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**Modern Irish Culture**

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- Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature* (London: Hutchinson, 1986)
- John Wilson Foster, *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1974)
- Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival: A Changeling Art* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987)
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- Rudiger Imhof, *The Modern Irish Novel: Irish Novelists after 1945* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 2002)
- Otto Rauchbauer (ed.), *Ancestral Voices: The Big House in Anglo-Irish Literature* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1992)
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## Irish music

Music in Ireland in the modern period reflected the changing socioeconomic strata of the society in which it was produced and consumed. Professional performances by popular European composers were put on in theatres for well-off audiences. A burgeoning print culture produced broadsides and pamphlets of songs and ballads disseminating radical republican ideas, coexisting with an older, Irish-language tradition, where anonymous love songs, drinking songs, laments and other songs by literate poets abounded.<sup>1</sup> Professional traditional musicians, harpers, fiddlers and pipers plied their trades and tailored their repertoires to suit their patrons, so that, depending on opportunity, their playing could range across the available gamut of contemporary musical genres. This chapter shows how an outline of the changing political climate is crucial for an understanding of the emergence of a canon of 'Irish music' as a distinct category. Developments in the formation of that canon, marking changing material realities and cultural tastes will also be discussed, and some account will be given of the enduring controversies that are integral to the ways in which 'Irish music' has been imagined.

Our modern understanding of Irish music begins in Scotland. From the mid-eighteenth century, James Macpherson's 'epics', loosely based on Gaelic heroic poetry, centring upon the legendary hero Ossian (or Oisín), enjoyed huge success, part of a growing and fashionable interest in the culture of the marginalised 'Celtic' periphery. These poems were popular in a climate marked by the effective defeat of the Jacobite forces at Culloden in 1746, and rode a wave of romanticism for a cause which had recently been a source of real danger to the peace and stability of the existing polity of the islands.

Ireland was centrally involved in debates that arose surrounding the authenticity of these creations. Macpherson was dismissive of Irish Gaelic claims on Ossian, and scholars like the Catholic historian, Charles O'Connor, took it upon themselves to correct him. Such lively debate belonged to a cultural climate in which an interest in history and antiquities flourished as part of a new patriotism among the ascendancy class. As the century progressed, this atmosphere became reenergised by events in mainland Europe. The French Revolution of 1789, and publications like Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1791), influenced the increasingly radical political mood on the island. Music partook of this mood and also helped incite it. From 1791, the Society of United Irishmen's programme for a non-sectarian, inclusive and democratic politics, following classic Enlightenment thought, stressed the enabling aspects of history and avoided divisive issues. Their internationalist gaze was oriented towards modernity and a future of rationality and progress, deliberately downplaying the excesses of the past. The United Irishmen aimed at politicising ordinary people by educating them about Enlightenment ideals through popular culture. A few of their number, however, were familiar with, or became absorbed in the Gaelic cultural heritage through antiquarian study, and sought to celebrate its regional uniqueness and specificity. This proto-Romantic nationalism, part of a wider European reaction to the Enlightenment, was to emerge as a powerful vector influencing the development of musical culture in Ireland, destabilising the preoccupation with the future by valorising the past.<sup>2</sup>

Many of those involved in the organisation of the Belfast Harp Festival in July 1792, held during the third anniversary of the revolution, were active in the United Irishmen. Theobald Wolfe Tone himself, later to lead a French-assisted armed uprising in 1798, attended some of the performances in the Exchange Rooms. Unimpressed by what he heard, however, he recorded the following caustic remarks in his diary: 'All go to Harpers at one; poor enough; ten performers; seven execrable, three good . . . the Harpers again, strum, strum and be hanged . . .'.<sup>3</sup> Gatherings of harpers had previously occurred at the 'Granard Balls' of 1781, 1782 and 1785, sponsored by James Duncan, a merchant resident in Copenhagen. They were competitive events, with the same performers taking the prizes every year, causing such acrimony among the remainder that Duncan withdrew his support. The Belfast event was directly influenced by these balls and took pains to avoid any bitterness over prize money. All competitors were to be given 'some premium' and the amounts were

kept secret, in an attempt to allay any potential jealousy.<sup>4</sup> Another major difference between the Belfast event and its predecessors was the explicit link to the United Irishmen, whose crest, a harp, bore the motto, 'It is new strung and shall be heard.' Thus, patriotic politics, metaphorically interpreted as harp-playing, specifically linked the imagined, historical Gaelic past with direct activism in a politically sensitised popular culture of the present.

