his music beyond those in immediate earshot. The Irish American recording industry in the first forty years of this century has had a profound effect on performance practice in Ireland up to this very day, and in other ways, as we shall see below. You can hear an example of Michael Coleman's playing on the enclosed CD. [Track 7]

However, it was not until the folk revival since the 1950s and the rapid growth in travel and media that regional barriers have disappeared. Today there are many occasions where musicians from various parts of the country can meet and swap tunes and musical ideas, especially in the system of competitions or Fleadhs run by the organisation Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann since 1952 . These competitions culminate in the great international gathering of traditional Irish musicians known as Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in a different venue every, or most, years. Using the technology of tape recorders many of these musicians can bring the music of these occasions home and would, because of the new commercial aspects of the tradition, be able to purchase recordings of exceptional traditional musicians originating in communities from around the country and indeed around the world. For example, the exceptional modern group, Altan, perform much music and song from Donegal. However they have an international recording contract with Virgin Records who distribute their recordings throughout the world which results in the Donegal repertoire of the band being played by traditional musicians throughout the world and many different musicians performing the repertoire also imitating some stylistic traits of the performance.

Musicians who previously would not have been exposed to music outside of their local area and thus not exposed to stylistic approaches and techniques beyond which their neighbours used are now thrown into a world of Irish music from which they can pick and choose style and technique at will. This has led to a situation today where one of the finest exponents of North-West Connaught style flute playing is from Cork — Conal Ó Gráda — and where the three Dublin brothers, Paddy, Seamus

and Kevin Glackin would be regarded as fine exponents of a Donegal fiddle style. Indeed many musicians have adopted a regional approach despite not being from that region. However most do not just attempt to emulate a particular regional style but choose from the now nearly limitless stylistic possibilities and techniques open to them to develop unique styles. Obviously, these new styles cannot be easily identified as being regional. This is not to say that one cannot have a regional style and be original. It is possible to create an original mix of techniques (not necessarily all associated with one region) and still be recognisable as being traditionally of a region. The playing of the great East Clare fiddle player Martin Hayes is a testament to this.

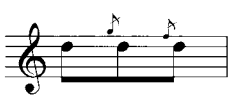
(i) performance practice

Recording and the professionalisation of the tradition has also led to developments in performance practice. Previous to this century the vast majority of musicians were amateurs unless they were itinerant musicians who would have been semi-professional. However, in America many musicians made a living, or a good part of their living, from music performance. When these musicians had more time to practice and were not endangering their performance capabilities through manual labour (anyone who works on a building site will know the frequency of accidents involving fingers) they were able to become better musicians and improve their technique. If the musician is dependent upon his capabilities to earn his keep he should be more eager to improve these capabilities. Also, recording practice, especially in the latter half of this century, has given the musician the opportunity to always present their very best performances and correct or conceal any mistakes in their playing. Thus is created the cult of the virtuoso. Recordings featuring technical advance or brilliance are more often than not emulated by other musicians, most often younger musicians, who attempt, and sometimes succeed, to emulate what is in essence a false image of performance. This is more important today as studio magic can often enhance a recording beyond the capacity and talent of the recording artist but this enhanced recording is still emulated. These factors have led to an inevitable rise in the standard of technique or skill between successive generations; many older players state that the technique of the younger generation is far superior to their own. However, it must be pointed out, and indeed is regularly by those who think the tradition should not change, that there are other factors which make a 'musical' performance, and it is rather the way technique is used than the quantity of it which makes a good traditional performance.

(ii) instrumental technique

Technique has also been enhanced through the improved quality of the instruments themselves. Older instruments can now be repaired easily and cheaply with the development of a repair and manufacture industry for most instruments. Flutes, especially with their delicate springs and pads on the key system, were often broken and thus restricted to playing in much the same way as a tin whistle. However today it is relatively easy to get a flute repaired quickly and cheaply thus making a fully chromatic instrument a reality. This has obvious consequences not just for the quality of the music but also the tonal scope of the music that is played. Also, the amount of very good instrument makers in and outside Ireland have made the acquisition of quality instruments relatively easy, which again has had obvious consequences for performance practice.

