

# **AT THE VANGUARD OF ANTIQUITY:**

Seeking the Avant-Garde of the Irish Fiddle  
in C20th Performance Practices



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## **Thesis Abstract:**

This thesis examines twentieth-century Irish fiddle performance practices in the search for the avant-garde of Irish traditional music. The central analysis focuses on processes of music structuring, particularly at a macro-structural level. Music structure defines the “terms of tradition” by way of permanent symmetric constructs, whereas it defines the avant-garde by way of transitory asymmetric constructs.

If musical individualism is represented exclusively by traditional micro-structural ornaments that are inconsequential to traditional macrostructure, then the musical individual contributes to the permanency of macrostructure under of the terms of tradition. Instead, the avant-garde fiddler seeks musical transitoriness where macrostructure can define and redefine, or be defined and redefined by, both itself and its micro-structural parts throughout the progression of a single musical event.

The determining nature of the fiddler’s musical interaction with the fiddle is that both human and artefact follow (thus become influenced by) the procedural dimensions of each other. Therefore, the method of analysis in this thesis has an ergonomic basis, which furthermore benefits from the emic perspective and practical expertise of its author. Accordingly, some of the more demanding performances by a selection of the country’s leading exponents are drawn upon to illustrate distinct aspects of where the fiddle instigates the negation of traditional modes of music structuring. Each example represents a different quarter point of the last century.

Ultimately, this thesis not only provides a clearer and more radical conception of the musical past, but it also provokes a traditional music avant-garde that emerges from inside fiddle performance practices of the recent century.



*for Rebe & Nóra*

## **Acknowledgements:**

Special thanks to my wife Rebeca and my daughter Nóra for their unceasing patience and active encouragement.

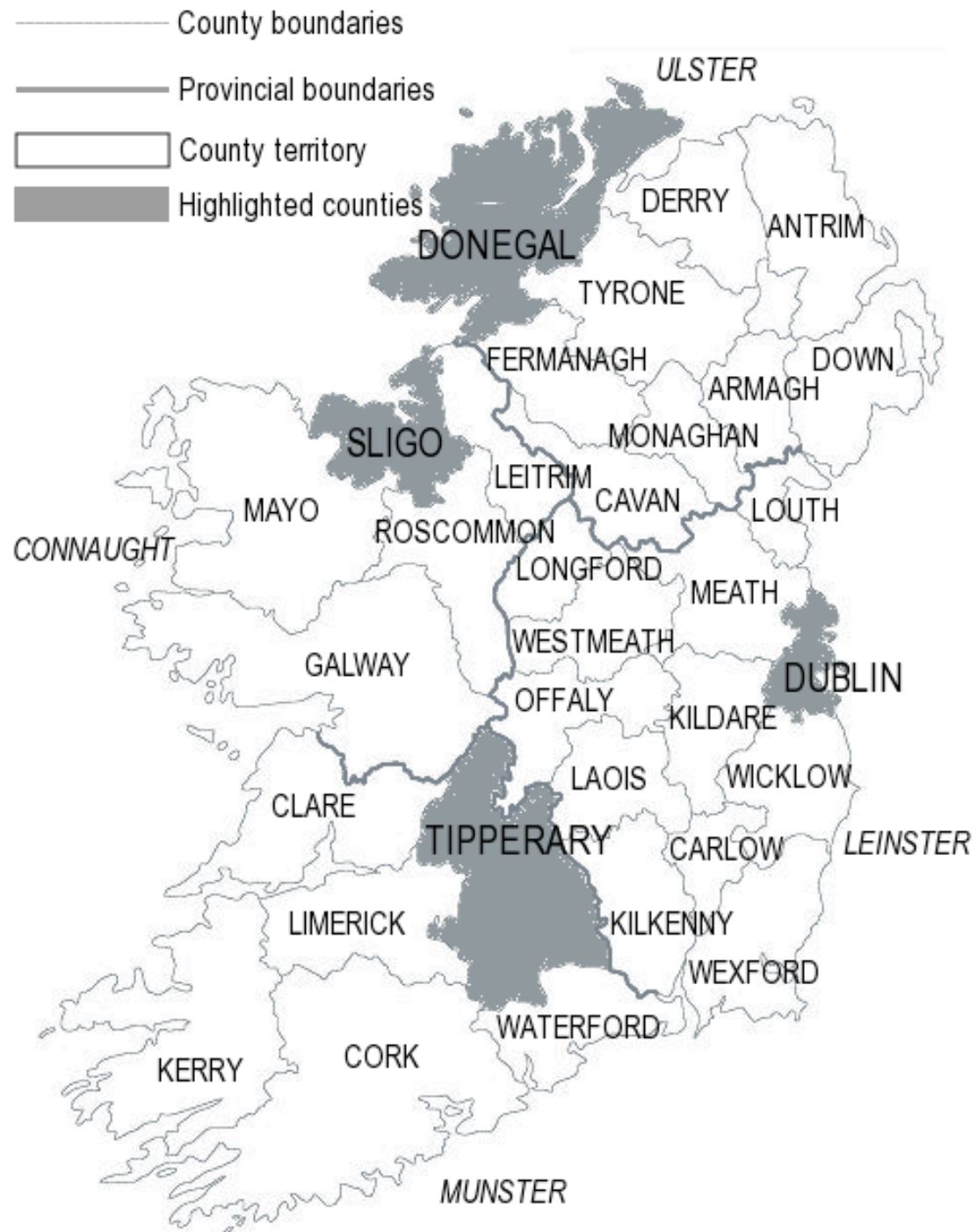
Special thanks to those musicians who kindly gave their time and words: James Byrne (RIP); Packie Manus Byrne; Vincent Campbell; Paula McNelis; and especially Tommy Peoples.

Special thanks to all those who facilitated this project in various ways: the staff at libraries, archives and institutions across Europe, especially those at Cardiff University; my work colleagues at the Irish Traditional Music Archive; additional musical friends and colleagues, especially Nicholas Carolan, Joan McDermot, Caoimhín MacAoidh, Mauricio Beltran, Nick Walker, Deirdre Ní Chonghaile, and Nollaig Ó Fiongháile; my family and extended family, especially Flaithrí, Éibhear and Marion Neff.

Special thanks to my supervisor Dr. John Morgan O’Connell, and Head of School Professor David Wyn Jones.

## Map of Ireland

Below I provide a County and Province map of Ireland highlighting the important county zones predominantly discussed in this thesis.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Map details are constructed by the author using a template provided by Trystan Russell, which is available at: <http://www.seomraranga.com/2010/08/map-of-ireland> (access date: 4 June 2012).

## Note on transcriptions

All transcriptions included in this thesis are by the author unless stated otherwise.

Standard Western notation is used for these. Some idiosyncrasies that may occur are explained below to help the reader. As a general rule: the larger note-heads indicate what is usually regarded as the main melo-rhythmic line (or the basic “tune”). This contrasts with smaller note-heads which indicate ornamental effect.

In my notation, ornaments may lie on either side of the main note being ornamented. This helps to indicate the weight distribution of individual ornaments relative to the main note being ornamented. For example, I employ the following convention when referencing a “long-roll”: four small note-heads coming after a larger note-head, as in:



I do this because the “long-roll” ornament takes time value from the main note already performed. On the other hand, when representing a “cut”, a single or even a double small note-head pattern precedes the larger note-head, as in:



I do this because the “cut” ornament takes time value from the note before it is performed, i.e. it delays the arrival of the main note. The only exception is when representing a “short-roll”. Here, a larger note-head is framed by smaller note-heads on either side, as in:



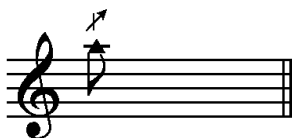
I do this because the “short-roll” ornament both delays the main note and subsequently takes time value from that note once performed. The “flicked triplet” is an important idiosyncratic bowed ornament that is discussed in chapter six of this thesis. I represent the technique using a series of thin triangular symbols either above or below the staff, as in:



Also, the following sign above the staff indicates what is called a “slide” (that is, a rising *glissando* effect), as in:



Occasionally, I use an upright triangular shaped note-head in combination with the above symbol to represent a particularly radical instance of the slide ornament, as in:



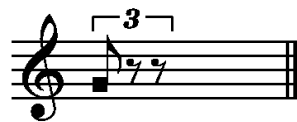
Bracketed notes with a slash running through the note-heads represent notes that are almost played yet very nearly missed, as in:



Perhaps one could term these “ghost notes”. Alternatively, non-bracketed notes with a backslash running through the note-heads represent “mistake” notes, as in:

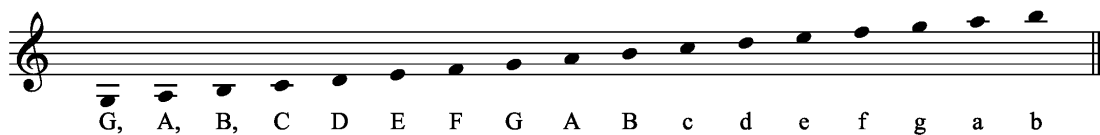


This highlights where an unintentional note emerges inside the musical line. In addition, I use square note-heads to represent “noise” notes, as in:



Here, the conventional timbre of the instrument is replaced by a “dirty” timbre that almost disguises the pitch of the note in question.

All pitches are but roughly demarcated, since the music is not always equal tempered. In an effort to maintain an ergonomic perspective during analysis, I use both lower- and upper-case letters as follows when referring to sections of my transcriptions:



This is a familiar method of representation that is used by a large portion of practising Irish musicians today. Importantly, by using this method, each note is represented by its position upon the instrument as it is by its pitch.

## **Contents:**

Declaration and Statements	i
Abstract	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Map of Ireland	v
Note on Transcriptions	vi
List of Plates	xii
List of Figures	xiii

## **Introduction** 1

### **Chapter 1. The Avant-Garde in Irish Traditional Music**

1.1 The Avant-Garde of Traditional Music	19
1.11 What Has the Avant-Garde Lent to the Study of Traditional Music?	21
1.12 What Can the Avant-Garde Lend to the Study of Traditional Music?	41
1.13 What Can the Avant-Garde Mean for Irish traditional music?	49
1.2 The Structures of Traditional Music	59
1.21 Structure Capturing Individualism.	59
1.22 Structure Controlling Individualism.	64
1.23 Structure Conducting Individualism.	69
Conclusion	72

### **Chapter 2. 1900: Edward Cronin: Flexing Structures**

2.1 Different Histories	75
2.11 Different Definitions.	77
2.12 Written Definitions.	81
2.13 Sound Definitions.	87
2.2 Recomposing Histories	116
2.21 Cronin's (Re-)Compositions.	120
2.22 Cronin's Second Telling.	128
2.23 Cronin's Turn.	134
Conclusion	144

## **Chapter 3. 1925: Michael Coleman: Fixing Structures**

<b>3.1 Classicism and Coleman</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>3.11 Challenges of Tradition.</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>3.12 Claiming Tradition.</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>3.13 (Cole)Man of Tradition.</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>3.2 Artefact and Coleman Facts</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>3.21 Coleman and the Fiddle.</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>3.22 Coleman and the Mistake.</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>3.23 Coleman and the Idiosyncratic Moment.</b>	<b>188</b>
Conclusion	<b>198</b>

## **Chapter 4. 1950: John Doherty: Fracturing Structures**

<b>4.1 Ergonomic Steps</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>4.11 Fiddle Sound Structures.</b>	<b>207</b>
<b>4.12 Fiddle Microstructures.</b>	<b>213</b>
<b>4.13 Fiddle Macrostructures.</b>	<b>219</b>
<b>4.2 The Gentleman's Step</b>	<b>228</b>
<b>4.21 The Gentle Listener.</b>	<b>229</b>
<b>4.22 The Gentle Performer.</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>4.23 The Gentle Step.</b>	<b>243</b>
Conclusion	<b>247</b>

## **Chapter 5. 1975: Tommie Potts: Fragmenting Structures**

<b>5.1 Some Times</b>	<b>251</b>
<b>5.11 At Times, Traditional.</b>	<b>257</b>
<b>5.12 At Times, Avant-Garde.</b>	<b>258</b>
<b>5.13 At Times, Traditionally Avant-Garde.</b>	<b>260</b>
<b>5.2 Negating Times</b>	<b>264</b>
<b>5.21 Melody and the Negation of Structure.</b>	<b>267</b>
<b>5.22 Rhythm and the Negation of Structure.</b>	<b>291</b>
<b>5.23 Structure and the Negation of Structure.</b>	<b>321</b>
Conclusion	<b>331</b>



<b>Chapter 6. 1999: Tommy Peoples: Fluxing Structures</b>	
<b>6.1 Finding Space</b>	<b>335</b>
<b>6.11 Sound Blocks.</b>	<b>340</b>
<b>6.12 The Traditional Ornament inside Sound Blocks.</b>	<b>345</b>
<b>6.13 The Traditional Ornament as Sound Blocks.</b>	<b>354</b>
<b>6.2 Pushing Space</b>	<b>361</b>
<b>6.21 Solo Push.</b>	<b>363</b>
<b>6.22 Micro-Structural Push.</b>	<b>370</b>
<b>6.23 Macro-Structural Push.</b>	<b>390</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>410</b>
<b>Conclusion. The Confines of Freedom</b>	<b>412</b>
<b>Appendix A. A General History of Music in Ireland Before the Famine</b>	<b>426</b>
<b>Appendix B. The Historical Position of Song in Irish Music Performance</b>	<b>435</b>
<b>Appendix C. The Historical Position of Dance in Irish Music Performance</b>	<b>441</b>
<b>Appendix D. The Historical Position of Instrumental Practice in Irish Music Performance</b>	<b>446</b>
<b>Appendix E. An Organology of the Bow in Irish Music History</b>	<b>449</b>
<b>Appendix F. An Organology of the Violin in Irish Music History</b>	<b>457</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>467</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>470</b>

## List of Plates

Plate 1.1: ‘Violín’ by Picasso	20
Plate 2.1: Edward Cronin	76
Plate 2.2: Cylinder recording featuring Edward Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune”	89
Plate 2.3: Emigrants Dancing Between Decks	95
Plate 2.4.1: Second finger as placed on the E-string (beside the first finger).	101
Plate 2.4.2: Second finger as placed on the A-string (notice the distance from the first finger becomes greater).	102
Plate 2.4.3: Second finger as placed on the D-string (now beside the third finger).	102
Plate 3.1: Michael Coleman	149
Plate 4.1: John Doherty	201
Plate 4.2: Example of a Donegal tin fiddle	210
Plate 5.1: Tommie Potts	252
Plate 6.1: Tommy Peoples	336
Plate C.1: “All Hallow-Eve – A Sketch in KilKenny”	442
Plate E.1: Twelfth-century stone carving of early Irish chordophone, Co. Kerry	451

## List of Figures

Figure 0.1: An outline of traditional macrostructure	10
Figure 1.1: <i>Balungan</i> line of main body of <i>Ladrang Saron Jagad</i>	53
Figure 1.2: Skeletal transcription of “The Mountain Road”	54
Figure 2.1: Transcription of Edward Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune”	90
Figure 2.2: Bar 11 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune”	96
Figure 2.3: Bar 129 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune”	96
Figure 2.4: Bar 39 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune”	97
Figure 2.5: Bars 24–25 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune” with fingering	97
Figure 2.6: Bar 28 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune”	97
Figure 2.7: Bar 1 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune”	98
Figure 2.8: Bar 53 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune”	98
Figure 2.9: Bar 19 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune”	99
Figure 2.10: Bar 115 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune”	100
Figure 2.11: Bars 3 & 11 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune”	103
Figure 2.12: Bar 60 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune”	104
Figure 2.13: Bars 41–42 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune”	106
Figure 2.14: Bars 25–32 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune” showing asymmetric phrasing	107
Figure 2.15: “Banish Misfortune” in O’Neill, 1907	114
Figure 2.16: “The Flowers of Limerick” in O’Neill, 1907	129
Figure 2.17: The first and third parts of “The Flowers of Limerick”	131

Figure 2.18: The second and fourth parts of “The Flowers of Limerick”	<b>133</b>
Figure 2.19: “Banish Misfortune” in Petrie, 1882	<b>136</b>
Figure 2.20: Comparison of the opening statements of Cronin’s “Banish Misfortune” with Petrie’s “Banish Misfortune”	<b>136</b>
Figure 2.21: Comparison of the opening statement of Cronin’s third part repeat with a phrase in Petrie’s second part	<b>137</b>
Figure 2.22: “The Bag of Meal” in Joyce, 1873.	<b>138</b>
Figure 2.23: “The Little Bag of Meal” in Roche, 1993	<b>139</b>
Figure 2.24: “Nancy Hynes” in O’Neill, 1903	<b>140</b>
Figure 2.25: “The Humors of Mullinafauna” in O’Neill, 1903	<b>140</b>
Figure 2.26: Bars 13–14 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune” showing asymmetric rhythms	<b>141</b>
Figure 2.27: Bars 33–34 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune” showing symmetric rhythms	<b>142</b>
Figure 2.28: “The Humours of Drinagh” in O’Neill, 1903	<b>142</b>
Figure 2.15b: “Banish Misfortune” in O’Neill, 1907	<b>143</b>
Figure 3.1: Transcription of the third parts of Coleman’s performance of “The Monaghan Jig”	<b>183</b>
Figure 3.2: Representing “mistake” notes on the score.	<b>184</b>
Figure 3.3: Transcription of the first parts of Coleman’s performance of “The Sligo Maid”	<b>191</b>
Figure 3.4: “Banish Misfortune” in Krassen, 1976	<b>193</b>
Figure 3.5: Transcription of Coleman’s first round performance of “Lord McDonald’s” plus subsequent third part repeats.	<b>195</b>
Figure 3.6: Transcription of Coleman’s “Lord McDonald’s” in Lyth, 1981	<b>196</b>
Figure 3.7: Coleman’s “Lord McDonald’s” in Krassen, 1976	<b>197</b>
Figure 4.1: John Doherty’s performance of “The Boyne Hunt”	<b>213</b>

Figure 4.2: Transcription of Con Cassidy’s performance of “The Frost is All Over” covering bars 1–8; 9–10; 13–14; 33–34	<b>217</b>
Figure 4.3: Skeletal transcription of the first part of “John Doherty’s Reel”	<b>223</b>
Figure 4.4: John Doherty’s 1st round performance of “The King of the Pipers”	<b>224</b>
Figure 4.5: Skeletal transcription of the traditional setting of the second part of “The King of the Pipers”	<b>225</b>
Figure 5.1: Transcription of Tommie Potts’ performance of “The Yellow Tinker” from the RTÉ tapes	<b>268</b>
Figure 5.2: Transcription of Tommie Potts’ performance of “The Yellow Tinker” from the Quinn tape	<b>270</b>
Figure 5.3: Transcription of Tommie Potts’ performance of “The Yellow Tinker” from the Evan tapes	<b>272</b>
Figure 5.4: Traditional opening two bars of “The Yellow Tinker”. “The Yellow Tinker” from the RTÉ tapes	<b>274</b>
Figure 5.5: Traditional opening bars versus Potts’ opening bars of “The Yellow Tinker”.	<b>275</b>
Figure 5.6: Potts’ opening bars and their repeat of “The Yellow Tinker” on the RTÉ & Quinn tapes	<b>279</b>
Figure 5.7: Traditional opening bars versus Potts’ final repeats of “The Yellow Tinker on the RTÉ & Quinn tapes	<b>282</b>
Figure 5.8: Potts’ “The Yellow Tinker” bars 29–36 on the RTÉ tapes	<b>283</b>
Figure 5.9: Transcription of Potts’ opening bars of “The Yellow Tinker” in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987:92	<b>285</b>
Figure 5.10: Potts’ opening bars of “The Yellow Tinker” on the Evans tapes	<b>286</b>
Figure 5.11: Potts’ transcription of “The Yellow Tinker” in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987:146a.	<b>287</b>
Figure 5.12: Potts’ “The Yellow Tinker” bars 33–44 on the RTÉ tapes	<b>288</b>
Figure 5.13: Potts’ 1st part of “Top it Off” on the RTÉ tapes	<b>292</b>
Figure 5.14: Potts’ 2nd part of “Top it Off” on the RTÉ tapes	<b>292</b>

Figure 5.15: Transcription of Tommie Potts' performance of "Toss the Feathers" from the Quinn tapes	<b>295</b>
Figure 5.16: "Extension motif" in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987: 143	<b>297</b>
Figure 5.17: "Toss the Feathers" traditional bar 1 in O'Neill, 1907, cited in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987: 129	<b>298</b>
Figure 5.16b: "Extension motif" in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987: 143	<b>299</b>
Figure 5.18: Variant 1 of "extension motif" in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987: 150	<b>299</b>
Figure 5.19: Variant 2 of "extension motif" in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987: 150	<b>299</b>
Figure 5.20: Variant 3 of "extension motif" in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987: 150	<b>300</b>
Figure 5.21: Potts' presentation of Chopin's Funeral March in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987:323, ill.81	<b>301</b>
Figure 5.22: "Harmonic Motif" from Potts' "Toss the Feathers" in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987: 327	<b>301</b>
Figure 5.23: Melodic overlaps between Potts' "Toss the Feathers" and Chopin's "Funeral March" in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987: 326	<b>303</b>
Figure 5.24: First three variations of bar 1 in Potts' "Toss the Feathers" on the Quinn tapes	<b>308</b>
Figure 5.25: Potts' "Toss the Feathers" bars 19–25 on the Quinn tapes	<b>309</b>
Figure 5.26: "Marker motifs" in Potts' "Toss the Feathers" according to Ó Súilleabháin, 1987: 160, ill.29.	<b>311</b>
Figure 5.28: Marker motifs M2 and (M2) in Potts' "Toss the Feathers" as outlined by Ó Súilleabháin	<b>312</b>
Figure 5.29: "Reduction motif" in Potts' "Toss the Feathers" according to Ó Súilleabháin, 1987: 153	<b>314</b>
Figure 5.30: Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" I	<b>318</b>
Figure 5.31: Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" II	<b>318</b>
Figure 5.32: Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" III	<b>319</b>

Figure 5.33: Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" IV	319
Figure 5.34: Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" V	320
Figure 5.35: Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" VI	320
Figure 5.36: Various four-bar phrases from Potts' "The Steampacket" on the RTÉ, Quinn, and Evans tapes	322
Figure 5.37: Omitted bars in Potts' "The Rocky Road to Dublin" according to Ó Súilleabháin, 1987: 188, ill.37	325
Figure 6.1: Bar 1's of Peoples' "Toss the Feathers" on the album "The High art of the Road", 1975	371
Figure 6.2: Transcription of Tommy Peoples' performance of "Port an Bhráthar" on the album "The High Part of the Road", 1975	373
Figure 6.3: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bar 1	375
Figure 6.4: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bars 5–6	376
Figure 6.5: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bars 93–4	376
Figure 6.6: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bar 3	377
Figure 6.7: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bar 23	377
Figure 6.8: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bar 19	378
Figure 6.9: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bar 72	379
Figure 6.10: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bar 29	381
Figure 6.11: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bar 45	385
Figure 6.12: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bars 8–10	386
Figure 6.13: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bars 32–34	387
Figure 6.14: Transcription of Tommy Peoples' performance of the first round of "The Spike Island Lassies" taken from a 1985 recording	393

Figure 6.15: Transcription of Tommy Peoples’ performance of the first round of “The Spike Island Lassies” taken from a 2002 recording	<b>394</b>
Figure 6.16: Peoples’ “Spike Island Lassies” bars 5–8 from the 1985 and 2002 versions	<b>395</b>
Figure 6.17: Peoples’ “Spike Island Lassies” 2002 version bar 4	<b>396</b>
Figure 6.18: Peoples’ “Spike Island Lassies” 1985 version bar 4	<b>397</b>
Figure 6.19: Peoples’ “Spike Island Lassies” 2002 version bars 5–6	<b>397</b>
Figure 6.20: Peoples’ “Spike Island Lassies” 1985 and 2002 versions bars 6–9	<b>398</b>
Figure 6.21: Peoples’ “Spike Island Lassies” 2002 version bars 15–17	<b>399</b>
Figure 6.22: Peoples’ “Spike Island Lassies” 2002 version bars 17–19	<b>399</b>
Figure 6.23: Skeleton transcription of “The Spike Island Lassies” exhibiting Peoples’ phrasing in the 1985 versus 2002 version	<b>405</b>



## Introduction

This thesis has its genesis in performance. As an Irish fiddle player discomforted by the contemporary terms of my own music tradition, the following is a search out of the torment of a perceived musical confinement.

Growing up in Cork, Ireland, my only real contact with “music” was through Irish traditional music. It is still relatively common among Irish fiddlers not to be classically trained, as is my case. The complete exclusion from all other popular genres is less common, though this was also my case until entering university. To illustrate, throughout my early adolescent years I was convinced that the Irish traditional music group *Dé Danann* discovered a strange, perhaps ancient, melody with their instrumental version of “Hey Jude”. I did not know of the pop band “The Beatles” (from where the song in question originates) until at the age of seventeen one flabbergasted secondary school colleague insisted that I listen to the famous group. While listening, it was clear that I was an “outsider” to this “other” music too, and I could not appreciate the spectacular draw it had on my classmates. In sum, my contact with genres of music outside of my direct immersion inside Irish traditional was either fleeting (perhaps a television commercial featuring a pop soundtrack); limited (for instance the specific Western art pieces included on the secondary school curriculum); or diluted (these outside influences as heard among fellow Irish traditional musicians).

However, despite (or more likely as a consequence of) my exclusivity to Irish traditional music, from early on I developed a great interest in the ergonomics of instrumental practice. Of course before acquiring a more conventional analytical

vocabulary, I would have thought of this as a kind of fidgeting with abnormal techniques and the “ugly” sounds of my fiddle. Curiously, after refining many of these practical enterprises, it seemed apparent that in the eyes of the majority of my peers my performance style did not fit my actual socio-cultural profile. These musical developments did not come out of nothing, of course, rather they emerged out of what (Irish traditional) musical sounds and/or adolescent frustrations I experienced at the time. Regardless, it surprised many – and continues to surprise most – that my early exposure to music was so “small town”.

Accordingly, throughout many reviews of my own performances, I apparently fiddle in terms of innovation. Those I ought to hold the highest respect for apparently fiddle in terms of purism. It is an argument that has gripped the Irish traditional music community all through the latter half of the twentieth century. However, the distinction is troublesome, the link between them (moving forward in terms of innovation while looking back in terms of purism) is a burden. In all, I feel that both amount to too same a thing anyway, as they are equally couched in the overarching “terms of tradition”.

I use this phrase frequently throughout the following chapters, and as such, immediately it begs an explanation. What I mean by the “terms of tradition” are the (contractual) conditions under which a traditional performer undertakes his musical actions. These conditions are a point of subconscious consensus among purists and innovators alike, outside of which a performer ceases to be a traditional musician. They are the ever-constant limits of innovation, and they are what gives credence to the purism project. In all, they are the petri dish wherein each party believes they hold a different corner. They are the rules that are not written down out of necessity (for

they are not contested, or they are incontestable), instead they form a code of musical conduct that is quite simply taken for granted.

Obviously, the “terms of tradition” cannot account for “the tradition” in its entirety, but there has been a very real effort among interested parties to make this so. So much so, that the “terms of tradition” feel like they do account for “the tradition” in its entirety, at least for younger generations of musicians such as myself, whether innovator or purist. In chapter three I discuss the Irish music organisation *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann* (CCÉ), formed in 1951, as the “Establishment” who primarily stipulate and promote the terms of tradition. While in chapter three I relate CCÉ’s influence through classicism upon the place of the fiddle in instrumental practice, here I will very briefly outline a more personal and general consideration of the organisation and its influence inside the wider Irish traditional music community.

Growing up as an Irish traditional fiddler, it became obvious to me at least that CCÉ held the largest market share of “the tradition” through a global network of affiliate branches, specialised summer schools, mediated social events, highly structured competitions, promotional tours, publications, recordings, and political sway. With a clear sense of hierarchy, the appointed Director-General of CCÉ since 1968, Labhrás Ó Murchú, has claimed much in the name of CCÉ – further helped no doubt by his role as a senator in *Seanad Éireann* (the upper house of the Irish parliament) since 1997. As a means of emphasising the controlling (even suffocating) reach of CCÉ’s influence, I will outline very briefly a debate concerning the copyright of traditional music performance that arose at the very end of the twentieth century.

Though initially CCÉ pledged their non-involvement with the Irish Music Rights Organisation (IMRO) in 1996, a letter of agreement was signed between both

organisations two years later. Ethnomusicologist and specialist in copyright law

Anthony McCann provides a breakdown of this agreement as follows:

For a nominal fee of £1000, Comhaltas contracted with the Irish Music Rights Organisation for a blanket licence to cover all official Comhaltas functions and centres. In return, IMRO agreed to make annual “financial subventions” to Comhaltas to a total of £250,000. As part of the agreement, IMRO also agreed to refer all requests for support for Traditional music to CCÉ. An additional sum of money, a “financial subvention” of £125,000, was also included, going to Brú Ború, a cultural centre affiliated to CCÉ and run by Labhrás Ó Murchú’s wife (McCann 2003).<sup>2</sup>

What is most conspicuous about the above equation it is that somehow a transfer in “ownership” has occurred. It is clear where IMRO has “purchased” the authority to administer the performing rights of Irish traditional music, though it is not at all explicit how said authority was CCÉ’s to “sell” in the first place. I will not unravel the many issues in this scheme, safe to say that CCÉ has assumed an all-encompassing authority over “the tradition”. Though the organisation cannot possibly represent “the tradition” in its entirety, through its administration of the terms of tradition it has convinced many an individual – as it has persuaded many an institution – to the contrary. Accordingly, the terms of tradition have entered, to varying degrees, the unconscious of the most innovative, as it has the most purist, Irish traditional music practitioner (even those who are hostile toward CCÉ). In turn, this prejudices each practitioner’s understanding of what “the tradition” really means, or what potentially it can mean. It is under this rubric that I speak of the terms of tradition.

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<sup>2</sup> The Irish pound (or *punt*) was replaced by the Euro in 2002 at an exchange rate of €1 = IR£0.787564.

The terms of tradition are conservative only because they unify the aggregate of a shared inherited musical past with a contemporary obligation toward this same inheritance. Accordingly, the terms of tradition are extremely resolute. Music theorist Leonard Meyer's concept of an "axiom of constancy" implies:

one does not give up the security of one basis for envisaging and choosing – one theory of how things work, however inadequate it may be – until another is available. Paradoxically, then, we attend to change in order to annul it, to control it by subsuming it within a constancy of some sort (Meyer 1996: 89).

Regardless, I have decided already that the terms of tradition are suspect, their basic terms of reference unconvincing. The "inadequacies" of the terms of tradition have already become unbearable, and I have already given up on them.

#### ETHNOGRAPHIC SKETCH 0:

While relaxing in a quiet plaza in Madrid with Tommy Peoples – who has always been a paragon of fiddle playing for me – I asked if he felt strained by all the subsidiary terminology belonging to contemporary Irish traditional music discourse; that is, "innovation" and "purism"? Was he even aware of fiddling according to this discourse? His response: "I just always played" (Private correspondence, June 2009).

On the other hand, the modern Irish fiddle player of my own generation simply must contend with this terminology, and do so always within the terms of tradition. To argue the virtues of purism versus innovation is the prolegomenon of our musical time. My methodology here, as such, is not to reason with this subsidiary terminology,

but to rid myself of the terms of tradition altogether. The terms of tradition are obviously not an inheritance from a previous generation of expert performers; Tommy Peoples successfully ignores the associated vocabulary. Rather, the terms of tradition in their present guise are inherited from the Establishment with its hierarchy of individuals who are not always musically competent. It is not enough inventively or subversively to use the terms of tradition as a mode of confronting them. That is merely to stir it up while still dancing to the same tune. Instead, one needs new terms.

Accordingly for my purposes, given that my process will necessarily be one of negation, the terms of the avant-garde most accurately account for my overall methodology. There are serious ramifications when using this approach for the study of traditional music. These are discussed in more detail in chapter one. However, for clarity I will briefly outline some important issues here in relation to an emic versus an etic perspective. Historically, ethnomusicology has prioritised and better supported etic analytical perspectives with an acute anthropological leaning (see Merriam 1964). As a result, emic analytical perspectives have had relatively less time to develop inside the discipline. Therefore, it is as an emic ethnomusicologist that I introduce the avant-garde as another basis for an alternative and valid research methodology.

It should be noted that occasionally the requisites for qualifying as an emic ethnomusicologist have been lax. For instance, in 1992 Rulan Chao Pian described herself as a native ethnomusicologist without being involved as an emic specialist in the music she examined. All previous contact with her local music tradition seems to have been coincidental before considering it properly during her studies in ethnomusicology (see Pian 1992). She then asked: “what is the difference between a native ethnomusicologist and a non-native ethnomusicologist?” Her answer:

I would say, both can be deeply concerned about the fate of a certain musical culture [owing to outside influence]. But to the native ethnomusicologist perhaps there could be a greater emotional burden (ibid. 5–6).

Yet musically speaking, Pian cannot really claim to be a native ethnomusicologist to know this. A real native ethnomusicologist must surely have been involved in the *musical* tradition under discussion before academic study. Perhaps what complicates matters for Pian is instead a nostalgia for something she never quite took seriously before becoming an ethnomusicologist. In terms of music, Pian still goes from outside in, a move that is still defined more accurately by an etic perspective. For the purposes of my study it is important not to allow the term “emic ethnomusicologist” such latitude in its meaning.

Even where an etic ethnomusicologist attains mastery over traditional instrumental practice, there is an important difference between her/his musical identity and that of the expert native/emic ethnomusicologist. The building blocks toward the acquisition of practical musical knowledge (that is, becoming an expert performer) will always remain different under both etic and emic perspectives. In this instance, I find social psychologist William McGuire’s consideration of “artefact” interesting. McGuire was referring to an artefact not by its archaeological definition, but instead as something observed in a scientific experiment that occurs as a result of the “unnatural” context of the investigative procedure itself. According to him, there are three stages in the life of an artefact: ignorance, coping and exploitation.

At first, the researchers seem unaware of the variable producing the artifact and tend even to deny it when its possibility is pointed out to them. The second stage

begins as its existence and possible importance becomes undeniable. [...] They give a great deal of attention to devising procedures which will reduce its contaminating influence and its limiting of the generalizability of experimental results. The third stage, exploitation, grows out of the considerable cogitation during the coping stage to understand the artifactual variable so as to eliminate it from the experimental situation. In their attempt to cope, some researchers almost inevitably become interested in the artifactual variable in its own right (McGuire 1969: 16–17).

Interestingly, the same is true when “artefact” is understood by its more common definition as a human-made material object. For instance, in properly learning to use an artefact such as the Irish fiddle, the ethnomusicologist is at first ignorant of, then must cope with, and hopefully eventually become able to exploit the potential of the musical instrument.<sup>3</sup> That said, the emic ethnomusicologist is first a native practitioner and only later an ethnomusicologist. Alternatively, the etic ethnomusicologist is first an ethnomusicologist and only later a non-native practitioner. As such, the same artefacts (using McGuire’s original term) that arise out of the “unnatural” context of the investigative procedure immediately reflect back on the certainties of the emic ethnomusicologist’s existing artifactual expertise (her/his ability to exploit the potential of the musical instrument); instead of first encouraging the pursuit of artifactual expertise upon the musical instrument (as is found in the case of the etic ethnomusicologist).

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<sup>3</sup> Non-specialists or non-expert musicians who are restricted to the “coping stage” of artifactual expertise and so never get to grips with the exploitative potential of a musical instrument are not considered here. Understandably, if limited to the “coping stage” of instrumental practice, one is more confined to a restricted range of musical terms defined by tradition. Instead, as an expert performer, the exploitative potential of instrumental practice better allows for a change in terms.



In considering the negation of traditional music, it is this reflexivity that my methodology relies upon. However, there are instances of unconscious versus conscious learning within the above dichotomy that simply cannot always coincide. The emic expert practitioner's musical past is conjoined with the specific genre under consideration, whereas the etic expert practitioner can only represent an echo of this. This should not be considered as a validation of the musical result in each case.<sup>4</sup> Simply: what musical elements are unchangeable and what musical elements are changeable are different in each case. At a most basic level, what is being considered for the emic specialist is "music", whereas what is being considered for the etic specialist is "*a* music". Therefore: while the emic specialist considers (musical) sounds, the etic specialist is forced to consider *characteristic* (musical) sounds. As such, what the emic specialist can "leave go of" or "allow to drift into changeable musical elements" is not always shared with the etic specialist.

At a practical level: even if the etic expert performer-researcher will notice (and reflect upon) distinctive attributes of a particular music system, s/he as an "outsider" will not be in a position to effect change in a manner similar to the emic specialist. This becomes increasingly important when considering the negation of traditional music sought in this thesis. To illustrate, the etic ethnomusicologist too, for instance, has often noticed the permanence of the macrostructure in Irish traditional music. Throughout this thesis "macrostructure" refers to the large-scale structure shared by every typical traditional Irish metrical piece: the "dance tune" and its symmetrical division into large "parts" and "phrases" as outlined below:

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<sup>4</sup> From the beginning, I should highlight that I am not suggesting that etic musical practitioners are inferior to their emic counterparts. Rather, I am outlining a fundamental musical difference that informs an alternative and very specific analytical methodology which is ultimately defined by an emic perspective.



Figure 0.1: An outline of traditional macrostructure.

Under the terms of tradition, however, this macrostructure has been taken for granted by native musicians. It is so blatantly there, that musicians have accepted macrostructure as “their lot”, feeling its presence at all times though never quite realising its significance. The French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, wrote: “The *sense* of limits implies *forgetting* the limits” (Bourdieu 1984: 471); and further argued:

Dominated agents, who assess the value of their position and their characteristics by applying a system of schemes of perception and appreciation which is the embodiment of the objective laws whereby their value is objectively constituted, tend to attribute to themselves what the distribution attributes to them, refusing what they are refused (“That’s not for the likes of us”), adjusting their expectations to their chances, defining themselves as the established order defines them, reproducing in their verdict on themselves the verdict the economy pronounces on them, in a word, condemning themselves to what is in any case their lot, *ta heautou*, as Plato put it, consenting to be what they have to be, “modest”, “humble” and “obscure” (ibid.).

The point is this: although etic ethnomusicologists have noted and observed the macrostructure of Irish traditional music, they have not done (nor have they wanted to do) anything else with this musical knowledge. Indeed, it is a central aspect of their practical musical learning that without it they would no longer find themselves as inside “*this music*” as they have until now. By not belonging to an “other” music before the ethnomusicological experiment begins, the emic ethnomusicologist cannot merely fall back outside “*this music*” – there is simply nowhere else for her/him to fall other than at the negation of “music” as it has come to be traditionally taken for granted.

Essentially, the etic ethnomusicologist must consciously learn to take the macrostructure for granted rather than simply take the macrostructure for granted from a point immemorial. This is why the etic ethnomusicologist in Ireland has mentioned this same macrostructure and then allowed it to slip back into an emic understanding (or lack thereof) of musical form.<sup>5</sup> The emic ethnomusicologist, once inside the same investigative procedure, may not be content to let it slip back so easily.

That said, under the terms of tradition the constancy of “traditional” macrostructure is overbearing for the emic specialist to examine the issue unbiasedly. Journalist and indeed native musician, Toner Quinn, has spoken pejoratively of a traditional reliance upon the tune by saying “the First Law of the Folk Revival, [...] is, ‘Thou shalt be subservient to the tune’” (Quinn 2001: 29). Quinn has come closest in print, but despite harbouring avant-gardist thoughts here (see chapter one) in reality

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<sup>5</sup> In this way too, the etic ethnomusicologist can become influential simply because s/he lends a respectable voice to what traditional music collectively grows to consider itself to be. Indeed, many an etic ethnomusicologist has joined in the ranks of the Establishment, or simply “participated” in its teachings of Irish traditional music.

he remains committed to the tune by remaining committed to its macrostructure. The following statement demonstrates this where Quinn returns to a traditional understanding of macrostructure in a later article:

Tunes are musical goods that we tamper with, the focus of our temporary experiments with the aesthetics of this music, with our own technique, with the challenge of finding musical unity in playing sixteen bars three times over (Quinn 2007b: 27).

To be fair, here Quinn is moving beyond the duties of a journalist (as someone who reports on and critiques what has occurred) to set up interesting expectations. But other examples within more academic publications are not at all prevalent. So even when he calls for an avant-garde in Irish traditional music, Quinn's adherence to the macrostructure as defined by tradition prevents a more radical consideration of the traditional "tune". Despite his seemingly innovative reading of traditional structures, Quinn in fact reiterates an understanding of macrostructure that already dominates Irish music scholarship.

Still, the emic ethnomusicologist (as defined in this thesis) has access to challenge the certainties of tradition to enable musical freedom and individual agency without merely becoming detached from the specific traditional "genre" being discussed. Rather than negate traditional macrostructure, the etic ethnomusicologist can always be accused of merely corrupting it from the outside. In a Freudian twist, the etic ethnomusicologist's "musical youth" has neither been conquered by the terms of tradition that belong to the specific genre under analysis and so may neither harbour the right kind of animosity necessary to bolster the negation of the terms of

tradition. Therefore, the emic ethnomusicologist is naturally better placed for an avant-gardist methodology where musical negation is suitably “genre-less”.

Accordingly, this thesis is a search for the avant-garde in Irish traditional music during the twentieth century with special reference to fiddle performance practices. In this respect, the thesis does not pretend to locate avant-garde Irish fiddle players during the period since the term “avant-garde” is rarely (if ever) mentioned in practice, nor even with regards to all five musicians discussed in-depth throughout the following chapters. However, this thesis does attempt to negate the terms of tradition while focussing on the musical materials of the same tradition. Though this maintains the “avant-garde” as an avant-garde peculiar to Irish traditional music, importantly it does not rely on traditional terms of reference nor does it engage with traditional value systems. By highlighting the significance of avant-gardist music structures to negate traditional modes of music structuring, this thesis hopes to provide a new understanding of Irish traditional music in the twentieth century.

It must be highlighted already at this point that I provide extensive appendices both on Irish music history with special reference to the fiddle (appendices A – D), and on the organology of the violin and bow in Ireland (appendices E–F). This will facilitate readers unfamiliar with such aspects of musical “antiquity” in an Irish context. I have also provided a glossary at the back of this thesis. This became necessary owing a the lack of existing terms to relate traditional music to an avant-garde. Given that I have had to coin certain words and phrases as well as reinterpret existing terms specifically for an Irish context, the glossary may prove an essential tool for all readers while engaging with the main body of the thesis.

Already, for instance, the concept of “antiquity” in Irish traditional music is worthy of some critical interrogation. Antiquity is a concept that is used in traditional music discourse to define an idealised past: “the ancient music of Ireland”. Hence, regardless of its dictionary definition, antiquity belongs to both the distant as well as the most recent past of Irish traditional music. Antiquity constitutes a permanent quality within tradition. As a continuation of antiquity, the sounds of the present reflect the permanent sounds of the past. On occasion, the notion of antiquity is implied by the use of other terms such as “the remotest times” (see Henebry 1903: 7). On other occasions, the use of the term is questioned, but merely replaced by a more pedantic phrase such as “considerably old” (see O’Connor 1991: 4).

Under the terms of tradition, all of these concepts (which are derived from a singular notion of antiquity) amount to the one aesthetic: the re-making of the past in the present. Antiquity is a term commonly used throughout recent centuries where the performance of traditional music is perceived as a call to the past, a past where song and dance aesthetics informed (and thus curtailed) instrumental performance practice: instrumental slow airs subservient to the related song tradition; and instrumental metrical tunes subservient to the related dance tradition. The Irish tradition’s need for permanence is seen here as the re-inscription of the ancient in the modern. Antiquity is tradition, at once past and permanent. The term “antiquity” is used here as a traditional trope in the Irish context.<sup>6</sup>

In this thesis, by focusing on a selection of the most interesting and provocative exponents of the Irish fiddle during the twentieth century, I will therefore prioritise instrumental practice over the assumptions of existing scholarship. My focus is on

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<sup>6</sup> Throughout appendices B, C and D, I outline different historical representations of antiquity as they relate to instrumental practice.

metrical tunes, and as such my initial effort is against the burden of a dance aesthetic in particular (see also appendix C). Note that ethnomusicologist, Gertrude P. Kurath, warned:

While there is music without associated movement and dance without melodic accompaniment, the two are for the most part so closely related as to demand joint analysis. A large proportion of ethnic music calls forth knowledge of “physical expression in visual form” (Rhodes 1956: 4), because of the mutual dependence of the two arts. Musicologists who attempt analysis of audible effects alone are apt to miss part of the point and may well encounter questions which could be answered by a choreologist (Kurath 1957: 8).

I deliberately employ the descriptor “autonomous” throughout this thesis; an autonomy enjoyed by instrumental music that insists upon a freedom from the aesthetics of dance (predominantly) and song (*en passant*). Other descriptors, such as “absolute” music for instance, are far more exclusive to that which lies closely beside it. Autonomous instrumental music very nicely opposes a perceived dependancy upon dance, but it exists in apposition and not in opposition. Basically, an “autonomy” admits to a link while establishing a primary independence.

In the Irish context, the “point” of instrumental music is apparently to accompany dance. Unlike Kurath’s generalised conviction, I argue that this is something which forces Irish music scholarship to miss significant parts of the point of Irish instrumental music performance practices. Dance, of course, is therefore also considered in this thesis. However, it is considered as something which enforces the

terms of tradition to the exclusion of instrumental freedom, especially as this relates to the individual practitioner.

Having now introduced the origins of this thesis, together with a selection of important considerations that inform the rest of its content, it remains only to introduce the main chapters which are organised in the following manner:

Chapter one discusses the avant-garde in Irish traditional music. It focusses on three central themes: an extreme negation of the past; a propensity towards crisis; and a transitory as opposed to permanent understanding of music structuring. In this matter, a detailed theory on the place of macrostructure in defining individual agency in music is outlined.

Chapter two marks the opening point of the twentieth century. It provides a close analysis of fiddle player Edward Cronin's performance of the traditional Irish jig "Banish Misfortune". Taken from a cylinder recording dating c.1900, Cronin is heard playing with unusual melo-rhythmic asymmetry. He thus demonstrates a musical palette that challenges the notion of "antiquity"; challenges the idealised present-day expectations of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century performance practices.

Chapter three marks the first quarter point of the twentieth century. It focusses on the influential fiddle player, Michael Coleman, and his commercial recordings of the 1920s and 1930s. Some of the stylistic parameters in Coleman's playing are outlined, which contribute to a fixed interpretation of macrostructure promoted by the "Establishment" within the traditional music community. However, in an expanded view of the musical event, the fiddle is subsequently considered as an interactive



artefact whose ergonomic potential influences performance practices and already introduces surprising avant-gardist elements in relation to Coleman.

Chapter four marks the second quarter point of the twentieth century. It analyses the playing of John Doherty and some other Donegal fiddle players beginning from the 1950s.<sup>7</sup> Continuing with an ergonomic investigation of the fiddle in practice, the dualism embodied by the instrument (at once a symbol of traditional conformity while at the same time an icon of individual expression) is discerned. A detailed analysis at both micro- and macro-structural levels provides evidence of a unique transitory play with music structure inside the Donegal fiddling tradition.

Chapter five marks the third quarter point of the twentieth century. It reconsiders the position of fiddle player Tommie Potts within the traditional disparity between purism and innovation. Here, Potts is shown to successfully negate the terms of tradition. An analysis of some of his most demanding (or destructive) performances, recorded during the 1970s, outlines an important crisis in Irish traditional music and questions our ability to cope with, or deny this.

Chapter six marks the fourth quarter point of the twentieth century. It examines the musical development of the contemporary Irish fiddle player, Tommy Peoples, moving from an ensemble to a solo context. An extreme focus on microstructure reveals highly idiosyncratic ergonomic moves toward virtuosic ornamental techniques that incorporate musical “noise” and provoke musical “silence”. Once outside the ensemble format, Peoples is shown to introduce liberal “breathing spaces” that both counteract the density of his ornaments and silently push against the permanence of traditional macrostructure.

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<sup>7</sup> Donegal is the most northwesterly county of Ireland.

By way of conclusion, and in considering the findings contained in each chapter, a practical process toward an avant-garde of Irish fiddle playing is posited.

# Chapter 1: The Avant-Garde in Irish Traditional Music

## 1.1: The avant-garde of traditional music

In a recent article appearing in the *JMI: The Journal of Music in Ireland* titled “Traditional Music & the Avant-Garde”, the magazine’s founding editor, Toner Quinn, observed “what the [Irish] traditional music scene lacks, is a platform for more experimental approaches to music, for music that is more demanding” (Quinn 2007a: 16). The article’s title already reveals what this “experimental approach” ought to be. Quinn bemoaned “even the most inventive today would usually stop short of breaking with a certain convention, of straying, for instance, into the avant-garde” (Quinn 2007a: 16).

The avant-garde has never been consensually defined, but apart from some light usage in commercial entertainment it has generally been understood to require an important step beyond the customarily innovative, beyond the cursory experimental. The term is receiving increasing (though as yet limited) attention among the Irish traditional music community. Given that until this point the avant-garde has not enjoyed firm or continuing usage within traditional or folk music discourse (including academia), this chapter must initially ask three fundamental questions:<sup>8</sup> What has the avant-garde lent to the study of traditional music? What can the avant-garde lend to

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<sup>8</sup> Both terms – “traditional” and “folk” – will be used interchangeably in this thesis. There is a very real difference between what is referred to as traditional music and what is referred to as folk music in Ireland. However, this difference is often not reciprocated internationally. For the context of this thesis, the term “traditional” will be used predominantly (in keeping with the local distinction). However, the term “folk” as it appears in other publications will be accepted as a relevant and comparable alternative.

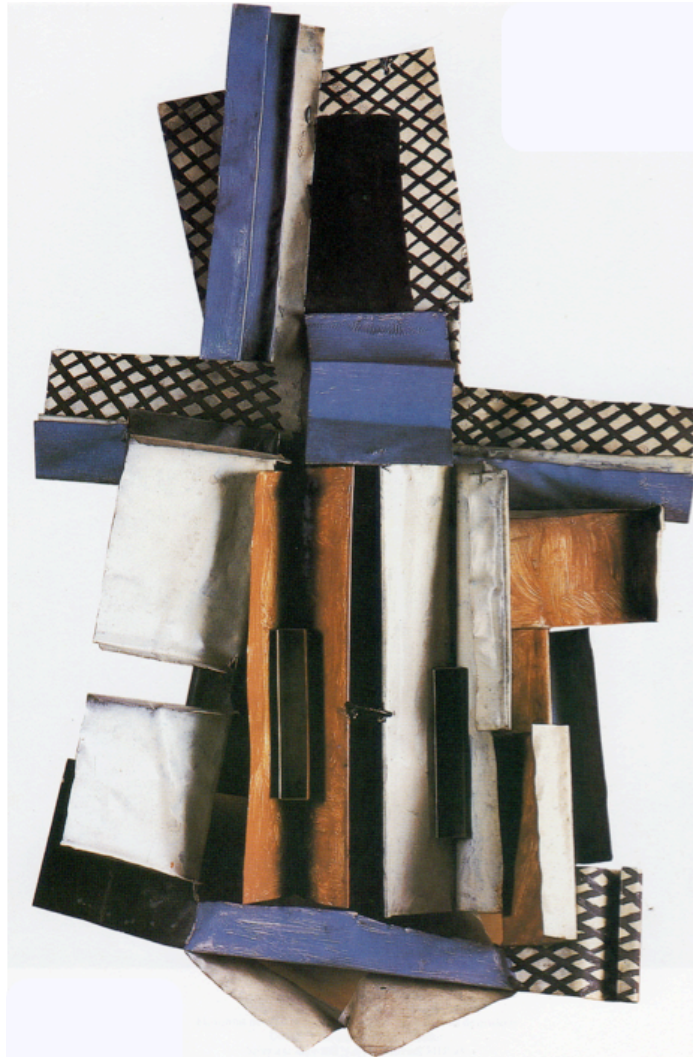


Plate 1.1: "Violín" by Picasso.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Taken from Walther, 2007:242.

the study of traditional music? What can the avant-garde mean for Irish traditional music?