Harpers, as professional musicians, were subject to the demands of their patrons. Consequently, most of the ten who attended knew items fashionable at the time, which might not have been regarded as particularly Irish. Some, indeed, may not have played Gaelic material regularly. To counter this, the festival organisers decreed specifically that only Irish music, understood as Gaelic harp music and folk music, was to be played, officially recognising 'Irish music' as a specific category, which conferred upon it a special status, serving to bracket it off from a more general repertoire of 'music played in Ireland'.

Uniquely in Belfast, preservation was a chief aim. Several experts, including a Gaelic scholar, were engaged to write down both music and words of the songs, although the only one to appear was Edward Bunting, a young organist from Armagh, and a protégé of the McCracken family who were active in the United Irishmen. Bunting noted tunes from the musicians over the three days of the festival, a singular achievement. Deeply impressed by his experiences, he devoted much of the rest of his life to the collecting and publication of Irish music. He made countrywide collecting trips later in 1792, in 1800 and 1802, and visited Arthur O'Neill, Daniel Black and Denis Hempson (the oldest of the harpers), collecting from them almost the only extant information about the playing technique of the Gaelic wire-strung harp. From this material, he published collections in 1796, in 1809 and in 1840 respectively. His manuscripts, held in the library of the Queen's University of Belfast, remain an important source regarding music in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland.

Bunting was trained in the major and minor system of keys which had emerged in the eighteenth century. Consequently, the modal character of much of the music may have eluded him and he often deliberately altered tunes to suit the conventions of his time. A re-emphasis of the link between medieval church modes and folk music, emerging around the turn of the twentieth century, led to criticism of Bunting's editorial methods, so that his work is now approached with caution. Nevertheless,

the Belfast Harp Festival marks the known beginning of the collection of music in Ireland from practising musicians, and the establishment of a tradition of scholarship concerning Irish music. Issues emerging from its Romantic impulses (notably the fear of extinction), the drive towards active transmission and performance, and the concern for purity and authenticity became established discourses within that scholarship and have remained influential factors in the direction of 'Irish music'.

In 1809, the Dublin Harp Society proposed to halt the decline of the harp, following the Belfast Harp Society, established the previous year, which also continued the ideals underpinning the festival. Financial troubles dogged the Belfast society from the beginning. Arthur O'Neill, appointed as teacher, died in penury in 1814. A revival in 1819 allowed it to limp on until 1840. One performer of note emerged, Patrick Byrne, who toured extensively until his death in 1863. The tradition of the wire-strung harp thus ended in the nineteenth century, as modern lightweight gut-strung instruments replaced it. Its identification as a nationalist symbol arguably contributed to this, but there was also a growing fashion for piano playing which overtook the harp as a drawing room accomplishment for young ladies.

Harp imagery is central in the work of Thomas Moore, a major musical and literary figure of this period. Born in Dublin, and encouraged by his mother to perform at social gatherings from an early age, he became an accomplished musician and singer. He entered Trinity College, then only recently made accessible to Catholics, and published his translation of the Odes of Anacreon in 1800 to instant acclaim. Although closely associated with a number of those active in the 1798 uprising, notably with the rebellious Robert Emmet, he was opposed to violence. He left Ireland in 1799 probably because of a genuine fear of arrest, although he remained committed to Ireland's welfare. His *Irish Melodies*, published in ten volumes between 1808 and 1834, form his most lasting legacy to both music and literature, gaining him the popular title of 'Ireland's National Poet' and earning him huge recognition across the nineteenth-century English-speaking world.

In Britain, Moore's achievement can be partly attributed to great personal charm and a gift for performance that ensured him a place in fashionable society.<sup>5</sup> His formidable lyrical facility and the sweet dreamy romanticism of his verses, wedded to appealing Gaelic melodies borrowed from Bunting and others, further enhanced his appeal. Their

reception in polite salons as lamentations for a defeated culture added another winning dimension. William Hazlitt, the renowned Romantic essayist, unimpressed by Moore's poetic style, famously remarked that he had turned the wild Irish harp into a 'musical snuff box'.<sup>6</sup> However, despite the superficially frivolous aural impression, Moore's musical box contained more incendiary materials. His tremendous popularity allowed the Catholic middle classes, gathering confidence after the repeal of most of the Penal statutes, to appropriate his work as an important element in a respectable and newly emergent English-speaking Irish national identity, instantly recognisable to all anglophones as Irish. Through his prudent foregrounding of melodic attractiveness and muting of aspects unpalatable to the colonial status quo, Irish audiences could hear claims to a national identity distinctly, if softly, voiced in his songs. His work, then, indicates the close but always ambivalent connection between nationalism, poetry and music.<sup>7</sup>