Increasing awareness of the capacities and the limitations of various instruments has allowed a stylistic crossover between instrumental traditions where instrumentalists are attempting to create the sounds made on other instruments. This is most obvious in ornamentation. For instance, flute and whistle players have copied the piping technique of the cran which is:



This gives these instruments the opportunity to ornament a D, as a roll cannot be played on this note. In popular mythology Matt Molloy, in the days before he joined the Chieftains, was the first flute player to adapt this technique from pipers and apply it to his own flute performance. Whether this is true or not, it is certainly true that Matt Molloy popularised the use of this technique among flute players. Another technique, this time taken from the fiddle, has been more recently adapted by performers on the accordion and lately on the flute. This ornament is the triplet achieved on a single note by using the bow.

Box (accordion) players imitate this, as do piano players, by quickly hitting the one key with three fingers producing something equitable to the staccato ornament. This imitation was first made popular by button accordion players such as Sharon Shannon, piano accordion players such as Karen Tweed and piano players such as Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin. Flute players more recently, such as Kevin Crawford and Brian Finnegan, have imitated the same technique but through triple tonguing to produce the staccato effect. This mimicking of other instruments in the tradition is obviously not a new process but is one that has been greatly accentuated in recent years.

However, it is probably not in the actual music itself that change from within Irish culture has occurred most startlingly but rather in the performance context. The old performance context for the music was mainly in the home as accompaniment for dancing. This has disappeared as the most popular performance context, to be replaced by the session and other areas of performance which tend to be detached from dancing.

With the processes of urbanisation over the last few centuries performers of traditional music have had to find new contexts for the performance of their music in their new lives in towns and cities. Also, in the countryside the house dances were discouraged by the Church until in 1936 the Dance Hall Act led to these traditional gatherings being outlawed. In rural Ireland the centre for socialisation moved out into the dance hall and the Parish hall. This led to the popularity of organised, semi-professional or professional bands which today can be seen, in a traditional manifestation, in the ceili bands. These bands took the native music and transformed it so as to survive the change of venue from home to hall. In the cities of the English speaking world traditional musicians were forced to find a new context for their traditional music practice. The home was no longer viable because of the crowded and impersonal nature of the cities. Bars and pubs soon filled this need for a novel performance context. Public houses and hotels in Ireland almost certainly had been common places for music performance in the towns of Ireland, especially on occasions when the populations of rural hinterlands would assemble in towns for fair days, etc. So the public house, although never previously the main venue for music performance, was the natural choice for many musicians from rural backgrounds whose only experience of traditional music in towns was probably in the pub. Certainly in the first decades of this century in the United States musicians performed in bars, and there were some successful and business-minded musicians such as John J. Kimmel, the German-American who was the first great performer of Irish music on the melodeon and accordion, who owned a string of bars. However, folklore tells us that the first 'sessions' in bars according to our modern understanding occurred in North London, specifically in the Favourite pub on the Holloway Road. Whether this is true or not (and it probably isn't) we know that by the 1960s the format of the session as it exists now was set and originated in the cities, an urban modern phenomenon, and thus spread back into the rural areas. The popularity of the music tradition in a modern, urban setting has also led to the music being placed in the modern, concert setting so now we have traditional music in venues more commonly associated with classical and popular music performance, venues such as the Point, the National Concert Hall and the University of Limerick Concert Hall.

Thus, the changes which have transformed the lives of the Irish since the famine have also helped transform the music of these people. Gradual urbanisation and technologisation have helped to transform the way people play and listen to the music so that it is no longer local, rural, community and dance-based but is international, commodified and listened to outside of the aesthetic of the dance. However, these modern processes of urbanisation and technologisation have also enabled an accelerated cross-cultural fertilisation with other musics. This in turn has helped these changes in musical practice and created new paths and performance practices for the tradition.

