

Re-Imagining Irish Music and Dance

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Irish music and dance traditions are among the most visible global symbols of Irishness in the world today, defining and articulating a cultural center at a time of unprecedented social change at home and abroad. Most performing artists, enthusiasts, and cultural commentators would probably agree that Irish music and dance are enjoying the best of times in an extraordinary cultural renaissance.

There are, of course, multiple genres of Irish music. They range from older traditional styles of playing and singing to classical Irish music in the European tradition; the fifes, drums, flutes, and lambegs of the Northern Unionists; the modern rock sounds of world-famous groups like U2, the Cranberries, and the Corrs; the musical fusions created by composers such as Bill Whelan; and the magisterial collaborations between traditional and classical musicians, spearheaded by innovators like Micheal Ó Súilleabháin and Shaun Davey.

Then there is the vast trove of musical expressions associated with the Irish Diaspora around the world: songs of the Irish transported to the British colonies, songs of the Irish laborer in England, songs of the Irish fishermen and loggers in the Canadian Maritime Provinces, and the many traditions of popular music and song associated with the Irish in America.

Over the past two centuries, Irish and Irish American traditional, classical, popular, and various hybrid musical forms have emerged, coalesced,

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and sometimes vanished at different times and under different conditions. Minstrelsy, Irish American Tin Pan Alley songs, vaudeville routines; the pub-singing genre pioneered by the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, Sean O'Riada, and Ceoltóirí Cualann; the Chieftains, Horslips, and Irish folk rock; Planxty and the Bothy Band in the 1970s; and, of course, *Riverdance* are just a few examples of innovative Irish or Irish American musical hybrids. And then there are Irish artists such as U2, the Cranberries, the Corrs, and Van Morrison who have gained an international reputation playing music that derives its primary inspiration from British and American rock genres.

Millions of people are purchasing recordings and videos of Irish music and dance in stores, by mail order, and online all over the world. Outlets for the music have increased dramatically; one can hear Irish music today internationally at concerts and festivals, in bars and clubs, on radio and TV, and in films. Irish musicians and dancers in large numbers are making a full-time living. Thousands more have become accomplished performing artists, making a part-time living from their art. And more men and women than ever before from within and outside the ancestral culture are learning to perform Irish music and dance.

What is really Irish about the disparate approaches to Irish music that are emerging in Ireland and in the Diaspora? What is Irish, for example, about music in the western classical style that is written in Ireland by Irish-born composers? What does it owe to Ireland and what does it owe to European high-art traditions? What is Irish about the music of U2, for example, beyond the obvious fact that the band members are Irish-born? Have jazz or experimental music played in Ireland any real claim to being "Irish"?

These are all questions that are being posed in contemporary Irish musical studies, amid perceptions that certain forms of musical discourse have been privileged over other forms by popular acclaim and also by academic institutions and cultural organizations. Such privileging is often critiqued as motivated by a barely concealed agenda of cultural nationalism which has its roots in the romantic nation-building movements of the nineteenth century.¹ The debate is often intense.

Against this backdrop is the simple fact that Irish people have chosen to express many of their deepest cultural concerns through certain genres of music and song, doing so during centuries of political and social strife and resistance to colonial rule. Over the past two hundred years, major themes in Irish history and social life have also been addressed through music, and

music in its various forms remains one of the most powerful connections that the Irish have to their cultural identity—and indeed to multiple cultural identities.