### 1.11: What has the Avant-Garde Lent to the Study of Traditional Music?

Glancing at the study of traditional and folk music generally (including Irish traditional music scholarship), the avant-garde seems not to fit into, or cause any significant interest for, theoretical formulations on the musicological construction, or sociological implications of traditional music. Despite Simon Frith's call for a unified approach to the study of "the classical, folk, and pop music worlds [...] to treat them comparatively, tracing contrasting solutions to shared problems", the implied hierarchy remains intact (Frith 1998: 43). Often unbeknownst to folk music scholarship itself, traditional music is denied the full compliments of impartial musicological inquiry. It is not, for instance, considered as having (or perhaps requiring, or even containing the capacity for) a serious musical impact outside of the usual requirements of local social conformity and episodes of controlled individualism. It is simply never thought of in the terms of the avant-garde, for instance. Instead, the study of traditional music retains exclusively the terms of tradition.

Traditional music's step beyond the communal local is more often seen as an embracing of popular global forces than as a critique coming out of its shared place within the new global environment. Traditional music – always innocent and fragile, always at risk – is at the mercy of globalisation rather than at a critical understanding of it. If not referencing or, more likely, being referenced by the global, then traditional

music very nicely reproaches the global where traditional music is presented as a utopian local enclosure that persists in contrast to the engulfing brutality of the global.

Understood as being particularly tied to its past, studies in Irish traditional music have more often begun with a foundation that attempts to reflect the scope of that past. In this way, traditional music initially satisfies the requirements of local social conformity ever before providing episodes of (controlled) individualism in music. Even though these episodes can sometimes be provocatively innovative and indeed at times subversive, traditional music is never quite the avant-garde. Throughout its episodes of individualism, traditional music somehow manages continually to satisfy its first requirement: answering to its traditional sociological responsibilities. This elementary reading of traditional music is what often can condemn it to a musicologically banal interpretation.

Indeed, it has often been the case that sociological issues and wider cultural contexts provoked most interest in the study of Irish traditional music, having already settled on a constant musicological theme. This is even evidenced by an Irish Arts Council grant awarded to the Music Association of Ireland in 1987 “to add a special Irish traditional music section within their existing ‘music in education’ schemes” (McCarthy 1999: 169). Music educator, Marie McCarthy continued:

The aim of the project was to ‘spread the love of our Traditional Native Music and provide enjoyment for the students’. Emphasis was placed on building positive attitudes towards participating in the music rather than developing technical proficiency (ibid.).

The constancy of a simple musical thread is brought out not only by those who deny traditional music any sophisticated examination, but unfortunately it is maintained by those apparently researching its complexities. This was highlighted for me while working at the Irish Traditional Music Archive in Dublin.

#### Ethnographic sketch 1.1:<sup>10</sup>

I am on duty in the library today. An energetic woman arrives with a mission: to provide a revised presentation of the “The Flowers of Edinburgh” hornpipe for the forthcoming new edition of the Junior Certificate music book.<sup>11</sup> Irish traditional music is now a compulsory area of musical enquiry in second-level music education in Ireland. So what kind of introduction are these students given in preparation for their intermediary exams? The main editor has sent this particular woman – a fellow contributor – to contend with “The Flowers of Edinburgh” hornpipe; an opportunity for me, also, to become somewhat acquainted with the effort at introducing Irish traditional music to the country’s youth.

Upon leafing to the correct page, I immediately notice the startling D-sharp in the staff notation that maps the hornpipe’s melodic course. “Obviously this is what has caused the revision”, I speculate to myself, “even among the lesser used notes in traditional music performance, D-sharp is virtually non-existent!” To my dismay, I only then notice the general rhythmic pattern that bears all the hallmarks of a reel, not

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<sup>10</sup> In an effort to respect privacy, this observational sketch is deliberately ambiguous regarding persons’ names and published works.

<sup>11</sup> The Junior Certificate exam (or *Teastas Sóisearach*) is a national state-run exam in Ireland involving a wide array of subjects. Typically a student sitting these examinations (averaging fifteen years of age) will choose between nine and twelve subjects. Upon successful completion of the exam, the Junior Certificate is awarded by the Irish Department of Education. It does not qualify students for entrance to university, rather functioning as a midway guide during the course of their second-level education.

a hornpipe!<sup>12</sup> “Ah”, I begin to revise my conclusions, “a more characteristic hornpipe is being sought, this one might not even be a hornpipe in the first place! Well, I should have noticed that first”.

To my bemusement, these obvious irregularities are not of concern. The woman is simply pursuing the “original” (or at least an earlier) printed version of the same hornpipe that is not subject to the laws of copyright. In preparing the previous edition of their book, the hornpipe was hurriedly and unceremoniously lifted from a more contemporary publication; hence the trepidation concerning the legalities of its current guise. After explaining the impossibility of an “original version”, I begin to demonstrate how to source alternative versions of the same piece using the Archive’s computer catalogue. Confessing her computer illiteracy, I am forced to deliver to the woman’s desk the earliest printed results of “The Flowers of Edinburgh” for her perusal.

Before gathering a few more items, exclamations of “search over!” catch my attention. The first occasion being an English hornpipe of the same name; the second occasion being a Scottish reel of the same name and melodic contour. Their musical similarities to the initial Junior Certificate hornpipe are based on a harmonic progression verbalised by the woman with prophetic certainty – this despite Irish traditional music not being harmonically conceived. Out of a sense of embarrassment I feel the woman ought to be feeling, I quickly bring her attention to both Petrie’s and Ryan’s collections of Irish melodies where the piece can also be found safely out of

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<sup>12</sup> Though both tune types are in four-four time, the hornpipe’s rhythm is far more punctuated by dotted-quavers.



copyright but ready-to-hand in an Irish context.<sup>13</sup> My suggestion simply to ask a well regarded contemporary musician to perform their favourite hornpipe for her to notate was met with wonderment. “‘The Flowers of Edinburgh’ is not exactly the most popular hornpipe among performing musicians anyway”, I declare. Uninterested, photocopies are requested of each of the out of copyright “Flowers of Edinburgh” hornpipes. A more informed decision will be reached later in collaboration with the main editor.

The musical disregard shown by the editors and compilers of this book toward “The Flowers of Edinburgh” hornpipe emphasises the kind of hierarchy denounced by Frith above. This is a book which is compulsory reading for thousands of young students every year. Yet, Irish traditional music is musically simple and relatively unimportant in the great scheme of Man’s musical achievements. A hornpipe is a hornpipe, plain and simple. If it has sixteen bars of melody divided into two, then it is a hornpipe once its title tells you so. This, therefore, is a musically precise system. Here, associated cultural issues are of most interest. That the hornpipe was performed in a cottage kitchen and danced to by the local dancing master upon a half-door provides an interesting contrast to the hornpipe’s contemporary cultural contexts. The placing of ornamental details in an improvised manner provides the understanding of why the piece “works” musically, but the associated cultural practices provide the understanding of why the piece exists at all. The implication here is that the hornpipe

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<sup>13</sup> The main Irish music collectors up to the very beginning of the twentieth century since the Neale brothers first published a dedicated collection of Irish melodies in 1726 are as follows: Edward Bunting (1773–1843), George Petrie (1789–1866), William Forde (1795–1850), Henry Elliott Hudson (1798–1889), R. M. Levey (1811–1899), John Edward Pigot (1822–1871), Patrick Weston Joyce (1827–1914), James Goodman (1828–1896), William Bradbury Ryan & Elias Howe (1831–1910; 1820–1895), Francis O’Neill (1848–1936), and Francis Roche (1866–1961).

does not have a significant place of its own, and the performance of it remains relatively constant despite significant changes in cultural contexts.

The main problem does not lie in these editors' disregard for the musical aspects of Irish traditional music. It lies in the way their apathy influences, and is influenced by, those who value traditional music. My own observations on the irregularities of the inner construction of the hornpipe were equally based on an acceptance of this hierarchy. Traditional music needs some form of simplistic pedagogical definition to summarise all of its complexities into the measly space allocated it. Whether this is made to the above editors' satisfaction or to my own, the representative musical summary always will remain somewhat banal. All too often this summary consequently provided the foundation for further and more elaborate studies of traditional music throughout the twentieth century. Irish music scholar, Tomás Ó Canainn, provided one such summary, and defended his effort by pointing out the following:

The tremendous growth of interest in traditional music, and the involvement in it of so many performers without a traditional background, makes it more than ever necessary to try to establish what is basic to the tradition and therefore worth preserving, and what is merely of secondary importance. This book goes some way towards this goal (Ó Canainn 1993a: 9).

By always beginning as a basic summary, traditional music performances that negate this summary are either castigated or – better still – ignored. As yet, the individual in traditional music has neither reached the extremes of the avant-garde in ethnomusicological literature. In relation to Irish traditional music, those musicians

who stand out for ethnomusicologists normally stand out as the most capable exemplars of a shared system who at most subvert that system by finding loopholes within it as innovators. Not, therefore, the most capable exemplars who fall out of the system to challenge it on new terms as avant-gardists.

In many ways the ethnomusicologist in Ireland has worked much like a revivalist, and so cannot fathom even today the ramifications of an avant-garde bent on negation instead of preservation.<sup>14</sup> It should be no secret that an anthropologically based study gains in value if it records the end of a historically relevant cultural practice, perhaps acting as a last saving grace that allows the continuation into posterity of an extinct tradition. With such a strong influence on ethnomusicology, this inclination toward the presentation of tragedy unfolding must be taken with caution. Béla Bartók alarmingly declared: “Every year of delay means an irreplaceable loss of cultural values” (Bartók 1992/1919: 163).

Irish music specialist, Helen O’Shea, related: “Anxiety about the loss of regional styles is evident in the ethnomusicological literature on Irish traditional music and is consistent with the discipline’s preoccupation with locating culturally integrated and enclosed musical communities” (O’Shea 2008: 56). This anxiety in the field can force the ethnomusicologist – just as it does the revivalist – to gather up all s/he can (often leading to the musical summary described earlier) before losing another year of irreplaceable cultural values. This occurred in the Irish context throughout the majority of twentieth century scholarship.

Ethnomusicologist, Tamara Livingston, noticed: “Revivalist stylistic parameters and aesthetics are based on what is believed to be the stylistic common denominator

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<sup>14</sup> See the following sections of this chapter for further discussion on the concept of negation in the avant-garde.

of individual informants and/or source recordings; this is transformed into the “essence” of the style which is then used to judge subsequent revivalist performances” (Livingston 1999: 71). She also recognised that:

music revivals are interesting subjects of study for what they can tell us about our own motivations and actions as ethnomusicologists. After all, many of us have dedicated ourselves to the preservation and dissemination of certain musical traditions. Issues of cultural politics, the concept and relative importance of historical fidelity and authenticity, and the use of value-laden categorisations of musical practices and musical influences as “modern”, “traditional”, or “global” affect both music revivals and the field of ethnomusicology in general (ibid. 81).

The ethnomusicologist often becomes part of the music culture that began as her/his subject matter, just like the revivalists “who become cultural insiders to the revived practice” (Livingston 1999: 74). That the ethnomusicologist salvages to a similar degree as do revivalists, and that s/he sometimes even shares in the practical continuation of the salvaged tradition in question, means that s/he is also in danger of becoming adverse to the negation of the stockpile of cultural values found in her/his notebook.

As such, an avant-garde of traditional music remains a somewhat illogical notion within ethnomusicology. Within traditional music’s initial summarised, and subsequently preserved, state certain musicological developments become near impossible. The avant-garde necessarily negates the musical past, which is exactly what has been summarised in Irish music studies of the last century which formed the basis of ethnomusicological analysis too. The avant-garde immobilises this

methodology. An avant-garde, of course, neither can exist within the initial summary, for it is, instead, saturated in the terms of tradition whereby innovation from both within and without claims all forms of musical radicalism.

In all, traditional music simply does not have room for an avant-garde because it must maintain a fundamental shared system answerable to this kind of generalised summary. To suggest an avant-garde of traditional music is a challenge to this initial summary, a challenge then also to the subsequent musical theories attributed to it, and a challenge then even to the social contexts perceived as belonging to it. In all, an avant-garde of traditional music is a challenge to both the apathy of the uninterested and the simplification or authoritative summarisation of the very interested who respond to this apathy without proper sophistication. Therefore ethnomusicology – more often considered the most thorough discipline in Irish traditional music studies – has so far failed properly to account for the avant-garde of traditional music.

Performing arts specialist, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, only highlights the avant-garde when it prepares Western audiences (familiar with atonal classical music) for the perceived new and exotic sounds of traditional music recitals. “Audiences who have learned the pleasures of confusion from their experience with avant-garde performance [of western art and perhaps jazz music] are prepared to receive performance forms from other social and cultural worlds as if they had emanated from the avant-garde itself” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 205). Here, the avant-garde is musically at a great distance from traditional music; it can only be accounted for sociologically.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett was examining audience reaction at the Los Angeles Festival, but as fellow ethnomusicologist, Gage Averill, has pointed out, “her

comments about the avant-garde are more generally applicable” (Averill 2004: 110). Averill also pointed toward avant-garde composers of a Western art vein who already invoke many of the sounds found in various genres of traditional music that thereby encourage this level of appreciation among Western audiences for it (see *ibid.* 103).<sup>15</sup> It may also be added that the widespread use of Indian- and African-style modal improvisations by some jazz performers aided the development of a jazz avant-garde. However, all of this speaks of avant-garde developments in classical and popular Western music genres. It does not, however, account for avant-garde developments within traditional music itself.

Only sociologically speaking do the sounds of traditional music – when under significant social and contextual transformations – become the sounds of the avant-garde. Already, the sociological dimension takes up most interest, in the end providing the only real avenue to an avant-garde of traditional music. The musical dimension of course remains constant, and indeed banal. Ethnomusicology is especially equipped for a wider anthropological view on a traditional music avant-garde. However, to attempt to include the sociological layers in avant-garde perceptions and interpretations in this thesis would be both too expansive for the current project and too distracting from its central concerns. More, issues of sociological and contextual changes relating to avant-garde understandings of traditional music can actually force traditional music back into its banal and eternally constant musical definition.

Anthropological and sociological considerations cannot be allowed to stifle radical musicological hypotheses in this way just yet. This thesis must prioritise the

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<sup>15</sup> As a good example of how Western composers have approached non-Western traditional music see ethnomusicologist Jonathon Grasse’s examination of the work of North American composer Lou Harrison and his compositions for Indonesian Gamelan ensemble (see Grasse et al. 1998).

proper examination of a musical avant-garde within traditional music; analysing the musical materials worked on by individual music practitioners; examining the avant-garde as a cultural movement consciously led by the artistic processes of the musician-artist as s/he interacts with (or reacts to) her/his own music system.

Of course ethnomusicologists specialising in jazz and Western art music have considered the jazz and classical avant-gardes to varying degrees (for instance in the work of Morgan Luker and Simon Calle). Outside of this, the ethnomusicologist Andrew Clay McGraw has examined new musical developments in Balinese compositions, termed *Musik Kontemporer*. What is immediately fascinating in McGraw's work is the readily accepted usage of the term "avant-garde" by many of the composers working in *Musik Kontemporer* to define their compositional processes (see McGraw 2009: 124). McGraw's article provides an introduction to parallel developments between Balinese and Western avant-gardes. Both sides of the world seem to move along similar musically aesthetic lines while often serving quite distinct socio-cultural aims. Even more interestingly, McGraw analysed where the Western conception of the avant-garde does interact with the local Balinese conception of *Musik Kontemporer*, elaborating on how an almost quasi-deliberate partial (even complete) misunderstanding (what McGraw eventually termed "creative mishearings") of the former helps define a uniquely "local" avant-garde.

McGraw spoke of Balinese *musik kontemporer* as "one of many emerging forms of experimental world musics" or world music avant-gardes that "represent new and challenging ground for ethnomusicologists" (McGraw 2009: 134). Inline with what has been stated of the discipline already, McGraw continued: "These are the expressions of often tiny subcultures – communities smaller than those

ethnomusicologists have traditionally dealt with” (ibid. 134–5). However, McGraw envisioned the possibility of a knowledge exchange between particular avant-garde studies onto a larger, perhaps universal scholarly platform representing “experimental world musics as a class of music-making around the world” (ibid. 137). As yet, though, there cannot be said that there is sufficient research already conducted into various avant-garde traditional musics to allow for significant comparative resources. Hopefully this will change. Already McGraw’s subject contains obvious parallels with the Western art tradition whereby a composer also instructs instrumental performers toward the execution of her/his avant-garde visions. This thesis, however, aims to outline a theory of the avant-garde within a traditional music whose composer is at once the performer.

Ethnomusicologist, Juniper Hill, gives the first real indications of a dedicated examination of the avant-garde in traditional music (as a composer-performer tradition) through her work on Finnish contemporary folk music. The title of her thesis dissertation seems quite promising: *From Ancient to Avant-Garde to Global: Creative Processes and Institutionalization in Finnish Contemporary Folk Music*. However, unfortunately, the avant-garde is never defined by Hill, and so never properly defined in the context of folk or traditional music. It is neither perceived as an aesthetic coming out of precisely Finnish folk music itself. Austerlitz declared before Hill that “the authenticity of the avant-garde traditionalists [of the Finnish contemporary folk tradition] has not been challenged by academics” (Austerlitz 2000: 198). Hill neither interrogates the notion of the avant-garde of traditional music. Instead, she presents it as an outside influence which helps develop the Finnish folk music tradition along what are completely alternative interests to that of the avant-



garde; namely, the re-continuation of a re-living tradition through process-based historical continuity. Hill's footnotes indicate her usage of the term:

While some of the “freak music” may be described as avant-garde, I do not believe that most contemporary folk musicians would use the term as a title or label for their music, even if it is a descriptive adjective. Furthermore, some of their experimentations and individual creations are stylistically different from avant-garde art music (Hill 2005: 195).

Unlike McGraw, Hill is therefore using terminology that is not commonly adopted by the music community she is studying. Yet she neither feels the need to explain her usage of the term “avant-garde” in the context of folk or traditional music. Hill merely aligns the avant-garde found in the Finnish tradition with a direct influence coming from the avant-garde of the Western art tradition –as well as perhaps jazz avant-garde, and free improvisation (itself largely belonging to the jazz avant-garde tradition). The stylistic differences between these genres and folk music regarding the avant-garde are never analysed. The focus of Hill's dissertation is the Folk Music Department of the Sibelius Academy, and a subsequent footnote reveals exactly from where the avant-garde elements derive in the contemporary folk music of Finland:

In general, most avant-garde, experimental, and minimalist techniques utilized by folk music students come directly from Heikki Laitinen (who himself was most influenced by his teacher of contemporary art music composition, Erik Bergman) (Hill 2005: 245).

Laitinen was the founding director of the Folk Music Department of the Sibelius Academy, and the avant-garde sound elements promoted by him are a required part of the Department's curriculum. Hill revealed Laitinen's understanding of the avant-garde as "shattering conventionality, breaking rules [...] believing in oneself and having the courage to go to the outermost limits as a musician in different modes of expression" (Hill 2009: 103). Again, Hill does not break this down for us. As it stands, the avant-garde defined by Laitinen is therefore quite ambiguous, it could just as easily define extreme innovation as it does the avant-garde. The avant-garde characteristics introduced by Laitinen do not arise from within folk music as such, but come from his experience of avant-garde processes found in Western art composition.

Already, traditional or folk music is placed at a distance from the concerns of the avant-garde. Traditional music here is only gaining influence from the avant-garde explorations coming out of other music traditions as separate sound constructs. These are elements introduced by the efforts of one particular folk music educator/instructor. The folk avant-garde here is forced using one particular form of institutionalisation of folk music. The Finnish tradition does not exactly create its own form of avant-garde; instead, it fuses avant-garde characteristics of other genres that therefore remain detachable rather than form an integral part of folk music *per se*. The process is fascinating, however it is more postmodernist than avant-gardist when considered from the standpoint of the folk music in question. Hill actually insisted:

[The] Folk Music Department uses avant-garde free improvisation primarily as a pedagogical tool. Not all contemporary folk musicians choose to pursue and develop avant-garde free improvisation, but most are significantly influenced by it during their study at the Academy" (Hill 2005: 259).

Hill elaborated with a case study:

Former student Pauliina Kauhanen Syrjälä, who is now the current director and principal instructor at the Ala-Könni folk music program in Kaustinen, confided to me that the most powerful impact that her studies at the Sibelius Academy had on her was from the intensive avant-garde improvisation seminar (described by Kristiina above). She felt that the experience of learning to do experimental and avant-garde free improvisation has such a profound impact on you as a musician that, even if you do not continue to play it, it affects how you play traditional music; it gives you the courage and self-confidence to do smaller things on a more subtle scale in your music and in your performance (personal communication, July 15, 2004). It frees musicians from the fear of making mistakes, for they realize that anything goes (for example, when Leena Joutsenlahti would teach me tunes, if I ever made any mistakes in repeating the tune back to her she would always exclaim “wonderful variation!”). It opens up minds to new possibilities and to different sounds and gives individuals the permission to be different, to be weird – in essence, the courage and freedom to express themselves and be creative (ibid. 262).

These Finnish folk musicians are of course legitimately responding to influential sounds coming from outside their own tradition; but an important distinction to be made is that the influence is from an avant-garde music, not from an avant-garde “aesthetic”. The concerns of the avant-garde become significantly reduced in the context of an institutionalised folk music environment where it is used as a pedagogical tool. A means to a different end, many of the avant-garde’s main concerns are side-stepped to provide for alternative performance skills; such as confidence in music-making and a freedom to become more innovative. This influence is not heard among non-Academy trained Finnish folk musicians, for

instance. Folk or traditional music from the Academy of necessity seems to ground the avant-garde influence onto a more subtle scale, especially once outside of the Department: it provides a confidence “to do smaller things”. A sense of “anything goes” can be de-radicalised to apply only to the subtle areas of improvisation in traditional music performance practice. Any of the musicians’ more overtly avant-garde sounding performances are by-and-large confined to within the walls of the Academy; the same musicians provide a more palatable fusion for the general public.

Hill continually reminded her readers that for the contemporary Finnish folk performer, “folk music is their *lähtökohta*, point of departure, and *pohja*, foundation, for creating music” (Hill 2005: 190). This is because the Finnish folk musician must first become folk scholar or revivalist before graduating to folk musician.

“Foundation” and “point of departure” do not easily provide synonyms of each other, but their distinction from any avant-garde connections at this point means that the separation between folk and avant-garde music persists. The foundation here works similarly to the summary of Irish traditional music I highlighted in my introduction. It is this foundation (or summary) which forms a point of departure upon which Finnish folk musicians fuse outside elements in the spirit of a re-living folk tradition.

The problem for the Finnish folk musician is that his music tradition at this moment is not really a living one. It is a tradition that had for all intensive purposes completely disappeared.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, the sense of a “point of departure” is easily understandable. There will always be a sense of adding to that which has been salvaged as opposed to developing out of (or even refusing) that which continues. A

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<sup>16</sup> There can be found, as always, some contention as to whether the Finnish tradition actually died out or not. However, its continuity was at such a minor scale that it will be accepted in this chapter as having died out. Perhaps Austerlitz’s terminology “dried out” when discussing the Finnish clarinet in the context of the Finnish *pelimanni* tradition would more accurately describe the obvious level of extreme demise endured by this particular music tradition in Finland (see Austerlitz 200: 184).

rupture in the life of a music tradition “creates discontinuities in transmission, performance practices, and creative processes” (Hill 2005: 40).

Usually, upon renewed interest in a disappeared music tradition, a revival aesthetic dominates subsequent musical developments wherein “authenticity” pervades contemporary performance practices. The contemporary Finnish folk revival, however, is therefore not a “revival” as such. It is neither “typically referred to as a revival” by musicians, nor is it ever discussed in terms of authenticity (see Hill 2005: 41). The contemporary Finnish folk musician transfers emphasis from a revival obsession with folk product to an active obsession with folk process (the spirit of a living tradition). “[T]he ideology shaping Finnish contemporary folk music is founded on an ideal musical process, an ideal way of being a folk musician, and an ideal relationship of folk music to contemporary society” (ibid. 47). Avant-garde improvisation is thus “inspired and justified by historical accounts” of like-minded improvisation from the past of their own folk tradition (ibid. 47; see also 251–2). Folk music continuity is achieved in this manner, wherein issues of authenticity take care of themselves. “The most fundamental ideological point of departure for creating contemporary folk music is that folk music should be a *living* tradition” (ibid. 190).

Nonetheless, the element of folk needs to be fabricated first for the Finnish musician because it is simply not already there for the taking. Her/his avant-garde improvisations remain contemporary detachable additions to the perceived notion of folk music (the latter already summarised to provide a convincing foundation). “Because Finnish contemporary folk musicians have not grown up immersed in a living tradition with such oral processes, as Yugoslavian epic singers (Lord 2000 [1960]) or traditional Irish musicians (Cowdery 1990) did, Folk Music Department

teachers have simulated this process by drawing on traditional material that nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Finnish folk music scholars collected, analyzed, and systematically compiled” (Hill 2005: 238). The Finnish folk musician must initially become obsessed with recreating the musical past so as to become familiar with it as a contained “point of departure”.

Hill’s analysis is especially apt when considered against the transmission of Irish traditional music in pedagogical circles. In Irish universities, for instance, Irish traditional music serves as a point of departure also. Many students who do not come to an Irish music department with previous knowledge of folk music are encouraged to innovate upon a basic summary of Irish traditional music in ensemble formations (here diverging from the Finnish situation where solo performance is central). The term “avant-garde” is neither used by Irish musicians, nor is it used by teaching staff. The avant-garde is not deliberately placed before Irish traditional musicians either. This is because Irish traditional music is already living, already there for the taking, already there for the innovating, already there for the negating. Therefore, radical innovation constantly occurs outside the walls of universities, which in turn influences the students within the university.

In a way, Hill’s use of the term “avant-garde” only complicates the idea of innovation. Innovation, for instance, would be the application of musical sounds of the avant-garde onto the musical foundation of a rediscovered folk music. This does not mean that the result is an example of the avant-garde of traditional music, however. The Irish context (where a living tradition remains unbroken) allows for innovation within its own context (inclusive but not exclusive of outside influence), where a point of departure is more difficult to pin down. The pedagogical presentation

of the Irish tradition is engulfed by the already existing tradition so that innovation lies more comfortably within its scope. It does not require additions to a “point of departure” for there is no point to depart from.

For Finnish musicians, additions are required because here, folk music can only be a “point of departure”. Their secondary sources of folk music (the early music collections) are not contextualised by a living tradition’s primary points of reference. Any pedagogical presentation of traditional music needs to grasp what exactly traditional music is, to know (or insist upon) its dimensions. Once this is achieved in the context of Finnish folk music, these dimensions may only serve as an out of context point of departure. Where contemporary Finnish folk musicians find the authority to continue their disappeared tradition in the manner of a re-living (as opposed to revived) music, is simply in their being Finnish:

Many contemporary folk musicians come to the Academy enculturated in classical, jazz, and popular musics with little folk music background (though the folk music background of incoming students has been gradually increasing as folk music education becomes more widely available). In addition to the skills, knowledge, and transformative experiences acquired at the Sibelius Academy that allow them to become tradition bearers of a musical culture in which many of them were not raised, their nationality and ethnicity grant them the right to carry on and innovate Finnish folk music (Hill 2005: 333).

The folk avant-garde remains a mere innovative fusion at the end of Hill’s research. She writes of diverse music genres that influence the contemporary Finnish folk musician, with one of these being avant-garde music (indicating art music and

possibly jazz music avant-gardes): “contemporary folk musicians may incorporate musical elements from avant-garde music, electronic music, jazz, popular music, and a variety of world music styles from Swedish to Mordvin to West African to Cuban to American to Australian” (Hill 2005: 342). It is possible to “incorporate” elements of “avant-garde music” only when taken as a sound product. This leaves any kind of avant-garde aesthetic (that is, its musical concerns revealed by its musical processes) far behind. The avant-garde is not a “style” in the traditional sense because style implies a history which is something the avant-garde prefers to negate. What matters at this point is that an understanding of the avant-garde is placed at a distance from an understanding of traditional music. The latter is a point of departure, the former an incorporated (thus detachable) outside musical element.

In actuality, the non-Finnish folk music styles that have been most prominent and influential in the contemporary scene are (1) avant-garde and experimental art music and (2) folk and traditional musics from other cultures (though the work of some individual folk musicians also shows influence from jazz or popular music) (Hill 2005: 52).

Plainly said: the avant-garde is “non-Finnish folk music”. Hill’s avant-garde is, therefore, simply that of the Western art music tradition. There remains no real avant-garde of traditional music. “By incorporating contemporary non-folk musical elements into their personally expressive improvisations, academy musicians make folk music contemporary, fulfilling their goals of continuing folk music as a living tradition and making it relevant to contemporary society” (Hill 2005: 37). In the end, the Finnish tradition is an example of an elaborate form of musical rebirth by



manipulating or radicalising the terms of tradition. The death of the native folk music left contemporary folk musicians searching for possible musical developments to add to a salvaged body of music in the effort to create an active re-living (or undead) music tradition. What Hill's study provides is an insight into a fascinating reinvigoration of a broken music tradition that uses, among other things, influential sound constructs from an avant-garde Western art music. Hill's study, however, does not provide a realistic avenue to understanding a folk avant-garde or an avant-garde of traditional music. And so, if not really already there, what can the avant-garde possibly lend to the study of traditional music?

#### 1.12: What can the avant-garde lend to the study of traditional music?

Before searching for an understanding of a folk or traditional music avant-garde, the concept of the avant-garde itself needs to be better appreciated. The avant-garde – though at some moments thought of as counteracting modernism – has by now become widely accepted as (if not a synonym, then) a continuation of, and most radical elaboration of, modernism. A most potent ingredient of the avant-garde is its negation of the past (and ultimately the present) until a condition of crisis. This is something which is achieved more through a dedication to the transitory reality of the present than to a blatant reversal of past values. Therefore, much like modernism, the avant-garde *de facto* dismisses the past simply by denying it loyalty or recognition as a worthy master. In all, refusing it as a source of direction or influence. As cultural historian Carl E. Schorske has observed:

Modern architecture, modern music, modern philosophy, modern science – all these define themselves not *out* of the past, indeed scarcely *against* the past, but in independence of the past. The modern mind has been growing indifferent to history because history, conceived as a continuous nourishing tradition, has become useless to it (Schorske, cited in Meyer 1996: 346).

For the avant-garde too, the past is not instructive, but it can be intrusive. Therefore, unlike early modernity, the avant-garde neither uses the aesthetic terms of reference of the past to argue in independence of the past. The avant-garde makes its own terms. Literary critic, Matei Călinescu, has emphasised the avant-garde as a “culture of crisis” (Călinescu 2006: 124). He elaborated:

it should not be surprising when, within the large context of modernity, the label “culture of crisis” is applied specifically to the avant-garde. The avant-gardist, far from being interested in novelty as such, or in novelty in general, actually tries to discover or invent new forms, aspects, or possibilities of *crisis*. Aesthetically, the avant-garde attitude implies the bluntest rejection of such traditional ideas as those of order, intelligibility, and even success (ibid. 124).

It may seem ridiculous to base a traditional music study on the avant-garde when traditional music seems to be that which is firmly defined by its past, not firmly rejective of its past. However, negation of the past to this extreme can lead to a more rigorous understanding of the musical past and so provide the study of traditional music with far greater insight than before. The avant-garde’s self-conscious negation of the idea of permanence (a central theme of tradition – itself a contemporary definition of the past) can bring the past toward it in crisis without becoming

suffocated by the past's own terms of reference (i.e. those belonging to the terms of tradition). From here, it can challenge the idea of tradition and permanence, satisfactorily removed from the object of study's own terms of reference.

The avant-garde does not want a history, it is utterly committed to the present; but it can be more aware of history than tradition can. Through its dedication to the present, and using its own terms of reference, the avant-garde leaves the past as past, though leaves it in crisis. Tradition, though associated with the past, is ironically a process of making contemporary the past. By requiring permanence, tradition paradoxically denies itself history because the past is constantly brought up-to-date to be inline with the present. The past seems forever instructive to tradition only because it is actually itself the present, the permanent contemporary understanding of the traditional "truth". This contaminates the real truth of the past and distorts the reality of history.

A proper study of traditional music requires an appropriately thorough investigation of the musical past, before an analysis of the contemporary perceived truth of the musical past can take place. For this, a complete negation of the past can be of enormous use to the study of traditional music. To negate the past in this way, the avant-garde manages an interrogation of the past where tradition cannot, often chastising both the past's real "truth" and the general contemporary understanding of this "truth" based on tradition. Through this form of negation, the past becomes undressed as never before, its "truth" becoming better understood. Where tradition makes contemporary the past into a cloud of reverence, the avant-garde negates the past into explicit crisis.

It is no longer helpful to examine traditional music as a thing of non-change and change, purity and innovation. Though presented as contrasting terms that provoke argument (for instance an argument that has occupied Irish music theorists throughout the twentieth century), they all constantly reference the terms of tradition. These terms are united in that none dispute the place of permanence in tradition. As such, they make impossible the proper examination of the musical past. The avant-garde offers the researcher the opportunity to become truly removed from his object of study, and gain the ability to objectively examine the musical materials facing her/him.

An increasing awareness of the perceived finer details of the past encroached on the twentieth century like never before, made available (and saleable) through modern technologies and mass production. As “awareness” shared out to mass culture, the past was knowledge simplified into something readily consumable (if not already pre-consumed). In this way, the past became contemporary in the form of tradition, or even modern in the form of *kitsch*. The avant-garde belongs to the twentieth century for this reason also. It effectively concerns itself with the negation of the banal (either as tradition or as *kitsch* which are both mass audience-based aesthetics) in favour of the challenge of the individual artist.

The avant-garde is presently a real concern for Irish traditional music. Quinn is adamant that it be significant, stating: “one of the most important things that will have to happen is a moving away from the idea that the ‘experimental’ or the ‘avant-garde’ in traditional music simply means more exploration in accompaniment and arrangement, and the coming together of artists from different genres. Too easy” (Quinn 2007: 17). It is not only too easy, but it is simply not avant-garde. The distinction needs to be made. The Finnish folk musician brings together the found folk

music of her/his country with the avant-garde sound characteristics of Western art music, but (as already indicated) this makes him more postmodernist than avant-gardist.

Postmodernism is already redundant to the study of Irish traditional music because it amounts to the “traditioning” of modernity. Though convinced of its “newness”, postmodernism still moves (both subversively and provocatively) within the same old terms of reference of tradition and so cannot come to understand the past in the same way the avant-garde can. Even while inventively referencing the past (its general habit of quoting or even parodying the past in unconventional ways), postmodernism must first accept the face value of the past as defined by tradition. In this way, postmodernism forms an interesting continuation of tradition and therefore does not provide a sufficiently interrogative vantage point. Postmodernism basically amounts to a most radical traditional innovation, and thus has the comfort to relate portions of the past (be these even the sound characteristics of the avant-garde) in distinctive ways.

For this reason, the contemporary Finnish folk musician is more a postmodernist than an avant-gardist. S/He has the freedom and comfort to take what s/he wants from the past as it has been commonly accepted and defined using the terms of tradition. On occasion cited as “avant-garde traditionalists”, the Sibelius Academy musicians engage in the cheeky mismatch of traditional and avant-garde musical elements. Renewed musical materials from the past become collectively reconstituted into a post-modern moment (see Austerlitz 2000: 197). It is important to avoid the idea of the avant-garde as being an example of innovation. This merely belittles the concerns of the avant-garde while forcing the pattern of history and tradition upon it where this

is most obstinately rebuffed. Unlike postmodernism, the avant-garde is inherently uncomfortable with the past and is therefore more demanding regarding the realities of its construct.

Irish traditional music has a past to negate, whereas the Finnish tradition has – as yet – only a past to salvage. The avant-garde is therefore, in theory, immediately accessible to Irish traditional music while it remains outside the possibilities of the Finnish folk tradition. For a proper avant-garde of traditional music, a proper understanding of what the aesthetic of the avant-garde actually demands of the music needs to be appreciated.<sup>17</sup> By applying this aesthetic to the analysis of the musical past (specifically the twentieth century as this is the avant-garde's century), a closer understanding of what exactly the avant-garde can mean for traditional music will be reached. The avant-garde's negation of the musical past is the only means of properly interrogating that past while overcoming the obstacle of tradition. The three most important ingredients of the avant-garde – of which still contradict the bourgeois values of conventionality, orderliness, and materialism (see Cameron 1990: 220) – are:

- i) its extreme negation of the past;
- ii) its propensity towards crisis; and
- iii) its transitory as opposed to permanent character.

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<sup>17</sup> Aestheticism itself is often interrogated and negated by the avant-garde owing to the remove from ordinary life (or human experience) the various processes of art enjoys (as if to claim for itself a certain aesthetic dominance). However, this very process undeniably forms an aesthetic of its own, and merely combines with that of the avant-garde itself.

From early on, the avant-garde set itself up against the bourgeois values outlined above, but later turned against this opposition (in line with its eternal move toward crisis). This was because of its obvious ironic dependancy on, and co-option by, the very bourgeoisie it despised. As the anthropologist Catherine Cameron stipulates, the avant-garde thus desired to become more self-directed and question the aesthetic separation coming out of “artistic hubris” (Cameron 1990: 221). In all, this was a radical re-evaluation of the institution of the arts as it had grown or developed within bourgeois society. In the end, the avant-garde never really altered its basic approach toward negation, transitoriness, and crisis. But it did suffer humiliation by the bourgeois acceptance of the art products coming out of these processes.

Architectural historian, James S. Ackerman, insisted that “an effective innovation in art or science occurs when the conditions of its specific cultural milieu are favorable to receiving it” (Ackerman 1969: 371). Ackerman is not simply suggesting that innovations are only successful if they are acceptable to society, he is concerned mainly with the effectiveness of innovation in serving a purpose which it aims to achieve. This is what leads Ackerman to query the modern condition of the avant-garde, given that it “was founded on public rejection and was destroyed by acceptance” (ibid. 374). Ackerman obviously believes that the avant-garde requires rejection from society (without doubt rejection from bourgeois society) for it to be successful. Here success can be viewed from an avant-gardist perspective where the lack of success is indicative of a radical negation of success. In all, Ackerman is critical of the “alienation characteristic” of the twentieth-century avant-garde. He elaborated: “But once a work of art is made available to others, it is irrelevant whether the artist intended to enlighten a public or only himself, because its fate is determined

by its – not his – impact on those who see it” (ibid. 377). Ackerman insisted:

“Rejection produced freedom along with suffering, and the artist of the avant garde in one sense depended on it in articulating toward his work” (ibid. 378). He further elaborated:

The lack of discrimination that brings adulation to every novelty suggests that we have not been enjoying a maturation of public taste and comprehension, but a shift in fashion from a posture of rejection to one of acceptance. Because the social role of the avant-garde artist is to expand the perception and understanding of his audience, he is rendered impotent by an audience that blandly gives way when he exerts pressure. He cannot maintain the individuality and distance essential to his work when the society draws him in with approval and denies him his position as an outsider. The avant garde is a phenomenon of the past, because the entire army, and a good part of the civilian population, has moved up to join and surround it (Ackerman 1969: 379).

Ackerman discovers, in a way, the pollution of the avant-garde through fashionable acceptance where the shallow novel is never quite distinguishable from the deep avant-garde essay. “A society changing so rapidly that innovation has become the rule rather than the exception has abolished the role of the avant-garde” (Ackerman 1969: 383). However, Ackerman is relating the success of avant-garde art during the 1950s, largely through painting and sculpture. The absence of a necessary tangible material product in music can actually save it from this level of high-society consumerism. Cameron clarified: “Unlike painting that produces a physical object that can be possessed and transferred through financial exchange, avant-garde music has not garnered a huge public or had much commercial



value” (Cameron 1990: 225). In all, it can be argued that music provides the most potent vehicle for the avant-garde, well why not Irish traditional music?

### 1.13: What can the avant-garde mean for Irish traditional music?

The above interrelated ingredients form the central aesthetic of the avant-garde. For the purposes of a study on the avant-garde in traditional music, an analysable unit must be located that represents all of these elements. This thesis uses structure as its analysable unit. The reason being: structure (and its aesthetic treatment), is what most defines the terms of tradition and what most defines those of the avant-garde. The avant-garde’s understanding of structure is found in transitoriness, whereas tradition’s understanding of structure is found in permanence. Meaning: the avant-garde highlights music structure; tradition makes music structure disappear. Yet, the avant-garde is usually perceived as “non-structure” (i.e. wherein any conception of musical structure is ignored).

The avant-garde improvisation of contemporary folk musicians is frequently unstructured, unmetered, and atonal (or nontonal) in nature and may make extensive use of dissonant tone clusters and unconventional and unpitched sounds (thus making it particularly difficult to transcribe in an accurate and meaningful way) (Hill 2005: 255).

Tradition’s understanding of structure is clearly – and through the requirements of permanence even necessarily – symmetrical. What is claimed as avant-garde in Irish traditional music is also the breaking of this symmetric music structure into what

is therefore regarded as non-structure characterised by extreme asymmetry. This is why the late twentieth-century fiddle player, Tommie Potts, usually accounts for the Irish avant-garde (see chapter five). Acclaimed Irish music specialist and authority on the music of Tommie Potts, Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, traced a musical line from Ireland through to Scandinavia, largely based on traditional music structure. He summarised, what “we have in Irish traditional music is a reworking of the elements of a more widespread system in the context of our own history” (Ó Súilleabháin 1981: 83). Ó Súilleabháin’s idea of a “reworking” essentially refers to the changeability of the musical microstructures within constant traditional macro-structural forms, the latter often shared even across distinct music traditions. (“Microstructure” here, and throughout this thesis refers to the small-scale structures within macrostructure; such as single or small groups of notes as well as traditional or idiosyncratic ornaments). Hence, structure in Irish music is equally understood in the terms of tradition as something permanent and analogous to traditional practices found elsewhere in Europe. Here, structure provides symmetrical cohesion both synchronically and diachronically.

Ó Súilleabháin thus refers to the macrostructure of Irish music – that is, the symmetrical sixteen-bar “round” (see introduction) – as the “inaudible [... that] yet informs every aspect of traditional dance music performance” (Ó Súilleabháin 1990: 130). This is where the permanence of tradition lies, in the silence of its macrostructure. Structure is taken for granted to a degree where it is completely forgotten. Essentially, by making structure disappear like this, tradition ensures its permanence in defining every aspect of its content. For instance, any innovation

occurring within this structure is using and unwittingly reinforcing the aesthetic terms of tradition even while claiming to be instigating serious change.

Ethnomusicologists, Mark Slobin and Jeff Todd Titon, assume: “Music in oral tradition shows greater variation over time and space than music that is tied to a definitive, written musical score” (Slobin and Titon 1984: 7). However, when they speak of variation, they speak of micro-structural variation only; that is, the small-scale structures within, and defined by, traditional macrostructure. Tradition makes certain that micro-structural variation contributes to the aesthetic of permanence (i.e. non-variation) by helping to disguise the overpowering presence of a permanent macrostructure. In the Irish context, macrostructure accounts for the large-scale structure shared by every metric traditional Irish piece; that is, the “dance tune” and its constant symmetrical division into “parts” (usually two) and “phrases” (typically two-bar phrases). It is in structure where we find the terms of tradition (that of permanence), and it is in structure too (or apparent non-structure) where we find the terms of the avant-garde (that of transitoriness). Therefore, it is in structure where we can analyse the avant-garde of Irish traditional music.

Tradition’s permanent symmetric macrostructure is the basis upon which all other theories of traditional performance develop. Macrostructure is what usually solidifies the initial summary provided by ethnomusicologists too. My own experience toward this kind of musical understanding as an etic ethnomusicologist was made clear to me during my performances of Indonesian Gamelan music as part of my undergraduate studies at the University of Ireland, Cork (UCC). Ultimately, what proved most interesting was my acceptance of similar processes of understanding Irish traditional music as an emic ethnomusicologist.

## Ethnographic sketch 1.2:

It suddenly strikes me. My Indonesian teacher seems pleased that I am all at once further inside *Ladrang Saron Jagad Sl. Manyara*, the Gamelan piece he is currently teaching me. This is because I realise that I am basically inside of what I customarily perform as an Irish fiddle player, only that the inner details are different. The outer structure holds me in place. I have the same freedoms here as I do while performing an Irish reel for instance. I can repeat the piece as many times as I see fit (with reference to the ensemble leader as well as the best practices of tradition of course). It is worth noting also, that like a medley of Irish tunes it is often the case in Gamelan to go from one *gendhing* straight into another. The music of both genres is constructed in equal symmetric units; for example, every *kenongan* phrase in a *ladrang* piece will have eight *balungan* beats; every “part” of an Irish “jig” will have eight bars. I remember reading Sumarsam’s translation of *gendhing*, as either ‘a gamelan composition,’ or ‘a gamelan composition that always consists of two parts’ (see Sumarsam 1984).<sup>18</sup> Sumarsam was rightfully cautious with such generalisations because of the inconsistencies which usually occur, yet just like most Irish tunes, the *gendhing* is usually in two parts. We have the first part or what is termed “tune” (not to be confused with the same term signifying an entire piece) of an Irish tune, and the second part or what is termed “turn”. This will relate in Gamelan to the *mérong* and *ingguh* of a *gendhing* respectively. The form in Irish music is usually binary, as frequently occurs in Gamelan.

I am playing *slenthem* (the largest and lowest in pitch of the *saron* or *balungan* instruments) with fellow students of the Gamelan ensemble, and I am intrigued by the

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<sup>18</sup> Sumarsam is a renowned Javanese musician and ethnomusicologist.

structure of the melody of this particular piece, *Ladrang Saron Jagad*. It feels quite natural for me to play it and very quickly I am in no need of the notation. Upon overcoming the initial barriers of my dependency on notation, I can focus more sincerely on the music itself and fall into place within its structure. Written in typical cipher notation, here is the *balungan* line of the main body of *Ladrang Saron Jagad* (i.e. without the *buka* or introduction):

1 5 1 6	2 3 5 6	1 5 1 6	2 3 5 6
1 5 1 6	2 3 5 6	5 5 6 3	6 5 3 2
5 6 5 3	6 5 3 2	5 6 5 3	6 5 3 2
5 6 5 3	6 5 3 2	6 6 1 6	2 3 5 6

Figure 1.1: *Balungan* line of main body of *Ladrang Saron Jagad*.<sup>19</sup>

The fascinating thing is that when I imagine an Irish reel – say “The Mountain Road” – the melodic contour and inner phrasing are remarkably similar to the Gamelan piece here. If I assign each *gatra* (a group of four digits above) to each bar of “The Mountain Road” for instance, the similarities very quickly begin to reveal themselves.

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<sup>19</sup> Transcription by the author. Cypher notation, in the pentatonic scale of *slendro*.



Figure 1.2: Skeletal transcription of “The Mountain Road”.<sup>20</sup>

Notice that there is a repeating melody in *gattras* one, three and five; and so too there is a repeating melody in bars one, three and five. Even the melodic contour is quite similar here. A new motif arises in *gatra* two, which is repeated in *gattras* four and six; as occurs in bars two, four and six of the Irish reel (it is varied in bar four but still holds an essential similarity). The melodic ideas change in *gattras* seven and eight; and so too they change in bars seven and eight. The same correlation exists in the “turn” of the reel (bars 9–16, with the exception of bar twelve), and the *inggah* of the *gendhing* (*gattras* 9–16). Yet further similarities occur between both parts of the same reel as well as both parts of the same *gendhing*. The eighth *gatra* is the repeating melody of the tenth, twelfth and fourteenth *gattras*; as happens (less accurately) in the reel corresponding to the same bar numbers (save for bar twelve). This reflects the occurrence of the last *gatra* and last bar of both pieces as the repeating melodic idea of *gattras* and bars two, four and six (plus bar twelve in the reel). I believe that this is

<sup>20</sup> Transcription by the author.

the reason behind my sudden affinity with this particular *gendhing*. There are, of course, different tune-types and *gendhing*-types that would not show such cohesion. But this episode reveals some regular commonalities nonetheless.

And so I have extended Ó Súilleabháin's line to the other side of the globe! What is most striking here is my acceptance of the staples of my own tradition. The links are admittedly fascinating and of course significant. However, studies of my own tradition remain fixed by the maintenance of this particular macro-structural cohesion. For the purposes of learning a new music tradition, structure reappears momentarily (in keeping with my ethnomusicological experience) as a useful comparative comfort blanket, remaining, as always, within the terms of tradition as something permanent. However, structure very quickly disappears once its traditional terms of reference have been reaccepted and reconstituted onto another musical platform (my own musical focus returning to the innards of the perceived traditional system).

Structure, in the terms of tradition, needs to disappear in this way so as to conceal the blandness of its symmetric form as well as the monotony of its permanence. It must disappear because it obstructs the perception of "variation" as is understood within the same terms of tradition. Understandably, the smallest musical details have, as such, predominantly occupied studies of Irish traditional music.<sup>21</sup> How to analyse macrostructure while it disappears before us is indeed the greater challenge. Logically therefore, to properly study structure in Irish traditional music the terms of tradition must be avoided. Rather, the terms of the avant-garde prove far more productive because here structure is already fore-grounded.

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<sup>21</sup> Specialist in Celtic studies and Irish music studies, Fr. Richard Henebry, investigated Irish fiddle playing using von Hornbostel's tonometrics as early as the 1920s (see Henebry 1928; see also Reynolds 1911: 12–15 for further discussion).

Timothy Rice included perceptions of musical form and structure as one of the “issues that might be discussed under individual creativity and experience” (Rice 1987: 476). At this point, it is necessary to examine more thoroughly the place of structure in tradition versus the avant-garde as this relates to true variation (and by extension real individualism). Essentially, this requires a comparison between the traditional music-maker (who uses variation within permanent symmetric structure) and the avant-garde music-maker (who uses transitory asymmetric structure within variation).

Before leaving this first part of this chapter altogether, there is another aspect of transitoriness that needs to be clarified. An avant-garde music structure, though transitory, is still framed by a particular musical event. (Throughout this thesis, I understand a “musical event” to mean more and less than a “music system”. That is, one single contained musical performance that involves the following salient ingredients: music maker; primary music tools; and the ergonomic interaction between these producing a musical continuum of silence–sound–noise). For instance, the so-called “experimental” composers of the Western art tradition during the latter half of the twentieth century (probably now referred to as postmodernists), focussed attention on where this particular musical event dissolved into a more general “situation” (see Nyman 1999: 1). Even though in the end, this “situation” remains equally defined by its musical “happenings” (or even “non-happenings”), it is framed by the constancy of a unique system of conduct as opposed to a unique system of sound. Composer and music theorist Michael Nyman explained:



Experimental composers are by and large not concerned with prescribing a defined *time-object* whose materials, structuring and relationships are calculated and arranged in advance, but are more excited by the prospect of outlining a *situation* in which sounds may occur (Nyman 1999: 4).