(b) Change from Without the Tradition

Probably the most interesting thing about the rapid development of the tradition in recent years is the way that other, sometimes previously unrelated, musical traditions have interacted with it and caused changes in every facet of traditional music performance. Many of these 'outside' traditions have had an influence over traditional Irish music for centuries (especially the classical music tradition and local folk traditions such as those in Scotland) but in recent years, with the world becoming smaller and mass communications spreading what were local musics across the world, musics from many different continents have been influencing our tradition. We must be very careful when we speak of other musics influencing our own. The Irish music tradition is not passive in these relationships but is instead always the active partner. Invariably aspects of other music cultures are acquired by Irish musicians who employ these aspects, whether they are new instruments, tunes etc., in an Irish context. When these aspects of other traditions are acquired they are changed in some way to adapt to the needs of the Irish musician performing in an Irish context. So we must not imagine this process being one where other musics impose themselves on our music but where our music 'borrows' elements from others and in borrowing these elements 'Irishises' them.

(i) literacy

Classical music has been for a long time a major donor to the Irish music tradition, giving us many instruments (e.g., the flute and fiddle) and dance tune forms and even the dances themselves (set dances). However, probably its greatest gift over the past one hundred and fifty years is musical literacy, the ability to read music. Previously, as stated earlier, the Irish music tradition was an oral one where repertoire was transmitted between individuals. However, now many musicians are musically literate in one form or another. Unlike classical music where generally only one form of notation, staff notation, is acceptable, in Irish music there are many different forms including staff notation but also including alphabetic notation, (C D E etc.) tonic-solfa (doh-re-mi), graphic notation (where the instrument is represented on the page), and numerical notation (where the fingers used are represented by numbers).

Literacy has become important to traditional musicians for several reasons. Firstly, the introduction of universal national school education in 1831 and music education as part of the school programmes helped the spread of literacy. Also important was the marching band, and particularly the temperance band, movement of the nineteenth century. By the end of the last century a sizable number, but not the majority, of traditional musicians could read music.

(ii) music publishing

The early-twentieth century saw the beginnings of a music publishing industry for traditional Irish musicians. The first great published collections of traditional music intended for traditional musicians were produced in the 1900s and 1910s in Chicago by Capt. Francis O'Neill, originally from Co. Cork and head of the Chicago police. Outstanding among his collections is *O'Neill's Music of Ireland* which contains 1,850 tunes, making it the largest printed collection of Irish traditional tunes ever. His other major publication was the 1001 tunes which become known among traditional musicians both in America and in Ireland simply as 'The Book'. Another great publisher/collector was Francis Roche

from Limerick, who between 1912 and 1927 published three volumes of *The Roche Collection of Traditional Irish Music*. Today there are many books, both tutors and collections, some better than others, published for traditional Irish musicians and this would not be possible without a fair degree of literacy within the tradition. This of course has consequences for performance. What were previously regional repertoires (tunes that would not be performed outside of a local area) spread to a much larger audience. In the cases of O'Neill and Roche, this meant that tunes which may have been peculiar to Cork and Limerick were spread far and wide. Also, collections tend to work as an artificial memory for the tradition. Many of the tunes that these people collected would otherwise have been forgotten and died out over the years. By collecting and publishing these tunes these people have allowed generations of musicians to have access to tunes which might have been lost or changed beyond recognition. In this function it also maintained stable versions of tunes, preventing the tunes changing much, something which must happen in an oral tradition. Therefore the introduction of literacy has resulted in the spread of repertoire and has also acted as an agent of stability by maintaining tunes in the forms they were collected in.

(ii) teaching

Literacy has also revolutionised the ways in which many people teach traditional Irish music. Today, classes often consist of big groups of children or adults. This group-teaching is very often facilitated, or at least made easier, by the use of notation of one form or another. Teaching large groups of people with often differing abilities can be difficult if not sometimes impossible. Notation skills allow more people to be taught by a single teacher who might otherwise be limited to teaching individuals or very small groups.

Literacy, based on western art notation skills, has therefore proved to be very important in the transmission of traditional Irish music in two ways: firstly, in the way repertoire is spread and maintained; and secondly, in the way it is taught. However, it must not be forgotten that the ear is still the primary form of transmission, while many traditional musicians combine literacy with aurality.