Moore's relationship with Edward Bunting can be regarded as the first significant instance of still current debates concerning tradition and innovation. Moore has been described variously as a mediator and a translator. Although Bunting produced his work in similar ways, he regarded himself as a preserver of the music's authentic character. Moore's offer of his services as a lyricist for Bunting's 1808 volume had been rejected. Because of Moore's subsequent celebrity, however, it is likely that Bunting regretted his rebuff. Although he praised Moore's lyrics, he alleged that his musical arrangements were compromised. Moore countered that by changing the songs he had popularised them, without which they would have remained sleeping in their 'authentic dross'.<sup>8</sup> The burden of authenticity and the commercial rewards of popular success were the issues at stake. Bunting represented the closest thing to faithful transcriptions in the field. Moore's melodic adaptations, conversely, prioritised his own lyrical requirements in a conscious strategy of communicative translation. Notwithstanding Bunting's objections, he certainly envied Moore's celebrity, and felt cheated of an acclaim that was rightly his.

Gaelic poets and singers also continued an ancient link between poetry and music. Although some came under United Irish influence, calling for the establishment of *dlí na Fraince* (the law of France), others invoked seventeenth-century traditions of bitter invective against the colonial presence. Pádraig Cundún, Máire Bhuí Ní Laoghaire and Tomás Rua Ó Súilleabháin in Munster, and Raiftearaí (Raftery) in east Galway

made songs on many subjects. They combined older motifs with the prophecies of 'Pastorini' in anticipation of the overthrow of the *Gaill* (foreigners), providing a stark contrast to Moore's delicate verse. Máire Bhuf's '*Cath Chéim an Fhíú*' is a musical and poetic classic of the genre. Love was also a theme, as were laments about local catastrophes, such as Raftery's graphic '*Eanách Dhúin*', commemorating nineteen people who drowned as they boated down the Corrib to a fair in Galway. Ó Súilleabháin's '*Amhrán na Leabhar*' is another highlight, a moving lament for the loss of his books in a fire aboard ship. The poet-singers' audiences were their Irish-speaking neighbours, whose concerns they shared. Their work remained locally popular, surviving the Famine, but, because of their lack of wide access to print culture, was largely unknown outside their own communities until the later Gaelic revival at the end of the century.

Many belonged to a popular vernacular culture in which musical performance, dancing and singing were essential social skills, the festive hallmarks of most important events. Wakes and funerals were occasions for such conspicuous merriment and consumption, often in the face of dire want. A separate women's tradition of keening formed a significant part in these practices, and is discussed in chapter 8 of this volume. When instrumentalists were unavailable, skilled individuals (often women) provided music for dancers by *portaireacht* (lilting or 'puss' music). Travelling dancing masters were in demand, teaching the steps of intricate jigs, reels and hornpipes among other solo and popular group dances. The Catholic clergy had waged a sustained and organised campaign against such popular entertainment from the late eighteenth century, seeking to control profane practices integral to festivals such as *laethanta patrúin* ('pattern' days), celebrated at Holy Wells dedicated to local saints. Although encompassing pilgrimages and other sincerely observed devotional practices, they also featured music, dancing, singing, courting, drinking and fighting.

Such a mingling of sacred and secular, the simultaneous celebration of the spiritual and the corporeal, both scandalised and fascinated the 'civilised' assumptions of nineteenth-century observers. In the aftermath of the Great Famine, beliefs in the fairy otherworld and similar phenomena, regarded as characteristically Irish, were rapidly being abandoned. As these aspects of life disappeared or went underground, attitudes towards them changed. Viewed with fear and suspicion by the educated in their heyday, they became increasingly valued as another

manifestation of old Gaelic culture threatened by advancing modernity as they declined.

The 'devotional revolution' gathered pace from 1850 with the appointment of Paul Cullen as archbishop of Armagh. His romanising of the Catholic church included musical reform. He introduced and promoted chant in the Palestrina style, then popular in Europe, to the exclusion of all other forms of music. A large body of vernacular hymns, maintained largely by women, many focusing on Christ's Passion and upon Mary as *bean chaoimhe* (keening woman), were anathema to this programme, and their use decreased.