However, inside this “situation” there is always at least one composer who may not be manipulating the final sound product, but s/he very much manipulates the “situation” out of which all sounds emerge. The particular musical outcome may not be determined by the composer here, but the system that dictates the “situation” certainly is. Therefore, from the perspective of each participant (I suppose this includes all “witnesses” to the “situation” above) the transference of manipulative power for the composer from a system of sound to a system of conduct can be intrusive before it is provocative. For instance, the “performer” here, as a musical individual, is automatically subsumed by a new order of things where a broader, though equally manipulative system remains dictated by a single (or maybe a conglomerate of) composer(s). Therefore, in much experimental music, a system of (musical) conduct is built upon a transitory aesthetic; whereas in the avant-garde this is contained to within a system of (musical) sound that is also built upon a transitory aesthetic.

Because the avant-garde creates sound products, the uniqueness of its transitoriness is often questioned by the experimental movement. However, there is nothing more permanent than an encapsulated system of conduct, even though apparently this same system repeated turns out “no perceptible musical ‘facts’ in common” (Nyman 1999: 9). The musical outcome may be more transitory in experimental music, but unlike the avant-garde, it cannot so easily facilitate a musical

comment on systems of permanence because it is itself a system of permanence that is defined and manipulated by a composer.

For the avant-garde, each music product must be uniquely identifiable; that is, not subsumed by a broader permanent system. That said, once a particular music product is repeated to the same listener, it adopts a certain element of permanence, though it is defined only by itself. For experimental music, this is avoided because every unique music product coming out of a determined system of conduct is identifiable only by the constancy of that particular system of conduct itself. That said, once the system of conduct is reproduced for the same participant, it adopts a certain element of permanence that is defined only by itself. The truth is, permanence can arise according to the reproduction of the music product of the avant-garde or according to the reproduction of the “situation” product of experimental music. In the end, experimental music rarely musters a musical comment on the permanence of systems of conduct because it is itself an example of this.

In this thesis, my focus remains fixed on the avant-garde therefore. One obvious difference between the experimental and the avant-garde is that more often than not the experimental relies on the participation of (or even merely the reception by) others. This will not do in my thesis because my primary analytical concern is the musical individual. Indeed my process examines more closely the performer/composer as a receiver of the performed sounds s/he her/himself creates. In experimental music, the aim is often to manipulate how sounds are experienced by all participants, contrasting the aim in the avant-garde for individualising how sounds are presented (and structured) by the artist. With this in mind, I now turn to an analysis on individualism within tradition versus the avant-garde.

## **1.2: The structures of traditional music**

I find the Marxist dialectic between sound and society a useful means of approaching the conflict between the musical individual and traditional forms of music structure. Anthropologist, Maurice Bloch provides a powerful presentation of the creative individual hopelessly entrapped by the confines of traditional form. On the other hand, the ethnomusicologist, John Blacking represents the musical individual as somehow independent from the confines of traditional form even while contributing to it. Rather, he argues, the musical individual requires traditional form as a foundation for individual creativity. I will set up a comparison between both readings of the traditional individual before finally searching for the avant-garde individual. In this matter, I will consider sociologist, philosopher and musicologist, Theodor Adorno's dichotomy between individualism and pseudo-individualism – representing "serious" (avant-garde) versus "popular" (traditional) music respectively.

### **1.21: Structure capturing individualism.**

What is of concern here, initially, is the harnessing of the sonic impulses of individual music-makers by the permanent structures of tradition. Bloch, in his presentation of religion as an extreme form of traditional authority, regards song as an extreme form of "formalisation". Though Bloch's study is a linguistic one – that of language used in ritual – his continuum of free use of syntax in ordinary speech to formalised use of syntax in song is helpful for the current emphasis on music structure. He cites song as a dominant mode of communication in ritual, characteristically laden with repetition

of pre-learned textual formations. Though not placed as far forward on Bloch's continuum of formalisation, his observations on stylised oratory are, at least, indicative of his views on song. Here, traditional modes of structuring are shown to restrict speech thus rendering stylised oratory devoid of any real argument; given that argument can only exist out of the freely constructed independent views of individual participants. It is both within the confines of predetermined symmetric structuring and through the implications of an inherited tradition powerful in its archaic "truths", that make any effort at real individual expression or argument in music performance a dubious one when looking at it from Bloch's perspective.

Taken further up the scale of formalisation, Bloch interrogates the creative potential of song. "As soon as you have accepted a form of speaking in an appropriate way you have begun to give up at a bewilderingly rapid rate the very potential for communication" (Bloch 1974: 61). Formalisation infers a continuing erosion of generative potential. As an enforced closed regime detailing appropriate ways of performing, song structures demolish the vast majority of meaningful potential in language. Devoid of multifarious meanings and possibilities, traditional song structure pollutes the significance of (musical) language. Bloch describes this phenomenon as a process of "drifting out of meaning" (ibid. 76). In this respect, he places instrumental music as the "final product" (ibid. footnote 8). At its most extreme, and shrouded in the impunity of an authoritative tradition, formalisation realises an inflexible clutch on articulation and thus denies any means of creative interaction by way of contradiction or, most essentially for Bloch: argument.

Blacking offers a somewhat more congenial alternative. In so doing, however, he does not contest that traditional structures drastically delimit the musical individual.

Blacking's theory of sound and society as being mutually influential has been well documented. Both are by default mutually dependent and therefore configure each other in unique ways. Blacking states that "music cannot express anything extramusical unless the experience to which it refers already exists in the mind of the listener"; and further emphasises: "music cannot communicate anything novel to its listeners except unfamiliar patterns of sound" (Blacking 1995a: 35; 36). Effectively, Blacking recognises that "no musical style has 'its own terms'" (Blacking 1973: 25). He argues that for music to be music at all, it needs formalisation (I'm adopting Bloch's terminology here) on the terms of its society (this would mean the terms of tradition). But this need not be regarded as the confinement of the individual. Music needs a common framework so that it can be exhumed from what may be culturally perceived as cacophony or nonsense sounds. Blacking illustrates:

Without cultural agreement among at least some human beings on what is perceived, there can be neither music nor musical communication (Blacking 1973: 9).

[...]

I am not arguing that particular musical systems are innate, but that some of the processes that generate them may be innate in all men (ibid. 115).

Blacking thus does not deny certain formalisation processes even in the very conception of music. He very famously defined music as humanly organised sound. This theory does nothing to impinge on Bloch's idea of formalisation, but neither does it imply the notion of confinement so ardently presented by him. Blacking agrees that music is "highly artificial", but perhaps this artificiality is a chosen platform for

expression rather than an enforced one, and ultimately a vital pairing of form and feeling that allows access to the finer subjects of communication which only music can contemplate (see Blacking 1995a: 33). “Form without feeling is sterile, and feeling without form is unlikely to be socially effective” (Blacking 1987: 74).

Blacking reveals a belief in music as the “cultural developments” of what he terms proto-music. “One important purpose of these arts is to restore, if only temporarily, the open state of cosmic consciousness that is the source of their existence” (Blacking 1987: 67). He toys with the notion of self-feeling and fellow-feeling as inter-dependant functions voiced through music (see *ibid.* 99). “If composers work consciously to express their inner experience in the “language” of their societies and cultures, they are using their minds to improve not their experience but the public expression of that experience” (Blacking 1995a: 53). Music for Blacking obviously offers a medium for man in his society to utilise a special creative desire to communicate to that society (and so using the permanent terms of reference belonging to that society). Of necessity, this involves the use of traditional form. But essentially it involves the special use of supra-communication that can supersede the actualities of formalisation.

Even though Bloch’s example of the song traditions of the Merina of Madagascar resonates directly with his theory on formalisation – something Blacking also admits – perhaps he is being too unforgiving in his treatment of song and, by association, instrumental music generally. Bloch leaves no room for interpretation, he states that there is no “*hidden code*”, only that code which is displayed directly by song (see Bloch 1974: 76). Blacking finds ample evidence of this hidden code. The Venda of Northern Transvaal – the focus of Blacking’s study – explain that “because they were

songs one should not necessarily expect words to mean exactly what they stated” (Blacking 1995b: 219). And it is here where the apparent power of communication lies in music, with those “indefinable emotions” which, according to Blacking, led composers like Mahler to communicate, through music, those things which language could not convey for him (see Blacking 1973: 61). Where Bloch finds argument impossible without revolution, Blacking by contrast finds evidence of argument despite the fixity of traditional form. In fact, Blacking finds a freedom of expression in music (indicative of argument) that is often suppressed socially. For instance, in his essay on South African Churches, Blacking highlights the power of music to communicate alternative political ideals within an ecclesiastic context (see Blacking 1995b).

Clearly both Bloch and Blacking are in agreement that there is indeed formalisation in music. Where they diverge is in their belief of music as a free and creative communicator: the voice of the individual. Bordieu’s well-known theory of *habitus* leads us to believe that we are predisposed to perform in accordance with our cultural bearings at every level, without conscious deliberation as to whether or not we conduct ourselves in this manner. But if we put to one side Bloch’s extreme views of song, his continuum of formalisation may still lend itself to further inquiry.

What is of concern to Bloch’s continuum is traditional form: the structuring of cultural/social communicative materials, not the materials themselves. That Bloch uncovers more evidence of formalisation in the traditional structuring of song than in the unstructured freedom found in ordinary speech is enough to justify his theory of diminished freedom within song. What will always remain contestable in Bloch’s theory is the metaphorical potency of song and instrumental music. Indeed, this is

what forms the basis of Blacking's argument. He insists that music can transcend both its own form and its usage in ritualised behaviour where the "value of music may not be entirely at the mercy of the ways in which it is used" (Blacking 1987: 50).

## 1.22: Structure controlling individualism.

Bloch regards extreme formalisation as an impoverished language. This is due to the generative potency of song being greatly diminished when compared with that of ordinary speech. Bloch includes aspects of form, volume, intonation, style, words, and syntax in this. However, form seems to direct confinement most predominantly.

"Although the restrictions are seen usually as restrictions of form rather than of content, they are a far more effective way of restricting content than would be possible if content were attacked directly" (Bloch 1974: 62). A primary tool for this is repetition.

A frozen statement cannot be expanded, it can only be made again and again and again. Repetition reminds us that we are not dealing with an argument, since an argument is a basis for another argument, not the basis for the same argument again (ibid. 76).

Song is, then, utterly predictable. As such song inhibits creativity and, by implication, individualism. "Communication has stopped being a dialectic and has become a matter of repeating correctly" (Bloch 1974: 72). This leaves song in a predicament as it cannot develop, indeed, it drifts further from meaning and further from creativity.



Blacking disputes this almost frightening theory and asserts, “in musical languages, as in architecture, repetition can be positively constructive, and the core of the ‘argument’” (Blacking 1995b: 201). For Blacking, interaction with the “materials of a cultural tradition” and “the ability to synthesize” them in an original way (rather than individually construct them anew), is perhaps conducive of argument (see Blacking 1973: 106). But this only goes so far in regaining music’s status as something capable of real individual argument. Blacking in one sense relinquishes his position inadvertently through his presentation of “democratic polyphony” of European hymns in South African church ceremonies (see Blacking 1987: 98).

Leadership was far from authoritarian, especially during worship, when it was expected that the Holy Spirit would lead the proceedings (Blacking 1995b: 207).

[...]

Music [...] was for all the most emotional and expressive element of worship [...] to find his/her inner self in the presence of and with the help of others (ibid. 209).

To Bloch this very scene represents a deluded notion of freedom of expression. The very appearance of something that belongs to everybody contributes to the very illusion of individual creativity in song. Because of formalisation and the reduction of generative potency, for Bloch “creativity has suddenly become controllable, hence enjoyable. This, however, is an illusion of creativity, in fact this is the sphere where it least occurs” (Bloch 1974: 73). For the collective interpretations of song in Blacking’s example to continue, form still remains intact, unaltered, not contradicted and without argument. “The individuality and historicity of event disappear since irrespective of minor differences these events are all *like* the scriptural examples” (ibid. 62). The past

is made contemporary and everything, therefore, is comparable with the same argument under multiple presentations, often mistaken for multifarious creative interpretations. Blacking, however, persists, and he presents different musical categories that on the one hand represent Bloch's view, and on the other hand represent Blacking's own belief in the potential of individualism in music.

There is a difference between music that is occasional and music that enhances human consciousness, music that is simply for having and music that is for being. I submit that the former may be good craftsmanship, but that the latter is art, no matter how simple or complex it sounds, and no matter under what circumstances it is produced (Blacking 1973: 50).

For Blacking, music can become predictable where "cultural development can reach a stage where it is almost mechanically self-generative"; and he cites "the only power that can change it, the creative force that springs from human self-consciousness" (Blacking 1973: 107). But can one be truly *self*-conscious within the extent of formalisation as we have witnessed it throughout Bloch's study? Indeed, Blacking seems to emphasise that it is only from within formalisation that one can be individually creative in music.

The purpose of art is to capture force with form: the force of individual human experience and the form of collective cultural experience [...] If artists want to communicate the force of their experience to others, they must base their work on given forms of expression even if they find it necessary to revise the rules (Blacking 1995: 52).

Blacking invests a certain confidence in traditional modes of structuring in music as a creative generative space. He sees that the “individual consciousness is nurtured within the collective consciousness of the community” (Blacking 1987: 98). This very process defines the individual as the individual defines the community. Blacking’s convictions are inspired by the belief of the Venda who “stress that ‘man is man because of his associations with other men’” (Blacking 1973: 107). But can we view the strictures of traditional form as harbouring individualism, or can we only provide an ideological interpretation of this?

Perhaps Adorno’s study on popular music probes deeper into the kind of dichotomy presented by Blacking as craftsmanship and art. Here, Adorno uses the terms “popular” and “serious” music, probing the distinction between these concepts through an examination of what he terms “standardization” (which basically amounts to Bloch’s “formalisation”). For Adorno, “details themselves are standardized no less than the form” in popular music (Adorno 1941: 1:4). However, this may be more to do with the power displayed by the highly formalised whole (or macrostructure), than by the lack of ingenuity on the part of the details (or microstructures).

Granted, the “listener becomes prone to evince stronger reactions to the part than to the whole”, but the structure of the whole is never dependant upon the details (see *ibid.* 1:5). In fact, the details are all “inconsequential” and indeed “substitutable” (*ibid.* 1:7; 1:12). Therefore these details, usually regarded as the epitome of individualised performance practice in popular or traditional music, are in Adorno’s theory also made to be redundant. Regardless of Blacking’s subversive and metaphorical understanding of song, form – adroitly conceived – always controls ornamental improvisations in traditional music performance.

However, Adorno by no means regards the entire enterprise of music as such. Adorno is essentially recanting the woes of a misuse of form as he sees it. Bloch finds no hope of anything but the extremes of formalisation in music, yet Adorno finds relief from this perception with what he terms “serious” music.<sup>22</sup> Here, “each musical element, even the simplest one, is ‘itself’” (Adorno 1941: 1:14). Adorno deals with repetition more positively in this light.

All the recognizable elements are organized in good serious music by a concrete and unique musical totality from which they derive their particular meaning, in the same sense as a word in a poem derives its meaning from the totality of the poem and not from the everyday use of the word, although the recognition of this everydayness of the word may be the necessary presupposition of any understanding of the poem (Adorno 1941: 3:2)

[...]

The musical sense is the New — something which cannot be traced back to and subsumed under the configuration of the known, but which springs out of it, if the listener comes to its aid (ibid. 3:3)

[...]

It is precisely this relationship between the recognized and the new which is destroyed in popular music. Recognition becomes an end instead of a means (ibid. 3:4).

Indeed there is a certain ambiguity, as Bloch also exposes, inherent in the indifference of the parts of a whole; an indifference even insurmountable by the

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<sup>22</sup> Although Adorno is referring directly to “popular” jazz music and “serious” serial music, I am deliberately bringing his concept onto a broader platform which disregards genre.

introduction of a perceived “new”. Significantly, where form regains its suppleness, as in Adorno’s “serious music”, it also regains individualism.

### 1.23: Structure conducting individualism.

Adorno investigates the notion of “pseudo-individualization” with respect to popular music, which is again “prescribed by the standardization of the framework” (Adorno 1941: 1:24). Indeed, individualised variation (predominantly made through improvised micro-structural details) has rarely been refuted as the definition of individualism in traditional music. For it is only through and in performance that variation like this can exist. “The most drastic example of standardization of presumably individualized features is to be found in so-called improvisations” (Adorno 1941: 1:24). For Adorno, the framework of the whole in popular music is “so rigid that the freedom it allows for any sort of improvisation is severely delimited” (ibid. 1:24). This echoes Bloch’s emphasis on the depletion of generative potential. Adorno continues: “the musical function of the improvised detail is determined completely by the scheme” (ibid. 1:24). This impacts enormously on what may until now have been considered as the obvious point of departure from the confines of formalisation.

Blacking delights in the traditional structuring of music where the individual voice emerges through the improvised variations that decorate traditional form. He explores the notion of *how* people perform as opposed to *what* they perform (Blacking 1995b: 213). But how far can the former be separated from (or disregard) the practicality of the latter? How abstract must music become to be perceived as a realm

for the individual artist? To what extent is the feeling of “letting go” unconsciously and spontaneously a free and individualistic undertaking while still permanently wrapped in the degenerative potential of appropriate traditional form (see *ibid.* 216)?

“You cannot really learn to improvise, but this does not mean that improvisation is random. The man who does it is not improvised: all aspects of his behaviour are subject to a series of interrelated, structured systems” (Blacking 1973: 100).

Therefore, Blacking attests that structure appears at every level of human behaviour, perhaps reminiscent of Bordieu’s concept of *habitus* (see Bordieu 1977). But neither Bloch nor especially Adorno deny the integral place of structure in what it is to be human. Adorno is highlighting an important difference between individual structure and standardised structure. When we return to Bloch’s idea of a continuum of formalisation we can better understand the place of improvised variation with respect to “free individualism” within a traditional form. To what extent is it predetermined even if it is apparently unlearned and unfixed?

Adorno (writing here in 1941) certainly views jazz improvisations as something “normalized”. He states: “Here, very few possibilities for actual improvisation remain, due to the necessity of merely melodically circumscribing the same underlying harmonic functions” (Adorno 1941: 1:24). He further explains the concept of “substitution” in jazz improvisation where their function “forbid their being grasped as musical events in themselves”, and continues:

They can be received only as embellishments. It is a well-known fact that in daring jazz arrangements worried notes, dirty notes, in other words, false notes, play a conspicuous role. They are apperceived as exciting stimuli only because they are corrected by the ear to the right note (Adorno 1941: 1:25).

To Adorno, these “pseudo-individualisations” are fitted into the basic units of the whole. Their lack of divergence from traditional form implies an innate irrelevance to the whole; a lack of self-consciousness in the creation of an argument that fails to attenuate the inescapable suppression of individualism within the terms of tradition. These apparently free individual expressions are submerged into the predetermined permanence of a traditional form. This form (or macrostructure) – after vanishing from musical consciousness – thus encroaches adroitly on the performer who is merely convinced of his own creativity.

And so to summarise these arguments: Bloch presents us with a continuum of formalisation reaching its peak in song. He believes that there cannot exist individual creativity under such a rigorous depletion of generative potential. Blacking relies on formalisation as a means to an end, an end where the creative individual can manipulate the given constructs of his culture without breaking them so as to compose something of significance in a metaphorical supra-communicative medium. Regardless of form, music can convey individuality, though in a somewhat indefinable way. Here micro-structural variation is seen as a peak of individualism, or at least an avenue wherein the individual can become most free.

Adorno argues that a misuse of form is found in such micro-structural subservience to a macro-structural whole. Any means espousing to the maintenance of a standard structure – even through improvised micro-structural variation – supports a deluded notion of creative individualism, i.e. pseudo-individualism. In fact, improvised micro-structural variation contributes to formalisation or standardisation by effectively concealing its permanence. Essentially form (or macrostructure) in the terms of tradition always denies the possibility of individualism in music. It is only

through the negation of a traditional form that true individuality can emerge. A process of self-conscious structuring at both a macro- and micro-structural level is the only real basis of individual creativity.

## **Conclusion**

Folklorist and musicologist, Samuel P. Bayard, seems quite provocative when declaring: “Folk melodies are living musical form and movement – not mechanical compilations of musical odds and ends” (Bayard 1950: 9). However, Bayard’s “living form” is based on the terms of tradition where permanence is still portrayed diachronically as a constant macrostructure shared by the participants of a sound community. He reveals that his perception of life and movement is also found solely within the innards of macrostructure. Here, Bayard rather typically links “the symmetrical, highly organized tunes of Ireland” with comparable traditions elsewhere (see *ibid.* 35).

Both English and Irish styles share some qualities to which I have already alluded: their tunes are generally couched in bisymmetric two- or four-line organizations, and have phrase-patterns of AABA, ABBA, ABCD, etc. I hope I have made it plain that the internal structure of these airs is much more varied, complex and subtly organized than any *A-plus-B* scheme of phrase-arrangements could indicate: these schemes are simply indications of fundamental models (Bayard 1950: 34).



Likewise, ethnomusicologist and composer, James Cowdery, views macrostructure as a given in the Irish tradition. For here, macrostructure enables Irish musicians to embellish using micro-structural variation.

Due to the predictability of overall structure, the listener is able to formulate general expectations which may then be manipulated by the performer through sensitive changes in ornamentation or small melodic variations. This subtle level of musical appreciation, so relished by those inside the tradition, is often missed by the outsider who may even be lulled into boredom by the predictability of Irish musical forms (Cowdery 1990: 17).

In general, Cowdery reflects the common understanding of music structure shared by scholars of Irish traditional music. Just like Blacking, he accepts that macro-structural form is a constant foundation upon which improvised micro-structural variation is added. For him, this accounts for musical individualism. Therefore, a full consideration of structure in Irish traditional music rarely occurs since these studies focus exclusively on the terms of reference provided by tradition itself. Structure has already disappeared before the analysis begins. To properly account for macrostructure in Irish traditional music of course is deeply unsettling. Meyer was also aware of this.

It is remarkable with what persistent and single-minded intent human beings strive for inner security and psychic certainty. We cling tenaciously to familiar ways and accepted explanations, blandly disregarding or rationalizing away incongruities and inconsistencies, if only we may be permitted the tranquility of a system and

certainty of a set of principles. Only a few can tolerate ambiguity and its attendant tensions (Meyer 1960: 49).

The convenience of a permanent macro-structural form comforts the study of traditional music itself. This thesis, however, will aim at crisis. In the following analysis of the fiddle music of Ireland during the twentieth century, I will explain an avant-garde of Irish traditional music by reflecting upon one small (though hugely important) sequence of music practitioners. Although perhaps never considering themselves as “avant-garde”, nor becoming in any important way influenced by each other, their performances contain the necessary elements for my own personal search for the avant-garde of Irish traditional music generally, and Irish fiddle performance practices specifically.

## **Chapter 2: 1900: Edward Cronin: Flexing Structures**

### **2.1: Different Histories**

In researching folk music before 1900, we are seldom privileged to hear the actual sounds of performance; instead, we rely upon written sources that hopefully contain relevant biographical data and musical materials. Even though further issues arise when considering recorded sounds from the past, our preferred medium of investigation as scholars of traditional music remains (or at least should usually remain) such auditory evidence. Theories attempting to construct the history of fiddle playing in Ireland customarily use as a sonic foothold the commercial recordings of Irish fiddle players in North America during the 1920s and 30s (see chapter 3). These immigrant performers are very often represented as a peak in technical-aesthetic accord, symbolising a euphoric junction where a preceding (though continuing) rise in technical accomplishment intersects with a previously constant (though subsequently declining) aesthetic integrity. This position very nicely informs the terms of tradition in the Irish context, something that is often supported by ethnomusicologists too, such as Laurence McCullough.

The rapid spread of the Sligo style [of these fiddle players in North America] was due to its utilization and extension of instrumental techniques and stylistic traits that already existed in the idiom of Irish music but had not yet been fully



Plate 2.1: Edward Cronin.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Taken from O'Neill, 1987/1913:333

developed by fiddle players in other areas.<sup>24</sup> [... These Sligo musicians] presented a synthesis that was novel yet wholly steeped in the tradition (McCullough 1978: 3).

This chapter attempts to redress the current view of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fiddle player in light of a cylinder recording that has until now escaped proper regard. It not only offers to augment existing research into early Irish fiddle playing by providing relevant audio evidence, but rather demands a fresh examination of those written sources that have previously functioned as the sole gamut of nineteenth-century Irish fiddle performance research. This may ultimately prompt a reconsideration of how evidence from literary sources is interpreted while divorced from any sound evidence (such as audio recordings) within the study of traditional music of the past. Here, three fundamental dichotomies are considered that reveal competing histories of Irish solo fiddle performance: First, that of literate versus oral representations of music history; second, that of an ancient versus a modern interpretation of the musical past; and third, that of a dance versus a musical conception of Irish traditional dance music.

## 2.11: Different Definitions.

Ethnomusicologist, Mark Slobin, declared: “Individual variety is the lifeblood of folk music, whether from person to person or village to village” (Slobin 1984: 176). He later emphasised: “In general, peasant music is a combination of group conservatism and individual expression. The former lends stability, while the latter introduces

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<sup>24</sup> Sligo is a northwestern county of Ireland from where the majority of the most successful Irish fiddlers emigrated to North America during this period.

change” (ibid. 182). This individualisation is more often viewed as improvisation, and in discussing improvisation ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl echoes Slobin’s sentiments. “One cross-culturally valid approach is examining the musician’s need to balance ‘doing your own thing’ with sticking to the rules” (Nettl 1998: 16). Irish music is regarded no differently, and is widely presented as “a solo art form, of which embellishment comprising ornament, melodic and rhythmic variation is a prominent stylistic feature” (Breathnach 1996/1985: 93).<sup>25</sup>

It is therefore held that individuality is realised through improvisation by means of micro-structural traditional ornaments, together with micro-structural melodic and rhythmic deviations that enhance a central modal design. Breathnach clearly insisted that “when the tune has been added to one’s repertoire, it should be regarded as one’s own” (Breathnach 1986: 123). Despite this, it is widely argued that Irish traditional music is something that is inherently tied to the dance environment, whether in the presence of dancers or not (refer also to appendix C). Therefore, somewhat paradoxically, Breathnach concludes that only a minority of purely instrumental pieces “for the ear and not for dancing” exist today.<sup>26</sup>

Breathnach’s perspective is replicated by other commentators. Referencing appendix C of this thesis, writers as varied as Fleischman, Foy, and Harvey are cited as supporters of the argument that emphasises the dominant position of dance in contemporary Irish music. Others, such as O’Sullivan and Fairbairn, have been shown to associate the predominance of dance with the overall aesthetic of the ancient (refer

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<sup>25</sup> For more examples in Irish music studies and ethnomusicology see Breathnach 1985b: xi; 1986: 122; Ó Canainn 1993: 45; Carson 1986: 51; Mac Mahon 1999: 177; McCullough 1978: 5; Koning 1980: 420; Cooke 1992: 241; Fairbairn 1993: 1; Hast and Scott 2004: 82–3.

<sup>26</sup> Breathnach contrasts this with an autonomous music tradition in Medieval sources which looked at music in terms of affect; the musical terms *suantraí*, *geantraí*, and *goltraí* being especially prominent (see Breathnach 1986: 2). Breathnach insisted that it would be “wholly fanciful” to categorise Irish dance music along similar lines today (see ibid. 34).

to appendix C). Karen Farrington, a multi-disciplined author, continues to represent this link between music and dance as something ancient. She states:

It still surprises many to discover that the purpose of Irish music was, until recently, to accompany dance. Its exit from the dance hall and elevation to entertainment in its own right was pioneered by Ó Riada (Farrington 1998: 19).<sup>27</sup>

Irish traditional music specialist and flute-maker, Colin Hamilton, presents commercial recordings as developing “the concept of “listening music” as opposed to dance music” (Hamilton 1994: 14). Thus shifting the changeover date from Ó Riada’s 1960s to Coleman’s 1920s, Hamilton’s statement still comes out of an understanding that “instrumental music is essentially dance music” (ibid. 14).<sup>28</sup> Hamilton’s view is shared by Irish music specialist and television producer, Nuala O’Connor, and thus featured prominently in her widely distributed television series “Bringing it all Back Home” aired in 1991 (see O’Connor 1991: 71).

Meanwhile, other writers such as fiddle educator, Pete Cooper, promote the continuing aesthetic of dance as it relates to the performance of the fiddle in particular. “With the obvious exception of slow airs, Irish tunes are always played *as if* for dancing, whether in fact there are dancers present or not” (Cooper 1995: 15). More recently, Dorothea E. Hast and Stanley Scott echo this by declaring that “whether danced to or not, the music is obviously dance music” (Hast and Scott 2004: 59).

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<sup>27</sup> From the 1960s onward, Irish composer and pianist Seán Ó Riada (1931–1971) symbolises for many the move to “listening” Irish traditional music using complex ensemble arrangements.

<sup>28</sup> Sligo fiddle player, Michael Coleman (1891–1945), was the most prominent of these early recording musicians. He receives further attention in chapter three of this thesis.

Ethnomusicologist, Jeff Pressing, is hardly alone in his belief that the soloist “either alone, or surrounded by fixed elements, is accorded the greatest latitude of action” (Pressing 1984: 351). Regardless, it is precisely Cooper’s widely shared notion of “*as if*” playing for dancers which binds the Irish soloist within the closed terms of tradition. Essentially, where the dancer exits stage left, the phantom dancer enters stage right. This phantom dancer has a basis in the musical past when – as in Farrington’s equation above – dance unquestionably controlled the instrumentalist’s performances.

It is the phantom dancer who very often administers the predetermined symmetric macrostructure required by the terms of tradition. The phantom dancer maintains a link with antiquity, hence his being fundamental to the terms of tradition. That the phantom dancer is perceived as being less surefooted after Ó Riada further emphasises the phantom dancer’s link to the musical past. The dancer’s weight in the musical past (donning the cloak of antiquity) regularly subverts ensemble practice in the later part of the twentieth century where performances (particularly those imitating Ó Riada’s precedent) are castigated for being non-traditional by failing to accommodate the phantom dancer. Academic and Irish traditional music specialist, Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, argues:

The renaissance [i.e. the 1970s] has also witnessed an increased separation between ‘performance’ music and ‘dance’ music. Older players, whose sense of rhythm was implicitly linked to set dancing, often felt isolated by younger players who abandoned the traditional dance milieu for the concert stage and television studio (Ó hAllmhuráin 1998: 151).



As a result, Irish dance music existing as a form of listening music is mainly viewed as a late twentieth-century ensemble phenomenon. The apparent symbiosis of dance and music during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century thus requires further attention.

It may be appreciated from early twentieth-century fiddle players that many were by this time inclined to perform listening dance music during solo performances too. For instance, Pádraig Ó Caoimh (1887–1963) made efforts “to show the beauty and the depth of the tune” (Browne 1993); whereby “his tunes were therefore worked up into something worthy of an audience” (Ward 1976: 20). Certainly Michael Coleman’s (1891–1945) fiddle playing “expressed a range of emotion far beyond the normal requirements of tunefulness and rhythm associated with Irish dance music” (Bradshaw 1991: 1). Is it fair, though, to assume that this elevation of music beyond the space occupied by the phantom dancer is such a recent phenomenon? The lack of historical evidence concerning listening music does not necessarily mean that it did not exist. After-all, it is difficult to hear it when relying solely upon written sources. Consequently, it is important to provide a finer analysis of the extant secondary sources, most especially in light of newly emerging primary ones.

## 2.12: Written Definitions.

Capt. Francis O’Neill’s (1848–1936) legendary collections of Irish folk melodies titled “O’Neill’s Music of Ireland” (1903) has long been an invaluable resource for both musicians and academics. A native of County Cork, O’Neill began gathering an eclectic mix of Irish repertoires from fellow Irish immigrants in Chicago while he was

swiftly climbing the ranks of the local police force. Upon his retirement as Chief of Police in 1905, O'Neill delved further into the study, and collecting of, his native music. He also wrote about his musical comrades in various sizeable publications, providing biographical and critical information intertwined with his own theories on Irish music.<sup>29</sup> His monumental project is one of immense import as O'Neill – unlike many of his predecessors – wrote with the authority of a practising musician with undeniably rich traditional musical pedigree (see Carolan 1997).

It must of course be recognised that not all are immediately convinced by O'Neill's status in this regard, something which therefore needs some attention before considering more important issues further on in this chapter. Renowned ethnomusicologist, Philip Bohlman, for instance seems not wholly convinced by claims made of O'Neill's work being representative of the national music of Ireland; already given that "Francis O'Neill did not gather his national folk-music collection in Ireland, but rather in Chicago" (Bohlman 2004: 108). However, there is no effort here to distinguish between newly arrived immigrants (who were Irish) and a later generation of Irish-Americans. As such, this representation is incomplete. Of course Bohlman's focus is on nationalism and it seems that he has simply misinterpreted the following Carolan quote claiming O'Neill's publications are "the largest snapshot of this music ever taken in its 9,000-year history". Bohlman assumes that O'Neill's collection is therefore apparently wholly representative of the tradition's 9,000 year history. However, O'Neill's collection accounts only for a snapshot of the tradition

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<sup>29</sup> See O'Neill 1910; O'Neill 1987/1913; O'Neill 1922.

taken at a particular moment, but a snapshot that entailed the collection of far more data than any other snapshot taken before – what Carolan actually points out.<sup>30</sup>

O'Neill's snapshot remains significant. His work is important not only for the sheer mass of data accumulated, but also because of his personal, practical, and scholarly interest in Irish traditional music. O'Neill also made a number of visits back to Ireland. And although “there were areas of Irish tradition, such as those of Donegal and Sligo for example, which O'Neill could only have lightly touched upon” (Carolan 1997: 39), the scope available to him on the widespread condition of Irish traditional music during his time was hard to surpass.<sup>31</sup>

True, O'Neill was directly involved in canvassing the nationalist cause. It follows, therefore, that for him, it was important to represent the entire range of musical sounds on the Island of Ireland. How nationalism informs O'Neill's views on Irish music remains uncertain.<sup>32</sup> Both O'Neill and his colleague, the Gaelic League activist Fr. James K. Fielding, spoke of the “national” music of Ireland.<sup>33</sup> Yet, with reference to musical diversity in Ireland, O'Neill stated that “among traditional Irish

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<sup>30</sup> Though Bohlman's focus is on nationalism in music, this issue is more practically investigated by the historian Michael Nichol森 in relation to O'Neill's activities. As Nichol森 states: “Traditional musicians encouraged the association of music with nationalism by performing at nationalist functions as well” (Nichol森 2007: 181). In this respect, many Irish musicians – including the fiddle player Edward Cronin (see below) – reportedly performed at a private reception for the co-founder of the Gaelic League, Douglas Hyde (1860–1949), that was organised by O'Neill and his associate Father James K. Fielding in January 1906. Hyde eventually served as the first President of Ireland from 1938 to 1945. However, it is not apparent that these musicians were sympathetic to, or even at all interested in the Organisation (see Nichol森 2007: 183–4). If anything can be deduced from their presence at this function, it is that these musicians were not against the nationalistic goals of the Gaelic League.

<sup>31</sup> O'Neill must have had at least some degree of familiarity with the Donegal tradition. His good friend, Fr Richard Henebry – that acclaimed Irish music theorist – spoke of “Jim and Pat Boyle, two very good fiddlers from Glen Columcille, Co. Donegal, whom I met in Denver, Colorado” (see Henebry 1903: 11). O'Neill's regular contact with Henebry would imply that this episode must also have been discussed between the two.

<sup>32</sup> Refer to appendix A for some discussion on nationalism and Irish music.

<sup>33</sup> Fr. Fielding was a keen flute player originally from County Kilkenny. Fielding must have been born in the mid-1870s because O'Neill states in his 1913 publication: “he was born nearly forty years ago” (O'Neill 1987/1913: 179).

musicians nothing is so noticeable as the absence of uniformity of style or system” (O’Neill 1910: 44–5). Here, O’Neill’s language always veered towards the poetic rather than the musical. His use of the term “national music” may equally be seen as much as a celebration of artistic diversity as the recognition of a unified national style. It is worth pointing out too that the concept of a regional style was not discussed during his time, only becoming an issue later in the twentieth century (see Keegan 2008: 642). A “national” music is perhaps all that he could speak of at the time of writing.

In all, O’Neill had a privileged vantage point when considering a cross-section of traditional music at home and abroad. Apart from the Irish music community in Chicago, O’Neill was without doubt aware of music making in Ireland where he made numerous visits and indulged in a private correspondence with interested parties. Within some of these private letters, Carolan notices: “Although he had many pleasant musical experiences in Ireland, especially in Clare, O’Neill was not generally impressed with the state of music there, and felt it to be inferior to what might commonly be heard in Chicago” (Carolan 1997: 26). Given this negative perception, whomever O’Neill singles out for adulation must be considered quite exceptional.

In this context, O’Neill’s veneration of the fiddler, Edward Cronin, is especially interesting. Originally from Limerick Junction (Co. Tipperary), Cronin played a prominent role as a contributor to, and collector in O’Neill’s work. Born around 1838, Cronin is for many reasons of vital importance to the study of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fiddle music in Ireland. The date of his death is unknown. However, it must be after 1913 as it would be unlikely that O’Neill would fail to include such information in his biographical sketches of the artist, the latest of which appeared in

“Irish Minstrels and Musicians” published in that year.<sup>34</sup> Known for his reliability and honesty, O’Neill’s portrayal of Cronin is typical. He does not resist in describing Cronin’s (at times) brutal character, regarding the fiddler as “excessive”. He attributes this personality flaw to Cronin’s “artistic temperament” (see O’Neill 1987/1913: 392). Even though O’Neill visited Cronin twice weekly for two years – covering a distance of 12 miles each way – he admits to his readers that an “enduring friendship was unattainable” between them: “Temperament and professional jealousy brought it to an abrupt end without apparent cause” (ibid. 394). Therefore, any praise afforded by him concerning Cronin’s musical ability must be weighed against such difficulties of character.

O’Neill describes Cronin as being “of more ancient vintage” and highlights him as “a mine of long-forgotten melody” consisting of “many a rare dance tune” perhaps “known only to himself” (O’Neill 1910: 45; O’Neill 1922: 185; O’Neill 1910: 87). O’Neill makes clear Cronin’s authority as a particularly ancient reservoir of tradition, providing the music for many an “elusive” tune, both “ancient and obsolete” (O’Neill 1910: 123). He is often heralded as having versions of melodies that are far superior to those found in much earlier published manuscripts; or for just being at all familiar with some of the more peculiar melodies found in print (see ibid. 89; 141). On other occasions he is singled out as the only other musician to have a variant for some particularly rare contributions performed by some musical associate in Chicago (see ibid. 104).

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<sup>34</sup> O’Neill also refers to Cronin (though not in the style of a biography) in his 1922 publication, “Waifs and Strays of Gaelic Melody”. Here, O’Neill does not mention if Cronin was still alive at the time. The obituary of one Edward Cronin that appears in a Sinn Féin Magazine of 1908 is more than likely that of a different O’Neill associate, an *uilleann* piper bearing the same name as our fiddle player.

Cronin's settings of tunes are then lauded for their deeply traditional flavour: "the real thing from the glens"; "well covered with moss"; "a revelation as an example of the traditional"; and many such poignant allusions toward characteristically "ancient strains" (see O'Neill 1910: 88; 78–9). Cronin is therefore not only valuable as a source of traditional material from the nineteenth century, he is vital as an exemplar of how one was to aspire to the aesthetic treatment of such melodies by the early twentieth century. It is never suggested that Cronin performed other genres of music during his time in North America. It is made abundantly clear that he was engaged in very hazardous employment involving heavy machinery, leaving his hands in quite a disagreeable condition even for an amateur musician. In fact, O'Neill laments Cronin's "long isolation" in North America, a complete lack of musical activity during this time thus revealing a corresponding lack of influence from either outside or even inside the Irish tradition.

In responding to some questions posed by the respected Irish writer, Alfred P. Graves, O'Neill referred to Cronin as "an exceptionally fine traditional violinist" (Graves [1907]: 33). Perhaps Graves' status as a man of letters urged O'Neill to use the term "violinist" instead of his more customary use of the word "fiddler" when referencing Irish traditional performers of the instrument. O'Neill refers to Cronin's contemporary, John McFadden, using similar terms of reference in the same letter, stating that he was "an excellent traditional violinist" (ibid. 34). O'Neill is known to have loathed the use of classical training among traditional musicians. When another contemporary, the music professor, Patrick J. Griffith, advocated the use of classical training to enhance the technique of the traditional fiddler, O'Neill was immediately critical (see O'Neill 1987/1913: 400). When O'Neill

mentions that Cronin was a “trained musician” he may have used this descriptor with reference to Cronin’s ability to write music, although Cronin’s standard of musical literacy was neither commended (see Graves [1907]: 34; see also below). In sum, it remains most unlikely that Cronin was classically trained.

Cronin apparently “had but one rival as an all round traditional fiddle player” (O’Neill 1913: 394); even among much younger contemporaries. O’Neill continually refers to him as a “genius”; someone “of uncommon brilliance”; in all, “an excellent fiddler of the traditional school” (O’Neill 1910: 87). Therefore, Cronin is both an exemplar of a musician with an authentic taste as well as a musician of the highest technical accomplishment. He can thus be considered an outstanding representative of fiddle playing during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. The high praise afforded Cronin by O’Neill is reliable as it is remarkable.

## 2.13: Sound Definitions.

The majority of the cylinder recordings which survive and which were made by O’Neill were unjustly kept from those with the greatest interest in them. Some are rather inaccessible, being stored in the sound archive of the Music Department at University College Cork. These recordings were sent by O’Neill to Henebry as a gift (c. 1907) who in turn left the collection to the University where he was Professor of Irish. The rest of the collection was presumed lost or destroyed. However many of these recordings have recently surfaced in North America. Only very recently in 2011 have these become widely accessible on a commercially available CD collection.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *The Francis O’Neill Cylinders: Thirty-two Recordings of Irish Traditional Music in America circa 1904*. WIMA, CD recording.

However, it is uncertain when these cylinders were recorded. It is probable that O'Neill had his own Edison Cylinder Recorder at the same time when his friend (and famed vaudevillian) *uilleann* piper, Patsy Touhey (1865–1923), was recording his own cylinders for postal orders during the 1890s.

Ilana Harlow and Stephen Winick, who are archivists at the Smithsonian, have already pointed out that O'Neill "does not mention his use of the new technology in his published writings, which makes it difficult to know exactly when he started recording" (Harlow and Winick 2007: 8). Since some of these recordings do not appear in O'Neill's publications, the archivists later conclude that "they might not have been known to O'Neill when the books were published; they may thus help scholars establish the date of the cylinder recordings, which is still in doubt" (ibid. 11). However, it seems likely that O'Neill's relationship with Cronin ended before 1907 when the master fiddler was recruited for, and subsequently dropped from his editorial contribution to the most famous publication *The Dance Music of Ireland*. As mentioned before, O'Neill made it abundantly clear (in 1913) that an "enduring friendship was unattainable".

There are no recordings of Cronin found among the Henebry selection. It is unlikely that O'Neill excluded recordings of Cronin in his gift to the fiddle-enthusiast Fr. Henebry (in 1907) had he not expected to gather more of these recordings for himself.<sup>36</sup> Fortunately, one cylinder recording among the newly discovered lot in North America contains a performance by Edward Cronin of the double jig "Banish Misfortune" – and this does appear in the O'Neill collections too. It is unlikely that all cylinder recordings are from the same date, but it would seem most probable that

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<sup>36</sup> See O'Neill, 1911:19 concerning Henebry's enthusiasm for innovative practices in traditional music performance.



Cronin's performance here predates, at least, the 1907 edition of O'Neill's collection. More than likely, it predates the first printing date of 1903. A proper analysis of Cronin's playing here provides important sonic evidence for, and a supreme musical example of the fiddling tradition of this era.

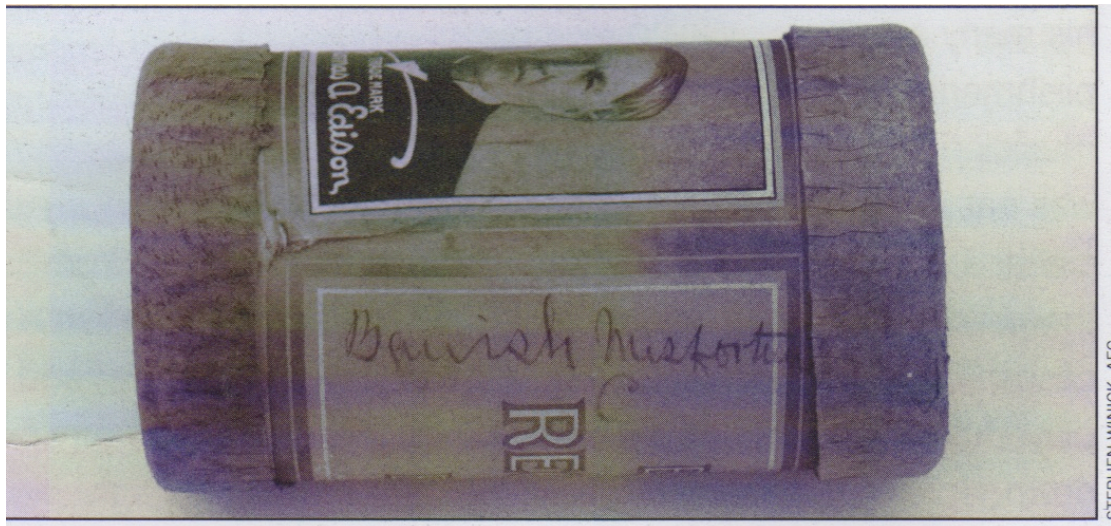


Plate 2.2: Cylinder recording featuring Edward Cronin's performance of "Banish Misfortune".<sup>37</sup>

Though Cronin's technical ability on his instrument is greatly admired by his contemporaries, it comes as a surprise to today's community of performers and enthusiasts. Criticism of past musicians does not dare make direct suggestions of inferior technical ability; this would clearly be in breach of modern interpretations of the tradition's aesthetics. But certainly, much criticism concerning present-day performances – "harmfully" imbued with technical feats – goes some way in asserting the belief that any such technical feats were never attained in earlier times. To this end, the following serves as a detailed transcription of Cronin's recorded performance:

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<sup>37</sup> Taken from Harlow & Winick, 2007.

# Banish Misfortune – performed by Edward Cronin, c 1900

$\text{♩} = 128$

A1

5

A2

13

17

B1

21

25

B2

29

33

C1

37

41

C2

45

49

A1

53

57

A2

61

65

B1

69

73

B2

77

81

C1

85

89

C2

93

The musical score is written in D major (two sharps) and 4/4 time. It consists of 93 measures, organized into systems of staves. The staves are labeled A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2. The score includes various musical notations such as treble clefs, key signatures, time signatures, and specific musical symbols like triplets, slurs, and accidentals. The piece concludes with a double bar line at measure 93.

97

A1

101

105

A2

109

113

B1

117

121

B2

125

129

C1

133

137

C2

141

Figure 2.1: Transcription of Edward Cronin's performance of "Banish Misfortune".<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Transcription by the author. To accurately represent the musical execution, I notate a Db at bar 17 rather than a c#. At this point of the performance, Cronin slides his third finger (that is, the "D-note finger") down a semitone rather than change to his second finger (that is, the "c-note finger"). With reference to Irish fiddle practise, ergonomically speaking this translates better as a Db rather than a c#.

Many institutions that foster traditional music expect modern performers to suppress technical accomplishment with a view to respecting and upholding a tradition that owes an astonishing allegiance to the musical past. In this context, the discovery of musical recordings from before the 1920s and the 1930s that show a high degree of technical accomplishment calls into question an established understanding of the musical past where it is believed that Irish music blossomed beyond all previous capacities during the inception of the first commercial recordings of the 1920s. This assumption requires fresh examination.

Cronin is presented by O'Neill as a genius amongst a very fine collection of fiddle players. The tradition of his time was therefore well positioned to appreciate Cronin's abilities on his instrument. Though clearly ahead of the posse, Cronin was never presented as being entirely out of reach. Already, Cronin's musical relationship to the music of the earlier half of the nineteenth century renders the contention by Séamus Tansey erroneous, the extravagant flute player states that "the standard of fiddle playing in Ireland before the Famine and during it was not that high anyway" (Tansey 1999: 212).<sup>39</sup> The source of Cronin's music could not have been so distant from what he produces on this recording; he never even developed as a professional musician to allow any such fantastic leap forward.

In contrast to contemporary representations of historic practice, Cronin's technique is almost modern in conception. His technical expertise calls into question the standard representation of fiddle playing during the nineteenth and very early twentieth century, underscoring the significance of an autonomous music tradition

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<sup>39</sup> Tansey here is articulating a widely held opinion that is not fully substantiated. Though an exceptional flute player, Tansey is also known for his radical purist views.

that was virtuosic in character. The following sections detail the musical attributes of this style.

2.131: Tempo: With the aid of a verbal introduction (probably made by O'Neill), it can be reasonably deduced at which tempo the recording best represents the original performance.<sup>40</sup> Given the limited recording space available on the cylinder, it would seem inappropriate for the announcer to take up unnecessary time when priority should be given to the music. In itself, the time span of the cylinder hints at the correct playback speed. This would determine that the fiddle is tuned between today's concert pitch and a semitone above. Tuning was not standardised at this time, just as it is not today. For example, traditional performers today – especially those with highly ornate styles like Tommy Peoples – prefer a crisper, brighter tone achieved with a higher-tuned instrument. Significantly, by tuning the fiddle a bit higher, the instrument's sound is better represented by the primitive recording apparatus. The higher pitch therefore seems to be more accurate.

Irish fiddle players usually sourced their instruments from Germany, where a cheaper option was available. Cronin was apparently in possession of an impressive range of fiddles. Despite this, his unenviable employment as a machinist ensured that Cronin was not in a position to purchase more expensive instruments. Presumably Cronin made new additions to his collection when he arrived in the New World, where the availability of musical instruments was better. As can be seen in the plate below titled "Emigrants Dancing Between Decks" – which appeared in the

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<sup>40</sup> Work currently being conducted by the Irish Traditional Music Archive will give a more accurate indication of the original tempo of performance.

“Illustrated London News” on 6/7/1850 (see plate 2.3 below) – many Irish fiddlers took their instruments with them when emigrating.



Plate 2.3: Emigrants Dancing Between Decks.<sup>41</sup>

It is unlikely that traditional musicians managed or were able to afford to carry more than one instrument each. It is argued that German violins were indeed tuned higher than their French counterparts. “As a rule, the Italian and German violins were probably tuned higher than the French, and this is one of several reasons why violins playing in the sonata style sounded different from those playing in dance style” (Boyden 1989: 71). Obviously, these instruments must have sounded best at a higher pitch. What is fascinating is as follows: the recorded pitch seems to reflect accurately the recorded tempo which is similar to the rapidity of fiddle players today,

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<sup>41</sup> Unknown, see website: <http://www.norwayheritage.com/gallery/gallery.asp?action=viewimage&imageid=1320&text=&categoryid=16&box=&shownew=>  
Access date, 10 November 2009.

even those playing in the fastest tempos. Remarkably, Cronin is comfortable with this tempo since the pulse is constant and indeed flawless.