(iii) ensemble performance

It is believed that previous to this century most traditional music was performed by solo musicians or by small informal groups gathered at social occasions. However, this century has seen the band becoming a major context for the performance of traditional music. The idea of traditional ensembles has invariably been modelled on other ensemble forms from other traditions, particularly jazz, classical and popular musics.

(iv) dance bands

The first dance bands appeared in the United States at the beginning of this century. Bands such as the James Morrison Band, The Flanagan Brothers, Dan Sullivan's Shamrock Band became popular in the Irish American Dance Halls and such bands became an important source of income for the professional and semi-professional Irish musicians at the time. The music they played consisted of traditional dance music, Irish-American songs (some of which are still popularly known and performed in Ireland today such as 'My Irish Molly-O' recently recreated by De Danann but originally performed by The Flanagan Brothers , 'The Stone Outside Dan Murphy's Door' recorded by John McGettigan and his Irish Minstrels and 'Little Bridget Flynn' again recorded by the Flanagan Brothers) and popular American dances at the time such as two-steps and waltzes. These bands also recorded extensively, leaving a legacy of Irish American dance-band music for us to examine today. Their music was very much geared to the demands of the large dance halls and shaped by the lack of effective amplification at the time. The ideal band played rhythmical and very loud dance music and to serve these demands new instruments were acquired by traditional musicians, some of which, like the saxophone and piccolo, have since mostly died out in traditional music practice. However, some

of these instruments, such as the banjo and drums, have survived that era. We can never know how the styles of these players were changed by the demands of the new dance hall environment (although notably the leading solo performer of the time, Michael Coleman, seemed not to have played in the dance halls). However, sets of tunes must have been organised and arranged, as were songs, to produce a more formal, organised standard of performance than that which probably had existed before.

The development of a popular Irish band movement in the United States was soon emulated in Ireland, but for other reasons, the most prominent being the introduction of the Dance Hall Act in 1936 which banned the traditional house dances. The first Céilí band believed to be billed as such was the 'Ballinakill Traditional Players' — they first played in 1926 — but it wasn't until the 1940s and 1950s that this movement gathered momentum. The history of the Céilí band movement is almost encapsulated in the history of the Tulla Céilí Band, established in 1946 (their first public performance was in St. John's Pavilion in Limerick the same year) and still going very strong. These bands seem to have been born out of very strong regional traditions, the Ballinakill Traditional Players from the very musically rich area of South-East Galway and the Tulla and Kilfenora Céilí Bands becoming central to the musical traditions of East and West Clare, respectively. The format of the Céilí Band solidified with the development of competitions under the aegis of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. Some instruments which had been acquired through the influence of the American dance bands such as the Saxophone and Piccolo were rejected whilst others such as the piano, banjo and small jazz drum kit (snare, block, bass drum and sometimes cymbal) were kept. The piano accordion was adopted from the playing of traditional Scottish dance bands and players such as Jimmy Shand. The classic formation of the Céilí band has become several fiddles and flutes, button accordion (or occasionally piano accordion), banjo, concertina, piano and drums, and has between three and ten members. These bands still perform for set and céilí dances today (popular bands would include Shaskeen, The Swallows Tail, the two aforementioned Clare bands and the Templehouse Céilí Band). An important performance context for many céilí bands is the competitions culminating in the All-Ireland Fleadh Cheoil each year.

The important thing to note about these bands is that they are very much dance bands: they are judged as to their suitability for dancing. More often than not, when you decide that a particular céilí band is good or not it is your feet, or your dance sense, which is telling you. In this sense music of this type, and the vast majority of music performed pre-1960s, is not an absolute music (that is, it is not music for music's sake alone; its suitability for dance is also a consideration), and this is not meant in a derogatory sense. The fortunes of the music were the fortunes of the dance, the two were tied together in a single system of behaviour which was manifest in the changing social dances, from kitchen to dance hall. You can hear a hornpipe played by the young céilí band, Ceoltóirí Corofinne, on the enclosed CD. [Track 8]

(v) music for listening to

Traditional Irish music went into decline in the 1930s, and 1940s. In America the record companies moved away from producing ethnic, including Irish, records. In Ireland the Dance Hall Act effectively outlawed the traditional setting for the music and dance. Also, the small increase in interest in traditional Irish music in the period before independence during the great upsurge in political and cultural nationalism, which was manifest in the activities of the Gaelic League, the establishment of the Cork and Dublin Pipers Clubs, the collections of Frank Roche and the publications of Grattan Flood, disappeared. Traditional Irish music became to many intensely unfashionable being, like the Irish language, associated with poverty and illiteracy.