Such cultural obsolescence was of grave concern to individuals like George Petrie, the inheritor of Bunting's mantle. A painter by profession, and also a violinist, he became a leading antiquary and was involved in the Ordnance Survey (1824–46) and the Royal Irish Academy, which brought him into contact with the Gaelic scholars John O'Donovan and Eugene O'Curry. The latter in particular shared Petrie's interest in music and provided him with many songs and information about them. Petrie regarded O'Curry as the essential embodiment of the purity and truth characteristic of the best of Gaelic culture, reflecting his conviction that the Gaelic component represented the most significantly Irish element of the musical repertoire. He collected from his youth and passed on material to more leading figures in the music world, particularly to Bunting, and to Moore between 1807 and 1808. Petrie published on Irish music from the 1820s, becoming more prominent after Bunting's death. In 1851, he was among the founders of the Society for the Preservation and Publication of the Melodies of Ireland, and also became its president. The concerns of the society centred, as earlier in Belfast, on the disappearance of Irish music and the need for collection and preservation. Petrie's work gained a new impetus after the Great Famine, which had reduced the population of Ireland by an estimated 1.7 million in the space of ten years, and was believed to have catastrophically affected the popular musical culture that provided the sources for the collectors' melodies. Despite the devastation, Petrie collected with O'Curry on Aran in 1857 and recovered excellent material, testifying to an uneven distribution of such change.

In 1855, the society published Volume 1 of *The Petrie Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland*. This ambitious project was soon disbanded, although a partially complete second volume appeared posthumously in 1882. Other publications associated with him include *Ancient Music of*



Ireland from the Petrie Collection and Sir Charles Stanford's *The Complete Collection of Irish Music as Noted by George Petrie*, published in three volumes between 1902 and 1905. Petrie critiqued Bunting's ideas, recognising melodic variation despite Bunting's claims to the contrary. He was committed to discovering the 'best' versions and believed in the existence of originals, sometimes applying rather subjective criteria. His musical approach seemed to embody a conflict between his romantic view of the Gaelic past and his commitment to scientific study. He published both Gaelic and English words to his songs, and gave detailed commentaries regarding their origins and structures, building upon Bunting's work. His conviction that the best versions of melodies were collected from singers, explicitly foregrounded singing as a mainstay of authenticity in the developing canon.

Thomas Moore had his musical heirs in the Young Ireland movement (1842–48). Due to growing literacy among the population, transmission from printed sources increased accordingly. Broadsheet ballads were hawked at fairs by wandering singers or underemployed labourers as a supplement to their income, seditious ballads apparently forming the most popular genre. Thomas Davis, whose ideas were influenced by Johann Gottfried Herder, the German nationalist philosopher, was a central figure and a seminal influence on the cultural nationalism of Young Ireland. Like the United Irishmen, this group recognised the excellent propagandising properties of the ballad and printed many in *The Nation*, established in 1842. They were published in *The Spirit of the Nation* (1845), reprinted fifty-eight times until 1934. Although more literary than the street ballads, and sometimes not strictly regarded as 'traditional', some of them ('A Nation Once Again' and 'The West's Awake') remain staples of the popular repertoire.

P. W. Joyce, from the Ballyhoura region of Limerick, came to Dublin where he met George Petrie, who encouraged him to write down songs and tunes from memory. He published three collections, *Ancient Irish Music* (1873), *Irish Music and Song* (1888) and his largest and most influential book, *Old Irish Folk Music and Songs* (1909), which drew from manuscript sources as well as from his own collecting. Joyce's lifetime saw the interest in Gaelic subjects reach a zenith in Ireland and the re-emergence of an interest in all things Celtic. It is also worth pointing out, however, that the rage for Celticism coincided with a crisis in Irish rural culture, exacerbated by emigration, a precarious economy and the demise of the great mass of the rural poor.

Interest led to the formation of societies to promote aspects of Gaelic culture, such as the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language (1876), the Gaelic Athletic Association (1884) and most importantly, perhaps, the Gaelic League (1893). The year previous to the foundation of the League, Douglas Hyde, the son of a Roscommon minister interested in the Irish language and in folklore, delivered his epoch-making address, 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland', addressing many of the same concerns as his predecessors. He focused on 'Irish music' as a close second to the Irish language in cultural importance. Taking up a familiar refrain, he noted that modern popular music was fast replacing old native airs, which, he insisted, were vastly superior. 'Irish Music' must be protected from encroachment and preserved at all costs. Adherents of the new cultural nationalism, of which the Gaelic League was emblematic, focused on rural dwellers in the west in ways practically unthinkable to most of their predecessors only a generation earlier. Irish-speakers were actively sought out, as urban dwellers began to learn and speak the Irish language, in line with Gaelic League ideas of revitalisation.

Fascination with folk music and song grew apace with the developing discipline of folklore. Echoing the Belfast Harp Festival of 1792, exponents emphasised living orally transmitted culture found in rural communities as an expression of national identity. Hyde explicitly linked the study of folklore with learning the Irish language. The Folk Song Movement was highly influential and assisted the formation of a new performance aesthetic based on principles outlined in Cecil Sharp's book, *English Folksong* (1907). The modal similarity of Gaelic airs and singing styles to plainchant also contributed to this new development, and Hyde's *Abhráin Ghrádh Chúiige Chonnacht (The Love-Songs of Connacht, 1893)* was important in identifying a canon of verse which stimulated other similar publications.