One of those identities is said to be "Celtic." And the question, "What is Celtic?" is about as tricky as the issue of what "Irish" may mean. The "Re-Imagining Ireland" conference was held in the southern United States, a region with a large population that can lay claim to both Irish and Scottish ancestry. Clearly there are historic and cultural connections between the peoples of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Brittany, Galicia, and other European regions. But is "Celtic" today simply a term that denotes ancestral connections? Or does use of the term imply that there are contemporary cultural connections, and are those connections informed by historical commonalities? Is the whole concept of a Pan Celtic identity largely amplified if not entirely invented by cultural nationalists like the great Breton musician Alan Stivell? Is it a notion that stresses cultural commonalities, primordial ancestral connections, and a unified history marked by marginalization and oppression, by which identity is deliberately suppressed as part of colonial policy? And inevitably then the next question is: even if this is so, then how are these connections constructed or articulated? Which voices are heard in public on this subject? Usually they are not the voices of the performing artists, most of whom quickly tire of this backdrop of ideological fulminations and simply want to get on with their art.

It seems clear that the term "Celtic" has widely different meanings to different people. It may mean little to many in the "Celtic" countries themselves. Does it mean more perhaps in the United States, where the word "Celtic" has become synonymous with the mass marketing of cultural symbols, particularly Celtic music, as commodities to be bought and sold?

Of course, all musics created in Ireland or by Irish composers in the Diaspora can validly claim a measure of Irishness. I would like to look at one of these forms, the music generally known as traditional Irish instrumental music, and the ability to sustain itself that it has shown over time. This music has preserved a core identity while accommodating a variety of outside influences—an experience that indeed encapsulates the general cultural history of the island itself.

While there are seemingly never-ending discussions about its precise parameters, the art form known as traditional Irish instrumental music both within and outside Ireland is the music played in a distinctive style on instruments

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such as the fiddle, uilleann pipes, flute, concertina, accordion, tenor banjo, and tin whistle with a variety of accompanying instruments such as the bodhrán, piano, guitar, bouzouki, and keyboards. There is also the tradition of the Irish harp, once an elite instrument, which since the late eighteenth century has been emblematic of the country of Ireland itself.

In any historical discussion of Irish traditional music, the first point that should be made is that innovation and modernization have always been the cornerstones of this music rather than a rigid conformity to artistic norms—which is an idea more often than not associated with antiquarian notions of tradition.

There are many pervasive myths about Irish traditional music—the biggest of all being that it is very old. There are some mediaeval strains in the music, particularly in the nondance forms, and some traditions such as the music of the harpers can be traced back to the seventeenth century. But the form, structure, and style of the traditional music played today in fact come from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most of the repertoire is in fact post-Famine.² It is a music based on a strophic eight-bar system in which two, or sometimes more, eight-bar strains are repeated a limited number of times. This is a structure shared by the whole Anglo Celtic Diaspora in the instrumental dance music of Ireland, Scotland, and the Maritime Provinces of Eastern Canada, New England, and Appalachia.

Even the now-dominant social context for informal traditional music making is new. For every serious Irish traditional musician, the group musical “session” is a home base—a kind of regenerating chamber to which one returns for grounding and inspiration. If polled informally, most musicians would probably say that gathering for a session is an age-old custom. In fact, the pub session is of very recent origin, dating back probably no earlier than the early 1950s, beginning in London and New York.

It’s nice to be involved in something that is rooted in ancient mystery rather than contemporary history. Thus many of us thrive on myths that cite an invented antiquity for our music. We do so partly because of an inherited ideology of cultural nationalism, but maybe also because the notion of antiquity in times of rapid change somehow helps to ground us. This in fact may be the key to the enduring contemporary appeal of the term “Celtic” as a mass-marketing tool.

Again, the fact is that most Irish dance tune genres such as jigs, reels, and hornpipes are imported forms, probably some derived from England and others like the polka, schottische, waltz, and mazurka from Continental Europe.³ Most of the instruments on which Irish traditional music is typically

played came from England or Continental Europe into the musical culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The fiddle arrived in the early eighteenth century, the flute a few decades later. The concertina, melodeon, and accordion enter at various points in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their accommodation was often contested vigorously. The *Gaelic American* newspaper, for example, issued a call to arms against the increasingly popular accordion:

The strains of the violin, the pipes or the flute are not heard as frequently or as generally in the land as of old, and in their stead the ears are tormented with the racking, discordant screech of the concertina and accordion. What prompted Irish boys and girls to adopt these instruments of torture and discard the violin, the pipes and the flute, it is hard to find out . . . The man or woman, boy or girl, in sympathy with the revival of things Irish—the music as well as the language of the race—should make a firm resolution and to act up to it, wherever and whenever he or she gets the opportunity, destroy every concertina and accordion that can be reached. The most ear-splitting one of these instruments ever made in Germany is not proof against a scissors or a knife—a hole in the bellows silences it forever. Every concertina or accordion destroyed in Ireland is a blow struck for the restoration of Irish national musical taste . . . Nature loves harmony and will bless you for the act.⁴

The piano begins its journey into Irish music in the immigrant dance halls of Irish America and in the early 78-rpm phonograph recordings made in the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century. The guitar was used sporadically in some of the early 78-rpm recordings but did not enter the music in earnest until the 1960s. It was also in the 1960s that the bouzouki, a Greek instrument, was introduced by genial Johnny Moynihan in the group Sweeney’s Men. Only the uilleann pipes, harp, and bodhrán can be considered truly native Irish instruments, and even those did not evolve independently of European influences.

But it’s what players of these instruments have to do to be appropriate within the canons of the tradition that ends up being more relevant in determining membership than where the instruments came from and when. It’s not necessarily an easy accommodation—as a tenor banjo player I have learned firsthand that the process of acquiring membership in the musical community is not an easy journey.

The tale of how the banjo ended up as an instrument used in traditional Irish music is remarkable, spanning several centuries and involving a great movement of music and musicians across and between three continents. The

story of its incorporation in Irish musical culture is a fascinating example of the way a living, dynamic tradition revitalizes itself and accommodates innovation and change in the complex process of its evolution. It is worth telling this story in some detail to underscore the complexity of cultural accommodation and cross-fertilization.

The early origins of the banjo are obscure, but that its precursors came from West Africa to America, probably via the West Indies, is by now well established. The banjo did not arrive from Africa in any literal sense; slaves brought no possessions with them. But they brought the idea with them of an instrument left behind in their tribal culture. The multitude of African peoples, languages, and musics makes it very difficult to associate the banjo with any specific African prototype. From various historical references, however, it can be deduced that the banjar, or bangle, or banjer, or banza, or banjo was played in early seventeenth-century America by Africans in slavery who constructed their instruments from gourds, wood, and tanned skins, using hemp or gut for strings. This prototype was eventually to lead to the evolution of the modern banjo in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Until about 1800, the banjo remained essentially an African American instrument. What brought the instrument to the attention of the nation, however, was the grotesque representation of African American culture by white performers in minstrel shows. A great number of the performers in minstrelsy were Irish immigrants—a marginal population performing on a marginal instrument, presenting stereotypical misrepresentations of a group even more stigmatized than themselves.⁵

Though banjos of various kinds were likely brought to Ireland in the early nineteenth century by visitors and returning emigrants, it wasn't until 1843 that the banjo was formally introduced to Ireland in public performance, when the Virginia Minstrels toured in England, Ireland, and France in 1843, 1844, and 1845. Two members of the Virginia Minstrels were Irish Americans. Both of them—Dan Emmett, one of the most prolific songwriters in minstrelsy, and Joel Walker Sweeney, whose antecedents came from County Mayo—were virtuoso banjo players.

The earliest Irish banjos were fretless. Up to the turn of the twentieth century, banjos were generally plucked and strummed by the fingers or a thimble. So originally the banjo was used in Ireland for rudimentary accompaniment of songs and tunes with perhaps some of the simpler melodies being plucked out by the fingers. From the beginning, it was on the fringes of the musical culture adopted primarily by Travellers, who continue to occupy

a marginal role in Irish culture to this day. The instrument was very effective in attracting attention in the kind of outdoor setting where Travellers sold their wares and particularly useful in hawking the broadsheets and song-books that they sold at fairs, horse races, and other public gatherings.