However, in the 1950s the beginning of what is known as the folk revival (a revival of interest in folk and traditional musics throughout the western world) saw a rekindling of interest in the tradition through the early ballad bands. The prominent bands of this 'ballad boom' were the Clancy Brothers and The Dubliners; other artists who came to the fore of this movement include Johnny McEvoy and later Christy Moore. These bands performed mostly ballads (and in the case of The Dubliners mostly urban ballads) and incorporated occasional sets of dance tunes. The songs had guitar backing and were arranged simply with breaks between verses for a melody instrument to take up the tune or a variation of it. These bands very quickly became popular, not only in Ireland but abroad as well, and received a lot of exposure on the new media of television.

The turning point for the performance of traditional dance music came with the establishment of the band Ceoltóirí Cualann by Seán Ó Riada. Seán Ó Riada was a classical composer with a background as a jazz pianist with an intense interest in Irish traditional music. With Ceoltóirí Cualann he attempted to create out of the traditional music and song of Ireland, a new Irish art music, a 'classical' music that was significantly different from western Art music. He even dressed his performers for the concerts in theatres in Dublin and Cork in dress suits, the dress of the classical musician. Musically he did this using the jazz ensemble as a model, where a group of musicians would play together and feature different soloists at different intervals. He felt this was a very suitable model for the performance of Irish traditional music, as the soloist was, and still is, a very important aspect of this tradition. Instrumentalists also performed in changing combinations to produce various textures. Another important aspect of their performance is that they did not play the same type of tunes in a single set or piece but might vary dance tune types, a practice which was previously fairly rare. After they split up Ceoltóirí Cualann reformed as the Chieftains, without Seán Ó Riada, and have retained this distinctive style of performance to this very day. Whatever Ó Riada's motives or level of success in creating a distinctive Irish art music, he was the first to put the dance music firmly outside the context of dance itself. He essentially created the first style of music which would not, and often could not, be danced to, and this was followed by many subsequent bands.

Pop Trad

However, Ó Riada's aim of creating a distinct Irish art music was not realised. Many have fused western art music with traditional music very successfully but Seán Ó Riada, with Ceoltóirí Cualann, was not attempting a direct music fusion: he did not envisage his band performing with an orchestra. Many of the bands which followed took their inspiration from the world of popular music.

The ballad boom throughout the western world was always on the periphery of and directly connected to popular music (the legacy of American artists such as Bob Dylan and even the Everly Brothers bears testament to the fact). This connection bore fruit for Irish music performance in the 1970s most notably with the two groups Planxty and The Bothy Band. The first of these two influential groups was Planxty (core members of which included Christy Moore, Donal Lunny, Andy Irvine and Liam O'Flynn) who took the format of the ballad band but increased the complexity of the arrangements, and especially of the harmonic accompaniment. The accompaniment was often provided by up to three string instruments working chordal accompaniment and a linear counterpoint against the song.

However, it is the Bothy Band which sets the mould for traditional ensemble performance (apart from those groups and individuals whose music is crossed with another tradition). The band was made up of three melody line players (Paddy Keenan on uilleann pipes, Matt Molloy, now of the Chieftains, on flute, first Tommy Peoples and then Kevin Burke on fiddle) and three harmony players (Donal Lunny on bouzouki, Triona Ní Dhomhnaill on harpsichord and Micheál Ó Domhnaill on guitar). The last two performers also sang, although the emphasis was very much on dance music performance. They arranged the tunes in a very similar style to the way Seán Ó Riada did, creating textures with different combinations of instruments and focusing on solos. Harmonic accompaniment was also interestingly provided by a harpsichord, the instrument played by Ó Riada in Ceoltóirí Cualann. However, two string players (Donal Lunny and Mícheál Ó Domhnaill) relating to their experience of the ballad bands and popular music, provided the core of the harmonic accompaniment so central to their sound. An essential aspect of that sound was the use of 'riffs' (repeated harmonic progressions) on the guitar and bouzouki similar to the way a rock or pop guitar player would play. The overall sound was extremely exciting and over a few years and in three albums in the mid seventies The Bothy Band set the model for traditional ensemble performance which is central to this very day.