2.132: Ornamentation: Cronin employs a wide variety of ornaments in common with today's performers, including an assortment of rolls, cuts, runs, and sliding techniques. These are masterfully executed with crisp assiduity, sounding extraordinarily fresh even while muffled by the primitive playback. This is on account of Cronin's approach leading into some of the ornaments. For instance, the cut receives extra accentuation by means of a minutely brief (indeed almost missed) reintroduction of the preceding melody note via a change of bow-stroke.



Figure 2.2: Bar 11 of Cronin's performance of "Banish Misfortune".

This in itself becomes a method of recreating the effect of a normal cut when performed without an actual cutting finger – thus employed as a reverse-cut – which in itself goes some way to expose its affect in enhancing Cronin's full cutting technique.



Figure 2.3: Bar 129 of Cronin's performance of "Banish Misfortune".

Cronin uses cuts frequently, even for dividing single quaver notes at unorthodox beats of the bar, thus adding a great deal of propulsion to his rendition.





Figure 2.4: Bar 39 of Cronin's performance of "Banish Misfortune".

He demonstrates his dexterity with this most simple of ornaments by adding a cut during an ergonomically challenging descending passage, whereby he must introduce his third finger to cut a first finger note that is directly preceded by a second finger placement.

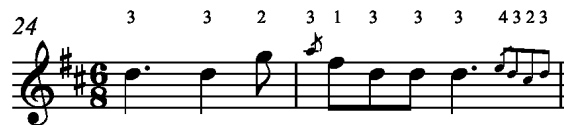


Figure 2.5: Bars 24–25 of Cronin's performance of "Banish Misfortune" with fingering.

Cronin uses a variety of methods when employing the long-roll ornament. He exploits similar effects to that of the cut (mentioned above) by briefly referencing the note below that is to be "rolled", most commonly found during a second finger roll.



Figure 2.6: Bar 28 of Cronin's performance of "Banish Misfortune".

Interestingly, both the open-string and third-finger rolls are the most ergonomically challenging for the fiddle player and yet Cronin never shies away from them in a tune that relentlessly offers their inclusion. Although the third-finger roll is consistent with an approach used today (see bars 2, 6, 10, 17, etc. in figure 2.1 above), the roll on the

open-string requires extra consideration. It is altered sometimes to include a more cutting action on the first finger, thus replacing the more conventional use of a rapid downward scalar pattern from the second finger.<sup>42</sup>



Figure 2.7: Bar 1 of Cronin's performance of "Banish Misfortune".

On other occasions, this cutting action divides individual notes rather than coming before them. As a result, the technique sounds even more like a roll.



Figure 2.8: Bar 53 of Cronin's performance of "Banish Misfortune".

Both examples, described above, are usually preceded by a clever "rolling" movement during the first three quavers of these bars. Here, the same cutting action is used on the second finger, again either coming before or dividing individual notes (see figures 2.7 and 2.8 above). Instead of forming a detachable embellishment (the roll ornament here is not readily extractable from the overall shape of the music), Cronin knits his dense micro-structural patterns into the fabric of the tune (see also chapter six for similar techniques by Tommy Peoples).

If heard as melody plus ornaments (as it would be in the terms of tradition today), then the opening bar of the piece is already densely ornamented (see figure 2.7

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<sup>42</sup> Though written as a simple cut, the aural effect here is akin to that of a "roll".

above). This would be frowned upon by modern-day theorists since they are convinced that the melody of the tune should not be concealed by using too much ornamentation – especially during the initial performance of the tune before it is repeated. If heard as one (in contrast to melody plus ornaments), then Cronin here balances both macro- and micro-structural elements, thereby establishing a symbiotic relationship between melody and ornament from the outset – a move that also contests the terms of tradition. Either: the roll conceals the bare melody of the tune; or there is no roll and there is no bare melody. In any event the effect is that of a complex rendition that is only achieved today by the more technically gifted musicians (for instance Tommy Peoples who is discussed in chapter six). This may account for Cronin’s very “modern” sound.

2.133: Fingering: Though he makes little use of the short-slide (see bars 4 and 34 in figure 2.1 above), Cronin’s use of an elongated slide on the second-finger during a prominent c-natural deserves special attention.



Figure 2.9: Bar 19 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune”.

Of course the introduction of a c-natural in the tune is something very striking given that the rest of the melody normally uses a c-sharp. Cronin performs this note using a very slight, though definitely continuous, upward manoeuvre that reaches progressively higher pitches and that climaxes with a long-roll (see figure 2.9 above). In this way, he ascribes to the notes in question a decidedly wailing quality.

In the process, Cronin also makes use of what is sometimes termed the “traditional c”, here written rather inaccurately as a c-quarter-sharp. Traditional-c lies somewhere between c-natural and c-sharp. However, each musician can favour a more personalised pitch within this spectrum making it impossible to apply a general value to it.<sup>43</sup> Whereas in bar 19 (figure 2.9 above) Cronin eventually reaches c-sharp, he only climbs as far as “traditional c” in bar 67 for instance (see figure 2.1 above). Alternatively, Cronin merely repeats the c-natural in bar 115 without any indication of the elongated slide performed during these earlier bars.



Figure 2.10: Bar 115 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune”.

Therefore, in contrast to traditional practice, Cronin actually simplifies his ornamental embellishments as he repeats the traditional tune (see chapter five).

The notes c-natural and F-natural are easily achieved by the traditional fiddle player as notes of colour that exist outside the usual modes of musical representation.<sup>44</sup> While the first and third fingers are constantly placed in the same position on all the strings, the second finger alters from a place beside the third (on the 4th and 3rd strings and more often than not on the 2nd string) to a place beside the first (sometimes on the 2nd string and always on the 1st string).<sup>45</sup> This change to the

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<sup>43</sup> Henebry describes what he terms an Irish C “three-quarters of a tone above B, and three-quarters below D” (Henebry 1903:17; see also diagrams on p.31).

<sup>44</sup> Readers are reminded to refer to my note on transcriptions that precedes this thesis where the I explain my use of both upper- and lower-case letters when referring to specific note pitches/placements.

<sup>45</sup> The 1st string on the fiddle is the thinnest and highest in pitch. This moves progressively down to the 4th string which is the fattest and lowest in pitch.

second finger placement privileges its use as a finger of tonal colour. In fact, it is most often the case that the F-natural (on the 3rd string) is used while f-sharp (on the 1st string) remains unchanged. Once the f-natural (on the 1st string) is applied, this note continues and results in a transposition of the customary modes of typical Irish tunes.

Ó Súilleabháin highlights the F-natural and c-natural as colour notes in Tommie Potts' fiddle playing too. However, he associates this directly with traditional practice found elsewhere in the instrumental tradition. The “traditional c” is, for instance, to be found in *uilleann* pipe performance practice (see Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 248). With regards to the fiddle, traditional-c can be realised ergonomically by the natural movement of the hand in traditional practice – especially since the traditional musician usually holds the fiddle with the neck of the instrument resting on the palm of the hand. Here, the second finger (already shown to be typically the only finger to change position across the four strings) naturally rises up the fingerboard as the hand rotates on the instrument.



Plate 2.4.1 Second finger as placed on the E-string (beside the first finger).



Plate 2.4.2: Second finger as placed on the A-string (notice the distance from the first finger becomes greater).



Plate 2.4.3: Second finger as placed on the D-string (now beside the third finger).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Photography by Rebeca Mateos Morante.

Therefore, the second finger tucked beside the first finger on the 1st string will naturally separate from the first finger when rotated onto the 2nd string. The second finger further separates from the first finger when rotated onto the 3rd string. Here, it translates naturally to F-sharp rather than F-natural, its customary position on that string. When applied to Cronin, this traditional technique of tonal coloration is both utilised and supplemented by the artist since he both recognises the traditional-c and the use of other variants of this note.

2.134: Dynamics: Apart from the sense of dynamic achieved by the long sliding technique just mentioned, further uses of dynamics are sometimes achieved using slight swelling crescendos on long dotted-crotchet notes that are otherwise left plain. Alternatively, on other occasions, some such notes are emphasised by a sudden *sforzando* followed by a short rest, where the bow briefly leaves the strings.



Figure 2.11: Bars 3 & 11 of Cronin's performance of "Banish Misfortune".

This demonstrates a light use of the bow, creating lively breath-like phrases. Even though Breathnach adamantly claims that "the use of dynamics betrays the non-native" (Breathnach 1986: 90), there are nonetheless far too many instances of dynamic variation in the music tradition for this contention to be so unequivocal. Perhaps due to the technical limitations of recording technology, Cronin does maintain a fairly continuous dynamic here, although he still uses volume as an ornamental device.

2.135: Bowing: O'Neill commented on Cronin's bowing, saying that he was "an adept in his peculiar style of free-hand bowing and slurring" (O'Neill 1987/1913: 394) – a sure sign of proficiency in fiddle technique. He creates a mixture of strokes, where a lilting group of three quavers (in one bow) is followed by a detached group of quavers for contrast (in single bows).<sup>47</sup> There is virtually no use of droning or double-stopping, something that would be often expected in fiddle performance both in Ireland and outside Ireland. Instead, Cronin masterfully controls his bow so that a monophonic line of his artistic performance is undisturbed. In one exception, he gestures fleetingly towards a drone on the open 3rd string when playing d on the 2nd string above.



Figure 2.12: Bar 60 of Cronin's performance of "Banish Misfortune".

However, it is worth noting that Cronin does employ quite sophisticated double-stopping techniques on another recording, a performance of the set dance "The Blackbird". These techniques involve combinations of the first and third fingers, as well as the first and the second fingers. Such techniques are only employed by the more adept performers today.

2.136: Tone: It is of course difficult to appreciate the tone and full dynamic of this performance as both the performer and listener must consider the necessity of imprinting sound on a primitive device. However, Cronin was certainly very

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<sup>47</sup> This can be observed while listening comparatively to bars 6 and 10 (see figure 2.1 above).



conscious of tone as is verified by the number of fiddles in his possession. In this recording too, his performance is characterised by a strong and confident tone (see O'Neill 1987/1913: 394). It must be added that such a finicky concern for sound production is hardly indicative of a concern for dance accompaniment.

To sum up so far: Cronin's intercourse with the fundamental ornamental properties of Irish instrumental dance music is nothing short of "uncommon brilliance", even in keeping with the best standard of modern master-fiddlers. Already, Cronin surprises and thus spoils the taken-for-granted terms of tradition with his very modern approach and ancient reputation. Also: Cronin's melodic realisation involves many deviations that usually result in daring manipulations of rhythm. The incorporation of added divisions, or passing notes, is often reserved for descending scalar passages that break with the expected rhythmic flow. These are considered in the following sections where rhythmic variations (rather than being merely technical) have a significant bearing on the treatment of macrostructure.

2.137: Rhythm: It is clear that Cronin provided music for step-dancers during his time in the United States. Yet, he obviously demonstrates a penchant for autonomous listening music here. O'Neill described him as "Faultless in time and rhythm" (O'Neill 1987/1913: 394), and though both of these competencies are a definite and characteristic requirement for dance, Cronin allows them to permeate his rendition of "Banish Misfortune" as compelling musical features.

Cronin frequently subverts the natural rhythmic beat of the double-jig to incorporate an alternative one generative of reel timing, or common time (see bars 13–14, 61–62, 89–90, 109–110, and 137–138 in figure 2.1 above; and figure 2.13 below).



Figure 2.13: Bars 41–42 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune”.

An association with dance is thus ruptured magnificently. This is surely something Cronin would have avoided when performing for dance. As noted in Appendix C: “The Irish jigs and planxties are not only the best dancing tunes, but the finest quick marches in the world” (Davis 1862: 216). It would not be unheard of for a musician to play differently for a dancer as for a listener.<sup>48</sup>

Cronin was also in demand by expert dancers in his youth, providing “odd tunes and Long dances” (O’Neill 1987/1913: 392). In this context, the “odd tunes” mentioned by O’Neill were probably atypical tune-types, such as the “long dances” mentioned in the quote. His comment hardly refers to Cronin’s idiosyncratic rendition of “Banish Misfortune”, for instance, an ordinary double-jig which O’Neill regarded as simply “Another of his good ones” (O’Neill 1910: 88); and so not one of his “odd tunes”. Rather, Cronin’s performance of this double-jig is part of a larger consideration of the fiddler’s traditional attributes by O’Neill. His performance here secures its position as just simply one of the regular, though admittedly good, traditional pieces, devoid of any element of “oddness” *per se*.

2.138: Phrasing: The phrasing in Cronin’s “Banish Misfortune” is atypical. It is more appropriate for a solo performance than for a role accompanying dancers. It conflicts

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<sup>48</sup> It is important to observe that in an Irish context the majority of dancers generally do not “listen” to the music being performed, but merely seek the beats. I discuss this further in chapter six, suffice to say here that the majority of contemporary dancers admit disliking the associated music genre while practising traditional musicians express varying levels of patience toward dancers generally.

with the beat usually associated with dance tune melodies. Essentially, the fiddler contests the strong beats of the bar. It is sufficient to state here that a double-jig usually conforms to the regular phrase structure of every two bars composed of four main beats (see Breathnach 1986: 56–57; Cooper 1995: 14). To impose this on Cronin’s repeat of the second part is discomfiting. Rather, one is more inclined to beat the phrases asymmetrically as outlined below.



Figure 2.14: Bars 25–32 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune” showing asymmetric phrasing.

The long high-g on the first beat of bar 28 above suggests a cadence to the previous phrase despite the long-roll. This is more so because of the group of three descending quavers beginning with high-a on the second beat of the bar which gain a peculiar weightiness, as if stressing the beginning of a new phrase; definitely not functioning as lead-in notes for the approaching traditional phrase. Perhaps for Cronin he would have imagined it rather differently, possibly forming a continuous reference to the end of the opening phrase of the part; thus unifying the part melodically rather than rupturing it rhythmically. Of course, the rhythmic complexities revealed elsewhere in the same piece would indicate the latter interpretation. In any event, the regular motor rhythm is somewhat concealed or distorted in the process, making it immediately uncomfortable for dancing. Instead, the performance amplifies the case

for a musical autonomy among fiddlers during the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. This autonomy extends to the instrumental tradition as a whole.

Famed *uilleann* piper, Willie Clancy (1918–1973), also claimed a “jig way” (i.e. for dancers) and “piece way” (i.e. without dancers) in performing particular tunes. A specialist in *uilleann* pipes research, Roger Millington, describes one of Clancy’s performances of “Banish Misfortune” as an example of the piece way.<sup>49</sup> This version was learned directly from the highly regarded fiddle player from Cree, Co. Clare, Patrick Kelly (1905–1976). The similarities between Kelly’s performance and Clancy’s are obvious. However, the similarities between Kelly’s performance of “Banish Misfortune” (recorded by Séamus Mac Mathúna in the 1950s) and Cronin’s (a half century before) are quite startling.

Even in the 1950’s, Kelly’s rendition employs the polyrhythmic sequences characteristic of Cronin’s recording, though his overall performance still reflects a more traditional symmetric interpretation of phrasing. Although Cronin’s performance practices are already diluted therefore, Brendan Taaffe, an Irish music specialist, regards this metric asymmetry as “one of the most spectacular features of Patrick’s playing” (Taaffe n.d.: [21]). That Kelly perhaps represents an example of an oral continuation of Cronin’s performance practices, and that his version of the tune is regarded by authoritative figures such as Willie Clancy as being an example of “the piece way” of playing contributes to my overall theory in this instance that an autonomous mode of fiddle performance (not tied to the dance tradition) already existed in the musical past to which Cronin belongs.

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<sup>49</sup> Millington, see website: <http://www.rogermillington.com/tunetoc/banishwillienf.html>. Access date, 10 November 2009.

If the musical effect of this technique can be described as “spectacular” for a performer in the 1950s, then Cronin’s “uncommon brilliance” (which occurred generations before Kelly) could hardly be imagined by the traditional music community today. At that, the asymmetric phrasing utilised by Cronin does not appear in Kelly’s playing. Rather, the latter exemplifies the twentieth-century trend toward symmetrically constant phrases. Already, Cronin has even more to offer the avant-garde of Irish traditional music performance.

Cronin’s repertoire contained further anomalies at a macro-structural level. However, this phenomenon can only be examined using written representations of his repertoire. Here I provide a list of tunes where the macrostructure does not follow the traditional breakdown into eight-bar parts.

First, his setting of the air “*Seaghan O’ Duibhir an Ghleanna*” (or “John O’Dwyer of the Glens”) is “peculiar in having but six bars in each strain” (O’Neill 1910: 70). Being one of the oldest airs still performed (believed to have been composed during the Cromwellian wars of the mid-seventeenth century) one is tempted to ascribe Cronin’s rendition to further antiquity. This air may have maintained a more complex rhythmic format inherited from earlier Gaelic times. Also of note is “*Bfuil an fear mor astig?*” (or “Is the Big Man Within?”), “having the first strain in nine-eight time and the second in six-eight time” (O’Neill 1910: 125) – of which suits Cronin’s polymetric inclinations perfectly. Further examples are as follows: Cronin represented the first part of the “Ace and Deuce of Piping” using twelve bars; his version of “The Hunt” uses twelve bars in the second part; his representation of “The Blackthorn Stick” contains fifteen bars; and “The White Blanket” contains eighteen bars in total.

There are three main reasons for not devoting greater attention to such extraordinary asymmetrical strains in this chapter.

The first reason owes to the fact that all the aforementioned examples are notated by O'Neill under his "Long Dances and Set Dances" subsection (see O'Neill 1903: 333–337; 1907: 164–169). These tune types (as mentioned earlier) are generally for solo dancers, experts who required that the melody frame a specialised choreography.

The surviving folk dances of Ireland are the jig, the reel, and the hornpipe, together with the various set-dances. These last have a general character in common with one of the other three but possess some peculiarity of time, measure or length requiring a special sort of dance for each particular tune. With few exceptions, set dances were always danced by a man without a partner, and this applies also to the hornpipe (O'Sullivan 1952: 51).<sup>50</sup>

I regard the asymmetry present in some jigs and reels (the more popular communal folk dance tune-types) of greater import during the twentieth century. This is because these dance tunes are most commonly performed by traditional musicians and are most commonly discussed by academics and modern practitioners under the terms of tradition. Essentially, these jigs and reels are the melodies that are controlled by the phantom dancer. In all, they are the melodies most commonly forced into standardised macro-structural sets.

The second reason owes to the uncertainty in categorising difficult melodies that may have encouraged O'Neill, together with his scribe James O'Neill, to use the Long

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<sup>50</sup> The term "set dance" (meaning a particular, though variable tune type relating to a solo dance tradition) should not be confused with the more general term, also "set dance". The latter refers to the still popular social communal dance tradition where two or four couples are arranged into various formations (or "sets").

Dance section as a repository for destructive tunes that upset the standardised formula. As a case in point, Cronin's representation of the dance tune "The Orange Rogue" is described by O'Neill as follows: "First classed as a jig, has been transferred to the Long Dances, where it properly belongs, in The Dance Music of Ireland" (O'Neill 1910: 124). Cronin was directly involved in the collecting and transcribing of traditional tunes for the 1903 publication where his above contribution was classed as a jig. Having been dropped from the position of editor for the 1907 publication, it would seem that Cronin was not involved in the tune's transference to the Long Dances section.

Indeed, as a similar example, it is difficult to appreciate why Cronin's "Barony Jig" lies in the Long Dances section when it could simply form part of the slip jig section. Therefore, it is sufficient at this point to note that asymmetry may also be a transparent reality at a greater macro-structural level among late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fiddlers. It is simply the case that such anomalies have not always been accurately presented in print.

The third reason owes to the literate representations of all non-Long Dance genres as standardised in O'Neill's publications. For instance, O'Neill added an extra bar to Cronin's version of the air "Planxty Tom Judge" where he states that a "limp in the metre caused by a missing bar was easily supplied" (O'Neill 1910: 83). It is not made absolutely clear in the text whether this extra bar was supplied due to a memory lapse on the part of Cronin or to a wish to standardise the representation of his music. If this tune were doctored for the benefit of a more standardised format, more is the pity. Because he was not musically literate, O'Neill employed James O'Neill as his main transcriber. In this respect, he found Cronin's version of this particular tune

fascinating but he states that the version “excited nothing but dislike in my Ulster namesake [James O’Neill], our talented scribe” (ibid. 83).

The issue of musical representation is significant here. Though also a collector, Breathnach warned of the misuse of Western art staff notation in the representation of traditional music.<sup>51</sup> It is also a common view held by ethnomusicologists when considering the literate representation of non-Western music cultures. The written representation of Irish music has always been controversial among traditional music bearers. The issue was also important for O’Neill, whose scribe (James O’Neill) sometimes inaccurately represented the music collected, resulting in some animosity between both men. After the first publication of “O’Neill’s Music of Ireland” (1903), O’Neill (amongst others) expressed their disappointment with regards to James O’Neill’s (mis)use of musical conventions such as key signatures and the like. This occurred despite O’Neill’s own standards of musical quality where, due to his musical illiteracy, he would have James O’Neill perform each piece to him after notation. It is apparent that James O’Neill’s performances were accurate where his transcriptions were not always so (see Carolan 1997: 41).

This led O’Neill to seek alternative pen-bearers for his second publication “The Dance Music of Ireland” (1907). His options were of course limited. The prime candidate for the restoration of unsatisfactorily notated melodies, as well as for the inclusion and exclusion of some others, was in fact the master-fiddler Edward Cronin. One O’Neill letter to H.C. Mercer dated October 15th, 1920 is revealing.

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<sup>51</sup> Breathnach makes this argument in his 1985 lecture to the Irish Traditional Music Society in University College Cork (see Breathnach 1996).



I can but “grope” my way on the printed page of music, and have always had to rely on the playing of others capable of reading and rendering manuscript or printed music on sight. Until less than a dozen years ago, only two of my musical friends – James O’Neill and Edward Cronin were capable of doing that (quoted in MacAoidh 2006: 39).

In the same letter, O’Neill continues in dismay:

Not until the Dance Music of Ireland had come from the press did I realize that neither of them was infallible in the matter of keys. [...] On the advice of certain enthusiasts the arrangement of the Dance Music of Ireland was entrusted to Mr. Cronin of the old traditional school as Sergt. O’Neill was a “fardown” or modern Ulster player (ibid. 90).

Certainly matters were put to rest when James O’Neill was eventually reinstated for this most famous of publications in 1907. Irish traditional music specialist, Caoimhín MacAoidh, associates the term “fardown” with a geographic association (as in “up North”, since James O’Neill was from Belfast). However, the meaning of the term implies also that James O’Neill was at some distance from the tradition, at least in comparison with Cronin who was particularly elevated in this regard. Cronin was therefore “capable of writing music, this accomplishment enabled him to aid us materially by noting down the tunes of others, as well as his own” (O’Neill 1910: 45–6).

Whatever of documenting the contributions of others, the suggestion that Cronin provided his own scores may be of significance. What the printed score of “Banish Misfortune” emphasises most persuasively is that the pen swings differently to the

bow. If Cronin provided the penned version, it would confirm his elaborate solo performance as being of his own individual invention. It would also indicate his understanding of the difference in character between a literate and an aural presentation of oral melody.



Figure 2.15: “Banish Misfortune” in O’Neill, 1907.

Although Cronin employs the aforementioned polyrhythmic sequence with regularity, the notation here does not indicate this to the reader (refer to the opening two bars of the final part in figure 2.15 above). Instead, the student is forced to interpret a series of two semiquavers followed by two quavers; at most to be construed as bowed triplets, something Cronin never uses during this performance. In this respect, the literate representation indicates a certain conservatism in performance practice, and thus an apparent regularity suited to dance and not to a soloist tradition. It is this literate rather than oral representation that informs the aesthetic idealisation of the past in the terms of tradition. Understandably (though regrettably) a view of solo instrumental performance practice emerges that prioritises the influence of the phantom dancer over the musical impulses of the musician.

Even more astoundingly, the section that obscures the customary phrase structure has been adjusted in print. Even though great care is demonstrated when notating the repeat of the second part (the entire last four bars being written out in full), the very bar that defined the asymmetry of phrasing remains unchanged (refer to the fourth bar of the second part in figure 2.15 above). This radically upsets the accuracy of the rendition, which now regains a more conventionally phrased macrostructure. Once again, the reader is denied access to the reality of the soloist, together with the stimulating autonomy of his musical interpretation.

It is noticeable that this later example of an autonomy of musical interpretation is neither found in the music of Kelly and Clancy amongst others (see above). Even here, it is already apparent that macro-structural asymmetries are becoming lost, these later generations of performers now conforming to the terms of tradition from the latter half of the twentieth century. A transitory macrostructure constitutes one necessary aspect of an avant-garde in traditional music, something that is observed (surprisingly) in Cronin's performance on this occasion.

The juxtaposition of the aural with the written representation of "Banish Misfortune" thus reveals two very different histories of Irish fiddling, and therefore calls into question the present methods of "soundless" investigation within Irish music studies. As Brian Boydell cautions: "By the time we reach the eighteenth century, when the systematic collection of Irish traditional music first began to be undertaken, the extent of the alterations that Irish melodies underwent in an oral tradition open to countless outside influences can only be imagined" (Boydell 1999a: 565–6). Considering Cronin's performance here, the process of collecting itself significantly influenced the representation of his music where the pen deviated from the bow to

produce an alternative reading of this particular tune as well as the peculiarities of his performance practices.

The music researcher is thus forced to re-evaluate literate interpretations of oral traditions that remain distant from the ear. This requires an appreciation of the sophistication of oral transmission; a recognition of its own form of musical invention concealed by the limits of the pen. Unfortunately the confusion cannot be claimed as an error in transcription. “The fact remains that, given the sheer number of musical pieces transcribed, remarkably few clear mistakes were made” (MacAoidh 2006: 78).

In this respect, the way “Banish Misfortune” is written is more than likely the way it was deliberately written. “Banish Misfortune” even appears in O’Neill’s *The Dance Music of Ireland* (1907) exactly the same way as it appears in O’Neill’s *Music of Ireland* (1903) before it. Therefore, an understanding of the process of recomposition must guide the analysis of written sources away from any conservative understanding of traditional performance practices. Perhaps then the significance of terms such as “ancient” and “modern” in the context of Irish music can be reconsidered: both for the accuracy of their content, and for their representation of an aesthetic dichotomy between past and present. As has been noted with Edward Cronin, the ancient often reveals itself through the sounds of modernity.

## **2.2: Recomposing Histories**

The highest moment of creativity in music must be in the act of composition. In Ireland, as in many musically non-literate traditions, composition is found largely in the act of performance where traditional musicians recompose or improvise using a

shared resource of musical materials. This process is achieved but constrained in the context of a knowledgeable music community (see chapter three). In contrast to a literate tradition where a composer can place an immutable stamp upon a communal music tradition whatever his context, in an oral tradition the composer is constantly recomposing during performance and thus becomes dependent upon a specific time and place.

In this way, for the literate composer, musical change must be perceived as something intentional and worthy of attention; for the oral composer, change can be perceived as something irrational where innovation is interpreted as an unfathomable deviation from a traditional norm. In Irish traditional music, for instance, the immediacy of the musical process from composition to transmission means that change can be (mis)interpreted as a passing musical error; that is, something only to be disregarded or even automatically “corrected” by the knowledgeable communal ear.

The manner with which a modern music community can stockpile its musical knowledge has been questioned in the first part of this chapter. The basic idea (the so-called traditional “truth”) held within a particular musical event must somehow demonstrate some familiar structural forms to be able to interact with this level of communal musical knowledge. So, if Irish traditional music accumulates unto itself a shared repertoire being more directly influenced by a communal sound aesthetic, where does individual composition really occur?

Theoretically, these forms can be idiosyncratically combined and dissolved during performance – in a similar manner to Albert Lord’s notion of “formulas” and “themes” (see Lord 1960). However, under the terms of tradition, this process is quite

restrictive, as demonstrated by the modern surprise concerning Edward Cronin's ancient performance. When a non-literate tradition is represented in a literate manner, its musical "utterances" are broken down into musical "specifics", a process that ruptures an oral logic in a catastrophic way. This deconstruction in turn devastates the integrity of the non-literate tradition by reconstructing that tradition as something that is more informed (in the literate sense) and yet at the same time more superficial (in the musical sense). In this way, the tuneful preservation of a non-literate aesthetic is reinvented in deceptive literate settings. These include tune books, ornamentation guides, standard musical analysis upon a written score, amongst others. Such settings which record the sounds from the past encourage the literate mind to appreciate different musical materials to those found in a non-literate setting.

This literate representation of the musical past in Ireland often underestimates the significance of recomposition as a complex (rather than simplistic) musical process. As a result, historical representations of Irish music today misrepresent the musical practices of the past, especially with regards to traditional fiddling during earlier centuries. For example, Cooke can only find radical forms of recomposition in diasporic contexts where, as he argues, Irish music (amongst others) has succumbed to a process of musical acculturation.

There seems [...] to have developed an important difference between the fiddling of the Americans and that of the Scots and Irish 'back home.' Both sides of the Atlantic initially shared the same four-square dance repertory, but in the New World there is a strong aurally transmitted tradition of variation-making during the performance of such tunes. This is, I suggest, the result of the African influence on fiddle style (Cooke 1992: 244).

Here, Cooke highlights the use of African slaves as music makers where they were required to learn the fiddle in order to entertain white colonisers. He argues that a more radical type of musical variation in Irish music is the result of an African influence.

[T]here is little evidence that in the eighteenth and nineteenth century the Scots or Irish practised much variation-making even though the essentially aural nature of the transmission of the repertory would have allowed for it. Since those times greater familiarity with “standard” settings has tended to inhibit tendencies for improvisation (Cooke 1992: 244).

That Irish music certainly “allows for” musical invention of the sort Cooke describes, should indicate that such variation existed in Ireland before emigration to America. Simply because literate sources conceal this kind of musical variation does not mean that musical variation did not exist. Therefore, the following section will attempt to challenge the assumption that elaborate recomposition did not exist at the end of the nineteenth century or the very beginning of the twentieth century in Ireland. This process has already been achieved through looking at an aural (a recording) rather than a literate (a score) representation of Edward Cronin’s “Banish Misfortune”. In the following sections, the results of this process will be carried forward to re-examine literate representations of additional repertoire still left without audio evidence. By interpolating the arguments already presented throughout the first part of this chapter, the following will examine a number of Cronin’s favourite tunes to seek evidence of more radical forms of recomposition.

## 2.21: Cronin's (Re-)Compositions.

To understand Cronin in this way, it is helpful to examine briefly his contemporary, the fiddle player, John McFadden. First, McFadden provides evidence that Cronin was not alone in his “uncommon brilliance”. As another contemporary cylinder recording demonstrates, McFadden performs the reel “The Swallow's Tail” with comparable velocity and virtuosity. Here, his melodic deviations – even at structurally important sections of the tune – are noteworthy. This despite tailoring his performance to suit the transcription process employed by O'Neill.<sup>52</sup>

Second, McFadden further questions the reliance among academics on secondary literate sources. For example, O'Neill recounted a story about a musical transcription of a representative tune by McFadden. Apparently the fiddler frustrated famous *uilleann* piper Patsy Touhey in 1911 while the latter was attempting to transcribe a tune from him. Upon many inconsistent repetitions, Touhey exclaimed: “Why, man alive, that's not how you gave it to me at all! You've changed the tune again” (quoted in O'Neill, 1987/1913:396). Here, Touhey, shows the problem of representing a non-literate music tradition according to the terms of a literate musical process.

Third, O'Neill confirms McFadden's ability to learn repertoire despite his many accolades for the fiddle and his capacity to improvise variations. He states:

The facility with which McFadden learns new tunes is only equalled by his versatility in improvising variations as he plays them. So chronic has the latter

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<sup>52</sup> It is important to note that Cronin seems to provide greater variation than McFadden on their respective cylinder recordings for O'Neill. This suggests that McFadden adopted a more conservative approach to recording. In any case, Cronin's performance is by comparison more musically inventive, especially with regards to macro-structural deviation.



practice grown that it is a matter of no little difficulty to reduce his playing to musical notation (O'Neill 1987/1913: 396).

Here lies the paradox of representation: If McFadden is incapable of presenting a tune for the benefit of others to learn, then how is it that he can be commended for learning a tune at the outset? By never reproducing a tune “accurately” for transcription, how can it be claimed that McFadden ever learned a tune at all? How also can O'Neill claim to know this? For one thing, O'Neill was obviously not troubled by these questions since he does not attempt to provide an answer in his text. At any rate, it is obvious that a literate rather than a non-literate quest for a satisfactory answer is futile. The renowned Donegal fiddle player John Doherty states when interviewed by the anthropologist Alan Feldman:

I would listen to a tune ... I would get the impression of it in my mind and maybe at three o'clock in the morning I'd wake up and I could go into it a good bit. I just only wanted to get the symptoms of the tune and I had it (cited in Feldman 1985: 33).

Literate representations of non-literate music cannot convey these “impressions”. Anyway, impressions are not trusted by the terms of tradition since they contain an inherent ambiguity that fosters individualism above communalism. Essentially, impressions result in multiple individual variations that call into question the fixity of the traditional tune. Like Doherty, McFadden also learns a tune by gaining an impression of it and elaborates through dramatic recomposition. Significantly, he was still recognised as having successfully learned the traditional tune by his

contemporary informed music community. Still, McFadden's more elaborate recomposition may have failed to be acknowledged by his transcribers. By contrast, radical variations introduced by Cronin perhaps are relatively more present in printed form, since the fiddler was also able to write music.

In the first instance, it is worth mentioning that Cronin is credited with composing a number of new tunes outside of the traditional repertoire, such as the three hornpipes "Roger O'Neill", "The Bantry Hornpipe", and "Caroline O'Neill's Hornpipe".<sup>53</sup> As O'Neill notes of Cronin: "Scoring down ancient and composing new music became with him an absorbing passion, after many years of corroding apathy" (O'Neill 1910: 45). That this creative energy finally came forth at a time when it could be captured in some secondary form is most fortunate.

All of the three hornpipes mentioned above contain four parts, where each part after the next represents a variation on an original musical statement: the third part elaborates the first, and the fourth part elaborates the second. Perhaps this shows Cronin's reported "uncommon brilliance" providing ready-elaborated tunes. At this point, what is most significant about Cronin as a composer is as follows: his capacity to invent new melo-rhythmic lines. It is not therefore a step too far to ascribe a similar sense of musical invention when considering the third part of "Banish Misfortune". It is noteworthy that a large proportion of Cronin's repertoire included in O'Neill's collection is written down in a multi-part format. As O'Neill states of the following two tunes:

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<sup>53</sup> These were often given titles in honour of O'Neill or one of his children.

“Doctor O’Neill” and “The King of the Pipers” created a sensation when first introduced by Mr. Cronin. None among his audience had heard them before. Each tune consisted of five strains and it is quite probable that they had originally been clan marches. As nothing resembling those ancient tunes have been encountered in our researches, we are fortunate in being the means of their preservation (O’Neill 1910: 88).

Because Cronin does not provide a source for many of his extended pieces, O’Neill ascribes them an ancient pedigree. It can hardly be imagined that either or both men might have followed in the footsteps of the Irish music collector Henry Hudson who reportedly ascribed to his own musical compositions the epithet of “ancient melodies” when representing Irish music in the Dublin magazine *The Citizen*.<sup>54</sup> In line with what has already been discerned, the act of re-presenting a traditional tune (even in a radically elaborated form) cannot be compared with an act of solitary composition. Instead, the received tune retains all of its own identity as a resource for individual recomposition thereafter. Even though Cronin may be seen to add his own “part” to a tune, for instance, he cannot take ownership of the final composition, however creative the individual invention.

O’Neill clarified: “As in the case of many other tunes encountered in our researches, the modern versions have been much embellished and improved, at least for modern taste” (O’Neill 1910: 124). “Modern taste” here can be understood simply as a contemporary realisation of a musical impression. The motivation for a traditional musician is to mark her/his impression of, and even upon, one stage in the development of a tune. Indeed, this is achieved through recomposition. When Cronin

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<sup>54</sup> See O’Sullivan, 1952 for a discussion of Irish music collectors in history.

“began to indulge in original composition and adaptation, with unexampled assiduity” (ibid. 120), the act of “composition” may have contributed entirely new tunes to the music tradition (such as the hornpipes above) but the act of “adaptation” must have dramatically reinvigorated existing traditional tunes.

The use of the word “adaptation” by O’Neill must reflect Cronin’s stature as an extraordinary musician, signifying some form of elaborate (perhaps radical) recomposition. The word does not simply imply mere embellishment through the application of ornamental figures characteristic of the musical tradition as understood under the terms of tradition. Positioned alongside his impressive compositions, Cronin’s adaptations must be imagined as something reflective of his “uncommon brilliance”. Elaborate recomposition like this by an influential artist may involve two related processes: one that entails the creation of a more elaborate “turn” where one or more parts are added; the other that involves the reconstruction of an entire tune that results in the doubling of the parts (usually from two to four).<sup>55</sup>

McFadden, as Cronin’s equal for instance, more than likely resisted maintaining any additional parts that would emerge out of these processes in his playing. However, possibly Cronin maintained his additional elaborated parts. In the context of repeated performances with a responsive audience, a traditional performer gains a better acquaintance with the musical impressions s/he her-/himself engenders during performance; s/he is able to assess the success of these. These musical impressions in

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<sup>55</sup> Though it is often difficult to authenticate traditional terminology, I use the generally adopted terms maintained in academic writings on Irish music. One full piece of music (the “tune”) usually consists of two repeating “parts” (and if not repeated, then the divisions are represented by a double bar-line at the end of every “part”). The first “part” is referred to (rather confusingly) as the “tune”. As this makes it difficult to distinguish between an entire piece (“tune”) and the first part of a piece (also “tune”), I reserve the term “tune” exclusively for the entire piece in this thesis. The second “part” of a “tune” is known as the “turn”. “Tunes” of more than two “parts” will refer to each “part” as “1<sup>st</sup> part”, “2<sup>nd</sup> part”, “3<sup>rd</sup> part”, etc. It is generally accepted that there are eight bars of music per “part”. However, this thesis hopefully disputes the rigorous enforcement of this “rule”.

turn inform an individual “setting” of a particular piece. In time, some musical impressions may crystallise into the traditional tune itself where their repetition by others refashions traditional tunes and fosters musical change. In this matter, Cronin’s knowledge of music transcription may have facilitated the crystallisation of his individual recomposition.

Indeed O’Neill was already well-versed in an aesthetic of multi-part recomposition. When trying to represent this process using musical notation, MacAoidh notes:

In extreme cases, they [O’Neill and James O’Neill] would also engage in a “reconstruction” process whereby a fragment of a tune would be rebuilt into an entire piece. This system is not so extraordinary. The phrasing structure of Irish music displays some well-defined repetition patterns, or “sequencing” in classical music terms. When these patterns are understood, and they would have been by James and Francis, then the rebuilding of full tunes out of fragments is not all that problematic.

[...]

Those who would criticise any such approach as tampering with the music would do well to take into account the fact that both James and Francis were highly talented, seasoned musicians with tested and proven instincts for traditional Irish music. As such, their considerations would normally be expected to have been well in keeping with excellent standards of traditional performance. Also, it must be considered that by its very nature, where melodic variation is a critical element of a tradition, tunes will change from performance to performance. Thus, the melody line of a tune is rarely strictly defined (MacAoidh 2006: 51).

Informed by the terms of tradition, MacAoidh here accepts that melodic variation using a predictable phrasing structure is the cornerstone of musical change. For example, Cronin demonstrates the possibility of an asymmetric realisation of a symmetrical form, despite its literate presentation. Regardless, the most significant issue here is that O'Neill demonstrates an openness towards "modern" variations and radical elaboration of the type exemplified by Cronin.

Concerning the transmission of four-part tunes, the Kerry fiddler Pádraig O'Keefe (1887–1963) is of interest. As the Irish music specialist Matt Cranitch noticed, O'Keefe took some of his repertoire from the 78rpm recordings of the Sligo fiddlers Michael Coleman and James Morrison (1893–1947). Many of these tunes were also written down by O'Keefe in his unique style of tablature notation. However, there is one interesting omission in his notated collection found in his transcription of a set of tunes apparently taken from a Morrison recording dating 1926. As Cranitch comments, "he includes only the first two parts of "The Millstone", whereas Morrison plays four parts, as is usually done" (Cranitch 2006: 218). For O'Keefe, the impression of the traditional tune is probably located in the first two parts, whereas the remaining two parts were probably considered an elaborate recomposition of this. In other words, for O'Keefe the final two parts may have interrupted his own musical impression and impeded his own musical recomposition of "The Millstone".

This process can just as easily move in the opposite direction with regard to Cronin's transcriptions. Whereas O'Keefe was notating for his own benefit (in this instance), Cronin was notating for the benefit of unknown others. Therefore, the blueprints of his performances can be utilised by mediocre performers. Equally, they can be ignored by a more gifted performer – just like O'Keefe. It follows that what

some of Edward Cronin's transcriptions may contain is an avenue toward understanding an elaborate process of recomposition by the fiddler.

Given the recently discovered recording of "Banish Misfortune", an inventiveness in rhythm already outlined easily corresponds with an inventiveness in melody elsewhere. To ignore melody is to deny the full potential of recomposition. Recomposition in Irish traditional fiddle playing "allows for" elaborate (or radical) melodic variation of this kind (see discussion of Cooke's quotation above). What the recording reveals then, is the radical restructuring of traditional macrostructure with respect to the addition of one (or more) part(s) to a tune. O'Neill explains this process almost poetically with a decidedly Darwinian turn:

Traditional music unlike any form of modern composition is not the work of one man but of many. Indeed it can hardly be said to have been composed at all. It is simply a growth to a certain extent subject to the influence of heredity, environment, natural selection, and the survival of the fittest (O'Neill 1987/1913: 127).

This expression of native creativity in tune formation is rarely recognised today, where an emphasis upon micro-structural variation inhibits the possibility of elaborate recomposition that involves extended macrostructure. Though it would be difficult to imagine the performance of an Irish tune attaining symphonic proportions in terms of length, the literate representation of Irish melodies do an injustice to the complexities of melodic potential within the tradition. As Joyce states:

There was not in Ireland, any more than elsewhere, anything like the modern developments of music. There were no such sustained and elaborate compositions as operas, oratorios, or sonatas. The music of ancient Ireland consisted wholly of short airs, each with two strains or parts – seldom more (Joyce 1913: 587).

The traditional music historian, Reg Hall (upon the testimony of fantastic fiddler Frank O’Higgins) communicates the following account of one Johnny Glenson from Robinstown: “He was equal to the best I ever heard and could entertain you all night on the one reel by playing it different ways” (see Hall 2001). While accounts of this kind are subject to exaggeration, they retain an element of truth especially when representing the processes of elaborate recomposition in the tradition.

The tradition consists of the elaborate development of “short airs”. Here recomposition rather than reiteration becomes the hallmark of traditional practice. As O’Neill suggests with reference to multi-part tunes, they may reflect the same kind of musical elaboration found in the ancient harp melodies (see O’Neill 1987/1913: 126). In this context, the modern understanding of musical elaboration as being confined to micro-structural variation may be flawed. The remaining sections of this chapter aim to challenge the established view by examining the performance practices of Edward Cronin inside “Banish Misfortune” and elsewhere in his repertoire.

## 2.22: Cronin’s Second Telling.

Given the scarcity of recordings featuring Cronin in the O’Neill cylinder collection, this form of elaborate recomposition must rely on the evidence contained in “Banish Misfortune” alone. Musicologist, David Milson, argues the following when



researching soundless sources with respect to violin practices in the Western art tradition:

From the historian's perspective, a fuller understanding of an historical topic is reason enough for its continued study. Given the universal problem of context and understanding at a significant temporal remove, the problems of evidence in pre-twentieth-century performance practice do not provide a conceptual barrier to study. Most historiographical enquiry is necessarily speculative. The error, in such a thought-world, lies in the naïve acceptance of evidence, not in the inclusion of incomplete evidence if that is all that survives (Milson 2003: 3).

In a similar fashion, this chapter must benefit from the availability of only one primary source to ascertain performance practices during the early twentieth century. Using this source, a further study of four-part melodies by Cronin in O'Neill will be undertaken. A good example is "The Flowers of Limerick", a four-part reel found in *The Dance Music of Ireland*.

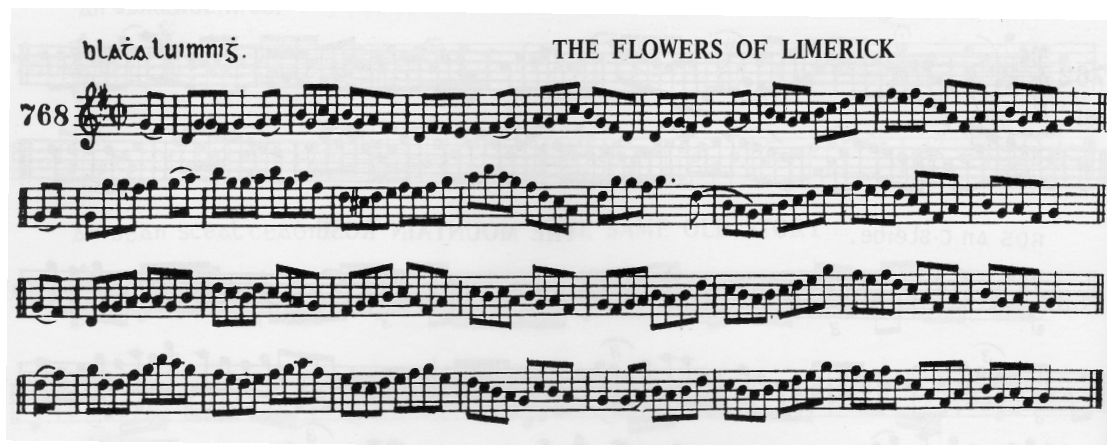


Figure 2.16: "The Flowers of Limerick" in O'Neill, 1907.

Indeed, “The Flowers of Limerick” was not the title of this reel when first entered in O’Neill’s earlier publication, *O’Neill’s Music of Ireland*. Here, the reel was simply titled “Cronin’s Favourite”. Fortunately, this difference is mentioned by O’Neill in a later publication again, *Waifs and Strays of Gaelic Melody*. Here, the reel is titled “The Ewe with the Crooked Horn” and is described by O’Neill as “a variant of Edward Cronin’s tune” (O’Neill 1922: 186). As O’Neill explains:

The origin of this unique name, the memory of which is but little more than legendary in our day, has been definitely traced back to the 18th century. A nameless reel known to a few aged members of the Irish Music Club of Chicago, was called “Cronin’s Favourite”, printed with his two variations in O’Neill’s *Music of Ireland*, (1903), and reprinted four years later in *The Dance Music of Ireland*, as “The Flowers of Limerick” its alleged proper name (ibid.).

One of the titles, “Cronin’s Favourite”, indicates Cronin’s delight with this particular tune. Indeed, the reel must have been performed frequently by him to bear Cronin’s name. However, O’Neill also mentions two variations of the tune by Cronin. While Breathnach mentions that O’Neill often collected composite tunes from various sources (see Breathnach 1996; see also MacAoidh 2006),<sup>56</sup> on this occasion O’Neill has presented a four-part tune as an original by Cronin. As mentioned previously, O’Neill made clear Cronin’s intense passion for recomposition as “adaptation”. The first two parts of “The Flowers of Limerick” are equivalent to the entire tune of “The Ewe with the Crooked Horn”. This equivalence may represent the transmission of the

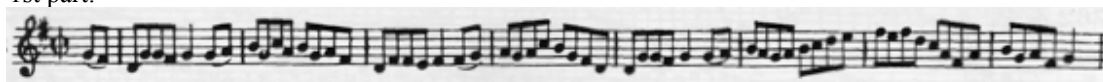
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<sup>56</sup> Breathnach originally presented this idea at The Irish Traditional Music Society Festival held in University College Cork in 1985.

musical materials as received by Cronin, amongst others. However, the other two parts of “The Flowers of Limerick” are by Cronin only; an example of “adaptation”.

Cowdery observes: “When a tune has more than two strains, the additional strains are often systematic variations of the first two” (Cowdery 1990: 16). When positioned beside each other, the first and third parts of Cronin’s “The Flowers of Limerick” provide evidence of melodic innovation similar to the musical complexities found in Cronin’s live performance of Banish Misfortune.

1st part:



3rd part:

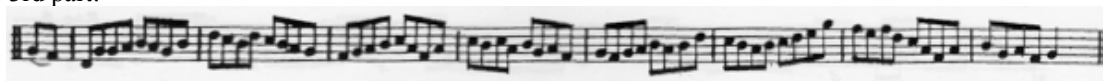


Figure 2.17: The first and third parts of “The Flowers of Limerick”.

Here, the third part elaborates upon the first with a melodic embellishment that weaves through the original melody bar-by-bar. It is easily appreciated that the third part cannot really survive in isolation as a new or distinct tune. Its melo-rhythmic line is extremely active, being reliant upon the opening line of the original traditional tune (or first part) to contextualise its intricacies. Apart from the conspicuous crotchets in the first part (see bars 1, 3, and 5) the slurred quavers that follow these hardly ignite any musical rapidity in terms of melodic progression. They function rather as lead-in notes to the ensuing bars composed of quavers. By comparison, the variant version (or third part) moves incessantly in quavers throughout, providing a far more intense melodic progression.

Essentially, the variant version slips in and out of the original. However, it consistently references the defining pitches of the original tune. The original presents the G as a defining pitch in bars 1 and 5. It employs the pitch F# (or f#) in bars 3 and 7 to create a specific melodic design. The variant version maintains this basic pitch pattern, even if it sometimes relies upon on a kind of associative listening where the audience (familiar with the traditional tune) must consider this variation within the context of the original tune. That the final two bars are presented identically in both the original and variant parts also enables the listener in identifying with the individual musical impression of the tune.

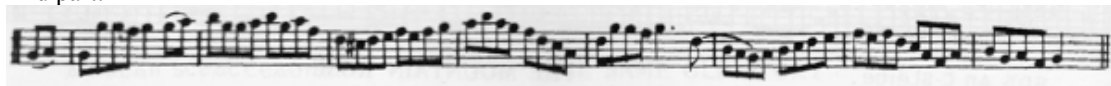
What is of great interest here is the extent to which Cronin claims a melodic freedom. He employs a relentless line of quavers in the variant part in a fashion that is atypical of the usual exclusive ornamented pathways noted by many theorists of Irish music. With reference to the third part, the second and fourth bars answer the first and third bars respectively in a call-and-response. For instance, the ascending line of the first bar beginning on D is answered in the following bar with a descending line starting on d one octave higher. Cronin's melodic variations are not the kind of ornamental strategies advocated by modern theorists who call for the slight alteration of insignificant pitches. Rather, Cronin celebrates a broader melodic conception without being restricted to a traditionalist preoccupation with individual notes.

In this way, Cronin subverts the traditional representation of historic practice expounded by modern commentators, who by and large have relied exclusively upon literate (that is notated) rather than aural (that is recorded) sources. Cronin's ability to elaborate a melody freely in this manner recalls Cooke's assertion that Irish melody "allows for" this. However, as already indicated, Cronin's ancient traditional pedigree

is unquestioned. Also highlighted earlier, Cronin's long separation from music performance upon leaving Ireland is clearly documented by O'Neill, which informs us that Cronin would not have been susceptible to the kinds of practical musical influences Cooke mentions (either coming from outside or within the Irish musical tradition in America). All this assures us that Irish melody was therefore elaborated freely in the manner Cooke describes before finding an influential place in the heterogeneous cultural life of North America. It did not wait for the innovative practices found in later music genres to demonstrate this.

The second and fourth parts reveal further examples of melodic variation.