Strong proponents of nativism were often at loggerheads with progressive cultural advocates. The 'old Irish style' of singing, soon to be called *sean-nós* (solo, unaccompanied and sometimes cacophonous to metropolitan ears) was touted by nativists at the expense of harmonised choral versions of Gaelic songs, alienating many urban singers. Harmonic arrangements and choral performance could be condemned as a pollution of the pure, authentic state of the music as collected from the people, in what amounted to an aesthetics of opposition. These issues can be regarded as extreme cases of the concerns addressed by Petrie's

work, and also as a continuation of the debate between Bunting and Moore.

The union or uilleann pipes, a bellows-blown instrument with a chanter, three drones and keyed melody pipes capable of harmonic effects, which had first emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century, also became the focus of attention. Steps taken at this time ensured an intermittent revival in the instruments' fortunes, until 1966, when *Na Píobairí Uilleann* (NPU) with offices at Henrietta St., Dublin, came to serve as an umbrella organisation for increasing numbers of pipers. Sets of quadrilles, however, having enjoyed their first wave of popularity in the 1820s were ostracised by the Gaelic League, which ousted them in favour of their own Scottish-influenced inventions. By the 1980s the style and the repertoire were back in vogue and are now considered by fervent advocates to be more authentically traditional than *céili* dancing.

The extremism that characterised much of the controversy of the Revival was reflected in a regrettable trend towards political entrenchment, which was to continue for many years. The new 'authenticity', perceived as more masculine, accompanied a waning of Thomas Moore's star as a musician, since his lyrical and musical approach were now considered an embarrassment.<sup>9</sup> In fact, his success in England could now be repudiated, causing him to be branded, in the words of one irascible commentator, a 'half-fledged pervert' who pandered to the colonial élite.<sup>10</sup> Such extreme nationalist viewpoints also led to the rejection of the composer Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924) as a unionist, although he knew the repertoire of Irish tunes well and combined it with German influences in his work, creating a distinctive voice, now claimed as 'English'.<sup>11</sup>

Emphasis on the preservation and publication of 'Irish Music' had focused primarily on song until now, since it was perceived as the crucial linguistic link to the aristocratic Gaelic past represented by the harpers. Jigs, reels, hornpipes and other instrumental dance tunes had not received the same attention, despite their huge popularity. It was probably no accident that the impetus for redressing this imbalance came from a musician resident outside Ireland. 'Chief' Francis O' Neill from Bantry, with his unrelated collaborator, Sergeant James O' Neill, compiled a prolific music collection in Chicago, from memory and from the playing of other emigrants. Among many publications, his most influential was *The Dance Music of Ireland* (1907). Known among musicians simply as 'The Book', it ran to four editions and became the most

popular reference work for practising traditional instrumentalists until it was superseded by Breandán Breathnach's first volume of *Ceol Rince na hÉireann* (1963). O'Neill was sometimes criticised for including material that was not 'Irish', such as the song 'Killarney' by Michael Balfé, although this item circulated in oral tradition. Such criticism highlights the selective nature of what was considered Irish, excluding elements that did not fit a particular prescriptive model. O'Neill's work also heralded the significance of the United States in Irish traditional music, a trend that continues to grow in the third millennium.

The establishment of two states coincided with the advent of radio on the island in 1921, and a period when extremist prescriptions became more marked. 2BE (now BBC Radio Ulster) began broadcasting in Belfast from 1922. By 1926, 2RN, a national radio channel, had been established in Dublin under the directorship of Séamus Clandillon. A prominent Gaelic Leaguer, singer and collector of Irish music, his leadership ensured that Gaelic song and traditional music were programmed regularly. Later, in 1951, outside broadcasters collected traditional music in the field, which led to successful series such as *A Job of Journey Work* and *The Long Note*. In Northern Ireland, on the other hand, in 'a society devoid of consensus',<sup>12</sup> music repeatedly proved to be a contentious issue drawing criticism from both sides of the political divide. Although, in Britain, it was hard to see that such matters could be contentious, society in the North became acutely sensitive to the least tweaking of political and cultural identities on the airwaves. Under the directorship of George Marshall, the station attempted to avoid material that might be critical of the Northern government. Music was an accurate barometer of such tensions, where songs such as 'The Minstrel Boy' and 'The Boyne Water' were guaranteed to offend Orange and Green sensibilities respectively.<sup>13</sup> Marshall also attempted to stop the broadcast of 'The Soldier's Song', the national anthem of the Republic, and was supremely reactive to Southern claims on the word 'Irish'. Sensitivities ran both ways. When the BBC attempted to mount a programme entitled 'County Ceitidhe' from Armagh in 1946, it drew the ire of the local Gaelic League, which regarded the attempt as a 'travesty of all that is commonly understood by *ceitidhe*'.<sup>14</sup>