The vast majority of contemporary bands follow the same model of two or three melody line instruments with two or three harmonic instruments (occasionally one of these is replaced with a bodhrán). They generally use the Ó Riada technique of combining and recombining the instruments into different formations to create different textures and highlight solos, a practice Ó Riada took from jazz, whilst also combining different types of tunes into sets. However the harmonic nature of the Bothy Band with a string, often guitar, based harmonic accompaniment has become standard and is descended from the use of these instruments and the guitar in popular western music culture. Therefore in the creation of a style of traditional music specifically to listen to out of what was essentially music to dance to, models and practices were taken from jazz, classical and popular musics. An example of a successful modern traditional group is Nomos, which you can hear on the enclosed CD. [Track 9]

Recently Borrowed Instruments and Techniques

As we have seen, the above was enabled partially through the acquisition of new instruments and techniques. For instance the guitar (which has been used to accompany traditional dance music since the 1920s but only extensively so since the 1950s) has been adopted through its use in the ballad boom from popular music practice, as have techniques and methods of performance (such as the previously mentioned riffs). The most obvious recent case of borrowing has been the bouzouki, taken from the Greek folk tradition (although most often with a large degree of structural modification) and which has become such a common instrument that a tutor for the instrument has been recently published entitled *The Irish Bouzouki*! These borrowings have been most notable in the field of harmony instruments, obviously because there has been little tradition of harmonic accompaniment previous to this century.

Techniques have also been borrowed from other traditions and applied to instruments which have been established in the tradition for long periods of time. These would include changing hand positions on the fiddle (traditional technique just involves first position) and using triple tonguing as an ornamental technique on flute and whistle (this is a classical flute technique). Banjo players often experiment with tuning systems more commonly associated with banjo playing current in the United States and some bodhran players are busy learning and applying percussion techniques and instruments from Eastern and African traditions. Of course, as previously mentioned, this process of acquisition is not a new process but one which has been accelerated through extensive urbanisation and technologisation.

'Fusions'

Many musicians however engage in more obvious mixes of styles between musical traditions which are often called 'fusions'. These fusions are often regarded to be at the very periphery of the tradition and some purists say that they exist completely outside of the tradition. Certainly this is where outside musical influence is most obviously heard. There are four broad types of fusion easily defined. These are with classical music, pop/rock music, jazz and other folk traditions.

The fusions between classical and traditional music often take the obvious format of a classical music ensemble accompanying a traditional musician playing dance tunes and airs. Some of the most popular composers to arrange and compose for these fusions are Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, Sean Davy and Bill Whelan. Sean Davy writes for sometimes huge ensembles of classical orchestra and traditional ensembles (his most famous works include *The Brendan Voyage* for pipes and orchestra and the *Pilgrim Suite*). Bill Whelan, internationally famous as the composer of the music to *Riverdance* has also composed other orchestral pieces such as the *Seville Suite*. Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin is perhaps the most well known for his work combining traditional music with classical in his arrangements of traditional dance tunes, airs and harp tunes for the piano, piano and string orchestra and traditional instruments and string orchestra as well as his own compositions. His suite for traditional flute and orchestra, *Oileán*, is one of the best examples of this type of work where the flute and Stravinsky-like strings play with the structure of a traditional jig and reel. The interesting thing about this work is that during the flute solos the instrument is not restricted by the orchestra, but has complete freedom to play in a very traditional style. [Track 10]