2nd part:



4th part:

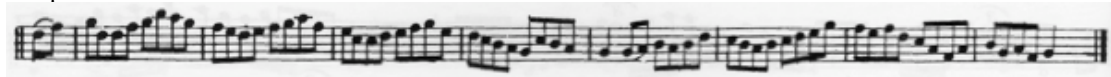


Figure 2.18: The second and fourth parts of "The Flowers of Limerick".

Though they too share similar cadences, the opening four bars become increasingly dissimilar. The opening of the fourth part manages to maintain the pitch g that is heard in the original statement. However, the part then diverges from the original, forming a distinctive identity constructed from a descending series of melodic sequences. In this way, Cronin defines something of radical individual musical significance during his elaborate recomposition; essentially, a motif that requires sequential development in a manner uncharacteristic (or inconsiderate) of the original tune.

Upon further consideration of other examples, this type of melodic sequencing is typical of Cronin's style within musical recomposition. For example, a descending

sequence also marks in the fourth part of Cronin's "The Humours of Drinagh". Again, Cronin's "The Barronstown Races" (perhaps the sister tune in jig format of "The Flowers of Limerick") is constructed similarly in its original and variant forms. Like the reel in question, the fourth part of the jig diverges from the original statement of the second part where a descending sequence develops an independent recomposed motif. Indeed, the third part of "Banish Misfortune" is elaborated using a similar descending sequence. This will be discussed in the following section.

### 2.23: Cronin's Turn.

Jigs, reels and almost all other dance forms usually contain two macro-sections which are repeated. The second of these is termed the "turn", a term that apparently indicates the cyclical nature of Irish music.<sup>57</sup> Breathnach reminds readers:

the story of the local priest who, having dispersed the dancers at a crossroad gathering, asked the blind musician, with heavy sarcasm, whether he could play the Our Father. The musician replied that if his reverence would whistle the tune, he was sure he would be able to turn it for him (Breathnach 1986: 57).

The turn, therefore, is a central and defining component of Irish traditional music. It provides a musical space for recomposition where the musician works out (a number of times) her/his impression of the traditional tune. Breathnach's account also reveals the immediacy inherent in the turn where the blind musician can present and re-

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<sup>57</sup> A contemporary understanding of cyclicity is contested in chapter five of this thesis.

present musical material in an improvised play with new (though somehow familiar) tunes.

On occasion, one or more additional part(s) “turn” a tune more elaborately, perhaps in a more individualised manner. In “Banish Misfortune”, Cronin develops an impressive rhythmic inventiveness during the third part of the tune. In this matter, O’Neill was obviously impressed by Cronin’s rendition of the jig, which he described as being “much superior to the two-strain setting in the Petrie Collection” (O’Neill 1910: 88).<sup>58</sup> There is much to indicate that this third part was the individual work of Cronin. By first interrogating extant musical sources and then analysing Cronin’s recorded performance of “Banish Misfortune”, I will show below how Cronin can lay claim to the third part of the jig. This will help construct an argument for Cronin’s own ability in creating radical elaborate variations of common musical resources (being extant traditional tunes).

#### 2.231: An analysis of extant musical sources:

The Petrie version of “Banish Misfortune” mentioned by O’Neill above is quite different from the version performed by Cronin. However, there are a number of consistencies in melodic content that replicate Cronin’s performed, rather than his notated, version (refer to figure 2.1 above).

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<sup>58</sup> George Petrie (1790–1866) was an Irish antiquarian and archaeologist, as well as one of Irish music’s most significant collectors.



Figure 2.19: "Banish Misfortune" in Petrie, 1882.

For example, the descending sequence at the opening of Petrie's tune closely matches Cronin's beginning. In this respect, it is best to examine Petrie's representation as a condensed version of Cronin's performance, where each phrase of the former is usually half that of the latter:



Figure 2.20: Comparison of the opening statements of Cronin's "Banish Misfortune" with Petrie's "Banish Misfortune".



The opening of the second part in Petrie's version also corresponds with the third part of Cronin's, again based on a descending melodic sequence. However, in Petrie the sequence is cut short and replicates more precisely the dominant tones shared with the second part of Cronin's rendition.<sup>59</sup> Yet, bars 5–6 in Petrie can be recognised as the full opening of Cronin's third part, where the fiddler presents his polyrhythmic sequence.



Figure 2.21: Comparison of the opening statement of Cronin's third part repeat with a phrase in Petrie's second part.

In both versions, the entire descending sequence is intact. From this comparison, it seems that the musical materials for Cronin's performed version in three parts were already in place, but as a two-part setting.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> In the second part: the high d in bars 1, 2 and the c-natural in bars 3, 4 (see figure 2.1).

<sup>60</sup> The "Banish Misfortune" in Petrie is actually a song to which Petrie notated a corresponding jig titled "The Bachagh of Wattle". However, this jig drifts further away from Cronin's performance of "Banish Misfortune". It is fascinating to note that Breathnach annotates a version of this particular jig which he titles "An Ghaoth Aniar Andeas" (or "The South West Wind"). Where Petrie's jig "The Bachagh of Wattle" is symmetrical, Breathnach's jig is regarded as "lopsided". At this, Breathnach seems somewhat disappointed by the version he has recorded from piper John Potts. "Tá an dá mhír den chéad chuid agamsa ar leathmhaing, de bheagán. Ba cheart an chéad trínín den tríú barra a athrú anonn go dtí tosach an seachtú barra" (Breathnach 1963: 89) (English, "The two phrases of the first part that I have are lopsided, slightly. The first triplet of the third bar should be changed over to the start of the seventh bar" [translation by the author]). Interestingly, John Potts is the father of fiddle player Tommie Potts, whose music is analysed in chapter five of this thesis, the most prophetic example of an avant-garde of Irish traditional music.

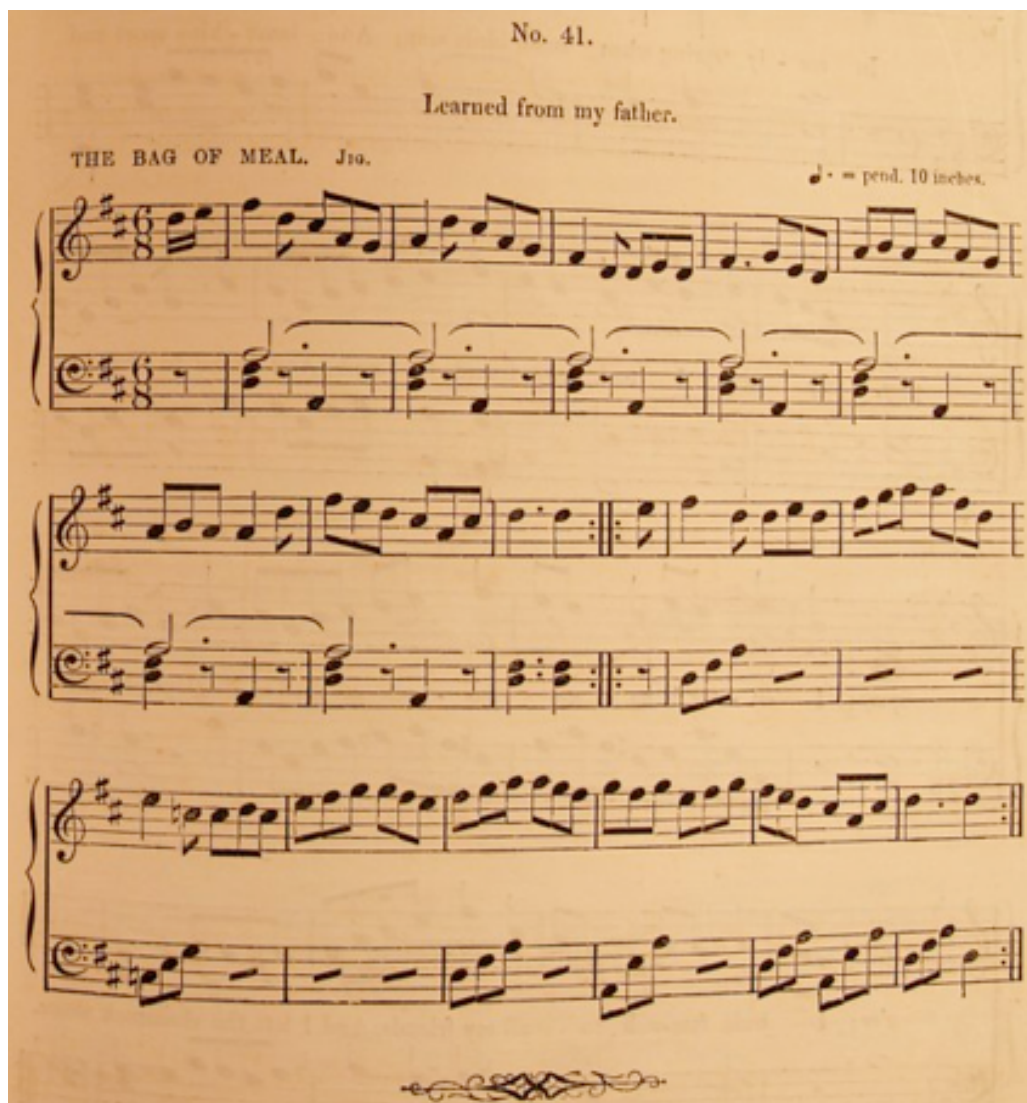


Figure 2.22: “The Bag of Meal” in Joyce, 1873.

Breathnach claims Joyce as the earliest source of the jig version of “Banish Misfortune”. In Joyce “Banish Misfortune” goes by the title “The Bag of Meal”. Again, it contains only two parts, the second part replicates almost exactly Cronin’s performed version; the first part resembles the version of the tune that is commonly played today (see figure 2.22 above).

Francis Roche provides a later version of this tune and furnishes a slightly altered title for it, “The Little Bag of Meal”. This version of the tune must also have been known to O’Neill. It contains minor differences from the earlier Joyce version.

However, it bears a remarkable similarity to the first two parts of Cronin's "Banish Misfortune" also.



Figure 2.23: "The Little Bag of Meal" in Roche, 1993

Breathnach argued that the tune "Nancy Hynes" was another variant, a version that O'Neill acquired from John Ennis.<sup>61</sup> It is interesting in that it also contains three parts. In many ways the second and third parts are more like the third part of Cronin's "Banish Misfortune". For example, the descending sequence at the opening of the second part, and especially that of the third part suggests the possibility of a fruitful comparison with Cronin's original. Obviously O'Neill did not regard these tunes as different versions of same piece.

<sup>61</sup> John Ennis did not receive much attention from O'Neill as a musician, even though he was President of the Irish Music Club for some time.

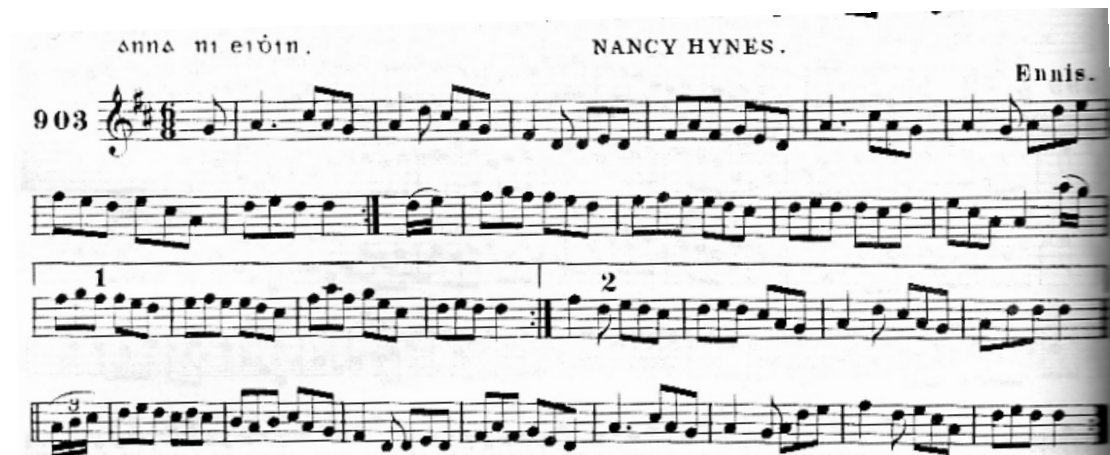


Figure 2.24: “Nancy Hynes” in O’Neill, 1903.

Perhaps the most startling comparison can be made between “Banish Misfortune” and a tune supplied by O’Neill himself titled “The Humors of Mullinafauna” (given as an alternative title to the tune “The Little Bag of Meal” documented by Roche above). Of course O’Neill was already familiar with aspects of Cronin’s version, and his own tune is closer to the relevant versions found both in Joyce and Roche. However, here O’Neill omits the c natural found in these earlier transcriptions.

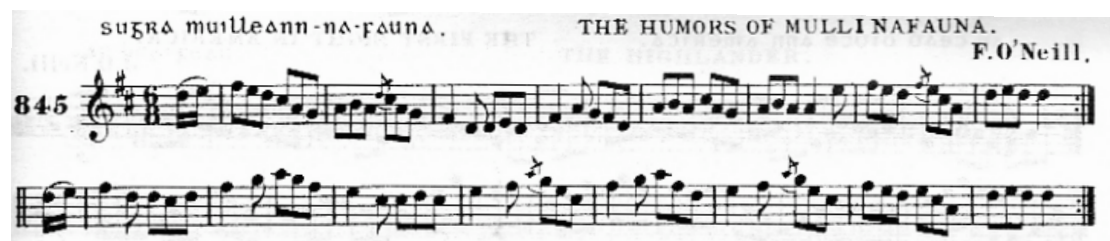


Figure 2.25: “The Humors of Mullinafauna” in O’Neill, 1903.

In all, there are quite a few versions of the piece identified as “Banish Misfortune”. However, none of these versions are exactly like Cronin’s rendition of the tune. The most striking distinction between these and Cronin’s version remains the

third part of the recorded original, even though elements of this part can be found in other transcriptions. “Banish Misfortune” is only once notated elsewhere as a three-part jig, “Nancy Hynes” (see figure 2.24 above). Even in this instance, Ennis’ version of the tune is sufficiently different to be declared a separate jig since it is the least consistent of all the other versions. In sum, in comparing “Banish Misfortune” with all other possible collected versions, the peculiar third part in Cronin’s performance is notably unique.

#### 2.232: An analysis of Cronin’s recorded performance:

Examining Cronin’s performance musically (refer to figure 2.1), he first introduces his polyrhythmic (or asymmetric) descending sequence towards the end of the first part repeat.<sup>62</sup>



Figure 2.26: Bars 13–14 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune” showing asymmetric rhythms.

Of course, Cronin may first have heard the tune performed with this asymmetric sequence. However, it is more probable that he inserted this sequence himself given his musical expertise and as an expression of his musical individualism. That Cronin notated the piece himself and that he therefore excluded these musical deviations in his written representation, underscores the contention that the asymmetric passages are a unique aspect of his re-compositional process. That being said, the same two-bar

<sup>62</sup> In my main transcription (figure 2.1) the opening phrases (bars 1, 5, 9 and their repeats) are usually notated as triplets. However, these should not be perceived asymmetrically. The aural effect here is merely that of an ornamented passage similar to a roll. The endings of these phrases (bars 4, 8, 48 and their repeats) do contain asymmetric passages. However, since these occur at the end of a phrase rather than the beginning, they do not hold the same weight or aural effect as the main asymmetric passage under consideration here (see also chapter five regarding opening versus cadential points).

statement in question is performed symmetrically at the original opening of the third part. This is probably the original version of the musical phrase learned by (or perhaps introduced by) Cronin.



Figure 2.27: Bars 33–34 of Cronin’s performance of “Banish Misfortune” showing symmetric rhythms.

Additional evidence to substantiate this position can be found in other written representations of Cronin’s repertoire. For instance, the double-jig “The Humours of Drinagh” contains a descending sequence that bears all the hallmarks of Cronin’s rhythmic inventiveness. Demonstrating the type of recomposition already discussed, the fourth part of this jig is very interesting.

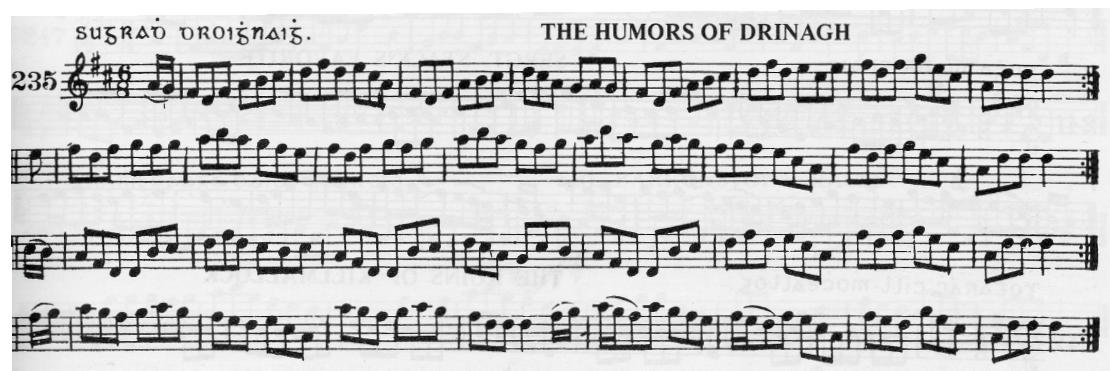


Figure 2.28: “The Humours of Drinagh” in O’Neill, 1903.

Bars 5 and 6 of the fourth part (see figure 2.28 above) suggest a descending pattern comparable with the opening two bars of the third part of “Banish Misfortune” (see figure 2.15b below). Since it is unlikely that Cronin refrained from rhythmic inventiveness in the performance of other traditional tunes, the literate

representation of “The Humours of Drinagh” more than likely conceals the kind of polyrhythms shown to have been concealed by the literate representation of “Banish Misfortune”. In this way it may reflect more accurately Cronin’s style of performance, especially during elaborate recomposition.



Figure 2.15b: “Banish Misfortune” in O’Neill, 1907.

Apart from the written representation of the second group of three quavers in bar 5 of “The Humours of Drinagh” under discussion, the two-bar motif in both tunes is almost identical. Of course, the melodic sequence is pitched a minor third apart respectively. Therefore, it is not inconceivable to suggest that this literate representation of “The Humours of Drinagh” is comparable with the aural representation of “Banish Misfortune”.

In sum: it is highly probable that asymmetric rhythmic invention is a stylistic feature of Cronin’s style, one that permeates his entire repertoire. Its appearance in the first part of “Banish Misfortune” may therefore have encouraged its elaboration in a new third part of the tune; or what can be considered Cronin’s elaborate “turn”. It is this individual musical idea that in the end becomes the focus of the entire tune; demonstrating an individualised impression of it. The musical section in question is

resurrected from obscurity at the end of the first part of the tune, to become emphasised and reconstituted as the opening two bars of the third part.

Interestingly, Cronin then recycles the opening three bars of the first part to form bars 3–5 of the third part (refer to figure 2.1). In this way, the musical materials that characterise “Banish Misfortune” have been re-negotiated, like a cubist painting depicting a taken-for-granted everyday object. New musical material in bar 6 of the third part provides a useful bridge back to the closing two-bar statement shared by all the parts of the tune. Here, Cronin provides his audience with familiar music structures, yet he has recomposed the tune most elaborately (even radically) from a melodic perspective this time.

## **Conclusion**

It is apparent that the extent of musical invention and individualism among solo fiddlers at the dawn of the twentieth century is not appreciated today. At that time, however, a sense of autonomy from the phantom dancer encouraged exciting musical inventions. This chapter has shown the extent of technical proficiency in performance practice and challenges the current under-representation of musical inventiveness during the period. Simply put, musical virtuosity during Cronin’s time is comparable (including favourably so) with the musical virtuosity of today, especially with regards to rhythmic boldness and melodic elaboration. Here, the modern preference for aesthetic restraint in solo performance cannot be divorced from available aural and literate sources. The phantom dancer, therefore, seems to be a recent apparition rather



than a ghost from the musical past of Irish instrumental music performance practices – at least with regard to the fiddling tradition.

Here, the reliability of the terms of tradition must be questioned. Performer and academic, Niall Keegan, argues the following with reference to the influence of literate sources:

Has performance been affected by notation through its use in transmission? The answer to this, I believe, is no. If notation was used to transmit more than just a basic repertoire it would change the personal and improvisatory nature of the elements transmitted in this different mode and thus [the] basic personal and improvisatory nature of the tradition. However, this is not the case. Also it is important that literacy does not seem to have been used extensively as a compositional tool, which might have led to greater complexity and the changing of basic structures and norms maintained through oral tradition (Keegan 1995: 341).

Unfortunately, literate sources have encouraged a distorted view of what constitutes the musical past. They curtail the reality of an exciting non-literate (perhaps even a musically radical) aesthetic. O'Neill's work has often been used to represent the musical past, whereas Cronin's performances have not. An avant-garde of traditional music is made impossible in O'Neill's work where macrostructure is hidden; whereas an avant-garde is made possible out of Cronin's performances where macrostructure is at times fore-grounded.

Both O'Neill and Cronin were involved with moving structures within the Irish tradition. However, the reconstitution of musical structures is an activity divided between the musically mediocre O'Neill and the musically excellent Cronin. As such,

not only could Cronin move structures, but he could flex structures to the extent of bringing the musical past (as seen from the perspective of the terms of tradition) to crisis. Edward Cronin thus brings about the reconfiguration of structure through his performance of “Banish Misfortune”, his ingenuity perhaps heralding an avant-garde aesthetic for the rest of the century that was (deliberately) not noticed by the terms of tradition.

Still, modern researchers are captured by the terms of tradition, not ready to consider the possibility of an avant-garde in Irish music. Cranitch hints at a similar macro-structural shift in the playing of Pádraig O’Keefe for instance.

Johnny O’Leary recounted to me that Padraig had told him, several months before his death, that he was working on the idea of playing ‘Miss McLeod’s’ reel backwards, and hoped thereby to improve it greatly. It is not clear what exactly was going to be involved, but it is unlikely that a literal interpretation of his words would account completely for what was in his mind. Perhaps his ideas included, *inter alia*, some inversion of the harmonic structure, as well as the reversing of various melodic ideas – who knows? (Cranitch 2006: 408).

O’Keefe apparently stated: “’Tisn’t much of a reel the way ’tis played ... To play it backwards, ’tis beautiful” (ibid. 408). The details of this process are unknown, but the scale of the process must be understood as something quite significant. Since Cranitch’s understanding of traditional music can also be located inside the terms of tradition, he imagines the potential of O’Keefe’s words more conservatively. That is, Cranitch represents a version of individualism expressed in terms of musical variation at the level of microstructure rather than macrostructure. He states:

Small-scale subtle variation can be as exiting as that on a large scale, if not even to a greater extent, particularly in the hands of the creative and expressive musician. The more that is changed in a piece of music, the greater is the likelihood that the tune may go ‘outside’ its particular essence and character. This then raises the general question of how to decide if and when a tune crosses that undefined and perhaps unclear boundary of its own identity to become another tune (Cranitch 2006: 400).

Although Cranitch suggests that oral transmission results in continuous variation over time, his approach to melodic variation is informed by the permanence and constancy of the terms of tradition. Instead, it is argued here that the greater a tune is changed “particularly in the hands of the creative and expressive musician” (as quoted above), the more its essence and character can be revealed. As well as obvious markers, hidden markers are revealed, reconstituted, and fore-grounded.

## **Chapter 3: Michael Coleman: Fixing Structures**

### **3.1: Classicism and Coleman**

Throughout chapter 2, and in contrast to established scholarly views, I examined how musical flexibility with regard to structure was characteristic of even the most renowned performers at the beginning of the twentieth century. How is it, then, that music structure became so utterly fixed by the latter half of the same century? How is it also that the terms of tradition do not acknowledge the kind of individual engagement with music structure clearly shown by Cronin and in so short a time? Here, I argue that the contemporary terms of tradition developed out of a process of classicism during the mid-twentieth century which privileged fixity over flexibility.

Classicism (in its most standard definition relating to the arts) often refers to a particular emulation of classical antiquity, specifically Ancient Greece and Rome. Here, standards in style and taste have a prominent code of reference which is constructed upon an aesthetic of restraint. Accordingly, the classical period of Western art music for instance adheres to a standardisation (thus predictability) of certain music practices and modes of music structuring that privileges specific compositional processes. For example, the standardisation of instrumental performance practices facilitates the continuity enjoyed by the authoritative written work. Classicism, when applied to other non-literate genres of music is equally reserved and formal, but may promote very negative implications for a tradition's compositional development.



Plate 3.1: Michael Coleman.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Taken from Bradshaw 1991

Meyer has noted:

Classicism has been characterized by a valuing of shared conventions and rational restraint, the playful exploitation of established constraints and the satisfaction of actuality (Being), the coherence of closed forms and the clarity of explicit meanings [...] (Meyer 1996: 162).

For non-literate music, the effect of classicism can become one of disenchantment. Here, classicism represents a process of (re)compositional stagnation guided by an aesthetic of restraint and a respect for a perceived musical oneness with an idealised musical past. Forward impetus is then socially nostalgic before being musically progressive. In the Irish context, this process has formulated the contemporary terms of tradition. This chapter specifically examines the role of the fiddle in promoting, yet at the same time challenging, classicism in Irish traditional music during the twentieth century.

To this end, I consider the fiddler Michael Coleman (1891–1945) as both a central figure of modern Irish fiddle playing and a primary model for the classicism project. By interrogating a fixed interpretation of Coleman's performances and critiquing the fiddler's position within his music tradition, I will show how classicism has exerted a significant challenge upon the tradition's most challenging instrument.

### 3.11: Challenges of tradition.

The contemporary terms of tradition at times can become fraught with contradiction, something for which classicism provides the necessary veil. The fiddle is more often

at the centre of this dilemma. Renowned traditional musicians and educators, Ethne and Brian Vallely, have stated most clearly: “The fiddle occupies a central place in the traditional Irish music scene of today. If the harp was the instrument of medieval Ireland, the fiddle is the instrument of 20th century Ireland” (Vallely n.d.: 3). In many respects, though, the fiddle has been an instrument to defy as well as define the traditional music scene. The Vallelys continue by adding that there “is perhaps no instrument with the same capacity for provoking controversy” (ibid. 3). The fiddle, then, lies on a boundary between definition and defamation, its “central place” within the tradition in many ways decentralising that tradition by means of an innate capacity for idiosyncratic musical invention.

Here, capacity is a musical notion in flux that is measured by artifactual potential; that is, the fiddle as a musical artefact capable of producing “new” sounds that spiral in and out of traditional norms. As capacity develops (which it constantly does), it reaches new levels of awareness in potential. It must therefore be judged moment by moment as the timely recognition of realised potential. For this very reason, capacity can be extremely volatile. Should a tradition wish to grasp a singular conception of the fiddle within its own terms of reference, it must also learn how to successfully “incapacitate” this instrument. This, of course, disrupts the natural impetus of capacity which constantly seeks to move forward and develop increasing amounts of potential. Therefore finding an effective method toward this end can prove somewhat challenging.

In the Irish context, the fiddle’s place in the tradition is often a paradoxical one. To illustrate, musician and scholar Tomás Ó Canainn accepts that the “freedom that the performer enjoys in the execution of a song or air is an essential part of the

tradition” (Ó Canainn 1993a: 4). However, he stipulates: “It is a freedom whose bounds have been established over many generations” (ibid. 4). This sort of “yes-but-no” theory can of course become accepted by those coming from within tradition (as a kind of “you know what I mean” scenario) as well as by those eager to come to terms with tradition as outsiders (as a kind of “you can’t really know what I mean yet” scenario). However, upon recognising the materiality of the instrument, when it comes to positioning the fiddle within the terms of tradition, poetic mystery can very soon turn to utter irrationality.

Ó Canainn also claims: “The fiddle gives the performer the possibility of straying from the tradition and, consequently, its greater flexibility might be considered a disadvantage” (Ó Canainn 1993a: 47). However, he insists that the fiddle, together with the pipes, can be considered the two most important instruments in the tradition today. Furthermore, he makes the following assertion:

[I]t is easier to play traditional music on a traditional instrument than on a non-traditional one and, furthermore, players of traditional instruments have a built-in protection against straying outside the tradition. Their best guide is the traditional instrument itself (ibid. 2).

Though Ó Canainn may be referring to instruments of unique Irish design, he cannot, and actually seems not to, refute the significant musical transformation that brought about the Irish fiddle out of the Italian violin. Despite Ciaran Carson’s very clear declaration that “there is no such thing as a traditional instrument” (Carson 1986: 11), the fact that the fiddle has long been an integral part of traditional music in Ireland must give it considerable standing as a “traditional” instrument. O’Boyle’s quip that



the *timpán* left “no recognizable trace in the national music” contrasts the fiddle’s significance during the twentieth century where it has left a lasting impact upon the music tradition (see appendices E & F; O’Boyle 1958: 49).

We can therefore assume that the fiddler’s “best guide” toward upholding the terms of tradition is the traditional instrument he holds in his hands. Yet, the fiddle seems neither to acknowledge the “bounds” nor abide by the constraints of Ó Canainn’s definition for a “traditional instrument”. In this sense, the fiddle’s place within the Irish music tradition remains locked inside the in-betweenness (the “yes-but-no”) of an altogether irrational musical ideal. Regardless of the many challenges shown the terms of tradition by the fiddle, the greater challenge seems to have been shown it. This challenge is built upon a classicism project, a corrupting musical aesthetic from the perspective of a non-literate music that renders acceptable these contradictions.

Here, the place of classicism in non-literate versus literate music traditions is of interest. In many non-literate traditions, composition is realised through the act of recomposition as already outlined in chapter two. Importantly, therefore, composition is achieved in relation to a specific instrument during performance. In this instance, the sacrifice in retarding an instrument’s capacity would not seem to be compensated for by the privileging of an alternative compositional platform (to favour, for instance, the constancy of a written compositional work as would happen in the Western art tradition). Consequently, classicism can thus diminish the act of composition within non-literate forms. Here, classicism undermines musical creativity and individuality.

The negative influence of classicism on Irish music is twofold: More obviously, it consists of the “suppression” of the future growth of capacity. Less obviously, it

consists of the “filing” (or “paring away”) of certain elements of capacity as these existed at the moment of classicism’s inception. On the one hand, suppression, with its claims on the musical future, is more often an overt process as it restrains the forward impetus of capacity. It therefore invites argument through revolt. On the other hand, filing, with its claims on the musical past, is more often a hidden process as it discards certain properties of capacity’s earlier condition to uphold something that is more ordered and pure in design. It therefore eludes argument through deception.

By discarding certain musical elements an idealised musical past is constructed that in turn is taken for granted. As Bordieu very insightfully explained: “Every established order tends to produce [...] the naturalization of its own arbitrariness” (Bordieu 1977: 164). In Irish music studies, suppression to the detriment of filing has been privileged. Accordingly, this focus has served (often inadvertently) the success of classicism instead of measuring or opposing it. An obsession with suppression leaves filing unquestioned. Yet it is precisely filing which forms the bedrock of classicism’s design; that is, where classicism validates (and even controls) the suppression of the forward impetus of capacity.

Once the product of filing is taken for granted, then classicism controls the representation of the musical past and the capacity of the musical future. As such, classicism is often most successful when it is perceived to have failed; that is, even while the product of suppression is strongly contested. Quinn states of Irish music:

if there really had been serious opposition to experimentation with traditional music over the years, it hardly needs to be pointed out that it has been an abject failure (Quinn 2006: 9).

Classicism's success lies in exactly this, its apparent failure to suppress capacity. Once attention is exclusively fixed on suppression, all argument seeking a musical alternative to the terms of tradition fails since filing is never assessed. The bounds of innovation are set within filing. In victory, therefore, innovators have truly lost everything. Their innovations that deny suppression are always built upon (and thus constantly uphold) a foundation built exclusively upon the filing of classicism.

Classicism is usually grafted out of one (controllable) aggregate of past capacity. Because capacity develops at a much greater pace amongst individuals, classicism serves to de-vitalise the musical individual. The mean between genius and ignorance necessarily makes classicism value mediocrity. Individual capacity within the musical past reveals the dependancy of classicism on underachievement, and so it must be subdued in the first instance. As such, classicism will always be most unforgiving toward individualism within the musical past; for it must claim the musical past outright. To establish order, therefore, classicism must be maintained by a hierarchy of administrators (an "Establishment", as it were) who are tasked with upholding the terms of tradition.

### 3.12: Claiming tradition.

Classicism, having successfully claimed the musical past, can then popularise the terms of tradition through the marketability of a revival aesthetic inside traditional music. Though Irish traditional music began a revival during the 1950s, it did not exactly require one. The Irish music revival was more an urban phenomenon than a general one; the tradition maintaining a significant place in the country's cultural

landscape throughout the twentieth century. Importantly, the apparent diminished popularity of traditional music performance during the middle of the century must not be confused with its wider role in popular culture where it once satisfied multifarious social requirements. The role of traditional music in community dances, for instance, reflects the popularity of communal dance or social gatherings *per se*, but not of traditional music performance in particular.

The performance skills necessary to fulfil these requirements of popular culture – such as in community dances – is neither a fair reflection of the popularity of music performance in and of itself. In a dance hall or crossroads gathering, music performance can be a relatively uninteresting means to a very different and more thrilling end. The quality of instrumental performance needed for such events was at a level that was scoffed at by many of history's luminary musical figures (see appendix C). So the decline in the popularity of these larger social gatherings cannot fully correspond with a decline in a dedication toward Irish music performance where this mattered most.

For instance, ethnomusicologist Damhnait Nic Suibhne demonstrates that during the inception of the revival of the 1950s, there existed a minority group of Donegal fiddle players who performed exclusively outside of these more popular contexts. Here, the distinction even extended to tune repertoire. Nic Suibhne asks, “since the tunes within this section were considered too complicated for dancing, and the house dance was the main outlet for musical activity. Where, then, were these listening tunes performed?” (Nic Suibhne 1995: 735). The answer lies in a variety of music nights with no dancing, perhaps even house competitions, and definitely the so-called “hard

session” that could also follow on from a night’s dancing.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, what is far more obvious than the apparent decline in the popularity of what can be termed music performance before the revival, is the rise in the popularity of music performance after the revival.

Essentially, the revival brought together smaller-scale traditional music performance events with the kind of audience that larger-scale social events would generate. In the process, however, it married the “dance musician” to the “performance musician”. This creating one music performer defined by the phantom dancer, and so eroded the kinds of distinctions unearthed by Nic Suibhne above. Consequently, the ideal post-revival music performer, though practically divorced from a dancing context, actually better reflects the pre-revival dancing class of musician (the common mediocre musician) rather than the pre-revival performing class of musician (the individual expert musician). Specialised musical expertise is thus devalued in favour of wider cultural participation. As a result, classicism dominates contemporary music performance aesthetics, popularised (thus made significantly stronger) by a fabricated music revival.

Ethnomusicologist, Tamara Livingston, records: “Music revivals are an important feature of the twentieth century musical landscape” (Livingston 1999: 66). They are, in fact, as much a part of the twentieth century as the avant-garde is. Revivalists may “distinguish themselves from the cultural mainstream” (ibid. 69), but this should not automatically declare them uninterested in the market. Livingston continues:

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<sup>64</sup> See chapter four. Also, this would be reminiscent of the bebop jazz sessions that would follow on from the big-band shows which provided music for large social gatherings and community dance.

In actuality the commodification of the revivalist tradition begins well before an industry emerges. It begins with the initial objectification of a musical tradition which transforms it into a “thing” which can be “restored” (ibid. 79).

The classicism project (in relation to a non-literate music tradition) can thus market traditional music as the saleable product of a music revival. In the valuable marketplace of the heritage industry during the twentieth century, music becomes a perfect instrument for recreating the illusion of dead social contexts – tapping into the highly sought-after nostalgia-effect of an organic experience within the industrial chaos of modern society. However, this means that music must be presented as something that has been salvaged and restored. Classicism provides this through filing, operating a controlled music revival that presents a salvaged and idealised musical past in an orderly and pure manner. In return, the classicism project gains the significant weight of popular cultural support.

Describing the heritage industry, the performance specialist Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discovers the peculiar use of historical architectural sites that no longer retain their original edifices. “The production of hereness, in the absence of actualities, depends increasingly on virtualities” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995: 376). Similarly, Irish traditional (dance) music now provides a virtual experience while referencing traditional music contexts outside of itself. It provides cultural consumers with an “authentic experience” of “Irishness” beyond actual musical concerns (see O’Shea 2008: 85). In this manner, contemporary Irish music performance sheds all

aspects of musical modernism and is instead marked by a compliance to older social contexts.<sup>65</sup>

Here, the classicism project can apply even greater restraint on individual music performers. Even though renowned ethnomusicologist, Alan Merriam, insisted that “creativity is a never-ending process under whatever cultural rules it is carried out” (Merriam 1964: 54), one still must question how creativity is mustered and in what form and for what purpose. One can be creatively compliant, or one can be creatively assertive. Music performers in the Irish context are continually made to comply with wider cultural concerns which are based on the past instead of the present. As such, their creativity is brought constantly out of date.

Irish musicologist, Harry White, bemoans that the “problem in tracing the history of an idea about music in Ireland is that the metaphorical status of ‘Irish music’ almost always eclipses the actual condition of the music itself” (White 2001b: 258). White’s focus is on nationalism, but the implication of all aspects of “Irishness” held within “Irish music” is both a heavy burden on contemporary musicians and a convenient restraining device for the classicism project.<sup>66</sup> That music in Ireland would “nourish every condition except its own” would mean that it is compliant to all other cultural modes, and never quite assertive of its own condition (see White 2005: 167).

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<sup>65</sup> What this means too is that the customary presentation of the innovator as being far more commercial than his traditionalist counterpart is a dubious argument.

<sup>66</sup> Fellow musicologist, Joseph Ryan, points toward nineteenth-century poet, Thomas Moore’s, “sanitized versions of Irish melody” that brought “the lawless [asymmetric traditional airs] to heel” of which both aided classicism and “did more to propagate the nationalist cause than could any rebellion” (Ryan 1995: 108). White continues: “Even within the domain of so-called ‘folk’ music, the emphasis is on the provenance of sources, rather than on any intrinsic assessment of or aesthetic engagement with the musical work” (White 2005:167). Though the idea of a “musical work” (as understood by the Western art tradition) in folk or traditional music is unsuitable, the constancy (or permanence) of traditional music performance under classicism means that a “musical work” can somehow emerge. That it does so within a traditional music context is enough to signify the lack of truly creative engagement with traditional music performance at a musical level.

Quinn too has spoken about the traditional music revival in Ireland and its continuing effect on contemporary music practices.

The response to the folk revival myth by the post-revival generation has not been silent, but certainly predominantly non-verbal. [...] It is demoralising for an entire generation to be weighed down by concepts and language that bear little resemblance with their reality. [...] They find themselves musically trying out the new, but are not encouraged to think of it on new terms. They are constantly dragged back to folk revival thinking. It nags at them and they sense a conflict in what they are doing (Quinn 2001: 27).

It is the terms of tradition that nag. So who lead the classicism project, who administers the terms of tradition? The founding in 1951 of the musical organisation *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann*, or CCÉ, marks the beginning of the music revival (see introduction). Since then, CCÉ has played a major role in the development of Irish music throughout Ireland and abroad. Concerning the international popularity of Irish traditional music, the Director-General of CCÉ, Labhrás Ó Murchú, openly claims responsibility. “What is the movement which has spearheaded this cultural revolution? Comhaltas” (Ó Murchú 1987: 7). Note the emphasis placed on “cultural” as opposed to “musical”. CCÉ has, as such, achieved a position of authority at the forefront of the classicism movement and has become the “Establishment” of Irish traditional music itself.

One of CCÉ’s official constitutional aims and objectives is “to promote Irish traditional music in all its forms”. Clearly any “form” of music that in whatever way falls outside this remit (that is, just simply not promoted by CCÉ) then obviously



should not claim “Irish traditional” status. To promote “all forms” is then to know all forms; to know all forms is then to umbrella all forms under the rubric of a classic music tradition.

CCÉ has been a powerful agent in co-opting selected rural musical practices and repertoires to become ‘Irish traditional music’, emblematic of a unified national culture. [...] Diverse domestic musical practices from the very recent past were idealised as part of an ancient national culture (O’Shea 2008: 45).

CCÉ have willingly adopted the tag of “purists” or, more significantly, “traditionalists” within the Irish music community. This aids their taken-for-granted position as purveyors of the terms of tradition (or what constitutes the musical past). Meyer admitted: “Style analysis must, of course, begin with description and classification, that is, with an account of the features replicated in some work or repertory of works (Meyer 1996: 10). However, when this process of “classification” is promoted as a “cultural revolution” (as cited in Ó Murchú above), the classification process becomes fiercely prescriptive of the repertory under question rather than merely descriptive of it. As a result, despite attempting to critique CCÉ, ethnomusicologist Edward O. Henry for instance gullibly concluded: “Informing people about the precise nature of music thus also becomes a responsibility of the sponsoring agency” (Henry 1989: 93) – of which he means CCÉ .

Henry is already distracted by the classicism project as represented by CCÉ. He merely replicates the same argument that ensures the success of classicism: “should suppression be allowed to stagnate the tradition”? Missing out entirely on “filing”, Henry grants CCÉ administrative rights to the terms of tradition before outlining,

again, the refreshing possibilities within innovation that can overcome “suppression”. Henry is satisfied that CCÉ has not altered the truth of traditional music greatly, and instead the organisation has at least provided a ground for debate. However, the nature of this debate as well as the actual presence (or absence) of real argument is never considered. Under the control of CCÉ, Irish traditional music is popularised whereby the terms of tradition (supported by the classicism project) are simply taken for granted by the entire music community.

CCÉ is not only interested in popularising this understanding of Irish traditional music, the organisation is populist in conception. Irish music as a popular music might well be regarded as “high context” – to use ethnomusicologist Edward T. Hall’s terminology – where “the link to the audience is more binding (since there is more shared information)” (Hall 1992: 231). However, as outlined above, if classicism controls all musical argument then this audience is empowered toward inaction. Importantly, they do feel empowered nonetheless. In the context of a non-literate music tradition, populism is an essential ingredient of classicism because of this reliance on its audience.

The clearest and most immediate definition of a music-system will be found in its audience. Where a genre of music is accepted by one group but rejected by another, this will usually mark the limits of the system (Ó Súilleabháin 1981: 83).

By way of classicism, the Irish music tradition can be claimed; but by way of populism it can be made look as though it has been claimed for everyone (hence the need for a revival). The maintenance of the terms of tradition is as a result, and all of a sudden, the responsibility of everybody, innovators included.

That said, some know how to maintain the terms of tradition better than others, hence the acceptance of a hierarchy of culture bearers where CCÉ lies on top. CCÉ become the primary guardians so to speak, or what could be termed in this context: the Establishment. As Alan Lomax stated:

Everyone in a culture responds with satisfaction or ecstasy to the apropos and with scorn and resentment to the unseemly. We all have a very nice sense about what new and exotic patterns are suitable to us culturally, although some trained specialists –the artists and critics– have more skill at this than ordinary folk (Lomax 1994: 12; see also Nettl 1965: 33).

In the Irish music context, CCÉ embody the requisite skills to decide what is suitable. To conserve its position and *raison d'être*, CCÉ invokes many of the controlling measures inherent to classicism. These include: controlled schooling (which begets classicism); controlled competitiveness (which validates institutionalisation); controlled social etiquette (which stunts individualism); and finally controlled idolisation (which substantiates the terms of tradition). It is through this final measure that classicism secures the fiddle as a centralising force within the terms of tradition. In this way it has served to smother the instrument's capacity.

As an artefact in need of knowledgeable human handling, the fiddle can be introduced as a tool to support the aims and objectives of classicism. "Unlike traditional singing which is simply picked up, instrumental music demands some tuition, at least in the initial stages" (Breathnach 1985a: 97). Classicism can then be fostered at the earliest stages of musical instruction through the formation of an official programme of institutionalisation. National competitions can then validate the

taught curricula by rewarding the performer who better “champions” the terms of tradition. Outside of institutional and competitive settings, controlled communal events provide a social outlet for fiddle performance. As a primary example: the staged session demands a strict social etiquette that does not allow sufficient space for individualism (see chapter six).

Generally, the modern session can be hardly considered a breathing space for the individual since any attempt at solo performance is considered egoistical and certainly frowned upon. The session is a forum for the exchange of repertoire where every musician will attempt to be familiar with every tune performed; and at that, a rendition of these tunes reflective of a classic music tradition (see chapter six). A specialist on the Donegal fiddling tradition, Caoimhín MacAoidh, recalls one “officer of the national executive of Comhaltas” insisting at one particular session that the Donegal version of a specific tune never be played again since it was “bad Scottish music!” (MacAoidh 1994a: 19). Instead he insisted that the Michael Coleman version was the “true version of the tune” (ibid.). By using one particular fiddle player as a musical idol, the classicism project has its laws personified – it has its protagonist: its hero.

### 3.13: (Cole)Man of Tradition.

The previous chapter has already placed fiddle player Michael Coleman (even more so than his contemporaries) on a point of technical proficiency and aesthetic integrity that help define the terms of tradition. Representing a reading of traditional fiddle performance practices characterised by classicism, Coleman is idolised almost

sanctimoniously. As ethnomusicologist Laurence McCullough states when referencing Coleman and (to a lesser extent) his contemporaries:

Of course, the authors of this work would not like to be accused of standing in the path of the natural evolution of a musical idiom, as this is clearly not their intent. Their purpose is to offer to a wider audience a stylistic dimension that many newcomers to Irish music may have overlooked, a dimension that should be known and understood by every person beginning Irish fiddling, no matter what their eventual stylistic inclinations. And there is no better entrance point to the intricacies of Irish fiddling than through the stylistic gateway provided by the music of the Sligo masters, past and present [and particularly Michael Coleman] (McCullough 1978: 3).

Despite denying outright that he is imposing a typical reading of Coleman's playing onto the wider Irish tradition of fiddle playing, McCullough's round of "should's" are nonetheless quite deafening. Coleman apparently remains fundamental to traditional fiddle playing no matter what the "eventual stylistic inclinations" of every performer thereafter. Coleman is the "filing" of classicism personified. The cover notes of the same publication (authored by U.S. American fiddle player Tony DeMarco) reads: "No one interested in Irish fiddling can afford to overlook this book – all the essentials are contained herein, neatly dissected and fully divulged, ready to be taken at your ease" (DeMarco 1978). That everyone can have "Irish traditional fiddle playing" for themselves allows the intangible (music) to become reproduced to order and consumed *en masse*.

In line with a revivalist perspective, however, and regardless of Coleman's popularity, the delicate condition of the revived practice is consistently emphasised.

“Sligo fiddling is in danger of becoming a lost art” (McCullough 1978: 3).

Significantly, the fiddling of the (now legendary) Michael Coleman is oftentimes credited for annihilating the regional (and individual) styles of Ireland that came before him. Although Hamilton rightly insists that “evidence on the ground does not fully support this theory” (Hamilton 1994: 17), Coleman is still used to substantiate a process of standardisation today. Essentially, Coleman represents every modern fiddler’s lot. The following analysis of both Coleman’s playing style and his place in time will serve to examine the processes toward his idolisation in the manner just outlined.

Coleman’s is the earliest easily available representation of what traditional music was. His audible proximity to the musical past allowed Coleman to be used as a representative figure of the terms of tradition. His performances were among the first to be validated by a large audience (again demonstrating the interest in populism). As McNamara and Woods stated:

It meant a lot to people that America, the one country we all looked up to, put enough value on our music to record it. [...] The fact that the most popular records were by the Sligo musicians Michael Coleman and James Morrison meant that, for many people, their music was considered the best. After all, if the Americans thought so (McNamara and Woods 1997: 22).

Further inspection uncovers the stylistic attributes that fostered the move toward an idolisation of Coleman as “Man of Tradition”. There are many stable elements in the fiddler’s playing which lend themselves quite readily to a standardised

interpretation. Fiddler Martin Wynne made a perceptive remark concerning Coleman's style:

I think when Michael went to New York, he got influenced by other players and took on what you might call a classical style. There was class in his music and he played with such abandon (cited in Bradshaw 1991: 65).

The paradox of this "class in music" is as follows: as it allowed Coleman the freedom to experiment with virtuosic flights of "abandon", it also allowed those inclined toward classicism to represent Coleman's style as something "classical". These classic elements represent the controllable components within Coleman's playing, in turn allowing for standardisation. His rhythm, intonation, dynamics, tone, tempo, and drive were all fairly regular. So once mastered by others, they can be reproduced. His embellishments were also both extractible from the musical bit and reducible to a "catalogue of rolls, cranns, triplets" (Carson 1986: 22).<sup>67</sup> In short, his style included many singular and containable mannerisms that allowed for their administration by others. These, of course, are musical ingredients that can be taken from extant recordings and can be recycled in an effort to manufacture more

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<sup>67</sup> This is a list of some of the more conventional traditional fiddle ornaments found in Irish traditional music therefore: The *roll* is a fingered ornament usually performed on a single and relatively long note value (or two shorter note values of the same pitch). It divides the main note pitch with a quick progression of three grace-notes: one above the main note, followed by another that returns to the main note pitch, followed by one further grace note below the main pitch, all of which is framed by the main note's (longer) beginning and (shorter) end points. The *crann* is more familiar to the piping tradition and divides a similar note value by a series of descending *cut*-like fingered grace-notes (two or three) above the main pitch, while consistently referencing the main note pitch before, after, and between each grace-note. Incidentally, the plain *cut* simply divides or introduces a main melody note pitch using a fingered grace-note above the main pitch. The *triplet* is then a bowed ornament that divides a main single long note (or a series of three rapidly changing (and usually scalar) note pitches) into a rapid three-note rhythmic embellishment that either uses the more common down-up-down bow-strokes, or the less common alternative up-down-up bow-strokes. See preface to Breathnach 1963 for more detailed documentation on the most common ornaments.

“authentic traditional” pieces. It all translates well onto the tools of standardisation where controllable exercises in individuality can follow.

Coleman’s recordings during the 1920’s and 1930’s made the classicism project not only possible through controlled idolisation, but it also made it convincing. That Coleman is an attractive figure for CCÉ is confirmed by the central involvement of this organisation in the running of the ambitious “Coleman Heritage Centre” in Co. Sligo.<sup>68</sup> Further, Coleman’s overall style and settings of tunes are actively promoted by CCÉ – this from my own experience performing in relevant institutions and competitive circles throughout my youth. The foremost of the so-called “old greats” from Irish music’s so-called “golden era”, Coleman’s performances are both stimulatingly variable (owing to his colourful approach to micro-structural embellishment) and yet ultimately reducible (owing to his *consistently* colourful approach to micro-structural embellishment). As far as the macrostructure, Coleman was rigid and unwavering.

As such, much of Coleman’s repertoire is equally reducible to a consistent blueprint of his style. Many of these stable elements have become institutionalised. They are, however, celebrated as an expression of individuality through their varied interpolations within a constant macrostructure. This successfully veils the monovalent nature of classicism and secures for itself a tangible music practice to define the terms of tradition. In the process, the place and posture of the fiddle is also defined. However, it remains that the fiddle – even in the hands of Michael Coleman – has much more to tell us regarding the musical past. It still challenges the terms of

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<sup>68</sup> Though not founded by CCÉ, the organisation has subsequently made this centre their home outside of the Irish capitol, Dublin.



tradition by provoking an almighty clash between capacity and classicism. The second part of this chapter explores this clash.