Matters improved with the appointment of Andrew Stewart in 1948, a seasoned BBC broadcaster, who oversaw the broadcast of the legendary series 'As I Roved Out' in 1951. By 1967, when a Clancy Brothers' concert heralding the arrival of BBC2 was held in the Ulster

Hall, the reception was unanimously enthusiastic, leading to a series with the group. Although classical music was broadcast by both stations, many technical and logistical difficulties had to be overcome to bring standards to an acceptable level.

The political upheavals of the twenties caused great disruption to musical activities in Ireland. The *Oireachtas*, since 1897 Ireland's first annual festival for literary and performing arts, was not held from 1924 until 1939. Although it remains an important platform for traditional singing in Irish, as a forum for instrumental music and English song, it has been supplanted by the *Fleadhanna of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann*. Dancing was also under attack in the 1920s from the clergy. Both they and conservative Gaelic League elements tried to suppress popular music and dance, the League favouring its own *céilí* dances instead. The Dance Halls Act (1935) attempted to regulate dancing, and probably contributed to the decline of the house dance. Conversely, however, it stimulated the formation of larger music ensembles, known as the *céilí* bands (sometimes including saxophones), whose heyday lasted into the showband era of the sixties. Full-time collectors hired by the Irish Folklore Commission from 1935 ensured that many excellent musicians and singers were recorded, initially on paper only, with sound recordings following gradually.

Despite such developments, traditional music was still seen as a threatened part of native culture. *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann* (literally, a gathering of Ireland's musicians) was established in 1951, coincidentally the same year as the Wexford Opera Festival was founded, and has since proliferated into the largest organisation promoting Irish music today, with 'provinces' in Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia. It places great emphasis on the transmission of musical skills to the young, claiming some 600 classes in 1999. Its competitive *Fleadhanna*, organised at county, provincial and international level, have raised playing standards across all instruments, leading also to a certain homogenisation of styles. *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann*, the culmination of the year's competitions, is held annually in Ireland and continues to attract up to 200,000 people. With a democratic political structure, CCE's membership covers a wide spectrum of opinion. Some of its social and political interventions were controversial, such as the cancellation of the 1971 *Fleadh* in protest against internment in Northern Ireland, and, in 1983, the adoption of a position in the national referendum on abortion. Lifetime (appointed 1968) Director General Labhrás Ó Murchú's government

report on traditional music in 1998 was widely criticised for its failure to consult organisations other than *Comhaltas* involved in traditional music. The 2002 Arts Bill was resisted also because it contained a proposal, supported by CCE, recommending the establishment of a standing committee that would advise the Arts Council on the new category of 'Traditional Arts'.

In classical music, English composers of the twenties and thirties, such as Philip Heseltine (Peter Warlock), Sir Arnold Bax and Ralph Vaughan Williams produced works that revealed some engagement with Irish culture. Seán Ó Riada is widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in Irish music in the second half of the twentieth century in terms of public appeal. Following such composers as the gifted but stricken progressive Frederick May and the prolific nationalist Éamonn Ó Gallchohair, his career has addressed the disjunctions between the European and the native repertoires.

Deeply familiar with mainstream European literature and music, Ó Riada was initially attracted by modernism. His interest in traditional music was stimulated by his association with figures in the organisation *Gael-Linn* and RTÉ. In a radio series in 1962, entitled 'Our Musical Heritage', he revealed ideas about Irish music that were considered ground-breaking and original in a modernising Ireland, inclined to view that music as part and parcel of a legacy of poverty and backwardness. Ó Riada's aesthetic strategy deliberately made links beyond European music with Indian classical music, emphasising its circularity and variational qualities. By invoking a more global context, Ó Riada's orientalisising imagining of Irish music succeeded in making traditional culture interesting to many who had previously rejected it. He experimented widely with the forms of traditional music, using orchestral arrangements of Gaelic airs in the film scores for *Mise Éire*, *Saoirse* and *An Tine Bheo*. These scores (particularly that for *Mise Éire*) were highly acclaimed, and made welcome within the climate of nationalistic fervour preceding the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 rising. Musically, however, they remain some of the most interesting experiments attempted with the traditional repertoire. The incongruity of creating a nineteenth-century symphonic soundscape as an accompaniment to a distinctly modern twentieth-century genre, commemorating Ireland's struggle for independence, clearly illustrates Ó Riada's formidable imaginative capability. These compositions almost seemed to fill the gap that existed in nineteenth-century musical development in Ireland, and yet