The kind of banjo favored in the music was to change at the turn of the twentieth century. Frets had been added to the instrument in the 1880s, and then steel strings were invented. Influenced by the use of the plectrum in mandolin playing, Irish banjo players in America started to experiment with different plectral playing styles. The idea of tuning the banjo in fifths, just like the fiddle or mandolin, caught on around this time as well. Many players began to remove the short fifth string from the banjo, and, before long, banjo makers started manufacturing four-string banjos, originally called plectrum banjos, which were full-sized twenty-two-fret banjos, just like the five-string banjo. Then, around 1915, the tango, or tenor, banjo was invented, coinciding with the popularity in America of the new exotic dance form imported from Latin America, which was sweeping the nation at the time. The tenor banjo had seventeen or nineteen frets, a shorter neck tuned in fifths just like the mandolin or fiddle, though not at the same pitch, and was played with a plectrum. It was perfect for Irish music, where the majority of the instrumental pieces had been composed by fiddlers. The journey into the Irish musical culture was now complete. Today there are more than five thousand tenor banjo players in Ireland, representing a remarkable transition from the fringes to the center of the tradition in less than a hundred years.⁶

There is of course a central conservative core to the creative process in Irish traditional music, otherwise it could hardly continue to exist as a recognizable art form. What is involved in this core is the preservation of the eight-bar strophic structure and the phenomenon of micro-ornamentation and embellishment on a restricted central theme. This kind of micro-elaboration is a unifying aesthetic in most forms of Irish artistic expression, ranging from Celtic calligraphy to music and dance, and also, I would suggest, in the kind of social interaction one finds everywhere in Ireland, rural and urban.

I remember the first time I visited the town of Duleek in County Meath in the mid-1960s. Duleek was and still is a great place for gossip and yarns, much of it the acerbic variety, and I would sit in the Murray household on many a night and marvel at the litany of stories about local life. One of the most colorful characters in Duleek was a man named Tony Murray who now lives in San Francisco. At some point in the evening, Tony was sure to come in the

door with a royal sense of occasion and tell what he'd been up to that night and with whom.

One night he "arrived in" when things were a bit quiet. "You'd never guess what happened to me tonight," says he. And I remember May Murray, who was sitting on the couch, piping up, saying, "Tell us, Tony, and be sure to put a stretch on it."

The memory of that phrase stayed with me because it seemed to sum up something very important and very enduring about an Irish style of artistic expression. In a way, "putting a stretch on it"—an elaboration beyond the functional necessity of conveying mere information—is the cornerstone of what makes for a distinctive Irish style. Such elaboration elevates the prosaic to the artistic and is central to Irish traditional musical expression. Even in conditions of extreme flux, something remains identifiably Irish, and it's always a matter more of style than substance.

What is involved in all excellent performances of traditional music is a highly innovative spinning out of an infinite set of possibilities within an essentially limited structure. Because of the limited structure, the process of creativity in the art of Irish traditional music is a journey that can take two directions. One is to embellish the outer form—that is, add textures, tone colors, and harmonies or indeed new instruments to arrangements of tunes or tune medleys. The other, more fundamental, journey is into the interior landscape of the music, exploring endless melodic and rhythmic possibilities for micro-ornamentation and variation on recurring eight-bar motifs. It's this penchant for variation and ornamentation that makes it easy for musicians to tell the difference between Irish music and other Anglo Celtic genres, even though particular tunes are shared by all these musical traditions.

On a fiddle tour of the United States, which took place in the early 1990s, Irish traditional, Appalachian old-time, bluegrass, and Texas swing styles were showcased. At the end of the tour, Kenny Baker, the great East Tennessee fiddler, was asked if he had ever had an interest in playing Irish music. "Hell, no," he said famously, "I ain't that nervous."