The jazz fusion has been a little less prominent in the public view but can be heard in the recordings of groups such as Puck Fair (made up of Mícheál Ó Domhnaill again on guitar, Tommy Hayes on bodhran and percussion and jazz flute player Brian Dunning) and Deiseal (low whistle, bouzouki, bass) where, to various extents, the performers improvise around traditional material. Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin also treats some traditional dance tunes in a similar way in some of his pieces, producing a three-way fusion between traditional, classical and jazz musics. The influence of jazz has, apart from these bands, been more subtle in the last ten years or so with the adoption of a swing jazz rhythm section by many musicians and groups. The first to adopt this was the band Four Men and a Dog and it has since become part of the band arrangements for prominent soloists such as Sharon Shannon (accordion) and Sean Smith (fiddle). The track on the CD of the 'Finnish Schottische/Sligo Reel' is what is regarded as a 'jazzy' approach to both melody playing and accompaniment. [Track 11]

The 1970s and 1980s saw the heyday of the rock/pop fusion bands with groups such as Horslips, Stockton's Wing and Moving Hearts. This very rock oriented fusion his diminished in prominence but has been replaced with the West-coast pop/trad fusion of bands like The Corrs and more recently in a similar vein Tamalin, and the dance/trad. fusions created by Ossian Lunny and groups such as Afro-Celt Sound System. Nóirín Ní Riain's track on the enclosed CD is an interesting example of a sean nós song with modern 'dance' rhythms, and also using modern computer sequencing technology in a fascinating blend. [Track 12]

Traditional Irish music has also crossed with the musics of other traditional cultures. Again of course this has always occurred with the neighbouring traditions such as the Scots and the English but today many musicians and composers look to more exotic fusions for inspiration. Obviously the Afro-Celt Sound System mixes the music of Africa, particularly that of Kenyan harper Ayub Ogade, with Irish music and modern dance music. Bill Whelan and Andy Irvine looked to Eastern European music and this lead to the album *Eastwind* and eventually to the music of *Riverdance* which, especially in its uneven metres and complex time signatures, refers to Balkan music traditions.

These crossovers or fusions have proved to be very profitable for traditional musicians and musicians coming from outside the music. They seem to capture the imagination of the public both in Ireland and abroad as the *Riverdance* phenomenon and the more recent Chieftains albums illustrate (the Chieftains have achieved their present popularity through Chinese, Galician, rock, pop and country fusions). However, many argue that these fusions are peripheral to the tradition and will never become central to traditional music practice. This obviously holds a certain amount of truth, although the long-term effects remain to be seen. These crossovers are still very interesting and have been an important way of presenting Irish music to the world, as well as pumping new life and vitality into our own traditional music. The Swap example on the enclosed CD is an interesting mix of Irish and Swedish traditional musics [Track 13], as well many other influences. Another example of a mixture of influences can be heard on the *Ceol Gan Amhras* CD, where Stephen Naughton plays a tune called 'Retour Des Hirondelles' to the guitar accompaniment of Mary Hennessy.

(c) Conclusion

What we have attempted to do here is provide a basic introduction to the native Irish folk music traditions and provide insights into the way the tradition has changed, especially recently. We have examined these changes in the context of 'from within' and 'from without' but it is important to remember that music is a product of the musician's own environment (both general and musical). As all experiences are to some extent unique then, to a certain extent, the music created by these individuals is also unique. Thus, every musician recreates his or her music in an individual and creative manner making any general account of this change across the whole tradition difficult. What must be remembered is that traditional music performance is a diverse practice stretching from music rooted in the dance music traditions of the regions to the modern day fusion bands. This diversity of music has been made possible by the changes in Irish society in the last 150 years and the exposure of that society to the musics of other cultures.

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5. Track List for Enclosed Compact Disc

(1) Paul Dooley (harp): 'Captain O'Kane', from *Rip The Calico*, CD available from Paul Dooley, Ennistymon, Co. Clare. Paul Dooley is a harper/fiddler living in Ennistymon, West Clare. His harp is a reproduction of a sixteenth-century Irish harp and he plays it in the manner of the old harpers. 'Captain O'Kane' is a piece by Turlough O'Carolan collected by Edward Bunting.

(2) Laoise Kelly (harp): 'Tyrell's Pass', 'The Coolinarne Jig', 'The Lisnagun' (jigs), from *River of Sound*, composer, Brendan Ring. (Virgin). Laoise Kelly from Westport, Co. Mayo, is one of the leading young harpers today. Performers such as she are attempting to bring the neo-Irish harp into the mainstream dance music tradition. These three jigs are recently composed by Brendan Ring, pipe maker from Kenmare, Co. Kerry.