also stand as a modern phenomenon, encapsulating the way in which past, present and future have never existed in some tidy, linear schematic sequence. Ó Riada's Mass, created in conjunction with the male unison choral group, *Cór Chúil Aodha*, drawn from the congregation in the west Cork village in which he had settled in 1963, also validated interest in traditional song. Ó Riada's popular appeal tended to overshadow other important composers among his predecessors and contemporaries.

Yet another experiment was the establishment of *Ceoltóirí Chualann* in the late fifties. Ó Riada assembled some of Ireland's most accomplished virtuoso players and formed them into an ensemble along classical lines, adding what some regarded as an unprecedented finesse to traditional music performance. His use of the singer Seán Ó Sé, whose excellent command of Irish and powerful tenor voice could be regarded as an attempt to reconcile *sean-nós* style with that of the 'trained' singer is a case in point. Above all, the evening wear adopted by *Ceoltóirí Chualann* for *Ó Riada sa Gáire* in 1969 transmitted a message that amplified Ó Riada's musical innovations. This was serious music that demanded respect.

Paddy Moloney, the ensemble's piper, convened a group of his fellow members to record for Claddagh Records in 1963, eventually forming a new band which began to develop Ó Riada's ideas. Since they went fully professional in 1975, The Chieftains have become one of the most commercially successful Irish traditional groups ever, paving the way for others.

Nor did the rich musical efflorescence end there. The Dubliners, whose powerful singing and playing represented many people's first contact with traditional music, emerged as a powerful force. Their performances of more earthy and ribald material gained recognition for street ballads, previously excluded from the officially prescribed canon as uncouth. The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, taking advantage of the folk revival in the United States, sporting Aran sweaters and singing rousing ballads, also became stars and spawned a myriad of imitators, some of whom were captured on celluloid by RTÉ, which had begun television broadcasting in 1961. Soon after came Sweeney's Men and the Johnstons. In 1974, another group, known as *Seachtar*, reformed as The Bothy Band. Named for the huts that had housed Irish migratory labourers in Scotland, the band created another kind of sound, influenced by rock music of the period, characterised by a unique drive, energy and virtuosic playing. Their style remains influential upon all traditional bands who have subsequently emerged. Groups such as Planxty, De Danann, Clannad,

Horslips and later, Moving Hearts and Altan, created their own sonic musical worlds and prefigured the rapid diversification that has now become an established pattern. The era also produced Them, a blues/rock group, that although itself short-lived, led to the emergence of lead-singer Van Morrison as a major international star. Rory Gallagher also achieved acclaim as a major blues guitarist and Thin Lizzy began a successful career with a rock version of a ballad on 'Top of the Pops'. The New Wave and Punk era also produced The Boomtown Rats and in Britain, Johnny Rotten and the Sex Pistols. Later, Boy George, The Smiths and the Pogues also explored the Irishness of the 'Plastic Paddy' phenomenon.<sup>15</sup>

'Irish music', imagined in different ways since 1792, was now on the way to becoming a marketable international commodity, a trend that has escalated since the seventies. The success of U2, Sinéad O' Connor, the Cranberries and Enya in the eighties and nineties has made it easier for Irish musicians of all genres to gain recognition in a global market. Country music has also flourished in a distinctively Irish form since the fifties – Daniel O'Donnell is, perhaps, its most popular exponent today. Like Thomas Moore, many musicians have successfully set forth to seek their fortune abroad, adapting and packaging 'Irish' music in arrangements attractive to audiences worldwide. 'Irish music' and the more ethereal 'Celtic' music have been transformed by this expansion to mediate with other musics across many genres. The phenomenal commercial success of Bill Whelan's *Riverdance*, with its innovative use of Balkan rhythms and its chorus lines of dancers, is perhaps the most spectacular example of the kind of melding of styles which is now occurring. This has caused unease among conservatives, sparking the old debate, familiar from Bunting and Moore's disagreements, about the 'real' meaning of 'tradition'. Such a debate provided the main theme for the Crossroads Conference, in Dublin (1996), where 'traditionalists' and 'innovators' met to discuss Irish music, giving rise to heated arguments about authenticity, maintenance, direction, change and commercialisation.