What Kenny was alluding to, of course, was the constant serpentine melodic and rhythmic ornamentation and variation that he heard in the Irish fiddling, a style of playing contrasting sharply with the kind of straight ahead, powerful swing and drive that form the core aesthetic values in his own musical tradition.

The possibilities of elaboration within the eight-bar strophic boundaries are literally endless, and this is in part why so many brilliant contemporary

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Irish traditional musicians and composers are perfectly happy to work with this seemingly limited structure. Composers less "enculturated" in the norms of the musical tradition might consider this very constraining, but scores of tune creators in the traditional idiom clearly do not.

Again it must be stressed that these core identificational issues have little to do with the subject of where the instruments or musical forms originally came from. Issues of historical truth may be of considerable importance, however, to members of cultural nationalistic organizations such as the Gaelic League and Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (the Musicians Association of Ireland), just two of the organizations that at various times between the late nineteenth century and today have appointed themselves as custodians of aspects of the native culture—including sports, language, and music and dance traditions. The Gaelic League began its activities in America after the visit of Douglas Hyde in 1898, and members quickly began to make statements about the notion of purity in Irish culture.

When the Gaelic League took up the revival of Irish National Dances, it found them, like the language, confined to the last strongholds of the Gael in the remotest sections of the island. In the towns, villages, and less isolated portions of Ireland, the ancient dance like everything else, became Anglicized; vulgarisms like the Lancashire clog, and what the League designates "barrack-room steps," gradually crept into it until the beautiful and time-honored forms of the "poetry of motion" degenerated into an unsightly, unedifying, floor-pounding trial of endurance. The Gaelic League, through a system of elimination, has now the old dance pretty well re-established throughout Ireland. The syllabuses issued by the League for the great dancing contests held under its auspices invariably contain the warning: "Lancashire clog, stage and barrack-room steps barred."

Where is the land can boast a dance which equals that of Ireland?
Tis pure in its conception like the music of our Sireland.
Unlike the waltz and two-step whose morality we question,
Tis characteristic of our race and free from all suggestion.⁷

These neo-Victorian, puritanical commentaries seem somewhat ridiculous to us today, but the position the Gaelic League took at that time raises a broader question of the value of strong affirmative action toward the traditional arts—the kind of patronage, in essence, that Western elite arts have enjoyed for centuries. Today we celebrate the renaissance of Irish traditional

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arts, but one could also reflect on the question of whether the art forms could have developed so magnificently if they had not been in effect ghettoized for so long.

Fusion, or syncretism, or hybridization is often defined as the coming together of two or more discrete cultural elements to create a new form. But, paradoxically, all the fusions that have taken place in Irish music and dance recently might not have happened at all had not the core styles and repertoires enjoyed or endured a kind of protectionism determined by a strange combination of circumstance and design. There cannot by definition be a fusion unless the disparate elements that come together exist discretely in the first place. As celebrated an example as *Riverdance* might not have happened at all had there not been an element of institutional protectionism overseen by cultural activists such as the members of the Irish Dancing Commission, an organizational outgrowth of the Gaelic League.

It has become fashionable these days to label leaders of organizations such as the Gaelic League, the Irish Dancing Commission, and Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann as cultural reactionaries, but whatever the internecine organizational politics that play out from time to time internally or on the national stage, these activists are men and women whose primary motivations have always been governed by the highest regard for those aspects of Irish traditional culture that they view as endangered.

Much of the energy of these organizations has been spent in countering the forces of cultural commodification in the global marketplace. In truth, on any occasion when a performance takes place for some kind of financial compensation, then, in a sense, the art performed becomes a commodity. But it is worth making a distinction between the artist's exploitation of his or her own art directly and the packaging and marketing of that art for gain and profit by others. We are now in an era where both happen at a level unknown in the past.