### **3.2: Artefacts and Coleman Facts**

If the priority in the study of non-literate music from the past is the actual sounds of performance, then the researcher should theoretically seek out all available “soundings” of non-literate performance practice before (or at least while) attending to literate (and therefore secondary) sources. In Ireland, the fiddle as a primary artefact for exploring the musical past is underrepresented. This is unfortunate. Bayard, for instance, observed that tune collection publications of the last four centuries are “the only insight we can gain into the nature of popular music in the past” (Bayard 1982: 5–6).

Though historian Dorothy Duncan may be exaggerating somewhat when stating: “Both oral and written history may reflect judgements that are inaccurate and biased; the artifact does not lie” (Duncan 1981: 3). However, at the very least, primary artefacts cannot lie in the same way as other historical records can. The artefact provides an interesting alternative view. As such, a primary musical artefact should be invaluable to a more thorough understanding of the musical past. By “primary (musical) artefact” I refer to any tool manipulated by a creative artist in the direct production of musical sounds. Both oral and written historical records (including music scores) do not belong inside this definition.

In a special edition of the journal “Ethnomusicology Forum” dedicated to the consideration of the past in music, editor Caroline Bithell highlights artefacts as

“sound tools”. Indeed, it is worth exploring the fiddle as a useful observation tool to the past, especially considering that instrumental performance practice is very much an artefact-based musical activity. Merriam’s study of music *as* culture has been clearly one of the most influential methodologies in the field of ethnomusicology throughout the twentieth century. In it, Merriam fails to highlight the significance of primary musical artefacts, choosing instead to look at music history from a behavioural perspective. As his critic, emic ethnomusicologist J.H. Nketia pointed out in his review of the publication in question: “The ethnomusicologist cannot accept the view that the ultimate focus of his study is human behavior and not music” (Nketia 1966: 226). However, the examination of primary artefacts in the study of music for instance is underrepresented in twentieth-century ethnomusicology. The renowned ethnomusicologist Anthony Seeger, for instance, also continued with an anthropological priority in his overall methodology.

A general definition of music must include both sounds and human beings. Music is a system of communication involving structured sounds produced by members of a community that communicate with other members (Seeger 1992: 89).

Obviously, the artefact (or sound tool) is still undervalued in Seeger’s broad and considered equation; its central place in the communicative event can be at most presumed only secondary. One of Merriam’s lesser influential contemporaries, Mieczyslaw Kolinski, demonstrated more understanding in this regard when he declared: “Biology and culture cannot be divorced from each other” (Kolinski 1967: 2). He went further yet:

At the outset of this article I stressed, in agreement with Merriam and other ethnomusicologists, the importance of the thesis that music cannot be approached as an isolated phenomenon; however, Merriam's extreme and one-sided contention that "music is a... phenomenon which exists only in terms of social interaction" (1964: 27) seems untenable. Without attempting to find a universally valid definition of what music is, it may be said that music, being created by man, is a product of his general physio-psychological constitution, motivated and diversified both by individual or collective inventiveness and by cultural environment (ibid. 3).

Part of this biology in music can be found very obviously in the interaction between instrumentalist and instrument. Perhaps Kolinski was not imagining exactly this, but it certainly remains an aspect of musical investigation that was not expanded by later ethnomusicologists.

Thankfully, the current academic climate invites more detailed musicological methodologies that allow for progressive modes of music analysis. Accordingly, I would like to advance one methodology based on the pioneering behavioural archaeologist Michael Brian Schiffer's work. Already, Schiffer has also noted the same oversight among social scientists who have "privileged people–people ("interpersonal") interactions, ignoring or marginalizing other kinds – even when they are relevant to explaining the forward motion of activities" (Schiffer 1999: 13). This criticism can rightly be made against Merriam's understanding of the "uniquely human phenomenon" of music for instance, where he supposes that "it is made by people for other people" (Merriam 1964: 27). In contrast, Schiffer regards it "a mistake of cosmic proportions to arbitrarily abstract "interpersonal" and "social" interactions from human life and study them apart from the artifacts in which they are

embedded” (Schiffer 1999: 3). Below, I invoke Schiffer’s critical perspective and present a much needed review of primary artefacts in the study of Irish fiddle music.

### 3.21: Coleman and the Fiddle.

On the few occasions that the fiddle has been examined as an artefact in Ireland, writers, such as Feldman, have defined it as “a colonial artifact” (Feldman 1999). Feldman later continues by stating that the “fiddle appeared in Ireland as a foreign object, and yet in the 18th century it was appropriated, rescripted and recodified into an eloquent conduit of social memory and cultural resistance” (ibid.). In keeping with a widespread nationalistic narrative, the fiddle here nourishes external cultural and social sentiments before that of its own condition as a musical artefact (see above). A historical account of the violin and bow in Ireland has been provided in appendices E and F. Though structurally almost identical with the violin, the Irish fiddle has been redefined by native human handling and as such has enjoyed a number of significant structural alterations distinguishing itself from its Italian prototype. These developments are indicative of a mutual influence between instrument and native instrumentalist alike.

Ethnomusicologist Sue DeVale’s already detailed and extensively interdisciplinary description of organology could benefit from an alternative methodology that uses ergonomics as its basis (see DeVale 1990). DeVale’s theory is typical of a twentieth-century leaning toward anthropology and leaning away from musicology inside ethnomusicology. “In my view, the ultimate purpose of organology should be to explain society and culture” (ibid. 22). In this respect, DeVale reiterates

the social concerns of her field where interpersonal relations are highlighted in favour of musicological concerns relating to primary musical artefacts.

However, one of the contributors to DeVale's collection, ethnomusicologist Dale Olsen, better attends to Schiffer's critique of the social sciences since at least he represents the musical artefact with its own life history. Schiffer has outlined that "the performance of an interactor playing any role depends partly upon its life history, including its immediately preceding performances" (Schiffer 1999: 65). This equation facilitates the possibility that the capacity of the instrument itself may broaden the scope of the musical past producing a more accurate interpretation of it. It allows for the synchronic as opposed to the diachronic analysis of the musical event between instrumentalist and instrument, thus helping to guard against the underestimation of the musical past.

For his part, Olsen outlines a four-step model toward musical and cultural knowledge: an archaeomusicological process, a music iconological process, a historiographic process, and finally an ethnological analogy process. This fourth process for Olsen is as follows: "the study of possible parallels between an ancient culture and a living culture or cultures" (Olsen 1990: 176). This can be examined between geographically distant or geographically static cultures.

Obviously this process is more to do with ancient versus modern civilisations, the time-span of this thesis (the most recent century) is hardly catered for by the intended use of Olsen's formula. However, his approach can also yield encouraging results when applied to the recent (as opposed to distant) musical past. All in all, the examination of the recent musical past can be even more obviously supported by a consideration of primary artefacts as they are still in use among contemporary

instrumentalists. In this matter, musical instruments often have a longer life-span than other modes of technology that “in their time or soon after [are] apparently discarded or abandoned, thus not consciously preserved or found in a context of direct use” (Buckley 1990: 15).

The fiddle is a relatively new instrument in Ireland anyway, granted that it had a significant life history even before arriving on the island. While physical alterations to its morphology were minor (though vital), sound alterations are significant. That the violin did not really directly replace an earlier instrument in Ireland means that it was newly acquired without any sure indications of its place in the existing music tradition (see appendices E & F). This newness actually still permeates the Irish tradition. The fiddle remains an instrument in flux (a flux that offers potential for the avant-garde too). By remaining both suspiciously modern and traditionally ancient all at once, the fiddle provides opportunities that are unequalled by any other instrument in an Irish context; it out-ages most other contemporary instruments, and out-fluxes all others older than it.

The violin is often appreciated for its “extraordinary musical versatility” (Boyden 1989: 1). Sound acoustics specialist (and entomologist), James Beament, referred to it consistently as the “perfect instrument” (see Beament 1997). Its basic design already disposes it to a plethora of musical possibilities. Beament insists that “a skilled player can coax worthwhile sound out of almost any [violin] instrument by making it behave” (ibid. 234). Perhaps this allowed for crude copies to pervade poorer regions, such as the box fiddles of Ireland or the Fry’s Shilling Chocolates box fiddles in Wales (see Morris 1983: 34–5). Violin maker and historian John Dilworth provides

further insight into the notion of the violin's perfect design, declaring it "a mechanically simple but acoustically complex instrument" (Dilworth 1992: 1).

In addition, the violin is an extremely personal instrument, hugged intimately by the musician under the neck and coaxed with the bow. Dilworth finds more evidence of this intimacy in the fact that the "major innovations in bow making in the Baroque are associated with musicians rather than craftsmen" (Dilworth 1992: 24). Boyden too mentions "17th-century violinists who discovered that tone could be muted by a device affixed to the bridge" (Boyden 1989: 24). Indeed, the instrument is prone to many more individual adjustments, not only in cross-cultural contexts, but it is clear that the instrument's life history in its original Western art setting is one of constant updating.

The more valuable the violin, the more likely it was to be refitted and modernized.

As far as is known, not a single Stradavari violin has come down to us in completely original condition – an ironic endorsement of excellence (ibid. 33).

The violin, or fiddle, is thus a musical artefact especially receptive to individualised human handling. With this in mind, the following chapters will focus rather narrowly on a single individual case-study: one Irish musician playing upon the fiddle. Schiffer has built a theory of communication in its widest sense, whereby "artifacts can play major communication roles" which is why communication in this context need not be strictly verbal nor exclusively interpersonal. Instead, this understanding "allows one explicitly to tie communication to all other human behavior" (Schiffer 1999: 63).

Essentially, Schiffer applies a sender-emitter-receiver model to every communication event. This includes various combinations of people and artefact

interactions where these are “relevant to explaining the forward motion of activities” (Schiffer 1999: 11). From an analytical standpoint, although “the theory being fashioned here allows any kind of interactor to play the three major roles, the roles themselves are not of equal analytical significance [...] my theory is receiver oriented” (ibid. 62). Importantly for Schiffer therefore: “Analysis of a communication process can begin when the investigator designates a receiver in the reference activity” (ibid. 70). More accurately, the methodology here is to analyse the receiver’s response (this is detailed below).

Schiffer already includes musical performance as a behavioural phenomenon “that can be treated as instances of communication” (Schiffer 1999: 59). He later outlines one possible analytical unit involving person-artifact-person processes where two interactors are delineated. “Someone secures information from an artifact (emitter), makes inferences about her own interactions (as sender) with that artifact, and then responds” (ibid. 97). Applying Schiffer’s three-role model of sender-emitter-receiver, this study follows the interaction that takes place between the musician (in this case being both sender and receiver) and the fiddle (here being the emitter). Indeed, this is a most simple presentation that ignores all other artefacts, emitters and possible interactions. However, Schiffer offers his theory with the understanding that any “communication process can be broken down into a set of inscription, emission, reception, and response events, but the investigator's research interests dictate the required level of detail” (Schiffer 1999: 69).

The current aim here is to present an introduction to a more comprehensive study that takes proper account of the instrumentalist’s artefact-laden musical environment. In any event, the fiddle is what Schiffer refers to as the “salient emitter”, being the



most consequential and important material artefact in the process of solo fiddle playing. (It is important to note that I speak of the fiddle in this chapter inclusive of the bow; that is, all the material parts that make up the fiddle instrument in its ordinary definition.)

In analysing the above scenario, then, we encounter two interactors: the musician and the fiddle. Both contain separate life-histories that conjoin at a specific moment in an analysable unit of activity: the performance of a tune (refer to Schiffer 1999: 23). I refer to this as a “musical event” (see glossary). Both interactors contribute consequentially to the forward motion of this particular activity. Again, Schiffer has noted with respect to conventional communication theories, that they “tend to focus on the sender’s actions and intent, and on how the sender can get the message across to the receiver” (ibid. 62). As such, the fiddle as an artefact is forgotten and subsumed under a human engagement with sound. Instead, Schiffer’s focus on the receiver and her/his response will incorporate the proper consideration of the fiddle in this instance.

In ethnomusicology too, very often the musician is interviewed and thus the sender stage of the musical event is prioritised. Here, the musician’s comments are rarely measured against a proper consideration of the second interactor: the fiddle artefact. The musician’s comments can be summarised as his own explanations of intent. By focussing exclusively on such commentary, the fiddle as a salient artefact is usually ignored, as the musician himself will very often take for granted its peculiar role in the forward motion of the musical event in question. Meyer acknowledged:

The past is [...] replete with documented events, situations, artifacts, and so on.

From these, historians choose to concern themselves with the very few that they believe to be significant (Meyer 1996: 86).

Therefore, it is surprising the lack of consideration given the instrument in instrumental music analysis. For Schiffer, the receiver's response should be prioritised – not to the exclusion of interviews, of course, which can be understood using the same model as before (see above). In this way, proper account of both the musician and the salient artefact is achieved. Clearly, a musician's "intent" can never take into account the entirety of the performance event either.<sup>69</sup>

The sender imparts information by performing in interactions that modify the emitter's properties. These interactions leave behind traces – be they formal properties, location, quantity, or associations – that affect the emitter's subsequent performances (emissions), potentially in many modes. Applying correlons to these emissions,<sup>70</sup> the receiver constructs inference(s) about the sender and sender-emitter interactions, and can also formulate forecasts. On the basis of information obtained from inferences and forecasts, the receiver responds (Schiffer 1999: 67).

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<sup>69</sup> Feld uses similar concepts as "message production" and "message interpretation" (see Feld 1991: 79). Albeit Schiffer takes far more seriously the artefact, and above all, prioritises what would be message interpretation to altogether guide the study of the above scene.

<sup>70</sup> Here is Schiffer's definition of, and reason for coining, the term "correlon": "in communication, a receiver constructs inferences – implicitly or explicitly, consciously or nonconsciously, with or without awareness – from interactor performances using correlate-like relational knowledge. Whereas correlates in archaeology tend to be established generalizations, based on independent research undertaken in experiments, ethnoarchaeology, and cross-cultural studies, the relational knowledge used in everyday communication need not be well founded. To avoid confusion, I apply the term "correlon" to the relational knowledge, or rules, underlying any communication phenomenon" (Schiffer 1999: 55–6).

The general determinants of a receiver's response lie in (1) emitter performances and (2) receiver-specific factors – i.e., tuning (as correlations), and properties and performance characteristics [...] (ibid. 103).

Schiffer defines a “performance characteristic” as “a capability, competence, or skill that could be exercised – i.e.: ‘come into play’ – in a specific performance, and thus is behaviorally relevant in a given interaction” (Schiffer 1999: 17). Given the complexity of the performance characteristics that constitute a musical instrument as an artefact, the defining point of a musical event lies in the response of the musician to both the sender (his own intentions) and sender-emitter (these intentions tempered by the performance characteristics of the fiddle) stages of the activity.

To focus on the sender stage of the musical event is to indulge in the terms of tradition. An intent can be constant (even predictable), and by this measure, permanent. Asking a musician to explain what s/he does implores that musician to reveal her/his intentions. As Bordieu has already noticed, the informant “tends to draw attention to the most remarkable “moves” [...] But the subtlest pitfall doubtless lies in the fact that such descriptions freely draw on the highly ambiguous vocabulary of rules [...] to express a social practice that in fact obeys quite different principles” (Bordieu 1977: 19). Schiffer proposes treating the informant's explanations of intent “as a receiver's response – no different from any other human performance” (Schiffer 1999: 104). If not, then the resulting breakdown of the intentions of the sender can be catalogued without sufficient scrutiny. They then inform and subsequently crystallise “rules” for traditional practice without being properly questioned and analysed in the first place.

This is what has occurred with Michael Coleman. His intentions, though not made known by him, have been assumed by those with the authority to do so (that is, those who administer the terms of tradition: the Establishment).<sup>71</sup> These are then reified via processes of classicism (see above) to become defining of the terms of tradition. However, by focussing on the receiver response, a far less predictable outcome unfolds. Importantly, unlike a sender's intentions, a receiver response cannot be constant and cannot be utterly fixed, which already allows for a transitory reading too. Schiffer's approach thereby enables an avant-gardist analysis by avoiding (perhaps even already negating) the terms of tradition. That is, as Coleman's response to the sender and sender-emitter stages of the musical event necessitates a consideration of the performance characteristics of the fiddle as an artefact, the analysis must confront the fixity and permanence of the terms of tradition that have relied exclusively on Coleman's intentions. To illustrate this, I will present two instances where the performance characteristics of the fiddle more obviously influence the receiver response: the first is the "mistake"; the second is the "idiosyncratic moment".

### 3.22: Coleman and the Mistake.

The great musician must always react well to the inevitable mistake that thwarts all original intent. There are many ways in which to make a musical mistake, but the influence of the instrument's own performance characteristics is what interests this current study. At a most obvious level, if an instrumentalist is lent an alternative

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<sup>71</sup> See introduction.

instrument to her/his own, then the musician's receiver response necessarily adjusts to the perceived limits of the new instrument's distinct performance characteristics. Outside of this, there are many ergonomically defined patterns specific to a music tradition that may at times filter into an instrumentalist's performance at the wrong moment, thus throwing her/him off an intended musical course. Yet despite these scenarios and more, the fiddle's role is easily forgotten in the study of a habitual musical activity.

The musician may not need to take full account of the activity involved, but merely focus on her/his own role(s) or even her/his own intention(s). By contrast, the ethnomusicologist should exercise a sound science by examining (at least) the main roles that make up the musical event itself.<sup>72</sup> Schiffer makes it clear: "Although indigenous knowledge may include correlons for inferring intent, scientific principles for discerning intent are utterly lacking now and may never be available. [...] In the final analysis, what matters most is that a receiver has acquired consequential information from emissions" (Schiffer 1999: 64).<sup>73</sup> The ethnomusicologist's responsibility is therefore more than that of documenter. For this reason, s/he must account for all relevant interactors that have contributed consequentially to the forward motion of an activity. At least, s/he should do this before attempting the tricky task of accounting for intent.

Coleman's own lack of commentary does nothing to prevent indigenous theories that arise and assume his intent. These are often communicated to the ethnomusicologist during fieldwork too. The authority assumed by (or attributed to)

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<sup>72</sup> Refer to the glossary of this thesis for a definition of "Musical event".

<sup>73</sup> Refer to footnote 70 in this chapter for a definition of "correlon".

such informants quickly convinced a discipline primarily built upon etic methodologies that are heavily dependant on emic perspectives (see introduction). In the context of a musical event such as this, where Coleman performs upon the fiddle, the terms of tradition therefore supplant the significance of the musical event itself, discarding for instance the “unintended” mistake.

Here, held within the mistake, a moment of heightened musical tension arises between the interactors who are contributing to the forward motion of the musical event. Remember, within the equation of sender–emitter–receiver, Coleman is both the sender and receiver, while the fiddle is the emitter. In this moment, the instrument as an artefact has asserted its position by severely undoing the intent of the performer. Essentially, the performer’s forecasts have been made erroneous. The receiver response then is to settle the conflict; here, translating to a heightened moment of both consternation and reliance between the instrumentalist and the instrument artefact. The performer is more aware of the role of the artefact at this very moment. Customary unconscious movements – like “when and where to put our fingers down on the fiddle” (Meyer 1996: 5) – are brought to a very conscious domain all of a sudden. The performer’s intentions are reconstituted since he relies more heavily upon the ergonomic potential of the artefact to resolve the impasse.

Coleman did not make a habit out of making mistakes; or at least, out of making many perceptible mistakes. The closest example of what would constitute an undoubted mistake occurs in his performance of “The Monaghan Jig”. This particular jig contains four parts, and during Coleman’s final performance of the third part, he seems go astray. Within the context of this singular musical event, I provide transcriptions of all of the third part performances by Coleman below.

## The Monaghan Jig – performed by Michael Coleman

round 1, part C



round 1.5, part C



round 2, part C





Figure 3.1: Transcription of the third parts of Coleman’s performance of “The Monaghan Jig”.<sup>74</sup>

Coleman actually performs the piece as AABBCDD, CCDD, AABBCDD, AABBCDD. I have therefore numbered the third parts round 1, round 1.5, round 2, and round 3 respectively.<sup>75</sup> This means that there are four instances in all of the repeating third part (or CC section). The notes where this mistake occurs are distinguished by the use of note-heads with an angled line drawn through, as in:



Figure 3.2: Representing “mistake” notes on the score.

Hopefully, the transcription helps to convey the muddled effect on the ear of this passage in particular.

<sup>74</sup> Transcription by the author.

<sup>75</sup> The “round” represents one complete performance of a single tune. As every tune is usually repeated at least once, this term also serves the function of differentiating between each subsequent hearing, i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> round, 2<sup>nd</sup> round, 3<sup>rd</sup> round, etc. In this instance it is written round 1, round 1.5, round 2, round 3 owing to the grammatical restriction of including a 1.5th round!



At round 1, Coleman opens each of the first six bars with some form of cut. Only the third bar gains any extra ornamentation where a bowed triplet is used. This way, Coleman effectively punches in every bar, emphasising the main beat throughout. The final two bars are completely plain, producing a rather inconsequential effect of trickling the part out toward an unspectacular conclusion. The repeat of the part becomes more varied – though basically it continues in much the same manner. What is most interesting is that the trickling effect of the last two bars is maintained despite the bowed triplet which introduces the penultimate bar.

At round 1.5, Coleman makes use of some long and short rolls that vary, once more, the first six bars. The last two bars are maintained as those of round 1, only that the triplet now occurs in the first instance and not during the repeat. What is noticeable is Coleman's consistent emphasis upon the first beat of each bar before the more steady trickling out of the part found in the final two bars. This way, the part continues to pound out the main beat. This effect continues in round 2. Though he continually varies the main beat of every bar with micro-structural embellishments, the second beat of every bar has so far been performed plain and is repeated exactly the same in every instance. Remember, each beat of a bar in a double jig is represented by three quavers, the first beat of a bar beginning on the first quaver respective to the second beat of the bar beginning on the fourth quaver. As such, even where there is melodic variation in the first set of three quavers as found in bars five and thirteen of round 2, the second set of three quavers is never altered either by way of ornamentation or melodic variation.

Round 3 contrasts all other rounds. It begins relatively un-ornamented, which makes for a spectacular musical effect as listeners still expect a higher proportion of

ornamental flourishes during subsequent repeats. The previous version heard in round 2 was a very complex rendering of the traditional melo-rhythmic line through this type of ornamental effect. As a result, the sweet emptiness of round 3 is even more drastically accentuated. However, the unusual plainness in Coleman's melodic line here seems to cause trouble for him by the sixth bar of the part (see bar 197 above).

He holds the first note of the bar as if to produce a crotchet (or perhaps even a dotted-crotchet), which further emphasises his relatively minimalist approach to the melody in this instance. Given that the final two bars of the part have always demonstrated less ornamentation and have been repeated identically to this point, Coleman's new musical approach here threatens to carry forward to these final two bars and indulge in a kind of musical barrenness not usually associated with his performances. However, it seems that the fiddler's habitual performance practices take hold all of a sudden before reaching this point of the part. It would be customary of Coleman to restrict longer note values to the beginning of symmetric phrases only; that is, to the beginning of every four bars, or at most, the beginning of every two bars. As a result, before extended the first quaver of bar 197 to a full crotchet, Coleman reverts back to the original quaver passage characteristic of previous repeats. However, this delay causes an unintended knock-on musical effect later in the line.

Coleman's effort in bar 197 to resume play after the delayed opening quaver on g, causes him to drop only one step down to an f# instead of the expected e. This has a knock-on effect in the second beat of the bar (that is, the second set of three quavers) where a step-by-step descent emerges in contrast to the two-step decent expected (see bar 197). Here we find the first instance of an alteration to the second beat of any bar thus far played. This ergonomic echo continues into the final two bars of the part.

Instead of the steady trickle that has always brought the part to an expected conclusion, a step-by-step dash presents listeners with a most uncharacteristic Michael Coleman. In this instance, his brilliant and confident tone is sullied as he wavers toward the final beat of the part.

In contrast to the earlier repeats, the final beat itself is a dotted crotchet on E, a change from the three-quaver movement A – G – F#. This elongated E pitch comes as in a panic, baring little resemblance to the melodic passages preceding it. Indeed, for a moment it seems as though the peculiar E should conclude the entire performance and in this respect gains a very unusual cadential weight; this, a highly unorthodox place to end with the traditional tune.

Consistent with bar 197, these subsequent closing bars of the part (bars 198–9) provide the only other two examples of melodic variation on the second beat of a bar. There is nothing at all unusual in the final repeat of the part in round 3, it demonstrates the same consistency shared with all other performances of the part in earlier rounds. Coleman therefore does not reference the unusual descent of the final bars of the part directly preceding this repeat, thus further revealing that a mistake had occurred at this point of his performance.

It may of course be argued still that this is not a mistake. However, all musical evidence points to the contrary. Indeed, it is a very interesting mistake that somehow produces a stimulating variation. It has forced Coleman to develop a musical strategy outside of his intended performance, and bring to his own attention certain aspects of his interaction with his instrument that have become mechanical. It is almost as though the instrument as an artefact is vying for the roles it must share with Coleman in the sender–emitter–receiver equation.

Coleman's grip on the musical event has been questioned by the ergonomic facility of the artefact which guides certain finger placements. Yet, he must still rely on this ergonomic facility to recover, eventually, his authority over the musical event. All in all, the potential of the fiddle moves somewhat beyond Coleman, who in turn has to rely on the same artefact's capacity to recompose himself. Interestingly, by wrenching from Coleman his authority over the musical event, the fiddle as an artefact reveals the increasing potential of its capacity; it reveals musical areas within the traditional structure that are left unexplored by Coleman (such as the second beat of the bars, or radical melodic variation). By way of contrast to the moment of consternation found in a musical mistake, similar musical consequences can develop within the fluctuating relationship between the same two interactors by way of co-operation. Here, an increase in potential (that progresses the capacity of the artefact) is also explored. It is found in the creation of an idiosyncratic moment, which is discussed below.

### 3.23: Coleman and the Idiosyncratic Moment.

To continue relying on Schiffer's theories and very helpful terminology, "tuning" is what basically steadies a tradition into an identifiable communal setting. "An appropriately tuned receiver is someone who possesses the correlons needed for constructing inferences/forecasts from, and responding skilfully to, emissions in a specific communication process" (Schiffer 1999: 74). Schiffer uses the term "tuning" in favour of "enculturation" or "socialisation", for example, for a number of reasons: Tuning includes "biological, even genetic components" (ibid. 75); tuning can also

account for “the sharing of correlons” across different social units and thus avoid the use of “ad hoc devices such as ‘subculture’” (ibid.); and most importantly for my own study, tuning applies to the “scale of the individual” as it does to the “widespread patterns”, and so can account for the “uncommon correlons” that generate “idiosyncratic responses” outside of cultural norms (ibid. 76).

In the following analysis, idiosyncratic responses will be analysed in the playing of Coleman. This is obviously at odds with his more customary association with classicism and the terms of tradition. Ethnomusicologist, Jeff Pressing, explains:

One prominent theory of musical emotion [...] is based on the creation of expectation. Such expectations can only be created in listeners if they are engaged by the music and if they understand enough the musical language (implicitly) to perceive expectancy manipulations (Pressing 1998: 57).

The receiver in my scenario above is the performer himself, whose inferences and forecasts equally set up expectations. However, as already seen, these expectations can on occasion become challenged by the unexpected: the performance characteristics of the artefact contributing to a heightened emotional response. This is not only the case during mistakes (themselves truly idiosyncratic), but a similar emotional effect can be produced more deliberately through the manipulation of sonic idiosyncrasies discovered within the capacity of the musical instrument as an artefact.

True to Coleman’s musical aesthetic, any idiosyncrasies are usually held at the micro-structural level. However, before discussing this, it is important to note similar instances of macro-structural idiosyncrasies elsewhere in Coleman’s recorded output. In the previous analysis, it is obvious that Coleman too played with macrostructure to

some extent, even though maintaining a highly symmetrical perspective. His “Monaghan Jig” is performed as AABBCDD, CCDD, AABBCDD, AABBCDD. This, of course, already goes unnoticed owing to the veil of classicism that surrounds his performance style. Any of the easily available transcriptions of Coleman’s performance of this jig provide one round only, thus covering AABBCDD.<sup>76</sup> Coleman, even if only very rarely, also manipulated the predictability of the macrostructure within the parts of the overall tune. One good example is found in his performance of “The Sligo Maid Reel”. A transcription of the performances by Coleman of each of the first parts of the tune are provided below:

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<sup>76</sup> In chapter five, I discuss a traditional versus an avant-garde perception of the round.

## The Sligo Maid – performed by Michael Coleman

### round 1, part A



### round 2, part A



### round 3, part A



Figure 3.3: Transcription of the first parts of Coleman's performance of "The Sligo Maid".<sup>77</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Transcription by the author.

In this tune, the first four bars are echoed by the next four to create a full hearing of the first part. The reel could almost progress to the second part already owing to this very repetitive formula. However, Coleman repeats the part again at every round. Yet, during his performance of bars 9 –12 of the first round, his first four phrases of the part become quite confusing. Bar 11 holds the B roll that normally signifies the end of the part. The dominating B note here is usually a cadential trick to help end the second four bars of the part (something which is employed by most traditional performers even today). By positioning this cadential figure at the end of the first four-bar phrase of the part, Coleman plays with the expectation of the arrival of the second part. During this recording, Coleman is accompanied by a piano, as was customary. The chord changes here seems to suggest that Coleman's accompanist was also ready for the transition to the second part. It is of little worth to consider this episode with any further scrutiny, however, as the astuteness of many of Coleman's accompanists was unreliable (see Dillane 2000).

Coleman subsequently uses the heavy B note in the more orthodox manner during the second round, while leaving it out entirely for the third and final round. Coleman, though showing a high level of structural consistency throughout his performance repertoire, still demonstrates an appetite for moving structures similar to – though not as extreme as – those found in Cronin's playing. Outside of the mistake, occasionally Coleman's idiosyncratic moments are also encouraged by the performance characteristics of the musical artefact itself. These, however, just as found with regard to Coleman's slight alterations of macrostructure demonstrated above, are also hidden by the under-whelming mechanisms of the classicism project.



Editorial representations of Coleman’s intent (in the vein of the classicism project outlined at the beginning of this chapter) are highlighted in the “improvement” on the O’Neill manuscripts as asserted by music specialist (and now Rabbi) Miles Krassen. Essentially, Krassen edited all the printed tunes to conform to Coleman’s renderings that “would in most cases be at least acceptable to [him]” (Krassen 1976: 13). What Krassen obviously disregards is whether these “improvements” would be acceptable to the second interactor: that is, acceptable to the performance characteristics and potential capacity of the fiddle. Krassen’s reliance on the contemporary terms of tradition is obvious when examining his “improvement” of Banish Misfortune – a tune never recorded by Coleman.



Figure 3.4: “Banish Misfortune” in Krassen, 1976.

In highlighting O’Neill’s flaws, Krassen discovers the following:

in many tunes an occasional note that could not have been written by anyone as familiar with the music as Francis O’Neill. In addition, the books suffer from the fact that the transcribers had no mechanical means, such as the modern tape recorder, for preserving the performances (Krassen 1976: 11).

Krassen's last claim here is very strange, especially given that O'Neill's gift of cylinder recordings to Henebry has long been known. What Krassen could not have known is that O'Neill preserved Cronin's performance of "Banish Misfortune" on cylinder also. Measuring both Cronin's performance with Krassen's rectified transcription, the newly "improved" written representation of the jig is taken further away from Cronin's actual performance. Krassen's place in the classicism project insures that this exciting performance is made ever more mechanical and predictable, ordered and pure, mundane and redundant. However, Krassen's claim to antiquity via a reliance on Coleman is obviously ridiculed in this instance at least by discoveries made in chapter two of this thesis.

In like manner, Krassen "improves" the printed representation of all the pieces performed by Coleman that are included in O'Neill's manuscripts, adjusting the printed settings of these to better reflect Coleman's recorded performances. What is more, Krassen disregards the famous fiddler's occasional idiosyncrasies even at a micro-structural level. This makes Coleman's idiosyncratic moments all the more significant, and their being filed all the more lurid. During his 1927 performance of a popular reel, "Lord McDonald's", Coleman employs an exaggerated sliding technique that engulfs the third part of the tune. This does not appear in such a manner anywhere else in his recorded repertoire. A transcription of the relevant parts of this tune are appended below, showing the complete first round performance and each performance of the third part thereafter (highlighted in yellow). Despite his tendency toward a varied ornamental approach during repeats (see above), Coleman almost exasperates the listener here with the incessant recurrence of this penetrating peculiar slide.

## Lord McDonald's – performed by Michael Coleman

The image displays a musical score for the tune "Lord McDonald's" by Michael Coleman. The score is written in treble clef, key of D major (indicated by two sharps), and 4/4 time. It consists of 11 staves of music. The first staff begins with a half rest followed by a dotted half note, then continues with a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The subsequent staves contain more complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs. Some staves are highlighted in yellow, specifically staves 17-20, 21-24, 49-52, 53-56, 113-116, and 117-120. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. The piece concludes with a double bar line on the final staff.

Figure 3.5: Transcription of Coleman's first round performance of "Lord McDonald's" plus subsequent third part repeats.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Transcription by the author.

The filing of the slide is easily observed through an examination of the tune's various published "transcriptions" which deny any indication of the technique whatever. One, by David Lyth, in the CCÉ-published *Bowing Styles in Irish Fiddle Playing, Volume 1* may avoid criticism as it deliberately focuses on the musician's bowing.<sup>79</sup> That being said, the deliberate push of the bow in successfully rendering the slide could increase its importance in Lyth's transcription also. In addition, it does reaffirm CCÉ's continued commitment to Coleman and prudent fostering of the apparent "Coleman way" – itself presented through filing.



Figure 3.6: Transcription of Coleman's "Lord McDonald's" in Lyth, 1981.

<sup>79</sup> That this is basically bowing transcriptions of Coleman (predominantly, and Killoran and Morrison less so) indicates that these actually define and constitute the Bowing Styles in Irish Fiddle Playing – at least in the first instance; Lyth subsequently published the bowing of Munster fiddlers also (see bibliography).

The next instance is a transcription by Miles Krassen in his self-confessed “corrected”, “update[d] and improve[d]” revision of the original *O’Neill’s Music of Ireland* that has “[w]herever possible [...] chosen the Coleman setting” (Krassen 1976: 11). Though Krassen laments of the original and famed Capt. Francis O’Neill publications their inaccuracies in correctly documenting ornamentation, Krassen himself fails to include any indication of Coleman’s incessant sliding during “Lord McDonald’s”.



Figure 3.7: Coleman’s “Lord McDonald’s” in Krassen, 1976.

Of course Krassen has attempted to provide one possible, or many concurrent, settings of Coleman’s so-called Sligo-style performances. But these slides recur in every round of Coleman’s rendition, and are thus most noted for their absence on Krassen’s page. His introduction to the “corrected” tune collections includes a section titled, “Ornamentation in Irish Fiddle Music”. Krassen neither takes care to mention the slide ornament here (whether the traditional type or the Coleman idiosyncratic type). Its exclusive use in “Lord McDonald’s”, though of course always heard, demands it to be filed from the consciousness of an authoritative representation of the

musical past that relies on an aesthetic based on classicism; hungry, as it is, for a consistently tangible (and thus controllable) traditional performance practice.

The exaggerated peculiarities of the slide are indeed exclusive to the tradition's only bowed chordophone and hint at a reliance on the instrument's unfettered capacity – Ó Canainn's warnings already not being heeded (see above). The Coleman files themselves thus ensure the subsumption into the terms of tradition of his idiosyncrasies borne of a deviant instrument. By basing the classicism project on the credibility of a fiddle player, the instrument is brought intimately closer to the ideal of a "classic" music tradition befitting and establishing the permanency of the terms of tradition.

## **Conclusion**

Classicism is built exclusively upon intent, and herein lies its irrational nature in the context of non-literate traditional music performance practices. Classicism should be interesting to ethnomusicology not because it represents "the precise nature of music" as Henry's study would have it, but because it establishes the terms of tradition. It has been shown that classicism cannot really be defining of the Irish musical past and so any study that uses its "bounds" – as Ó Canainn puts it – as its parameters of inquiry is essentially a flawed one. Proper consideration of the filed aspects in classicism, made transparent through the materiality of the fiddle for instance, can thus aid in the rigour of music scholarship.

Through a consideration of the fiddle as an artefact, the potential of a musical event from the musical past is compounded by the capacity of the instrument that

often lies outside of the intentions of the instrumentalist. The performing musician's intentions may be viewed as standardised, and even the instrument s/he uses may be viewed as standardised; but the interaction between instrumentalist and instrument cannot be said to be standardised – especially within a music tradition that is defined primarily by a process of recomposition built exclusively upon performance.

Michael Coleman was performing at the limits of his own capacity. This adds tremendous emotion to his music. He on occasion may flounder on the edge of a make-or-break passage, almost losing his grip. The effect is one of intensity and the audience shares in this intensity. The argument then that one should never move beyond Coleman's skill is dubious. In fact, to gain the same level of expressive worth as a solo performer as Coleman achieved, one has to be always on that edge of musical skill versus musical disaster. If this requires more skill than Coleman (hopefully it does) then to suppress this is counterproductive to the attempted emulation of Coleman's performances.

Coleman exuded virtuosity, a virtuosity most revealing at heightened moments of interaction between instrumentalist and instrument. This ought to relate directly to the capacity of Coleman as a fiddler and the capacity of the Irish fiddle as a primary musical artefact. However, as classicism de-capacitates the fiddle, Coleman's position as an ideal fiddler is secured; without the possibility of further exploring the instrument's capacity, that heightened interaction between fiddler and fiddle can never be equalled nor bettered. In this instance, however, a central compositional platform in non-literate music-making has been severed. Classicism thus entrusts musical creativity to the methodical drudgery of the terms of tradition.

## **Chapter 4: John Doherty: Fracturing Structures**

### **4.1: Ergonomic Steps**

Owing to the fiddle's particular musical potential found naturally within its material capacity, together with its central place within Irish traditional music generally, perhaps it is an especially intuitive vehicle for an avant-garde of Irish traditional music? The fiddle as an artefact therefore requires further examination in this thesis. As Schiffer observes: "The hard evidence for fashioning inferences consists of the present-day performances of artifacts and other interactions, for these are the remnants of past behavioral systems" (Schiffer 1999: 52). Schiffer, of course, cautions that relational knowledge which guides inferences concerning specific artefacts can of course be at odds during different moments in time. With this in mind, an informed examination of such artefacts in the present can very often relay valuable information concerning past interactions with the same artefact. In this chapter, I will employ emic knowledge to provide a musical examination of the interaction between musician and artefact at the dawn of the classicism project (that is, beginning during the 1950s). In this matter, I rely upon a theory of ergonomics.

Ergonomics – as David J. Osborne tidily summed up: "from the Greek: *ergon* = work; *nomos* = natural laws" (Osborne 1995: 5) – usually concerns the science of fitting machine with man. The measurement for this is basically comfort or ease of use; considering the productivity (and safety) of humans at work with machines. Theoretically, therefore, machines are designed to fit best with a person's general





Plate 5.1: John Doherty (Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí 2009).

working physique. However, an “opposing philosophy that is often espoused with equal strength [...] argues that people are more adaptable than their machines and environments, that they can learn to interact with their situations more easily – and often more cheaply – and so it is easier to make people ‘fit’ in with their surroundings than the reverse” (Osborne 1995: 2). Either way around, the most likely outcome of the human interaction with machines (or artefacts generally) would mean a mixture of both processes, involving design and adaptation. The basic principle remains: the easier it is for a successful interaction to take place (whether through clever machine design or human adaptive capabilities or both) the greater the level of productivity. The basis of this interaction is that both human and artefact follow (thus become influenced by) the procedural dimensions of each other.

Sociologist and ethnomethodologist, David Sudnow, explained this interaction in the context of performing instrumental music. According to Sudnow:

For there is no melody, there is melodying. And melodying practices are handful practices as soundfully aimed articualional reaching (Sudnow 1993: 146).

Of course, Rice recognised similar procedures during fieldwork in Bulgaria when learning the *gaida* bagpipe. As he stated: “Perhaps the most profound discovery was that I learned to fuse my concepts of melody and ornamentation into a single concept expressed most vividly in the hands, not in musical notation – precisely the kind of integration I imagine young Bulgarian boys achieved when they learned this tradition” (Rice 1994: 77). In this matter, the violin or fiddle is already recognised as a particularly adaptable instrument. Bohlman notes:

Wide distribution notwithstanding, the fiddle is one of the most malleable of all instruments in ethnic music. Not only does it lend itself to membership in broadly different ensembles, but it can adopt the sound of just about any ensemble, whether the small group playing in a Lebanese club in Montreal or the fiddle-and-guitar duo accompanying folk dance in rural New Mexico. We might wonder whether this extreme adaptability is a possible explanation for the currency of the term “fiddle”, as if to distinguish its many ethnic varieties from the stalwart violin of Western art music. Its name and its function underscore its familiarity; the fiddle is never a foreigner in ethnic musical styles (Bohlman 1992: 298).

The fiddle becomes, as such, a very personal musical artefact, always a friend and never a stranger. This is not to say that the fiddle neither endures some fumbling when first introduced to a new musical context where native musicians are initially at the “coping” stage of instrumental proficiency (see introduction). Even the ergonomic grappling found in the early stages of the violin’s development in the Western art tradition demonstrates this; the placement of the instrument on the human body began for many at the chest, then rising to the shoulder before becoming fixed under the chin. The same is true with the grip of the bow. In the past, musicians often held the bow with the thumb below the horse hair benefiting shorter strokes as opposed to below the stick like in modern practice (see Boyden 1989: 40).

Interestingly, there is not much evidence of the fiddle being held at the chest in the Irish tradition, a position favoured by many folk dance fiddlers outside of Ireland even today (see Boyden 1989: 39). This calls into question the representation of the Irish fiddler as primarily associated with dance. Rather, the instrument placed at the chest is an ergonomically uncomfortable position for undertaking more challenging performance practices such as those heard from Edward Cronin. As O’Neill recounts,

with a reference to a remark by the fiddle player Mrs. Bridget Kenny: “‘I’m entirely self-taught, and proud of it,’ is the way she put it when asked how she came to have such wonderful control of her instrument” (O’Neill 1987/1913: 389). The kind of human handling enjoyed by the fiddle in Ireland represents a serious movement toward an adept musically productive interaction between human and artefact.

A consideration of ergonomics is central to the study of Irish traditional fiddle playing. Again, for the purposes of this thesis, my focus on ergonomics as it relates to Irish fiddle playing will be largely restricted to the area of primary contact between instrument and instrumentalist during performance. That is, a particular focus on the hand as it balances musical desire with practical accomplishment. There is not space here for a general definition of ergonomics in a musical context which would consider a larger scale the physiological interaction with a primary musical artefact that influences musical output; that is, by way of genre-related habitual anatomical patterning together with individual limitation and expansion of artifactual potential.

Most ethnomusicological studies of Irish music ignore ergonomics in the same way that they ignore musical artefacts. For example, Cowdery explores the similarities in melodic contour between distinct melodies taken from different instrumental and vocal performances. However, for his transcriptions he freely transposes some of these melodic lines so that they all share the same key. This may allow for a clearer analysis regarding the convergence and divergence of these distinct melodies once displayed on a score. However, a particular melodic contour performed on the fiddle, for instance, has a completely different musical identity at different positions on the instrument. This is on account of the ergonomic interaction between fiddler and fiddle.

As such, the transpositions that Cowdery makes are out of place in instrumental analysis. Owing to the distinct musical sounds at different locations of the instrument, and to the distinct relational processes going from one pitch location to another, transposition upsets the integrity of the performance in relation to musical sound (what is actually heard) even while maintaining the integrity of the performance in relation to musical contour (what can only be seen). Indeed, a fiddle player who transposes a tune can very much alter its identity, oftentimes refreshing the life of the traditional tune by attracting new attention to old contours; by creating new ergonomic settings, the “sound” of the tune is altered significantly. By contrast, if the same fiddle player achieves this new register for the same melody by simply retuning his instrument and thus maintaining the original finger placements, then it is merely the tone (either deeper or brighter) that has changed, not the sound or the musical identity of the tune itself.

Specific finger placements and bowing patterns are audibly locational for the traditional performer and listener alike. Accordingly, an Irish fiddler will often transpose a tune a fifth above or below the customary setting to maintain the exact same fingering and bowing that identify the original melody. For the fiddle player, the perfect fifth is her/his “ergonomic octave”. Even Henebry long ago suggested that the fiddle used the fifth as a more natural musical unit in contrast to the pipes and the harp, instruments where the octave is the more convenient musical unit (see Henebry 1903: 19; 28). This is of course based on the ergonomic mould of each instrument. D is always the bottom note on a piper’s chanter even where it may be pitched B-flat (as many so-called “flat-sets” are). When written in any form of local notation, this B-flat will still be written as D by the native practitioner, thus it is understood ergonomically

upon the chanter as opposed to pitch-like upon the score. In sum, certainly in traditional music, ergonomics define melody far greater than melodic contours do.

Celebrated Irish music specialist, Prof. Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, also dismissed the consideration of melodic contours in the study of Irish music. He demonstrates the uncanny resemblance between two traditional reels – “My Love is in America” and “The Dunmore Lassies” – using contour analysis. Ó Súilleabháin then points to the fact that traditional performers fail to register this resemblance; both tunes remaining distinct in the minds of practising musicians. Ó Súilleabháin’s alternative methodology using “set accented tones” provides a better point of comparison (see chapter five).

Though Ó Súilleabháin does not place his findings on an ergonomic platform, his set accented tones are at least ergonomically bound to the actual “sound” of melody. The fact that both tunes highlighted by Ó Súilleabháin generally run parallel at one tone apart would seem to indicate the same tune transposed. However, during performance each reel accentuates alternative aspects of the same contour. This is as a result of the differential ergonomic weight of the interaction between instrumentalist and instrument. There is no effort made by the traditional performer to keep the original sound of the original melodic contour once transposed, rather s/he deliberately moulds a new sound out of the new ergonomic interaction with her/his instrument. The issue of ergonomics would seem to arise in the literate Western art tradition more inside of what is termed “experimental” music. Here, the “performer” has all of a sudden increased his creative role. Nyman, has stressed the consequence of this transformation for the Western art music performer.

The *head* has always been the guiding principle of Western music, and experimental music has successfully taught performers to remember with their hands, to produce and experience sounds physiologically (Nyman 1999: 14)

This is why a methodology that is cognisant of the ergonomic interplay between instrumentalist and instrument is vital to a successful analysis of traditional music. Accordingly, I will apply these analytical techniques during my discussion below.

#### 4.11: Fiddle Sound Structures.

As demonstrated previously, the fiddle is at once a symbol of traditional conformity while at the same time it is an icon of individual expression. Indeed the capacity of the fiddle as a primary musical artefact is cause for concern for those reliant on the encompassing terms of tradition (see chapter three). O'Neill observed that although "seemingly simple and uniform in construction, fiddles possess marked individuality" (O'Neill 1987/1913: 362). It is this individuality that allows for the production of a plethora of distinctive sounds within a traditional milieu. Owing to its place within classicism and its potential outside of it, for many commentators the Irish fiddle has occupied a rather confusing position, especially during what Hammy Hamilton refers to as the "post-revival years" (that is, post 1950s) of Irish traditional music (see Hamilton 1999: 82–87).

This chapter considers an Irish context where instrumental virtuosity was paramount during this time, providing a musical aesthetic that was guided by the ergonomic interaction between fiddler and fiddle rather than by classicism. John Doherty (1895–1980) and his contemporaries of the Donegal fiddling tradition

demonstrate a musical individualism at odds with the national objectives of the classicism project. Here, I present a considered look at Doherty's sound aesthetics before providing a detailed analysis of Donegal fiddle music at both a micro- and a macro-structural level, revealing an exciting contestation of an established canon. In chapter three I developed the notion of classicism and how it serves to incapacitate (even de-capacitate) the fiddle in Irish traditional music. I then explored the notion of the fiddle as an artefact to better establish its role in the musical event. I will now develop further on the interaction between the fiddler and the fiddle (as an artefact) where the ergonomic co-operation between both allows for greater potential in relation to an avant-garde approach to traditional practice.

To begin with, the Donegal fiddling community showed an enthusiastic interest in the varieties of timbral manipulations available to them on the fiddle, most obviously in programmatic pieces. John Doherty's performance of "*Tuaim na Farraige*" (English, "The Swell of the Sea"), which was composed by Anthony Helferty, imitates the sound of waves lapping on the shore. Here, the effort in developing the idea of the waves means that the steady tempo of the tune is interrupted. Doherty's brother, Mickey, also presents a programmatic interpretation of "The Hounds after the Hare", where every sound of the hunt is mimicked. The manipulation of tone in the fiddle is a very natural device for the instrument as the musician is by necessity the architect of the sound production in every detail. To be "guided by one's instrument" again requires that the interaction between fiddler and fiddle amplifies the artefact's creative potential too, in ways that are instinctive to its construct (see chapter three; Ó Canainn 1993: 2).



This capacity for sonic experimentation allows the Donegal fiddlers to incorporate influences from both the *uilleann* and Highland bagpipe traditions. Here, droning techniques that utilise alternative tunings, combine with ornamental figures (such as the “*cran*”) that are more familiar to piping. There is also evidence that these fiddlers were influenced by the old harping tradition. John Doherty attributed his use of complicated chordal plucking techniques juxtaposed with regular fiddle bowings to this source (see Mac Aoidh 1994a: 39). Here the fiddle is brought outside of its own particular identity to mimic other instruments, and yet this is in itself unique to its design. The Donegal fiddler, Neilidh Boyle, spoke almost arrogantly about the fiddle. He presented it as the “perfect instrument”, because it is able to mimic other musical instruments.<sup>80</sup>

The instrument itself was often adjusted in Donegal, whereby material additions were employed to alter the timbral quality of the instrument. For instance, teaspoons would be placed on the f-holes of the fiddle and rattle as the musician played. Neilidh Boyle’s complex arrangement of three cloths pegs on his bridge during certain slow-air performances exemplifies such extremes of timbral manipulation (see Mac Aoidh 1994b). Here, rather than a more conventional mute for the bridge, a very precise muted tone was sought. Many of the Donegal fiddlers doubled as whitesmiths and crafted metal fiddles (particularly tin fiddles) with distinctive muted tones. Their familiarity with its construction and sound architecture therefore was at a level beyond the crude examples of box fiddles reported throughout the rest of the country

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<sup>80</sup> See MacAoidh 1994a for bibliographical information on some of the most important Donegal fiddlers. Neilidh Boyle was a contemporary of Doherty who embarked on a professional music career. Unlike Doherty, he was not an itinerant musician.

and farther afield. Plate 4.2 below shows the craftsmanship that went into the making of these instruments:







Plate 4.2: Example of a Donegal Tin Fiddle.<sup>81</sup>

The above example demonstrates the considerable care in the design of the tin fiddle, with the inclusion of important structural features drawn from the original wooden instrument. This ensured a good quality sound.<sup>82</sup> It is important to note here the peculiarities of the Irish fiddle when compared with the Italian violin.<sup>83</sup> Many researchers echo Hast and Scott's following assertion: "The contemporary Irish fiddle is identical to the standard European violin" (Hast and Scott 2004: 76). Admittedly, the differences are subtle, yet they are ergonomically significant. In Ireland, the flatter

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<sup>81</sup> Photographed by the author. This presents a series of photos of a surviving metal fiddle in the possession of Paula McNelis, Ardara (Donegal). The maker is unknown, though there is general agreement that it is either the work of one of the Doherty brothers, or indeed one of their relations, the McConnells.

<sup>82</sup> When I performed on this particular tin fiddle, I experienced first-hand its impressive response and extraordinarily sweet tone.