(3) Lillis O Laoire (voice): 'Airdí Cuain', recorded at the Irish World Music Centre, University of Limerick. Lillis is one of the most important exponents of sean nós singing especially the style associated with his native Donegal. Lillis is a lecturer in Irish at the University of Limerick. Lillis Ó Laoire has made two recordings of traditional unaccompanied song, *Bláth Gach Géag dá dTig* (twelve songs in Irish from the Northern tradition with accompanying notes in Irish and English) published by Cló Iar-Chonnachta, Indreabhán Co na Gaillimhe, and *Datgan*, available from select record shops.

(4) Sandra Joyce (voice): 'The Thresher', recorded at the Irish World Music Centre, University of Limerick.

(5) Niall Keegan (flute): Unnamed East Galway reel, recorded at the Irish World Music Centre, University of Limerick.

(6) Niall Keegan (flute): 'The Boys of Ballisodare', recorded at the Irish World Music Centre, University of Limerick.

(7) Michael Coleman (fiddle): 'Mrs. Kenny's Barndance', from *Michael Coleman* (Viva Voce). Michael Coleman was probably the most important figure in traditional music in America in the first half of this century. 'Mrs Kenny's Barndance' is a tune which has been recently made popular by the flute player Matt Molloy (of the Chieftains).

(8) Ceoltóirí Corofinne under-18 Céilí Band: Hornpipe, recorded Dr Duggan Hall, Corofin, Co. Galway. This Ceili Band is one of the leading young bands in the country. They have been formed under the auspices of the Corofin branch of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann.

(9) Nomos: 'The Scalloway Lasses', from *Set You Free* (Grapevine). Nomos is one of a new generation of bands around today. The three reels played here ('The Scalloway Lasses', 'Boney Anne and Scotch Mary') are all associated with flute players from Ulster.

(10) Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin: *Oileán/Island*, 3rd Movement, from *Oileán/Island* (Virgin/Venture). This is possibly one of the finest examples of trad/classical crossover there is. The mixture of Matt Molloy on traditional flute and the Stravinskian strings of the Irish chamber orchestra is unusual.

(11) Niall Keegan (flute), Sandra Joyce (bodhran), Chris Kelly (guitar): 'Finnish-Schottische', recorded at the Irish World Music Centre, University of Limerick.

(12) Nóirín Ní Riain: 'Port Na bPúcaí', from *Celtic Soul* (Living Music). The use of a sean nós song with dance percussion and synthesized sounds illustrates the use of sequencers and computer music editing and production in traditional music today.

(13) Swap: 'Congress', from *Swap* (Amigo Musik), available from SWAP, P.O. Box 171, Castle Donington, Derbyshire, DE74 2ZP. This new band combines the Irish sounds of English-based musicians Karen Tweed (piano accordion) and Ian Carr (guitar) with the Swedish music of fiddlers, Carina Normansson and Ola Bäckström.

Ceol Gan Amhras

The other enclosed CD, *Ceol Gan Amhras*, is a recording of contemporary traditional music by a school-based group of musicians. The album represents many of the modern trends in traditional music, and contains both traditional and newly-composed tunes. Some of these are by the musicians themselves, and there are many tunes from other traditions. The arrangements of these tunes are in a contemporary manner, with development of textures and harmony in both chordal accompaniment and harmony lines on melody instruments. The songs are either modern contemporary compositions such as 'Wonder Child', 'Wall of Tears' and 'Leaving the Land', or traditional Irish language songs such as 'Dónal agus Mórag' and 'Tei Abhaile Riú'. For those of you who are familiar with these musical traditions some of the arrangements and material have obvious roots (such as Mary Black, Clannad, De Danann and Altan). The arrangements of the material are very attractive and contemporary, and the standard of musicianship is very good (and augmented by former students of Cólaiste na Trócaire, Rathkeale, Co. Limerick). This recording illustrates how very creative and musical results are attainable by students.