Essentially what we are looking at in the global marketplace, where there are generally no readily identifiable shared cultural norms, is decontextualized art—art as commodity. In the marketplace, the original social functions of art—in other words, the multiple roles it plays or has played in the culture of the traditional society—are irrelevant. Some lament the dislocation of traditional arts from a community matrix, while others see this as a liberation from inherited social, economic, and political constraints—and this freedom, of course, is the very foundation of the Western notion of individual liberty.

In Ireland there have been very definite landmarks in the processes that led to the commodification of traditional music over the last half century. These landmarks were all part of the business of creating musical genres that could be presented on stage as acceptable and palatable public performance for nonparticipating, listening general audiences. Those audiences were possessed of disposable income in a new Ireland where the power of a generation of wage earners (unleashed by the economic growth of the 1960s and 1970s) was becoming a decisive social force in determining the shape of market forces—a far cry from the days when the woebegone figure of Blind Raftery played for empty pockets.

Between the late 1950s and the mid-1970s, artists such as Sean O'Riada, Ceoltóirí Cualann, the Chieftains, Planxty, and the Bothy Band became the central figures in a paradigm shift, creating new possibilities in the way that Irish traditional music could be arranged or performed for general audiences, who sought to passively enjoy and then purchase recordings of the music they had heard. During this period, the Irish in growing numbers began to affirm their heritage of traditional music, as the movement to present such music gathered momentum. Such consolidation heralded the beginning of the reversal of negative, some would say postcolonial, attitudes toward the native culture. A tendency which had begun in the 1960s, with the radio broadcasts of Sean O'Riada and Ceoltoiri Cualann and the burgeoning success of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann under the stewardship of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, would enter a triumphant phase with the dazzling emergence of *Riverdance* on the world stage in the mid-1990s.

It is important to note that cultural symbols and forms of expression can mean one thing in the home country and something quite different in the Diaspora. Shortly after arriving in the United States in 1973, for example, I discovered that Irish traditional music was just one part of an arsenal of potent ethnic symbols that were used to represent Irish ethnic identity in a multicultural society. Paradoxically, the very symbols treated with affection and respect in America—including the shamrock, shillelagh, and leprechaun—were already considered old-fashioned (even embarrassing) back in the home country.

I remember well the first St. Patrick's Day parade that I attended in the United States. It was in Savannah, Georgia, where, along with other Irish musicians, I was hired by a local Irish cultural organization to perform in a 16 March concert and then invited to attend the parade the following day. My fellow Irish-born musicians and I were mortified to find that we seemed to be

the only people attending the parade who were not wearing green! It didn't take me long to learn, through people's life stories, that to be Irish in America was very different from being Irish in Ireland. We here were part of a general story in which we were distinguished from others by cultural symbols that have become more potent for the ethnic population than for those left behind in the homeland—a story very familiar to refugee and immigrant populations all over the world.

In all the visits I have made back home over the past thirty years, I have found that Ireland takes its traditional music and musicians far more for granted than do Irish Americans of any generation and, in particular, first-generation immigrant Irish. This is partly because, in the Diasporic context, the “pure drop,” however that might be defined, often has more resonance with an immigrant or ethnic audience—confirming a sense of security in familiarity—than do more acculturated musical forms.

There are, of course, major generational differences in audiences that support different kinds of Irish musical events in America as well as differences in class, education, and general musical taste. But I have been involved in programming concerts and festivals in the United States for over thirty years and have learned, often the hard way, that there is an ongoing process of complex negotiation between inherited or acquired musical tastes and the willingness or openness to embrace change.

Audiences in Ireland today seem, however, to have little trouble embracing change. In fact, almost paradoxically, most innovations in Irish music are now far more likely to come from Ireland than from America, a society and culture founded on the willingness to change rather than accept conformity.