<sup>83</sup> The differences between the Irish fiddle and the violin have often been discussed in Irish music literature as they relate to performance practice, stylisation, and overall sound output (see Carson 1986). However, for similar discussions on the physical differences between both fiddle and violin see Burman-Hall 1984. In this publication, a more detailed examination of the same issue as it relates to the American fiddling tradition is given.

bridge with the strings much closer to the fingerboard greatly enhances a traditional musician's ability to perform across a pitch range limited to first position – and at the rapid tempos demanded by the genre (especially in Donegal). The ignorance of many fiddlers today of these subtle adjustments to their instrument places them at a considerable disadvantage. As craftsmen, the fiddlers of Donegal were in a privileged position to tweak the fiddle so as to further enrich its musical possibilities.

Indeed the range of tune-types found in the repertoire of Donegal fiddlers is seldom reciprocated elsewhere in the genre; a proficiency that owes much to an acceptance of sounds emanating from places outside of the country. Influences from the Western art tradition were adopted and transformed freely in Donegal, for instance. In particular, Donegal kept close links with Scotland, both culturally and musically.<sup>84</sup> Both music genres were mutually accessible. The “Scotch-snap” style of bowing was implemented by Donegal fiddlers, though somewhat softened during the process of transmission. In addition, the connection facilitated the transference of repertoire exclusive now to the Donegal tradition within an Irish context (e.g. the “highland” and “strathspey”). John Doherty summed up this emphatic alertness to all sounds and influences emanating from the musician's environment.

The old musicians in them days, they would take music from anything. They would take music from the sound of the sea, or they would go alongside of the river at the time of the flood and they would take music from that. They would take music from the chase of the hound and the hare. They would take music from several things (cited in Feldman 1985: 50).

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<sup>84</sup> See O'Dowd, 1995 for further information regarding the significantly large population of Donegal migratory workers, as well as the tradition of hiring fairs throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

#### 4.12: Fiddle Microstructures.

It has often been noted that the Donegal fiddlers used very little left-hand finger ornamentation. Though this is somewhat inaccurate to begin with, there are examples of particularly demanding tunes where such ornamentation was unnecessary (or impossible) in many cases. Often the melodic design provided quite enough interest to impress listeners, boasting a wide register that demanded a lot of crossings from string to string. The Donegal tradition has often been noted for the speed and dexterity of its music also. This is made possible through the redesign (or adaptation) of a tune's melody, where notable Donegal fiddlers relied on an ergonomic interaction with their instrument. A transcription of John Doherty's performance of the reel "The Boyne Hunt" may help demonstrate this phenomenon, noted also for its speed:

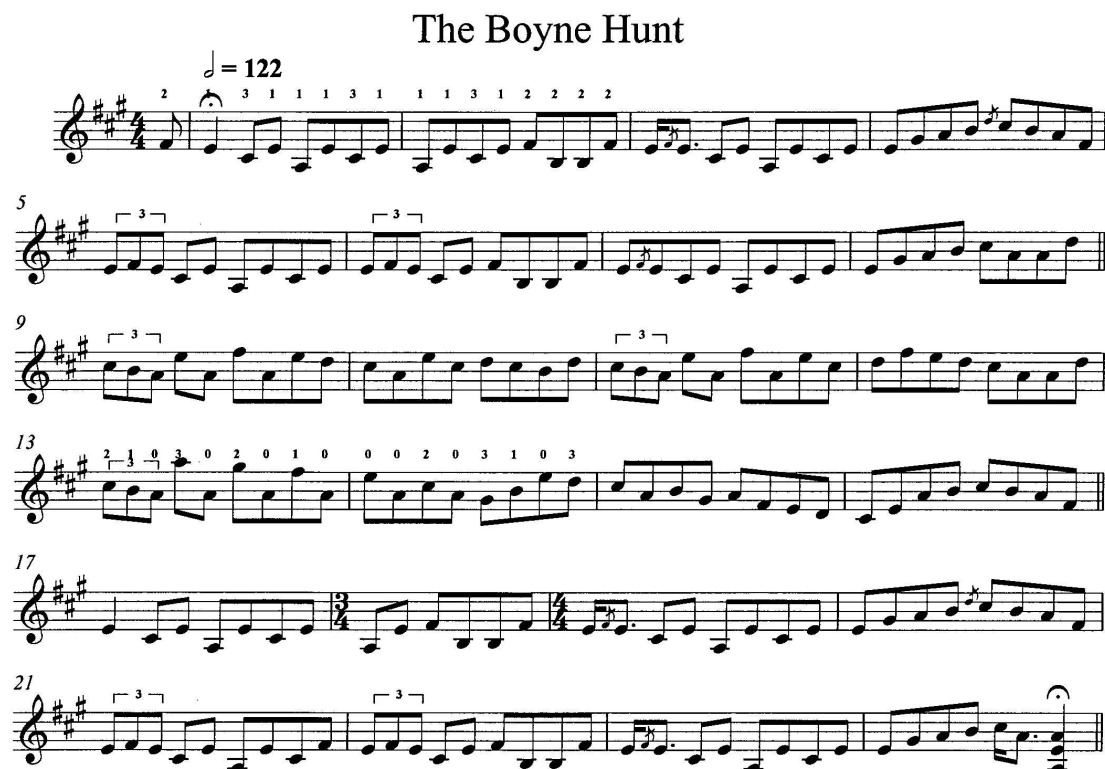


Figure 4.1: John Doherty's performance of "The Boyne Hunt".<sup>85</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Transcription by the author.

The finger patterns involved in the performance of this tune, while they often require a certain dexterity, more often follow routes that lie comfortably within reach. The opening passage involves an interchange between the first and third fingers (bars 1–2). This can be observed in my transcription by the numbers above the notes indicating the relevant finger placement. The necessary crossing of the strings in the repetitive pattern of these bars is dynamically suited to an aggressive fast-moving bow. In his performance, Doherty lets his bow bounce across the two strings thus further impressing listeners. He also allows a rather lazy crossing of the strings exposing the concordant sound of the minor-third and perfect-fifth. Doherty of course incorporates cuts and triplets too, lending an extra element of virtuosity to his rendition. Still, the bow does most of the work. The exchange between the first finger (which holds its position on both strings at once) and the third finger is deceptively infrequent. Further, during the latter half of the second bar the second finger likewise rests on both strings at once.

A similar exchange between the open string and the second finger may also be observed as an ergonomically simple manoeuvre on the fiddle. This is briefly illustrated during the opening of bars 10 and 14 above. Also of note is the descending scale from the third-finger to the open string on the 1st string with the 2nd string consistently intervening (see bars 13–14). Again, this is a feature relatively easily achieved on the instrument. Such leaps can be rendered comfortably on few other instruments. It delights listeners when heard on the fiddle, thus serving a purpose similar to that of more conventional traditional ornamentation. In this respect, the fiddle highlights the tune's motives in ways only made possible by its very design.

What becomes noticeable is Doherty's reliance upon, or co-operation with his instrument in producing stimulating effects on the ear.

This performance also demonstrates the extremely wide register quite common among fiddle-tunes in Donegal, encompassing two octaves and covering all four strings. The melody follows the more accessible pathways for the fingers, strategically positioned to facilitate also such speedy excursions within a relatively short time-span. "The Boyne Hunt" can be heard in alternative tones or "keys" and normally restricted to a more confined register when performed on other instruments. Michael Coleman also performed this tune in what can be regarded as D major, where the bottom note reaches the open 3rd string or "D-string" (thus denying the two-octave register). This contrasts with the low A, note which Doherty maintains from the original Scottish source in Perthshire (dating back to late eighteenth century). The latter version is therefore meant exclusively for the fiddle, wherein the instrument lends a defining touch.

The solitude of the soloist may have encouraged this manipulation of a wide register among Donegal players, helping to maintain a more impressive texture capable of filling out the sonic spectrum. To note the general absence of wide registers in the Donegal *sean-nós* (or old-style solo song) tradition would imply the development of an exclusive instrumental tradition that explores the ergonomic potential of the fiddle.<sup>86</sup> The music is undoubtedly that of the Irish tradition, though ultimately the instrument informs the tradition just as the tradition informs this particular refined use of the instrument.

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<sup>86</sup> For instance, the Munster song tradition throughout the southern counties of Ireland has a comparatively wide register.

What emerges therefore is a fiddle music developing from the ergonomic features of the instrument's own construct. This of course contrasts the aesthetic values of classicism which began to take hold of the fiddle music of Ireland at this time. It should be pointed out that Neillídh Boyle – in his characteristic exuberance – demanded an appreciation for the singing tradition by instrumentalists, and strove especially to invoke the complexity of the human voice during the performance of slow airs.<sup>87</sup> However, the aesthetic of the voice did not mean a denial of his own interaction with his instrument. Boyle exploited the fiddle's register and other stylistic nuances that lie beyond a vocal conception.

Perhaps more significant, much of the Donegal repertoire conflicts with the associated dance tradition also. It may be observed that during Doherty's return to the first part of "The Boyne Hunt" the usual eight bars have been disrupted by the skipping of a beat (here notated as bar 18). This, of course, is problematic for a regular dancer. Instead of concluding that Doherty has made an error here, it should be considered that it really would not matter whether he conforms consistently to the regular eight-bar beats or not when performing exclusively for listeners.<sup>88</sup> The following sections of this chapter explore further idiosyncrasies through an asymmetric addition of beats. First, however, it is useful here to point out similar disruptions to the regular dance beat within the frame of the eight-bar repeats. A wonderful example is found in Con Cassidy's performance of the jig "The Frost is All Over":

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<sup>87</sup> See Ó Laoire, 1995 for a comprehensive article on the Donegal *sean nós* tradition.

<sup>88</sup> See Nic Suibhne, 1995 concerning the definite split between music for dance and music for listening that existed in Donegal among musicians during this time.



## The Frost is All Over



Figure 4.2: Transcription of Con Cassidy's performance of "The Frost is All Over" covering bars 1–8; 9–10; 13–14; 33–34.<sup>89</sup>

As outlined before, the usual dance beat in an Irish jig emphasises the first beat of every collection of three quavers; the one at the beginning of each bar being most pronounced. However, in the opening two bars here, the melodic progression subverts the usual rhythmic design. The final quaver of bar 1 (the note B) is accented because of its melodic position in relation to its decent from d. It is further emphasised by the following ascent to the d note at the beginning of the next bar (bar 2). This second d serves more as a passing note even though it lies at what traditionally is the most accented beat of the bar. It is followed by an even greater decent to the note A and, together with the previous melodic drop, implies a short sequence (bracketed in the transcription above). This results in what could be perceived as a change in metre away from the compound metre of the double-jig. The e note that immediately precedes this sequence can also claim a role in the destruction of the regular jig metre despite its own emphasis lying firmly within the expected rhythm of 6/8 metre. It is,

<sup>89</sup> Transcription by the author.

however, the strength of the B and A notes that define the destruction of the regular beat, the e somehow lending support in retrospect.

Of course, the performance on the fiddle by Cassidy further accentuates the ambivalence regarding traditional bar-lines; that is, the regular conception of a jig metre that would normally serve to instruct dancers. Ergonomically, the first-finger note, B, and the open-string, A, are much stronger than the relatively duller stopping by the third-finger on the d; this is especially so due to the inherent descending snapping motion involved in this case. The musician, of course, can opt to alter this sonic impression with some effort of the bow. However, Cassidy chooses not to do this, preferring instead to indulge in the more natural dynamic of his instrument, again highlighting the co-operation between fiddle and fiddler.

The result can prove challenging not only to the foot, but also to the ear that is accustomed to a more regular beat. Yet Cassidy demonstrates complete comfort in executing such rhythmic anomalies. Included in this transcription above is the two-bar passage in question as it appears throughout various repetitions of the part. These illustrate the various approaches made by Cassidy when leading into the specific passage of “The Frost is all Over” highlighted here.

The initial appearance of the passage is quite similar to the third repetition of it (beginning bars 1 and 9 respectively). However, the upbeat preceding both of these is still different: one, a rapid ascending scale; the other, a more open-sounding quaver. The second and fourth repeats of the passage are again quite similar to each other (beginning bars 5 and 13 respectively), though Cassidy pauses a fraction longer on the initial d of bar 5. However, they are very different from bars 1 and 9. In this respect, bars 5 and 13 begin with a c# instead of the expected d. This d note appears instead as

the second quaver in bars 5 and 13, giving it a rather delayed effect. It never fully loses all of its weight and thus antagonises the bar-lines even further. The normally rigorously imposed bar-lines seem malleable to the touch of Cassidy's individualised interpretation. All the while, this is very much connected with the capacity of the instrument itself, producing an idiosyncratic reading of the traditional tune.

The final repeat shown in my transcription (bars 33–34) presents another dramatic change to the opening of the phrase. The descending figure  $g-f\#-e$  in bar 33 brings us wonderfully back to the first part of the tune after it has been “turned”; that is, the second part played through and completed. The descending figure momentarily implies a harmonic-like shift away from the expected “tonic”  $d$  (either delayed or not) that should reintroduce the tune. It is vital that one bears in mind that this melody is not harmonically conceived, my reference to the “tonic” solely intent on highlighting the noticeable deviation from the normative melodic shape. The facility with which Cassidy approaches this out-of-metre-like section is remarkable. In this matter, the fixity of the dancing beat that is assumed by contemporary scholarship of Irish music must be questioned. The following deals with the same aspects of disintegration of traditional structures on a macro scale.

#### 4.13: Fiddle Macrostructures.

Hammy Hamilton proclaims that “variations depend for their effect on the contrast that they make with the basic tune, and it therefore follows that this basis must be well known to the listeners” (Hamilton 1999: 84). But what is this basic tune, and how familiar is the Irish traditional community with its basis? Is it possible that the

traditional community has in some unintentional way become over-familiar with what it has come to regard as a basic tune? Ó Canainn declares that “there is no art where there are no constraints on the artist” (Ó Canainn 1993: 47). Should structure ultimately define these constraints, then the permanence of standardised form takes precedence over individual impulses (see chapter one).

Carson assures us that “the same tune played by the same musician on different occasions will not be the same tune” (Carson 1986: 8). But it is the same tune nonetheless. It seems that the standardisation of macrostructure imposes a decisive constraint by imposing a melodic “skeleton” onto a fixed metrical frame. Each individual musician is ultimately confined to a labyrinth of passageways that lead to the same shared conclusion: the loyal adherence to a permanent traditional macrostructure.

Meyer indicated: “Since constraints allow for a variety of realisations, patterns need not be alike in *all* respects in order to be shared replications, but only in those respects that define the pattern-relationships in question” (Meyer 1996: 3). Clearly the logic goes that Irish musicians, once a desire is met with ability, can decorate the contours of a traditional piece by using a multitude of crafty inflections (that are also informed by the terms of tradition). These are generously supplied for the musician’s amusement at least, or, creative fervour most hopefully. Yet, can we ascribe ornamental techniques as indicating individual agency in and of themselves? Or, can a transitoriness in macrostructure more convincingly indicate individual agency?

These questions have already been discussed in chapter one. Here I will relate them directly to an Irish music context. When written, an Irish traditional tune is typically divided into two main “parts” following an AABB format where each part is

made up of a total of eight regular bars. However, it is quite prominent to include in this repertoire, tunes with more than two parts. Among Donegal fiddlers these extended tunes often do not follow the established format in the repetition of the parts. Readers should be reminded of Michael Coleman's restructuring along similar lines (see chapter three). Examples of this phenomenon in Donegal include Mickey Simi Doherty's rendition of the three-part reel "The Old Oak Tree" using the following format: AABBAABBCCAABBAABB. Even more adventurous, John Doherty incorporates two tunes into one in "McFarley's" by essentially developing the second tune out of the first tune in the following manner:

first tune: AABBAABB;

to second tune: AABB;

to first tune: AABB;

to second tune: AAB.

These irregularities even within a standardised repeating eight-bar format are not delivered for the exclusive benefit of dance. In other words, these alterations are interesting musical designs made for listeners. And indeed, these are very clearly alterations to macro-structural norms which already seem at odds with the terms of tradition. It should be stressed again that this thesis does not intend to imply that Irish music is not dance music. My argument is that Irish music is not exclusively dance music, and by extension instrumental music performance is not always defined by a dance aesthetic.

This is already in evidence when noting odd tune arrangements in Donegal. Here, Mickey Doherty moves from one genre to the next within a single performance. For instance his progression from the reel “The Enchanted Lady” to the jig “Tatter Jack Walsh” is not typical of tune progressions traditionally – even innovative musicians today would usually have the reel follow the jig.

The Donegal fiddle tradition thus seems quite adept at dispensing with a singular concept of the dance music “round”, contesting the most basic of macro-structural “norms” when it comes to how macrostructure is divided. There are numerous other examples where the “round” has been disrupted; this, outside of the many programmatic pieces or the odd tune-types like the brass band marches, mazurkas and barn dances with acutely changing metres.<sup>90</sup> These macro-structural variations are evident in ordinary dance tune melodies such as jigs and reels. These include tunes with 12, 10, 9, 8-and-a-half, or 6 bars in a part. Even more confusing is that within the same tune these odd-bar parts are normally placed side-by-side with a traditionally structured part that retains the customary 8 bars. Of course they offer the exploratory dancer some challenging alternatives, and perhaps there were (and are) *sean-nós* dancers to respond to these asymmetrical structures during improvised solo dances.

Among Irish musicians today, the very possibility of breaking the traditional macrostructure (the 16-bar round) is foreboding to say the least. Ever since the invention of the “skeleton” (which came about through contact with musical notation) post-revival musicians have aspired to embrace a freedom of expression – no matter how deviant – through micro-structural embellishment alone, thus leaving the traditional macrostructure unchanged. Yet, how essential is the 16-bar structure? How

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<sup>90</sup> Examples include: “Hounds after the Hare”, as well as “The Hen’s March Over the Midden”, amongst others.

important is it in defining a piece of Irish traditional music? Indeed it is by far the most common configuration due largely to its connection with the dancing tradition. But can its rigidity be alleviated for solely musical purposes?

This certainly seemed to be the case among Donegal fiddlers. For instance, the reel “John Doherty’s” features 9 bars in the first part.<sup>91</sup> The turn (or second part) retains the usual 8 bars and thus emphasises the overall asymmetric form more clearly. This is an example of a single reel where the parts are usually played once, following an AB format. The 9 bar form results from the repetition within the part detailed below which includes an extra  $\frac{1}{2}$  bar in bar 2:

### John Doherty's Reel



Figure 4.3: Skeletal transcription of the first part of “John Doherty’s Reel”.<sup>92</sup>

This extended bar appears unobtrusive to the melodic progression of the tune, indeed it is somewhat unnoticeable. Later examples are more destructive, but “John Doherty’s Reel” already is a testament to the solo fiddle tradition where such anomalies are fostered by an instrumental tradition independent of dance. In this case, the structural asymmetry is only revealed as being destructive inside the contexts of dance or ensemble practices. Though this tune cannot be regarded as popular or common, the 9 bar structure persists in this form even today.

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<sup>91</sup> John Doherty is the earliest source for this tune that I know of, and his name affixed as the common title also suggests that he at least popularised it.

<sup>92</sup> Transcription by the author.

Possibly most unsuited to dancing, however, are those tunes that incorporate a  $\frac{1}{2}$  bar or extra beat within the 8-bar part. Indeed John Doherty performs an extra  $\frac{1}{2}$  bar in the second part of his rendition of “The King of the Pipers”:

### The King of the Pipers



Figure 4.4: John Doherty’s 1st round performance of “The King of the Pipers”.<sup>93</sup>

I have never heard the extra beat found in second part here performed by contemporary musicians. This is a popular double-jig, and Doherty’s addition (whether originally being his or not) has not persisted.

Bar 15 stands aloof in  $\frac{3}{8}$  metre, and visually on the score appears to subvert directly the phantom dancer. However, this is one of many cases where the transcription deceives us. It is more useful to analyse this section with the ear and the instrument. Doherty’s rendition is motivated by the characteristic c-natural that continually appears at both strong beats of the penultimate bar in every part of this

<sup>93</sup> Transcription by the author.



tune. In fact, both first and third parts of the tune only reserve the penultimate bar for any significant appearance of c-natural, while it serves only as a passing note elsewhere. Its presence is therefore both obvious and defining of the penultimate bar shared across each part.

However, in the more commonly played traditional version of the tune, c-natural does not appear in the penultimate bar of the second part. Instead, the c-natural only appears in the third bar of the part (which also occurs in Doherty's rendition). The common version of the second part of "The King of the Pipers" (also known as "*Franc A'Phoill*") – fairly well known throughout the country today – is notated below:

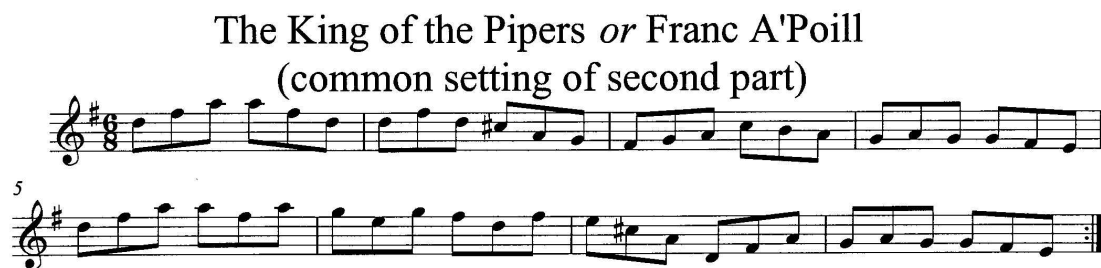


Figure: 4.5: Skeletal transcription of the traditional setting of the second part of "The King of the Pipers".<sup>94</sup>

The most common musical design for most Irish tunes produces two main phrases per part. In addition, the overall melodic structure very often produces a repeat of the melodic content of the ultimate and penultimate bars across each part. Interestingly, the traditional setting of the second part of "The King of the Pipers" above breaks with the traditional mould. Here, the penultimate bar is different from the three other parts of the tune (bar 7 in figure 4.5). Instead, Doherty's musical priority is to retain, at least, the c-natural in the penultimate bar of the second part of

<sup>94</sup> Transcription by the author.

the tune (bar 16 in figure 4.4) to ensure that it remains true to the characteristic penultimate bar of each of the other parts of the tune (bars 7, 24, and 32 in figure 4.4). How Doherty achieves this is very interesting and is explained below.

Notice that the prominent 3/8 metre bar (that is, bar 15 in figure 4.4) in Doherty's rendition makes melodic reference to the first beat of the penultimate bar in the common version of the same tune (bar 7 in figure 4.5). This melodic passage is therefore not in fact an addition to the part just yet. However, this shorter bar facilitates Doherty's musical priorities, which is to respond to the third bar of this second part (bar 11 in figure 4.4; bar 3 in figure 4.5) by using the characteristic penultimate bar featured in the tune's other parts (bars 7, 24, and 32 in figure 4.4). It is a very significant ergonomic challenge for the fiddler to leave bar 14 on the top string (where the second finger stops the string for the final note while positioned beside the first finger) and immediately fall two strings down to the first note of bar 16 which now requires that the same second finger stop the string at a different position on the finger-board (now lying next to the third finger). And this at the rapid tempo demanded by the double-jig in Doherty's hands.

Therefore, this 3/8 metre bar (very similarly conceived as the opening of the penultimate bar in contemporary renditions) actually allows the fiddler to achieve his preferred rendition of the part by retaining the characteristic penultimate bar. Doherty is required to put the breaks on the melody at the end of bar 14 to graft the tune obediently to his musical desires. The shortened bar 15 facilitates this. In this matter, the ergonomic constraints of the fiddle informs the final execution of the piece, the instrument having a hand (the pun intended) in the overall structural design of the music.

The evidence presented in this chapter speaks of an instrumental tradition which follows an ergonomic logic based on a human interaction with a primary musical artefact. The terms of tradition are already negated in this context where permanent music structures are rejected, or made subservient, to individual musical and ergonomic considerations. Paramount to the Donegal tradition is a mastery over the instrument, not over a musical aesthetic guided by the phantom dancer.

Despite often doubling as whitesmiths and handymen, many of the itinerant fiddlers in Donegal – such as John Doherty – were professional musicians. Perhaps there were no concert stages or television studios available to them, but they maintained a professional outlet and indeed a following (see chapter two; Ó hAllmhuráin 1998: 151). They were required to be masters, distinguishing themselves from capable amateurs for financial gain. The motivation to exceed mediocrity and to succeed financially must have proven a heavy burden in times when people had little to spend on entertainment. As professional performers they had to be recognised as unique and extraordinary. As such, individuality is essential, which explains their appetite for musical adventure in this corner of Ireland.

To sum up so far: I have endeavoured in this chapter to refute the sixteen-bar round as something incorruptible; to refute that micro-structural symmetry and metrical unity are musical constants; to refute that there did not exist a solo instrumental listening tradition apart from the aesthetic requirements of dance and song; and to refute the restrictive aesthetics of classicism and standardisation. Instead, I suggest that fiddlers expanded on the ergonomic interaction with the fiddle to assert a professional individualism and to develop a musical freedom.

## 4.2: The Gentleman's Step

Of course, even Breathnach had already noticed macro-structural inconsistencies in some traditional tunes. Yet, he somehow still managed to side with the dancer instead of the instrumentalist. In his words: “The occurrence in manuscript collections of dance tunes having six, seven, or some other unusual number of bars in each strain points to the existence of dances different from these [quadrilles] described above and now lost” (Breathnach 1986: 62–3). Here, Breathnach’s statement is left isolated by a lack of supportive evidence. Still, given that John Doherty was particularly fond of breaking traditional structures to a level that would be at least disconcerting for the ordinary dancer, it may be worth qualifying his performances as being one of the following

1. Supportive of specific (and now lost) dances; or
2. Apathetic, or even hostile toward a dance aesthetic.<sup>95</sup>

Though Breathnach resists developing a hypothesis on the form that these lost dances may have taken, it is of course conceivable that *sean-nós* (lit.: “old style”) dancers could improvise on the unpredictable rhythms in Doherty’s playing; in principle, allowing for the inclusion of asymmetric melodies. The keen ear of the solo *sean-nós* dancer would not be replicated by a wider community of folk dancers, however. In addition, there is little evidence of solo dancing in Donegal anyway (see

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<sup>95</sup> The deliberate undoing of the dancer has already been reported in relation to other fiddle players during the mid-twentieth century. Cranitch, for instance, has noted that the Sliabh Luachra fiddle-master, Pádraig O’Keefe “was also known to be mischievous in sometimes taking precipitative action so as not to be able to play [for dancers]” (Cranitch 2006: 222).

Nic Suibhne 1995: 729). Therefore, I went in search of Doherty's performance contexts to test the findings emerging from the musical analysis presented in the first part of this chapter. Privileging musical analysis over ethnographic inquiry, my position as an emic specialist informs the following discussion. As such, some of the "dialogue" conducted with fellow musicians in my case was a deliberate attempt to discover their reaction toward certain conclusions already arrived at through an emic music analysis.

#### 4.21: The Gentle Listener.

Feldman speaks of Doherty's concern for "the sympathetic listener" during fiddle performances, revealing that the fiddler "forces the listener to contemplate the mystery that lies hidden in each tune" (Feldman 1985: 48). Doherty included storytelling and singing as part of his performance repertoire to aid him in communicating this to his audience. A personal friend of Doherty's, the author Pádraig Ó Baoighill, also spoke of the fiddler's preference for intimate listening contexts.

B'fhearr le John an teach leanna ciúin ar an uaigneas a dtiocfadh leis suí go sócúlach ann, port a bhualadh agus a chomhrá a dhéanamh. [...] Bhí sé ábailte scéal a chumadh, scéal maith a insint agus an scéal a shnáthadh isteach lena chuid fidiléireachta (Ó Baoighill 1994: 38).<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> English: John preferred the quiet pub, in the solitude that would come with it, sitting comfortably there to play a tune and make conversation. He was able to compose a story, tell a good story – a story that would add even more to his fiddle playing (translation by the author).

Dancers are noticeable here by their absence from the above scene. The dedicated listening audience (so dedicated as to be forgotten on occasion within the solitude of the “quiet pub”) provides an ideal context to accommodate the whims of the solo instrumentalist.

In this matter, it is interesting to consider the compositional developments of French Canadian fiddler Émile Benoit as noted by folklorist and ethnomusicologist, Colin Quigley. The terms of Benoit’s tradition not only forced his “musical ideas into a form of limited length”, but upon forming melodies “of non-standard length” he admitted, “I was kind of shy to play it in public” (Quigley 1993: 170; 184). This resonates with what Rice noted as the reservedness among Bulgarian performers, musicians who were unwilling to be seen “improvising new texts” that contradict communal values of “self-control, modesty and shame”; these also reflecting “the demands of tradition” (Rice 1994: 96–7; 104).

However, in the case of Benoit, his audience sought musical values above wider cultural constraints. As Quigley demonstrates, “Émile quickly discovered that it was well received by audiences in the concert situations in which he increasingly began to find himself” (Quigley 1993: 185). In all, it seems “non-standard” traditional music is acceptable once an audience of dedicated musical listeners provide a suitable musical space. Such gentle listeners obviously supported the individualism that was developed by professional fiddlers in Donegal.

Doherty not only found himself in the context of a listening audience though, he also sought out such audiences deliberately. He often resisted dancing contexts completely, and he even avoided loud and out-of control environments generally. What is important is that Doherty’s preferred and exclusive context had an outlet in

Donegal, where the house dance was not the only musical context for music performance. When I (EN) conducted an informal interview with the late James Byrne (JB) at a bar in Glencolmcille (Donegal), he informed me that Donegal fiddlers used to tell him about larger gatherings in certain houses where dancing was merely one potential outcome during a night of entertainment.

EN: Last night you played a version of a jig – it was Con Cassidy’s version – and you were saying that you had a version from John Doherty and you had a version from Francie Dearg. And they’re all different versions?

JB: Ah yea, they would be all different versions. Ah they all had different versions you know?

EN: Yea, and how did that come about? Is there a strong element of solo playing or something in Donegal?

JB: There would be. There would be you know? ...

EN: And as well, I don’t know was I interpreting this wrong last night when I was talking to you [at another pub session]. But was there – apart from the house dances – would there be house sessions where it would be just music and storytelling?

JB: Oh there would be.

EN: Away from the dance then?

JB: Well I mean they could end up with it being a dance. A few would come in and somebody would get up and dance you know? There

were no mobile phones or anything but yet word got around and the crowds would come in!

EN: And was there a great listening appreciation for the music?

JB: Ah there was, you know. Even when I was young, there was a lot of people that didn't play but they knew as much about the music as the ones that played, maybe more, some of them you know? So they were always very keen listeners. [Interview with James Byrne, 03/06/2007]

Upon meeting Vincent Campbell in The Glen Tavern (Glenties, Donegal), the great Donegal fiddler also spoke of such sessions where “every trick that can be done on the fiddle would be made there”. Vincent thus described it as a “very hard session”. Here, the listening audience must have included expert performers, appreciative of “every trick in the book”. While visiting Packie Manus Byrne (PMB) – that legendary Donegal storyteller and whistle-player – in Kilybegs Hospital (Donegal), I asked the following:

EN: Would the solo playing be very important so generally around Donegal?

PMB: Solo playing?

EN: Yea, just playing on your own, was that important to have that?

PMB: Well the thing is that wasn't all that important if the principal fiddle player in a gathering got the idea that the other fiddle player was reasonably good, they would play together great. But he would prefer



to not have him, or her as the case may ... well, in those days now,  
women didn't play fiddles. They didn't play music of any kind. [...]

EN: Was there always an audience back then for listening properly to  
music?

PMB: Oh there would be, yes. Oh eye.

EN: Even in the house dances, would people want to be dancing all the  
time or would they like to listen then?

PMB: Oh no. The thing about it is we called them *Hoolies*.

EN: *Hoolies*?

PMB: Eye, well a *hoolie* was ... maybe there would be two or three dances,  
but then the dances in those days they were hectic and they were hard  
going. And nearly every dance was tapped. I don't know maybe I was  
telling you this before that that was the beginning of *Riverdance* with  
the tapping! And while that was going on people were pooling sweat  
of course, they were probably drinking *poitín* in between steps of the  
dance.<sup>97</sup> Well then there would be a laurel and somebody would tell a  
story or sing a song or somebody might do a solo piece (a very slow  
air or something), and then back to the crazy dancing again. And that  
was crazy. [Interview with Packie Manus Byrne, 29/05/2007]

Therefore, even in the context of large gatherings – the ones which Doherty normally  
avoided – there was space provided for the solo performer. However, Vincent

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<sup>97</sup> *Poitín* or “poteen” is a strong alcoholic drink made from potatoes. It is still brewed illegally today  
using various home-made distillers.

Campbell alludes to a two-tier system of performance during another interview at the Highland Hotel, Glenties (Donegal):

You see there was plenty of hands to play fiddle that time. Some of them mightn't be great fiddle players, but they'd be good enough for dancing. As long as you had good time you were OK for the dance. [Interview with Vincent Campbell, 28/05/2007]

Nic Suibhne also describes the clear segregation between fiddle players for dancing and fiddle players for listening.

Con Cassidy said that few players were regarded as good solo players, possibly as few as two or three in a region of thirty. He talked of fiddlers who were considered to be good 'dance players', yet you couldn't sit down and listen to them (Nic Suibhne 1995: 721).

Nic Suibhne goes on to provide a useful representative breakdown among fiddle players, subdivided by a "hierarchy of musical accomplishment" as follows:

*The house fiddler* who could manage to play a tune or two for dancing in his own home but who didn't regard himself as a real fiddler and who would not be asked to play at functions of any kind.

*The local fiddler* who was considerably skilled and would be expected to take his fiddle around with him to social evenings, or whose home was used as a centre for the big nights or for house dances during the winter evenings.

*The fiddle expert*: the travelling musicians and the professional players undoubtedly responsible for promoting and developing the highly distinctive Donegal fiddle style (Nic Suibhne 1995: 721–722).

The last category would have included the master fiddle player, John Doherty; a musician who belonged to four interrelated itinerant families consisting of the Dohertys, the Mac Sweeneys, the McConnells, and the Gallaghers. Nic Suibhne traces the origins of these musical connections to the early nineteenth century, with repertoire in these circles transmitted by way of mouth blown pipes reaching as far back as the sixteenth century (see Nic Suibhne 1995: 722; 724). John Doherty inherited the title of the “last and perhaps the most famous of these travelling musicians in Donegal” (ibid. 724). Nic Suibhne goes into much detail concerning the divide between solo fiddle players and dance fiddle players. Her analysis extended to a hierarchical consideration of tune types. In this matter, reels, all genres of jig, hornpipes, strathspeys, airs, and programatic pieces were all tunes for listening. These listening tunes (without doubt representing the most complex and challenging repertoire) were almost always performed solo, in contrast to dance tunes (see ibid. 734).

Nic Suibhne laments in 1995 that “the notion of the fiddler’s divided repertoire no longer pertains” (Nic Suibhne 1995: 741). She accounts for the disappearance of this hierarchy by way of various social changes. As indicated previously in this thesis, the musical effect is one of the listening tune repertoire becoming defined exclusively according to dance aesthetics. Of course there were obvious points of interchange between these categories of tune types during Doherty’s time also. However, there remained a perceptible two-tier system of categorisation. Vincent Campbell

elaborated on this exchange between (in contrast to the combining of) the two systems during his youth:

That's right. Well what they used to do (the old fiddle players), if there was a reel there that wasn't too lively for dancing, they would scrap it for a highland. They would play it slower, and play it as a highland. And then on the other hand, if there was a highland there that was very lively, they would make a reel out of it. Play it faster and they would make a reel out of it.

[Interview with Vincent Campbell, 28/05/2007]

I also asked Packie Manus Byrne to elaborate on this hierarchy.

EN: Would there be special tunes for special dances then as well?

PMB: Oh there would, oh God yes. And I tell you something, there would be certain people would do a certain dance. Now, they would be a version of a jig or a reel or a hornpipe. But that would be their version, their way of doing it. And there was only one or two certain tunes that they would dance to. It had to be their tune or: "well, keep it".

EN: And what happened all the other tunes, were they just played then as music?

PMB: Oh they were played in the session, and played solo too. But for dancing it had to be the real tune. Probably somebody thought of a tune one time and said, "Oh, that's a tune for a reel that Maggie

So-and-so dances. Maybe Maggie (who ever she was) never heard of the tune, but this fella had to put some little tale to it and 'twud become "Maggie So-and-so's Reel" or "Hornpipe" or what ever it might be. And do you know that that name still applies down through the ages? You'll still get "Somebody's Favourite". Well that's how that all started you know? [Interview with Packie Manus Byrne, 29/05/2007]

Vincent Campbell also told me of dancers who demanded particular tunes they could recognise as their own. For this reason, specific tunes were often associated with specific dances. Obviously, this also encouraged a fairly limited repertoire of dance tune types. The exchange between the two distinct categories of tune types therefore reflects a recycling of musical material from one to the other as demand required. What is important is that there was an audience for both categories.

#### 4.22: The Gentle Performer.

There were some inconsistencies in the reports I gathered regarding Doherty and dancers. However, even where Doherty is cited as playing for dancers, this was always presented in the context of a one-off or occasional event. Despite the clear asymmetries in his performances, Vincent Campbell insisted that Doherty did play for dancers at some kitchen gatherings. Even here, he added that the night always stretched beyond such services to include an almighty session. Packie Manus Byrne also reported that Doherty did perform for dancers on certain occasions. However,

when I asked him whether he thought Doherty preferred performing solo or for dancers, he categorically declared that he “preferred playing on his own”.

That being said, even outside of his macro-structural anomalies, Doherty reportedly performed slight intricacies in bowing that would also confound the dancer.

Vincent Campbell spoke of one such technique during my interview:

The Dohertys now would tell you, they used to tell me all about... They had a name on everything they done with the bow. Oh yea, the bows was very important, in Donegal here especially. Because if you met some fiddle player somewhere and you would tell the Dohertys about it (or any fiddle player) they would ask you always: “What kind of a bow-hand?” The bow-hand here, and most of Ulster even, was very important. More important than what you’d do with the fingers. [...]

Well there’s a thing they used to call – you do these things only on certain tunes you see – things they call “The Floating Bow”. It goes like this: I’ll play it ordinary first, then I’ll float the bow, and move it over and back.

[Vincent demonstrates with his fiddle whereby the bow moves erratically across the strings in a fashion that de-emphasises and re-emphasises different beats of the melody]. You float the bow, that’s what they call it.

Your bow is like nearly gone way haywire on the strings. But that’s to make the tune sound different. (Interview with Vincent Campbell, 28/05/2007.)

James Byrne emphasised another bowing technique widely used among Donegal fiddlers that would also exasperate the dancers. In an interview at McRoarty's Bar, Glencolmcille (Donegal), I asked him to demonstrate this technique for me.

EN: You were saying – I saw a DVD there from The Cup of Tae Festival of last year, Paula [McNelis] was interviewing you there – you were on about the up-bow as well as being some kind of a distinctive feature?

JB: Yea well that would be a very important feature of the Donegal style you know?

EN: What exactly is that? As in, would it be an accentuated up-bow?

JB: Yes, it would be. Part of the tune that you would want to stress, usually it would be taken on an up-bow. When you are in Clare maybe the same thing would be done on a down-bow.

EN: So as in the main beat – let's say – of a tune might end up on the up-bow?

JB: Yea, it would be taken on the up-bow most of the time, anywhere it's possible! So it's a different sound you know? The up-bow and the down-bow is a different sound you know? Even if it's the same note, it still sounds different. [Interview with James Byrne, 03/06/2007]

The logical movement of the bow for the dancer is therefore reversed in the technique illustrated by James Byrne. Boyden explained as follows:

Down-bow for stressed notes must have been used from the earliest times by violinists, especially to make the strong accent needed by dancers on the first beat. In general the down-bow, because it is naturally a weightier stroke than the up-bow, has been found appropriate for the stressed note (Boyden 1989: 42).

A note may still be stressed during the up-bow, but it perhaps never achieves the same emphatic effect as the stressed down-bow. The so-called main dance beats of the melody are therefore not as immediately accessible to dancers in this context. Outside of dancing contexts, James Byrne insisted that Doherty still enjoyed performing together with other fiddlers.

EN: I heard Johnny Doherty didn't want to play with anybody else at all.

JB: Ah that is not true, no , no.

EN: He used play with Frank Cassidy as well?

JB: Ah well he used to play a lot with Frank you know? Ah I often heard him playing with players that wasn't as good as Frank either!

EN: Ah he would yea, but apparently he enjoyed playing on his own as well?

JB: Ah well he did, yea. He was mainly a solo player you know? Some of the things he did. You might be listening to him night after night but the tune was never the same you know?

EN: Oh right, always varying it?

JB: So there was always something different. So if he played the same tune every night you wouldn't be tired listening to him. Well, we



better play another tune then... [the session resumes]. (Interview with James Byrne, 03/06/2007.)

In the end, Doherty is usually represented as the emblematic solo fiddler. Despite sightings of him performing in ensemble or in dance contexts, Doherty's preference seems to have been clear. In speaking with Packie Manus Byrne, I discovered that Doherty did not even play with his superbly talented brother, Mickey. Instead, I understand that a fierce rivalry developed between the two recognised soloists.

EN: Would Mickey be on the road a lot as well, playing for house dances?

PMB: Not much, no. Well maybe he would go somewhere that he was certain that John wouldn't be.

EN: Oh right, would they never travel together as a duet?

PMB: Oh God, never together, no no! Two of them never played together.

Not even in the house, I know that. Because old Peter Campbell who was a very good friend of mine (he was Jimmy's father) he used to tell that there would be only one fiddle used at a time in Dohertys'.

Oh that was all.

EN: One at a time. So they wouldn't be playing together then?

PMB: No, and the other two would probably go away out walking while one was playing! Ah they were strange people you know? (Interview with Packie Manus Byrne, 29/05/2007.)

I continued to ask Packie Manus Byrne about John Doherty's apparent exclusivity when playing the fiddle.

EN: And then when Doherty would have been playing for house dances – John would wouldn't he? He'd travel around and he'd play for some of the house dances? Would he play on his own in the house dances as well or would he play with other fiddle players from the region?

PMB: Well he'd prefer to not play with other fiddle players.

EN: Oh he preferred to be on his own playing?

PMB: He was a clever musician you know in a way, because he would play a tune that he knew you knew very well, but he would play it in a way that you couldn't play along with him.

EN: Oh right, he had a few tricks!

PMB: Oh eye he was. He was full of tricks! Tricks were coming out in his ears!

EN: Would he change the tune slightly or would he just...

PMB: Well he'd probably change the speed of one bar or something and that then would put you out. And by the time you were back with him again he would ... there was nothing he wasn't up to. (Interview with Packie Manus Byrne, 29/05/2007.)

These tricks demonstrate a conscious effort by Doherty to avoid any form of interruption to his skilled performances; these demanding constant creative updating on his part. Packie Manus Byrne also perceived a change of speed in some bars during

Doherty's performances. This may refer directly to the asymmetric performance practices by Doherty analysed above. In this way, Doherty managed to gently side-step the obligation to perform for dancers or even with other musicians.

#### 4.23: The Gentle Step.

In seeking the dancer's perspective, I deliberately sought a musical dancer. As already pointed out previously in the Irish context, the non-musical dancer not only provides little insight into the current project but normally demonstrates very little interest in it. I was therefore fortunate to have a visit from one such musical dancer while researching in Caoimhín MacAoidh's private archive in Ballyshannon (Donegal). As a young professional dancer and a fiddler from Donegal (as well as music teacher and dance instructor), Paula McNelis (PMN) elaborated upon the dancer versus fiddler theme.

EN: Does your dancing influence your music?

PMN: [After long considered pause] No. ... Music influences my dancing far more. And if I'm making up steps, it's rhythms in my head from music that allow me, I think, to do a good job on the dancing. ...

EN: Do you think dancers who don't play music, listen to the music?

PMN: [Laughs] Not a lot of the time, no. They don't hear it. They can't hear the rhythm. They know the steps, it's kind of mechanical. They can't really hear the "and". You know, the one-*and*-two-*and*. They can't hear that back-beat. They can only hear the "one".

EN: The main beat?

PMN: Yea. They don't hear what happens in between the main beats, what you're supposed to do with your foot. They lose that. They don't understand what I'm talking about when it's the "and". They're like "Oh"? They just don't get it.

EN: Do you think that was always the case. Could you imagine dancers always not picking up these subtleties of music?

PMN: I do, yea, it has just always been there. Even my former dancing teacher would have missed a lot of things that I would hear. She wouldn't have heard, but it's just I would have a different musical ear than her. [...]

It's very hard to play for dancers. If I was playing in a session, I would never think of a dancer, never. But if I was playing for a dancer I would have a whole different way of thinking. Any wee kind of ornaments or little variations that you put in, you try to keep it plainer. Not that you think the dancer wouldn't understand you, it's not that. But, you kind of let the feet then take over with the little ornamentation and little extras, and you're just providing a very basic back-line. And a much slower tempo.

EN: Could you imagine John Doherty thinking of a dancer when he was playing?

PMN: No, unless... I don't know what kind of dancers they had back then ... something I can do that a lot of people can't do is improvise. If I was playing with a fiddler and I didn't have a clue what you were going

to do – and I only have to be with you for a couple of seconds – I could feel what you’re at and I could play with you. If you were going to slow down or speed up, I could go with you because I can understand what you’re thinking. But 90% of people can’t do that because they don’t play. So unless Johnny Doherty had very talented dancers around him that were as uniquely different in their dance field as he was as a fiddler, then they could work together. But the average dancer couldn’t dance to him unless he was just playing normally. Definitely not. [Jokingly] But I could! [Laughs] Johnny and I would get on great! (Interview with Paula McNelis, 05/06/2007.)

Primarily a dancer, Paula McNelis’ thoughts during this interview aid the current project by providing a musically informed dancer’s perspective on the interconnections between music and dance; thereby replicating similar concerns facing musicians and dancers in the past. It is interesting that, in contrast to current norms, musical aesthetics dominates Paula’s own conception of dance. (Again, in the Irish context, music, song and dance are defined by instrumental practice, singing practice and dancing practice respectively.) By referencing generations preceding her own (her own dance instructor for instance), Paula assumes the supremacy of instrumental practice over dance when defining music – especially given that the majority of dancers have always seemed to have “different” (perhaps unreliable) musical ears. Logically, then, the Irish dancers generally can hardly be regarded as capable music keepers.

Consistent with other specialists mentioned in this thesis, Paula has a “performance” way of playing the fiddle as well as a distinct “dance” way of playing the instrument. When without a dancer, she is neither inclined to think of dance while playing: hence the death of the phantom dancer. In contrast to Paula, most dancers are only aware of the “dance” way of instrumental practice – their “different musical ear.” As emphasised by Paula, musicians would be aware both of the “performance” way and the “dance” way of instrumental practice. Therefore, in relation to the embodiment of traditional music, dance must occupy a subordinate position to instrumental practice.

For John Doherty, a “special” kind of talented dancer is required since he reserved his impressive and demanding solo repertoire for a discerning audience of listeners. Interestingly, Doherty’s capacity to just play “normally” (or simply in the “dance” way) is never questioned by Paula. By comparison, a dancer’s capacity to conform to the “uniquely different” approach of John Doherty’s playing is merely open to at most 10% of dancers (normally those who take an active interest in music performance also). In this context, it seems probable that traditional music’s keeper is the instrumentalist; dancers thus having relatively less to do with the maintenance and/or development of the music tradition as a whole. By extension, instrumentalists must enjoy independence from dancers, especially on account of the dancer’s failure to always comprehend music.

## Conclusion

As revealed in this chapter, John Doherty deliberately sought out the gentle listener. In turn, as a gentle performer he would use subtle instrumental techniques that displaced the dominance of the phantom dancer. I have shown also the central importance of solo performance practices in Donegal in contrast to the limited musical capacity of dancers. As a point of principle, Doherty's avoidance of dance contexts seems to have directly contributed to his asymmetric treatment of tunes on occasion. Packie Manus Byrne confirmed this:

And you know, John Doherty was responsible for changing a lot of tunes. And that was really to put some other one off playing with him. And then the third person would be listening and he would go: "That's not so bad". And the next time played it round he'd play it the same that John done, and then it became a different version of the tune. (Interview with Packie Manus Byrne, 29/05/2007.)

Given that my interviews with Packie Manus Byrne were recorded next to his hospital bed, it was not always easy to set up a recording apparatus in the ward.<sup>98</sup> However, during our conversations, I also received a better image of John Doherty as a man. According to Packie, he was a tall and upright gentleman who never called anybody by their first name: "It was always Mr.

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<sup>98</sup> Already at a ripe old age, this larger-than-life character was only on a short-term hospital visit, though I was unable to stay longer in Donegal to visit him at home thereafter.

Byrne!” He was very clean about himself, receiving regular haircuts and demanding a full wash (“not just a splash of water now!” as Packie joked).

We also discussed the work that goes into becoming a master instrumentalist. John Doherty did not always own a fiddle. In asking how Doherty managed to continue to be such a master fiddler despite often having to rely on house fiddles, Packie simply reiterated that Doherty was “a very clever musician ... every time that he played was a practice”.

During my initial meeting with Vincent Campbell in the Glen Tavern, he spoke of John Doherty’s lineage. I managed to jot down from memory the gist of his explanation upon returning to my hotel room in the early hours of the morning.

Diary notes: May 26th, 2007.

At 03:30 in the morning, many things have been confirmed. One being that Glenties merely gets going when the rest of Ireland is winding down.

Another is that the Campbells are very fine drinkers, the only “rounds” they should be joined with are those of the musical kind! They are of course even finer fiddlers, with Vincent being the most gifted. I had an enjoyable night, Jimmy being a particularly gracious session host. Vincent spoke of the Doherty musical lineage dating unbroken from the “Flight of the Earls” all the way up to the magnificence of John, Mickey, and Simon on their respective fiddles. According to him, the Dohertys were the court musicians for the O’Donnells (the old Gaelic gentry of Donegal) and were subsequently scattered throughout the county upon the O’Donnells’ flight to



Spain. Those Dohertys that were left behind had no other alternative than to take to the road as itinerant musicians and tinsmiths.

Vincent Campbell claimed that this aristocratic legacy remained with the Dohertys until the end, and showed itself through various physical idiosyncrasies. One of these distinguishing marks was what Vincent Campbell termed, “the gentleman’s step”. He can apparently recognise a Doherty descendant from this very particular walk. Vincent Campbell kindly elaborated on this for me during a subsequent interview at The Highlands Hotel in Glenties.

A gentleman’s step. I would always know one of the Dohertys by looking at his back going down the road. They had a step that nobody else had. No, no ordinary person had anyhow. Because there was a good one a few years ago, there was a big gathering down, they came from Spain ... This Admiral O’Doherty was in it, and there was a tall girl in it with them (she was very like the Dohertys). But he was telling me that he was the generation of the Dohertys. You see the Dohertys had a castle a way back down there. They were the main musicians and composers and tinsmiths and storytellers for the O’Donnells, the Earls. So then when the Flight of the Earls came, the Dohertys had nothing only to take to the road. So that’s what happened to them. But then I was asking your man about the Dohertys and he was telling me what he knew about their history. And he told me, he said: “I’m a direct descendant of the Dohertys”. “Oh”, I says, “Do you know what you’ll do for me? Will you walk out that corridor there now, and I’ll tell you whether

there is O'Doherty blood in you or not". And he walked the corridor and he had the very same jump on his step that the Dohertys had. He had to laugh at it, I didn't tell him 'til after why! But he laughed at it then, he enjoyed it! But he certainly had the steps. (Interview with Vincent Campbell, 28/05/2007.)