Old barriers continue to be breached in ways inconceivable even twenty years ago. In 1996, at the Merriman Summer School, five of Ireland's most prominent musicians shared the stage in a one-off gala concert: Hugh Tinney (piano), Louis Stewart (jazz guitar), Joe and Anne Burke (accordian) and Aine Uí Cheallaigh (song). This may be read as an unprecedented official acceptance of a musically heteroglossic island.

One consequence of continuing globalisation and commodification of 'Irish music' as a 'world' genre has been to exacerbate debates about

copyright. Although three organisations collect and administer musicians' copyright dues, dissatisfaction with their rationale is widespread. 'Irish music', until recently regarded as common property has increasingly become 'enclosed' as individuals and organisations claim ownership in order to reap the financial rewards of commercialisation. Copy-right is likely to be a cause of acute concern for traditional musicians for some time to come. The recently established FACE (Fíil Amhránaíthe agus Ceoltóirí Éireann) (2001) has emerged as an alternative body, aiming to promote and defend the rights of many artists who are dissatisfied with existing institutions.

The expansion of 'Irish music' means that its direction is ever more difficult to control, and that it will increasingly mediate with newly emerging popular music genres. Although programmes continue to be broadcast on Radio 1 and on RTE's music and arts station, Lyric FM, *Raidió na Gaeltachta*, broadcasting in the Irish language has become the main state-sponsored forum for traditional music. Yet here too there are signs of hybridity, since every night between ten and midnight, the acclaimed *An Taobh Tuathail* (The Dark Side), broadcasts the latest worldbeat, ambient and techno dance rhythms from bands such as Hyperborea, alongside world music and commentary in Irish.

Academic study has expanded since the seventies. Micheál Ó Súilleabháin established traditional music as a core element of the University College Cork music degree from the seventies and, on founding the Irish World Music Centre at the University of Limerick, has developed innovative programmes in many areas. Since 1996, the post-primary music syllabus in the Republic of Ireland contains a core element on traditional music, so that its longstanding neglect in the educational system has been somewhat redressed. Only some 25 per cent of second-level schools in the Republic offer music, however, an irony in a state whose emblem is a harp. By contrast, in Northern Ireland, where all schools are obliged to offer music, traditional music has been available in the second level curriculum since 1988.

Research into traditional music has grown steadily, but more is needed in the area of classical music. The publication of Harry White's controversial *The Keeper's Recital* (1998) heralded a new departure in Irish music scholarship. White's argument that nationalism and the dominance of literary forms had left music in an underdeveloped and static condition in Ireland has been vigorously disputed. Debates arising from this pessimistic view are likely to continue and, beneficially, to stimulate

much needed studies and histories of both 'Irish' music and 'music in Ireland'.

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3. Gráinne Yeats, *The Belfast Harpers' Festival, 1792* (Dublin: Gael Linn, 1980), p. 23.
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5. Matthew Campbell, 'Thomas Moore's wild song: the 1821 Irish melodies', *Bullán* 4, 2 (Winter/Spring 1999–2000), 83–103.
6. William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age* (1823; Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1989), p. 397.
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11. Online: <http://www.classical.net/music/comp.i4i/acc/stanford.html>. Date accessed: 30/10/02.
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## Modern architecture and national identity in Ireland

### Nationalism and modernism: the twin imperatives

In 1939, the Irish architect Michael Scott brought his design for an Irish Pavilion to the New York World's Fair: 'A board of ten or twelve architects vetted every building for the World's Fair. I appeared before them with the model and explained the whole idea behind it. They thought it was marvellous, a wonderful building. They liked how I solved the problem of nationalism and made it modern at the same time.<sup>21</sup> To the visitor the pavilion initially appeared as a sleek and sinuous form clad in concrete and glass, with a bright, airy interior (Fig. 16.1). Only from the air would it become clear that the building had a shamrock-shaped plan. If this device now seems somewhat corny or superficial, the challenge facing Scott – that of reconciling the imperatives of nationalism and of modernism within a single representative form – was evidently a substantial and enduring one. Indeed it seems possible to discuss the architecture of Ireland's modern era precisely in terms of this tension between the desire to be modern and the requirement to be representative of some idea of the 'national spirit'.

While this tension sometimes became the subject of deliberate theories and projects (as with Scott's pavilion), more often it simply formed the cultural climate within which Irish architecture was produced. Sometimes the two forces effectively cancelled each other out, resulting in architecture which was neither particularly modern nor particularly Irish. But at other times an architecture emerged which seemed, almost effortlessly, to be as much of its place as of its time. However, Michael Scott's claims that his pavilion had achieved this difficult balance do seem somewhat disingenuous, especially when compared with perhaps the