Certain varieties of commodified art inevitably end up being more privileged than others in the marketplace. Irish music that is highly arranged, acculturated, and modified has a clear edge in the global market; mass audiences are generally not interested in supporting or consuming less acculturated forms. But the core of traditional Irish musical culture is so strong that there seems little possibility that market forces will lead to the kind of displacement that often happens with art forms that have a weaker foundation. The strength of Irish traditional music can be seen most of all in the remarkable ubiquity of public “sessions” now taking place in bars all around the world.⁸ In such settings—thoroughly modern social contexts for music imbued with the behavioral norms of a pre-industrial pastoral culture—the old and the new are found in a state of creative and finely balanced dynamic interplay.

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What it comes down to is that in Irish traditional music—and also, I should say, in Irish step dance traditions—the artistic core is so strong and powerful that surface changes or collaborations with nontraditional artists pose little threat to the essence of the tradition. Such collaborations, in fact, have helped to enliven and showcase the music's fundamental power, its adaptive potential, and, most important of all, its *beauty*. Indeed, exposure to Irish-based, highly accessible works produced by popular artists such as Paul Brady, Christy Moore, Moving Hearts, and the Afro Celt Fusion has for many listeners over the years become the first step in a transformative journey into the interior landscape of the deep core of the tradition.

Measured by the level of affirmation at home and abroad, the sheer aesthetic value of Irish music and dance forms has turned out to be as enduring and important as their cultural meaning. Together the power of their appeal has proved irresistible. The art is valid strictly on its own terms. But Irish traditional music and dance also retain their power for every generation because they continue to be imaginatively relevant in periods of dramatic social and cultural change. Without this primary appeal, they would just become museum pieces, admired at a distance, remnants of a once-great tradition. Extreme cultural nationalists might favor this kind of pristine preservation over a more acculturated living variety. But the music and dance would then exist in a vacuum, having lost their connection to a living tradition. Instead, in a time of unparalleled global transformation, the traditional music and dance emphatically ground Irish culture. They have demonstrated that they can have enduring parallel half-lives as both abstracted art objects and cultural icons and have become in the process a roaring success in the global marketplace—one that defines and validates Irishness across the world.

NOTES

1. A series of issues of the *Journal of Music in Ireland* in 2002 and 2003 featured an ongoing lively debate on this topic. Much of the debate was focused on Irish classical composition, which, in the view of regular contributors, has been relegated to the perimeter of Irish music by cultural biases. The same argument is presented forcibly by Harry White in *The Keeper's Recital: Music and Cultural History in Ireland, 1770–1970*, in *Critical Conditions: Field Day Essays and Monographs 6* (South Bend and Dublin: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998).
2. Reg Hall offers a good discussion of the post-Famine social and cultural context of the traditional music. See Reginald Hall, *The Crossroads Conference 1996* (Dublin: Ossian Publications, 2000), 77–82.

3. See Breandán Breathnach, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1971) and Fintan Vallely, ed., *Companion to Irish Music* (Cork: University College Cork and New York: New York University Press, 2000). Both contain extensive general historical information on the evolution of Irish traditional music forms, individual and regional style, and the incorporation of instruments into the musical tradition.
4. *Gaelic American* (New York), 16 December 1905, 4.
5. For a good general history of the banjo in nineteenth-century America, see Karen Linn, "That Half Barbaric Twang," in *The Banjo in American Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994) and Philip F. Gura and James F. Bollman, "America's Instrument," in *The Banjo in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).
6. Ireland's primary banjo maker and repair expert, Tom Cussen from Clarinbridge, Co. Galway, has informally come up with this total from his extensive database.
7. *Gaelic American* (New York), 14 July 1907.
8. The traditional Irish music session is a complex, rule-ordered, uniquely open event located in public space where good manners and neighborliness are expected and, indeed, demanded. Even the least-accomplished aspiring musician, drunk or sober, should he or she interfere with the dynamics of a session, would rarely be confronted publicly but dealt with indirectly, in a manner least designed to ruffle sensibilities.