John Doherty had many jumps in his step: constantly side-stepping unfavourable performance contexts. Though this was not always possible, Doherty seems to have made it clear that he was a solo performer: avoiding noisy parties, rigid dancers, and even other musicians (good or bad). Doherty very consciously fostered highly complex solo performance practices using the expansive ergonomic capacity of the fiddle as exposed by the analyses throughout the first part of this chapter. The result: a refreshing transitory aesthetic supported by an asymmetric approach to structure. In this way, John Doherty very definitely brings the terms of tradition into crisis.

## Chapter 5: Tommie Potts: Fragmenting Structures

To exacerbate the crisis unearthed by the previous chapters upon the terms of tradition, the fiddler Tommie Potts will be discussed here.<sup>99</sup> Potts (1912–1988) was born in Coombe, Dublin, right in the heartland of the revival movement. He was an exceptional fiddler. I use the word exceptional here in all of its meaning: not only was Potts unusually good, but he was outstandingly unique. In fact, so exceptional was he that despite his only album being released more than 40 years ago, arguably Potts remains the most ‘one-off’ fiddler in the music tradition of Ireland. Effectively, Potts can be regarded as perhaps the most little understood, widely respected fiddler in the music tradition. Scholars who have tried to explain Potts’ fiddle playing have adopted various approaches, some being more thorough than others. For instance, Potts is often associated with an avant-garde of Irish music. Yet, an avant-garde in Irish traditional music has never been properly considered (see chapter one). And, naturally, a proper explanation as to why Potts can be perceived as avant-garde is rarely if at all conceptualised. This chapter makes an initial step towards an examination of the fiddle playing of Tommie Potts as an expression of an avant-garde within Irish fiddle performance practices.

### 5.1: Some Times

Potts is unique not only in terms of his musical performances but also in terms of his place among purists and innovators. He is often claimed by both sides of the

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<sup>99</sup> The spelling of “Tommie” is more often seen as “Tommy”. I adopt the spelling used in Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin’s authoritative study on the fiddle (see Ó Súilleabháin 1987).



Plate 5.1: Tommie Potts.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Taken from *The Liffey Banks: Traditional Irish Music Played by Tommy Potts*. Tommy [or Tommie] Potts. Dublin: Ceirníní Cladaigh CC13CD, 1972. Photograph by Jeffrey Craig.

divide: representing at times an extremely innovative jump out of the chains of antiquity while at other times representing a profound continuation of a mystical ancient. Potts' peculiar place in this regard is observed respectively in Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin (as an innovator) and in Tony MacMahon (as a purist) at "The Crossroads Conference" in 1996 – a conference that concerned the place of Irish traditional music at the end of the twentieth century (see Ó Súilleabháin 1999; MacMahon 1999: 119). However, here, a respect and admiration for Potts' music is not the only immediate common denominator. I argue that both an innovator's and a purist's musical perspective is united each with the other by the overarching terms of tradition. Referring to chapter one where I demonstrated how the terms of tradition push macrostructure to the background while the avant-garde brings macrostructure to the foreground, it is interesting to note both MacMahon's and Ó Súilleabháin's analytical treatment of Potts' performances.

The purist study cannot sustain macrostructure in the foreground of musical analysis and instead turns to a mystical reading of the fiddler's music-making process; the ambiguity of which compensates for a lack of analytical depth and understanding. MacMahon states of Potts: "Of all the musicians and singers I've met, his was the only music that could skewer its way into the inner soul of the listener and burn his footprint into it forever" (MacMahon 1999: 119). Far more assertive on an analytical level, the innovator study must also eventually re-submerge macrostructure to the background of music analysis. As such, it is necessary to go into some detail concerning the innovator perspective here. Ultimately I will reveal that both the innovator and purist perspectives are resistant to an avant-garde, and can be united under the terms of tradition. Before this, it is important first (especially following on

from the conclusions made in the preceding chapters of this thesis) to understand Potts' music in a new historical context of twentieth-century performance practices.

Neither Ó Súilleabháin nor MacMahon show an awareness of the developing crisis facing traditional macrostructure throughout the first half of the twentieth century among certain fiddlers before Potts. This reflects a general lacuna in the consideration of such matters in Irish traditional music discourse. Ó Súilleabháin discusses the “traditional balance between individual creativity and communal formulae” before revealing his own contention that “it is this very balance, serving as it has the dance-music tradition so effectively for over three hundred years, which has been challenged by Tommie Potts” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 60). Also relying on Potts as the only exception to the rule of maintaining a permanent shared macrostructure, the ethnomusicologist Hazel Fairbairn confirms that “Ó’Súilleabháin sheds light on the communal formulae which enable group playing through the examination of a musician who is perhaps the *only* traditional performer who could not operate in a group setting” (Fairbairn 1993: 5; emphasis mine). Ethnomusicologist, Sally Sommers-Smith stresses the same issue while looking at it from the opposite view; she states that “few players could play along with Potts” (Sommers-Smith 1999: 388).<sup>101</sup>

It is apparent from the selected quotes above, that the ensemble reinforces the permanence of macrostructure, where a privileging of social contexts dictates musical form. Because Potts disrupts the macrostructure of tunes, obviously he could not fully partake in the specific cultural environment wherein these tunes were primarily defined by the latter half of the twentieth century; specifically, the session (see chapter

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<sup>101</sup> See also the oft-cited Wilfrid Mellers article “From Folk Fiddle to Jazz Violin” (Mellers 1984) for additional comments on Potts' talent.

six). However, where this thesis differs significantly from other studies in this regard, is that I have identified similar patterns of musical individualism on a macro-structural scale elsewhere in the instrumental tradition preceding Potts.

This means that unlike other scholars and commentators, I can immediately identify Potts' performance practices as part of a wider solo fiddling tradition where traditional macrostructure is contested. In this matter, Potts' musical isolation is better contextualised. It must be noted – with reference to chapter three – that my understanding of an Irish fiddling tradition is based on the interaction between a creative human and a fiddle as an instrumental artefact within an Irish musical context. Therefore, the instrument's own life history shares in the portrayal of the historical aspects of this particular instrumental tradition in Ireland. As such, Potts may or may not be directly influenced by the performers discussed in previous chapters. What needs to be recognised is that because Potts shares with these other performers similar ergonomic patterns within a particular music genre, then his performance practices form part of the same instrumental tradition, whether or not each musician is aware of the other.

Where this thesis is in agreement with other studies, is that Potts – together with his innovative musical “deviations” (see Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 66) – is not immediately inline with the customary definition of Irish traditional music. Where this thesis differs from these other studies, is that in the final analysis Potts does not become subsumed by the terms of tradition. For instance, though placed momentarily on the periphery of tradition in Ó Súilleabháin's most considered work, Potts is eventually brought back inline with the terms of tradition (even while occupying an extremely innovative position). In Ó Súilleabháin, as such, it is easy to understand

Potts as a “prophetic” musician who somehow promotes the terms of tradition even while deviating from them.

A major shift in focus in this thesis, therefore, is that I do not rely on the terms of tradition for my analysis of Potts’ music. The fiddler can be still placed on the periphery (in the sense that a transitory approach to macrostructure remains unpopular to the genre) and he can still become ultimately prophetic (in the sense that his radical interpretation of macrostructure takes Irish music to a new level of transitoriness and avant-gardism). However, throughout this chapter Potts creates the greatest crisis for the terms of tradition and maintains this crisis without ever really returning to the terms of tradition.

In sum: very often when Ó Súilleabháin speaks of “deviation” (as opposed to variation), I speak of “negation”. Where Ó Súilleabháin brings Potts back in line with the terms of tradition, I argue that Potts has left the terms of tradition in crisis.

Analytical continuity in this chapter therefore is not seen socially within the permanence and fixity of the terms of tradition, but rather musically within the transitoriness and individualism of an ergonomic pathway toward real crisis. But before analysing Potts’ negation of the terms of tradition, it is worth making some general notes regarding Potts’ place in time, framing his complex musical processes within a contemporary understanding of musical developments during the 1960s and 1970s. At this time, both revival aesthetics and/or avant-gardist impulses were general features of artistic practices on a global scale, at least throughout Western music genres. To this end, I will explore Potts’ position within the context of a revival movement in traditional music and an avant-garde movement outside of traditional music.



### 5.11: At Times Traditional.

Contrary to the views of many scholars, Potts could of course “operate in a group setting” (see above; Fairbairn 1993: 5). Given that the revival of traditional music (both in Ireland and abroad) was in many instances marked by ensemble practice, it is interesting to consider Potts in this regard. Not all of his performances reflect an utter fragmentation of traditional music structures. For instance, there are recordings where Potts performs a set of tunes popularised by Michael Coleman – a suite known as “The Tarboltan Set”. Here, Potts remains uncharacteristically loyal to Coleman’s more rigid understanding of structure (see chapter three). Though he was incapable of performing his favoured pieces “straight”, so to speak, this does not mean that he could not perform the bulk of his repertoire in ways that were more familiar to the typical traditional music audience of the time.

To highlight this, is also to rupture the poetic mysticism surrounding Potts’ music performances. He was obviously familiar with what should be expected of him as an Irish traditional fiddler of his time, and therefore he must have been equally aware of the ramifications of his individualism upon such expectations. As another example, Potts’ performance of “Banish Misfortune”, in comparison with Edward Cronin’s presentation of the same tune (see chapter two), is less destructive to traditional expectations than Cronin’s recorded performance.

Just as Cronin was able to perform both for dancers and for listeners, Potts could also manage both ensemble and solo renditions of standard tunes simply by responding to cultural distinctions in performance practice. Just because he did not like to, does not mean that he “could not”. Indeed there are recordings of Potts

performing in duet with the esteemed *uilleann* piper Séamus Ennis, or accompanied on organ by the equally brilliant Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin. The musical evidence is there to assure us that Potts was able to perform with proficiency as a soloist and in ensemble situations.

### 5.12: At Times Avant-Garde.

Jazz music specialist, Joachim Berendt, draws a “parallel between jazz and modern European concert music [in their] growing disgust with the mechanistic, machinelike character of the traditional system” (Berendt 1992: 25). In a similar fashion, Potts shows an impatience with the music system that continues to punctuate the Irish tradition, especially with respect to macrostructure which is fixed by the terms of tradition. Potts was openly critical of performing Irish music “by the book”. To perform “by the book” would result in the same musical effect as that brought on by the phantom dancer (see chapter two). Traditional music – most especially under the conditions of a revival aesthetic – discourages an outward “disgust” with the traditional system. Perhaps falling shy of disgust (or only openly so), Potts’ idiosyncratic performance practices demonstrate a contempt for structural lignification within the terms of his own musical tradition. And importantly, Potts was conscious of his own contempt for such things.

Sommers-Smith noted that Potts was “quite open about his impatience with the propensity of most traditional players to follow standard settings of tunes” (Sommers-Smith 1999: 388). Potts’ musical concerns were contemporary with the same developments effecting other Western music genres (such as those compared by

Berendt above). That Ireland itself was familiar with the avant-garde is evident in the world of literature – for instance, as a more obvious example, James Joyce’s negation of traditional narrative structures in “Ulysses”. Potts was musically aware of the classical and jazz worlds as demonstrated during interviews with Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin.<sup>102</sup> This does not mean that his interest in these genres was focussed on the avant-garde expressions within them. However, Potts was naturally moving toward an avant-garde that perhaps even he did not recognise within his own music tradition. In addition, Potts’ significance as an avant-garde artist is not widely recognised because of a general lack of commitment among ethnomusicologists toward a musical avant-garde, especially when considered in the context of Irish traditional music (see chapter one).

While always remaining a distinct music genre, Irish traditional music can echo some common trends found in other musical avant-gardes. Jazz pianist, Paul Bley, explains: “Now how do you retain the jazz flavour when you’re dealing with atonal music? By being a jazz musician, I guess” (Lyons 1983: 164). Essentially, traditional musicians can be just as flippant. After-all, while adopting an avant-garde approach they must still contend with musical materials that are often very distinct from jazz and Western art music. Here, Potts may add an Irish voice to what can be seen as a cross-cultural development of a musical avant-garde in the genres of the West.

Though this could easily reflect the common sociological conditions of the period shared across various countries, surprisingly ethnomusicology has not generally sought the avant-garde in Western traditional music genres.<sup>103</sup> At most, it is

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<sup>102</sup> See Ó Súilleabháin, 1987 for his discussion on the various musical genres influencing Potts’ performances. These included Western art and jazz music references. However, he was never “trained” in any other music style other than Irish traditional.

<sup>103</sup> See chapter one for a consideration of the avant-garde in the Finnish music tradition.

often noted by ethnomusicologists (among other music specialists) that traditional music has facilitated the development of an avant-garde within Western art and jazz music genres. Jazz specialist, Ekkehard Jost, regards jazz musicians' interest in modal music (specifically the various traditional and classical styles found in Africa and India) as an important ingredient in the creation of a jazz avant-garde.

Ethnomusicologist, Ingrid Monson, elaborates on the cross-cultural processes of the avant-garde from a jazz perspective: "Coltrane, at least at this point of his career, stressed engagement with non-Western traditions, but these same musical structures, when employed by artists like Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor, also generated an intense engagement with Western ideas of the avant-garde" (Monson 1998: 163).

Why then has the avant-garde not been properly examined from a traditional music perspective, in and of itself? Despite each music genre enjoying a distinct identity from the next, there are common aesthetic concerns during the twentieth century shared by musicians across all of these genres, though often voiced in very different musical ways. Here, Potts may provide perhaps the most credible example of the avant-garde within an Irish traditional music context.

### 5.13: At Times "Traditionally Avant-Garde".

Given that Potts is predominantly considered within the terms of tradition instead of those of an avant-garde, he is inevitably compared with other innovative musical figures in Irish music history that are not consistent with a proper consideration of the avant-garde. One example is the comparison between Potts, the quintessential innovative solo fiddler, and Sean Ó Riada, the quintessential innovative ensemble

arranger. Although both artists are regularly considered to be the great innovators of Irish music of the twentieth century, their innovative approaches are not complimentary. Although contemporaries, their distinctive approaches to traditional music provide a useful framework for discussing the concept of innovation within the tradition and within the avant-garde.

As innovators, Ó Riada represents a widespread push towards ensemble practice, while Potts represents a singular push towards a solo practice. Ó Canainn was particularly enthused by Ó Riada's potential in the development of tune melodies in ensemble arrangements. He discusses "An Long fé Lán tSeoil" (English, "The Ships are Sailing") from the recording "Reacaireacht an Riadaigh" as follows:

Ní sheinneadh gnáthcheoltóirí traidisiúnta an lae inniu é níos mó ná trí huairé I  
ndiaidh a chéile sula n-éireoidís tuirseach de, ach féach go seinneann Ceoltóirí  
Cualann sé huairé as a chéile é ar an taifeadadh seo agus is ar éigean a cheapfá go  
raibh sé tosaithe I gceart acu (Ó Canainn 1993b: 127).<sup>104</sup>

Here, the "common musician" is perceived as being comparatively un-resourceful in terms of melodic development. By the "common musician" I assume that the author is referring to a typical solo Irish musician of, and possibly before, this time. Ó Canainn is not wrong here if one considers contemporary performances of Irish music by solo artists generally. However, perhaps what is more important here is that he ought to be wrong.

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<sup>104</sup> English, "Common traditional musicians of today would not play this tune more than three times before tiring of it, but notice that [Ó Riada's] Ceoltóirí Cualann play it six times through on this recording and you would nearly think that they had only just begun" (translation by the author).

Potts certainly contests this representation by performing some of his own tunes many times over – indeed he performed some parts of the same tune more times than others. For instance, during a recorded performance of one of his most celebrated pieces, Potts repeats the first part of “My Love is in America” for the equivalent of five “rounds”. This features on the only commercial recording available of Potts’ music – “The Liffey Banks” – where the tune follows a very unexpected structure: AAAAAABBAABBA. Already Potts expresses an individual freedom when he chooses to repeat some parts of the same tune more than others, something which cannot be so easily conceived in Ó Riada’s ensemble format.

Ó Súilleabháin makes some interesting comparisons between Potts and Ó Riada. With respect to the latter, he considers Ó Riada’s frustration with the limitations of the symmetrical inaudible round.

Our comparison of Ó Riada and Potts as innovative forces within Irish traditional music, therefore, has shown us that while Ó Riada in his role as director / proposer was confined to juggling with what might be termed the macrostructure of the music, Potts in his role as creative performer was in a position to deal with the music’s microstructure (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 368; see also 361–373).<sup>105</sup>

However, it is not that each innovator focussed on macro- and microstructure respectively: it is that each innovator approaches music structure differently. What is central here is that Ó Riada was not only limited to sharing out the macrostructure among the musicians of his ensemble, but he was limited to dividing the macrostructure according to the terms of tradition; maintaining traditional symmetry

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<sup>105</sup> For further discussion on the musical links between Ó Riada and Potts (together with the eighteenth-century blind itinerant harper Turlough O’Carolan) see Ó Súilleabháin 1998.

and the integrity of its repetitive parts. By contrast, Potts, by virtue of his experimentation with micro-structural elements, was in a better position to re-imagine the divisions of traditional macrostructure in a manner that was discordant with the terms of tradition; negating traditional symmetry and the repetitive nature of its parts.

What is important here is that Potts continued a traditional practice of micro-structural variation. This is highlighted by Ó Súilleabháin. However, in addition, Potts encouraged innovative permutations of the macrostructure outside of the terms of tradition. I explain this throughout the second part of this chapter. It is significant at this point that Ó Riada was pinned down by the terms of tradition not only because he was a musical arranger constrained to use the established macrostructure (as Ó Súilleabháin mentions) but because he resisted contesting a traditional definition of this macrostructure. In this matter, Potts did not.

Admittedly, there are instances where it is neither clear whether portions of Potts' musical output ought to be placed in a staunchly traditional context or in a vehemently avant-garde one. This in itself reflects the distinct musical character of an Irish traditional music avant-garde. Ó Súilleabháin at one point during an interview notices the syncopation in Potts' playing as something reminiscent of jazz performances of the time. Yet Potts, seemingly surprised by his question, reassures him that such syncopation had been performed by Irish traditional flute players for many decades before, where the necessary intake of air during performances sometimes accentuated off-beats (see Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 209). Potts exclaims: "Well, there's nothing terribly radical or alarming about that because flute players do it" (ibid. 345). Despite these instances, Ó Súilleabháin finds that the most radical

moments in Potts' performances can often arise in the most traditional of musical spaces.

A further investigation into the connection between this traditional process of improvisation (interchangeable segments) and the innovatory process of improvisation found in Potts' 'Rocky Road to Dublin' showed a high degree of correlation between those motifs which are flexible within the interchangeable-segment process and those selected by Potts for omission or transposition. This supports the theory that within any piece some segments have a degree of fluidity which others do not. It is also a further indication of the underlying tradition-based logic within Potts' musical thought (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 205).

In the following sections, however, I provide an alternative musical understanding. As I show below, it can be more fruitful to examine Potts in the context of his complete negation of the terms of tradition rather than within a context that is still controlled and defined by the terms of tradition. Among all other fiddlers discussed, Potts' musical prowess more immediately brings out an avant-garde of Irish traditional music. To understand this, I will review some of his performance practices, analysed from the perspective of the avant-garde.

## **5.2: Negating Times**

This section of chapter five inevitably focusses on selections of Potts' repertoire already discussed and analysed by the esteemed pianist and excellent traditional music scholar, Prof. Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin. This is both unavoidable (as Ó



Súilleabháin's work is the quintessential study on Potts' music) and beneficial (as Ó Súilleabháin's singular work helps to highlight an ultimate dependence on the terms of tradition even within the most detailed and considered traditional music analysis). Fundamentally, I will examine Potts' musical output from a very different analytical base to that of Ó Súilleabháin, and attempt to validate my approach as a useful alternative when considering Potts' unique musical processes.

To reiterate, Ó Súilleabháin's study of Potts' musical idiosyncrasies seeks analytical continuity via "the balance of innovation and tradition" (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 23). This balance relies largely on the terms of tradition and in particular on the permanence found in the persistent and constant symmetric traditional macrostructure. Accordingly, there are prominent macro-structural identifiers shared by every traditional tune. Ó Súilleabháin uses the term "Marker Motif" as follows:

Certain motifs which tend to remain unchanged, or to undergo little change, in the various settings of a piece as found in the tradition (ibid. 62).

The most prominent marker motif should be the phrase that begins a tune. I say this, because a traditional performer today need only whistle the opening one or maybe two bars of a tune for his colleague to recognise and understand the particular piece in its entirety; that is, he is informed of the whole macrostructure (thus entire entity) of a tune by way of this smallest musical fragment. Evidence of this capacity among traditional performers can be found immediately in their many personal notebooks which merely provide these one or two bars as a useful reminder for their

repertoire.<sup>106</sup> Even though musicians, including Potts, may begin on the second part (or “turn”) of a tune, this opening statement (or “marker motif”) carries most weight in identifying and defining the traditional tune in question: a “primary tune identifier”.<sup>107</sup>

Ciaran Carson is adamant that “every individual tune [...] has a definite beginning and end. The musician does what he is doing within sixteen bars, and then he does it again, only differently” (Carson 1986: 9). Despite the general celebration of an evolving cyclical nature for each Irish tune among performing musicians, in reality the terms of tradition force the student to conceptualise a tune only once, and in isolation. That is, one singular round of a tune represents the full identity of that tune, which is only then repeated.

Upon each repetition of the tune, this one round is a conceptual mainstay which is consistently referenced once and again. Fundamentally, there is repetition of this one round side by side: either immediately (as in the performance of the tune three times round); or after a space of time (as in the lapse between each musical event featuring the same tune). Basically, the round here is thus a constant, an invariable that really does not evolve cyclically. It is, rather, already whole-made and repeated wholesale. Its immediate repetition merely showcases the possibilities of micro-structural variation which itself continues to reference the single round concept. The round’s rigidity in this respect ensures its permanence.

Already, therefore, in considering cyclicity within the terms of tradition, one concession among innovators toward purists is that the first round of a tune is

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<sup>106</sup> More often than not these “bars” will not be written using staff notation, but instead would be noted using various and sometimes idiosyncratic music symbols or lettering. This, of course, owes to the fact that Irish traditional music largely remains a non-literate one.

<sup>107</sup> See Ó Súilleabháin, 1987:230 for his discussion of Potts’ “My Love is in America”.

performed with few micro-structural variations. The most innovative micro-structural variations are only performed during the subsequent repeats of the round. Here is a very real musical space that is shared by apparently contrasting musical ideologies: the innovator's and the purist's alike. After presenting the entire tune first in a manner that is consistent with the tradition as this is taken for granted (in a manner that is simple, bare, mundane) musicians can add personal additions by providing their own innovations limited to micro-structural variation.

Potts very often turns this convention on its head, as can be observed from the following analyses. He often begins his performances using an extravagant negation of a particular tune. The following sections will examine the resulting crisis brought to traditional macrostructure by Potts using: melodic, rhythmic, and structural negation. Throughout, analytical priority is given to the examination of the primary “marker motif” or “primary tune identifier”; that is, the opening one or two bars of each traditional tune.

### 5.21: Melody and the Negation of Structure.

In this section, I focus mainly on the destructive impact melody has on traditional macrostructure in Potts' performances of the traditional reel, “The Yellow Tinker”. Provided below are three separate transcriptions which represent three separate performances by Potts, and are delineated by the following headings denoting their source: “RTÉ tape”; “Quinn tape”; and “Evans tape”.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> These represent all of the audio examples I could access. However, additional transcribed examples can be found in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987.

The Yellow Tinker – performed by Tommie Potts (RTÉ tape)

The musical score for 'The Yellow Tinker' is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The piece begins in 2/4 time and changes to 4/4 time at the first measure rest. The melody is characterized by frequent triplet patterns and grace notes. The score is divided into ten systems, each starting with a measure number (1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25, 29, 33, 37, 41). The notation includes various musical symbols such as eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and rests, along with dynamic markings like accents and slurs. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the final system.



Figure 5.1: Transcription of Tommie Potts' performance of "The Yellow Tinker" from the RTÉ tapes.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Transcription by the author.

# The Yellow Tinker – performed by Tommie Potts (Quinn tape)

*Introduction*

1

5

9

13

17

21

25

29

33

*exaggerated and slow*

37 *return to original tempo*



Figure 5.2: Transcription of Tommie Potts' performance of "The Yellow Tinker" from the Quinn tapes.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Transcription by the author.

The Yellow Tinker – performed by Tommie Potts (Evans tape)

The musical score for 'The Yellow Tinker' is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The piece begins in 3/4 time and changes to 2/4 time at measure 4. The notation includes various musical symbols such as slurs, ties, and triplets. Measure numbers 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25, 29, 33, and 37 are indicated at the start of their respective lines. The score concludes with a double bar line at the end of the final line.



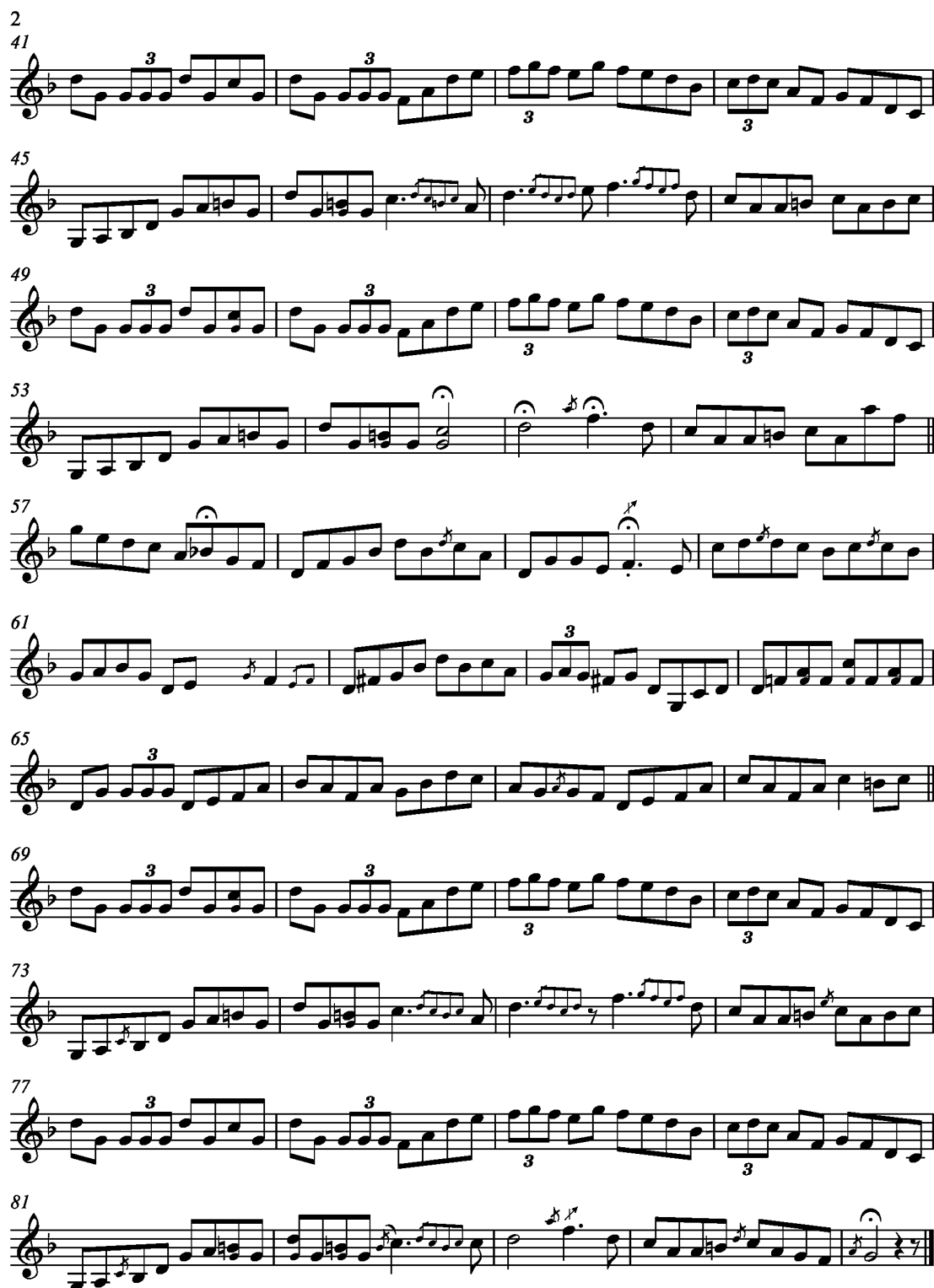


Figure 5.3: Transcription of Tommie Potts' performance of "The Yellow Tinker" from the Evans tapes.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Transcription by the author.

It is important for those unfamiliar with this particular traditional reel to bear in mind that the opening two bars of the round would be more than likely whistled by the traditional musician as follows:

### The Yellow Tinker (traditional opening two bars)



Figure 5.4: Traditional opening two bars of “The Yellow Tinker”.

The transcriptions above immediately highlight Potts’ negation of this most prominent traditional tune identifier or “marker motif” in each of his three recorded performances. Already, the most recognisable (or familiar) performance of the first part of this tune can be found in the third and final repeat of the round in the RTÉ and Quinn tapes (figures 5.1 and 5.2); while it is sandwiched in the Evans tape between the first round and the final repeat of the round (figure 5.3). The RTÉ and Quinn versions are generally quite similar. In Ó Súilleabháin’s analysis of Potts’ “The Yellow Tinker” he rightly points to the opening bar (bar 1) in the first instance. Here, the “traditional ear” (as Ó Súilleabháin suitably describes it) at best hears a lead-in bar. It bears little resemblance to the commonly performed “The Yellow Tinker”.

The confusion for the “traditional ear” is exacerbated in the second bar (bar 2), which closely resembles the usual second bar in the traditional tune; that is, the one permanent round of the tune as defined by the terms of tradition. This is outlined comparatively below:

## Traditional opening bars vs. Potts' opening bars

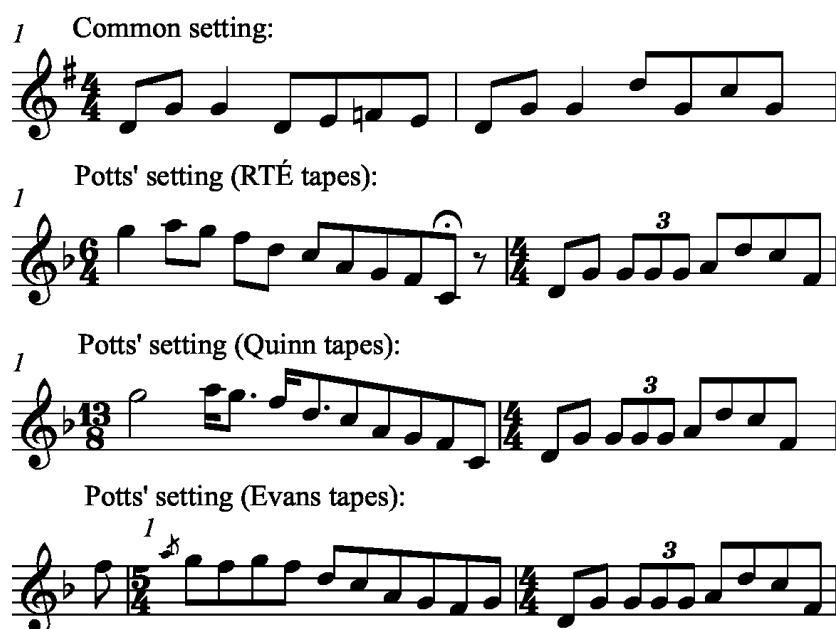


Figure 5.5: Traditional opening bars versus Potts' opening bars of "The Yellow Tinker".

The association between the untraditional bar 1 and the traditional bar 2 weighs heavily on the "traditional ear". Here, the "traditional ear" can only conceptualise the "The Yellow Tinker" by recognising this bar as the beginning of the tune; that is, bar 2 as the new bar 1. Therefore, the piece is dislocated from the expected norm, now containing a missing bar. That is, when bar 2 becomes bar 1, only seven bars remain, as opposed to the traditional symmetrical eight. The part is therefore made up of seven bars in total (see also Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 98).

Ó Súilleabháin eventually pins down this lead-in sounding first bar to make it correspond with the expected traditional first bar. In this way, he successfully reunites the lead-in sounding bar with the part, recovering its status as the first bar in a part consisting of a traditional symmetrical eight bars. The following serves as an explanation of Ó Súilleabháin's fascinating approach.

Ó Súilleabháin uses a paradigmatic reading of Potts' performance, based on an examination of micro-structural elements which disguise what Ó Súilleabháin refers to as the "submerged round". Essentially, he discovered that a syntagmatic analysis of linear musical movement disguises the reality of this first bar. "A syntagmatic analysis [...] reveals little, except to confirm the expected linear relationship within the melodic line which itself is perceived, as already stated, as having broken with the round" (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 91). Adopting a paradigmatic analysis of relational musical movement, he noted that the bar's true identity was found. To this end, Ó Súilleabháin first examined Potts' repeat of the part (bars 9–16) and how this aligns with the traditional eight-bar setting of the part. By a form of traditional music logic, this allowed Ó Súilleabháin to relate the lead-in sounding bar back to the same bar 1 of the traditional setting. I explain this here.

Basically, the second bar of the repeat of the part (bar 10) is a variation of bar 2. Both bar 2 and bar 10, of course, correspond aurally with the second bar of the common setting of the tune also. Therefore, if Potts performs a bar 1 and 2 on the repeat of the part using the traditional structure, then what comes before bar 2 in Potts' opening of the tune must make up a traditional bar 1 also. This means that Potts' lead-in sounding bar is actually a very idiosyncratic melodic deviation of the traditional bar 1.

Ó Súilleabháin's analytical approach is based on radical deviations at a micro-structural scale of which remain somehow subservient to the traditional macrostructure. That said, Ó Súilleabháin never achieves any direct micro-structural link between the traditional bar 1 and Potts' bar 1. Through a fascinating melodic analysis elsewhere in the part which links Potts' performance to the traditional setting,

when it comes to bar 1, Ó Súilleabháin can only position (or perhaps impose) the traditional macrostructure on top of Potts' performance. The traditional macrostructure that lies at the background of his music analysis therefore annuls the greater significance of Potts' idiosyncratic bar 1 (that is, its own significance at a macro-structural level). The problem is, the analytical process here is thus never fully defined within itself. That is, although relying on melody at a micro-structural level for his analysis, on this occasion there is no explanation by Ó Súilleabháin of where the corresponding traditional and idiosyncratic melodies actually align in this case.

Additionally, Ó Súilleabháin's process is very difficult (even impossible) to hear. Without using Ó Súilleabháin's rather complex methodology, realistically the listener would have no chance whatever of understanding bar 1 according to Ó Súilleabháin's results. He explains that the syntagmatic mode of analysis reflects what the "traditional ear" interprets, and the paradigmatic mode of analysis reflects Potts' own concordance with the traditional round – even by way of extreme deviation. However, because Ó Súilleabháin is dealing with micro-structural deviation, the melodic deviation at Potts' bar 1 ought to be revealed by his analysis. But this is made impossible by the severity of the deviation in question.

As a result, Ó Súilleabháin can only sum up that he has demonstrated "the surprising divergence between the piece as it exists in patterns of linear relationships, and the same piece as it exists in terms of a semi-audible, or at times inaudible, model" (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 94). As such, even within Ó Súilleabháin's own analytical process, bar 1 must remain undefined by the traditional bar 1. Yet, though it also remains undefined by traditional macrostructure, it is glossed over by (and controlled by) traditional macrostructure. Accordingly, I will provide an alternative

method of analysis below, an alternative way of understanding the primary “marker motif” (or primary tune identifier) which is destroyed under no matter what analysis: MacMahon’s, Ó Súilleabháin’s, and indeed my own.

To recap: Ó Súilleabháin focussed his analysis upon the traditionally constant single round of the tune. In this way, the single traditional round of “The Yellow Tinker” remains permanent and defining, claiming by implication all authority, even over Potts’ “devious” performance. For Ó Súilleabháin, Potts’ first repeat of the round where a similar idiosyncratic melodic invention remains, provides “further proof” of the same argument he uncovered through his paradigmatic analysis before (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 105). This in itself demonstrates where Ó Súilleabháin considers Potts’ performance upon the repetitive schema of the traditional round alone. However, I argue that the opening musical statement in question (bar 1) can be understood musically only when considered within the context of the performed piece of music as a whole.

With this in mind, I now examine Potts’ “The Yellow Tinker” in and of itself, as it defines itself using its own terms of reference.<sup>112</sup> Basically, Potts’ performance will be considered within Potts’ “The Yellow Tinker” instead of without Potts’ “The Yellow Tinker”. That is, to deny (or negate) “The Yellow Tinker” as performed and maintained by the terms of tradition (i.e. within the single constant referential round). Instead, I present a more transitory mode of music analysis. As with Ó Súilleabháin, however, I will also focus on bar 1.

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<sup>112</sup> Meyer insisted: “One cannot analyze or criticize a piece of music ‘in its own terms’” (Meyer 1996: 64). I should make it clear here that what I mean by analysing this performed piece of music using “its own terms of reference” is that I invite a breakdown of what Meyer would classify as the “finite rules” of a particular music style (or tradition). Essentially, I bring these aspects of music style (or structure) onto an analytical platform which Meyer would classify under “infinite strategies”.

I begin here by discussing solely the RTÉ and Quinn tapes. In this respect, I suggest the following: it is only when one hears the performed “round” for the second time that one *first* comes to realise the truth of the opening statement (bars 33 and 1 respectively). Figure 5.6 below helps to illustrate this.

### Potts’ opening bars and their repeat (RTÉ & Quinn tapes)

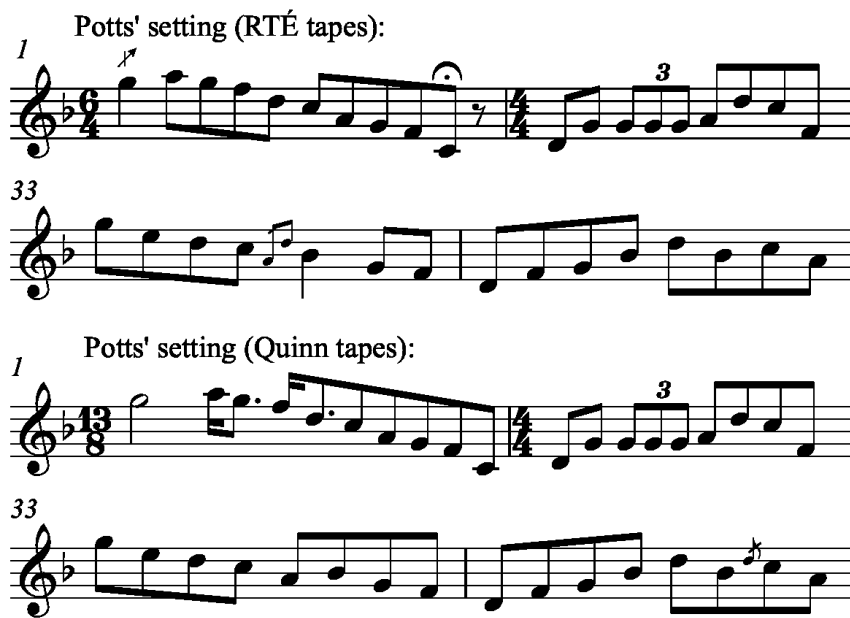


Figure 5.6: Potts’ opening bars and their repeat of “The Yellow Tinker” on the RTÉ & Quinn tapes.

The direct reference to the opening statement upon the first repeat of the round immediately suggests to the listener that the opening statement itself was not a lead-in bar after all; obviously one cannot lead-in to a single piece half way through its performance. As such, the whole becomes informed by the parts and the parts become informed by the whole. At one point the opening statement is actually a lead-in to an asymmetric structure which seemed to negate traditional practice. But it neither stays that way, nor does it provide any new kind of permanence. Upon its repeat later in the performance, the lead-in bar actually re-evolves within the formation of the whole

piece. It therefore contributes to a musical experience that is quintessentially transitory and so not determined by the terms of tradition.

In many respects, to look outside Potts “The Yellow Tinker” can lead to more confusion; that is, to rely on the traditional single round is more frustrating for the listener. Nay, it is impossible to hear the opening statement at bar 1 as something other than a lead-in bar until this musical material reoccurs some 32 bars later. Given that the musical material contained in Potts’ bar 1 cannot be related to the musical material of the traditional bar 1, means that the musical material contained within Potts’ bar 1 can ultimately relate back to itself only. This is why its repeat within the whole musical event is the only realistic key toward discovering a new identity for the introductory material (especially if one is basing an analysis on melody such as that which Ó Súilleabháin and I provide).

In the end, it can be more satisfying to listen to Potts’ performance using alternative terms of reference such as those of the avant-garde. Within the avant-garde, the “round” can only represent a transitory musical motion: the “round” can define and redefine (or itself become defined and redefined by) both itself and its parts through the progression of the musical event (that is, a single performance of a tune). It is this extreme transitoriness in Potts’ playing which can be most provocative. It aggravates the “traditional ear” and negates the referential (or reverential) terms of tradition to offer interesting possibilities within an avant-garde of traditional music. I outline below why the traditional ear so often fails in this respect.

It is interesting that an avant-gardist reading of the “round” provides a tangible approach for the listener to understand the musical processes informing Potts’ musical production. Ironically, though, it would seem that the “traditional ear” is unusually



prepared for this type of active avant-garde listening. The listening habits of the “traditional ear” should, by definition, allow listeners to interpret and reinterpret the “round” instantaneously during performance. I am referring here to the traditional definition of the round as something “cyclical”. Even Ó Súilleabháin defines the round as the “cyclic structure on which all Irish traditional dance-music is based” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 79). Ó Riada noted a visual comparison using a serpent with its tail in its mouth during his radio broadcasts titled “Our Musical Heritage”.

However, if the “round” is fundamental to the terms of tradition and to how traditional ears perceive a musical event, its scope has been greatly diminished. From an avant-gardist perspective at least, the traditional “round” is fossilised and made to fit a musical aesthetic defined by classicism (see chapter three). Accordingly, it has been denied its potential to be truly cyclical. In a true cycle, there is not always an absolute beginning nor an absolute end. Consequently, there neither needs to be clear consistent definition of the segments that constitute the cycle. The understanding of a cycle within the terms of tradition is extremely limited. It would seem that when the terms of tradition refer to a cycle, they refer directly to macro-structural repetition. In contrast to a cycle, a repetition has a specific beginning, a specific end, and a clear definition of each segment being repeated. The traditional round is of course repeated. It has a specific beginning and a specific end. It also contains clear segments which are all repeated.

Surprisingly, it is only by using an avant-garde interpretation of traditional listening habits that both the opening musical statement and a tangible concept of the “round” in Potts’ performance re-emerge. Here, a truly cyclical performance of the musical material that identifies the “The Yellow Tinker” re-contextualises the opening

musical statement (bar 1). Simply put: with regards to an avant-garde, a “round” need not be repeated, it only needs to be wholly formed.

What may surprise the listener most, is the sudden appearance of the traditional bar 1 at the opening of the third “round” (bar 61 in both the RTÉ and the Quinn tapes). This is very important. The traditional bar 1, which usually alerts the initiated listener to the performance of “The Yellow Tinker” at the offset, now acquires a new significance. Somehow, the expected appears unexpectedly, even though it appears exactly where it is expected to appear.

### Traditional opening bars vs. Potts’ final repeats

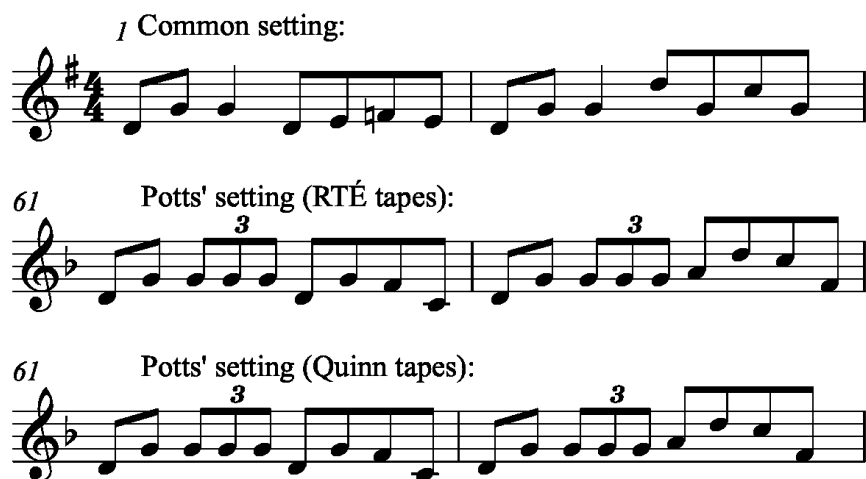


Figure 5.7: Traditional opening bars versus Potts’ final repeats on the RTÉ & Quinn tapes.

In the end, this traditional bar 1 (which is usually enough for the “traditional ear” to predict the entire performance at a macro-structural level) arrives too late, and at that, arrives out-of-place by virtue of arriving in its place. Potts here negates musically all what a traditional bar 1 stands for within the terms of tradition. More: he almost mocks what the traditional bar 1 stands for, and by extension he mocks the terms of tradition themselves. Even if it merely recoups the musical gravity initially

lost to the second bar, the appearance of the traditional bar 1 here successfully eschews traditional listening habits. In this way, the terms of tradition are very successfully brought into crisis. This is why the “traditional ear” is left distraught while listening to Potts. There is a very real musical crisis lying behind the feelings of crisis experienced by the listener.

Before leaving the RTÉ example (figure 5.1 above), it is worth drawing attention to the extreme liberty Potts claims for the “dance” beat of this reel (I discuss the concept of a musical “beat” versus a musical “pulse” in chapter six). As described above, the “traditional ear” re-contextualises the musical material in Potts’ opening statement from a lead-in bar to a bar 1. This is due to the reappearance of the same musical material at the beginning of the second round. However, in the RTÉ example, Potts further accentuates the ambiguity of the musical material that defines bar 1. During the musical passage surrounding and including bar 33, Potts especially ignores the rigidity of the traditional rhythmic beat of the reel in favour of a free-rhythmic reinterpretation. In this way, he retains some of the trappings of a lead-in style.



Figure 5.8: Potts’ “The Yellow Tinker” bars 29–36 on the RTÉ tapes.

The note B-flat in bar 33 is particularly drawn out, being especially reminiscent of Potts’ laborious opening statement (see figure 5.1). The listener, therefore, must

contend with the notion that Potts is somehow “re-leading-in”. The elongated note c carrying over from bar 35 to bar 36 extends the free-rhythmic pulse created by Potts. As such, though, it reassures the “traditional ear” that this rhythmic liberty cannot in itself signify a lead-in. Only in retrospect can the first bar be emphasised as bar 1 (rather than as a lead-in). This retrospective view of bar 1 is perhaps more delayed in the RTÉ example than in the Quinn example owing to the free-rhythmic pulse outlined above.

That being said, Potts’ performance of the same reel on the Evans tape is perhaps the most demanding of the three versions (see figure 5.3). Here, the second, as opposed to the third round introduces the traditional bar 1. This strongly contrasts the other two versions where the traditional bar 1 only surfaces in the third round. As such, before revealing the ambiguous lead-in bar as bar 1 immediately during the beginning of the second round, Potts instead jolts the listener back to a more familiar setting. However, even here this move cannot have been expected by a traditional audience that has settled on the truncated version of the part as outlined earlier in my analysis; that is, a seven-bar first part plus introduction. It is not until the third round that the listener recognises the lead-in bar as bar 1. However, in this instance, such a process is further complicated by the surprise disappearance (in the third round) of the traditional bar 1 (from the second round) once again.

There remains another important distinction between Ó Súilleabháin’s paradigmatic reading of Potts’ bar 1 and my avant-gardist reading of Potts’ bar 1. In Ó Súilleabháin’s transcription, he retains some of the opening statement’s musical material for a lead-in bar (or bar 0):

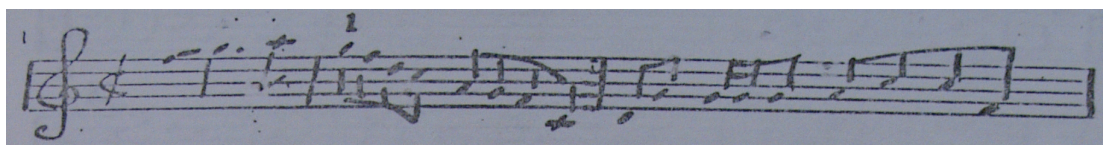


Figure 5.9: Transcription of Potts' opening bars of "The Yellow Tinker" in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987-92.

The "round" as defined using the terms of tradition must discard these initial notes because they cannot fit inside its symmetric structure. Alternatively, from an avant-gardist perspective, these same notes must be integrated into bar 1 resulting in a more asymmetric whole once more. The notes Ó Súilleabháin places in bar 0 form part of the same introductory material as those contained in a more symmetrical bar 1 which he has forged out of the requirements of traditional macrostructure. Indeed, to begin bar 1 eight quaver lengths back from the beginning of bar 2 does nothing to link Potts' idiosyncratic melody to the traditional melody of bar 1 either. As such, the impetus for doing so is solely based on the requirements of a symmetric traditional macrostructure that is essentially glossing over the issue of a negated traditional bar 1.

In my analysis, the entire opening statement initially was a lead-in bar (bar 1 in my transcriptions and bars 0–1 in Ó Súilleabháin's transcription). This same bar is then redefined later on in the cycle to become part of the main melodic material; that is, it becomes bar 1. However, within the terms of tradition (as in Ó Súilleabháin's analysis) this cannot fully occur. Instead the same musical material must become half lead-in bar, half bar 1. However, the distinction between bar 0 and bar 1 is impossible to appreciate aurally. Ó Súilleabháin agreed that the musical material initially thought of as a lead-in is re-contextualised as part of the main melodic content. However, in his transcription, this can only become half true. That Potts' repeat of the musical material of bar 1 in bar 33 is contained within a traditional metric unit should neither influence the understanding of his original bar 1, as bar 0 and bar 1. As already

demonstrated, Potts moves dramatically outside the rhythmic constancy of the metric unit around bar 33 in the RTÉ example too.

More, observe that I do include a bar 0 in my transcription of the Evans tape recording:

### Potts' opening bars as performed on the Evans tape



Figure 5.10: Potts' opening bars of "The Yellow Tinker" on the Evans tapes.

This bar 0 is not to be confused with what can be considered a lead-in. The f note in my bar 0 is merely a "pick-up note". In many ways a pick-up note is like a crutch for the instrumentalist to set him off on his performance, just like the "ah" or "em" preceding an opening sentence during speech. Its primary function is therefore not as a melodic introduction to the main material which a lead-in sequence usually provides. It would be a very common practice among fiddlers to use a first finger note as a pick-up note to an opening phrase which begins on the second finger.

In addition, on the Evans tape the initial first bar (bar 1) is less free in its metric execution than in the other two performances. This in itself further confirms the asymmetric length of the bar in relation to beats, where a more consistent motor rhythm more immediately gathers the entire phrase together. The first group of four quavers in bar 1 here are inseparable in any event. Together they almost form a short-roll ornament. In contrast to the other two versions discussed, here Potts actually begins faster and subsequently slows down to a more regular pulse during the first

bar; thus further contributing to the sensation that a short-roll on g has been performed. This means that the inclusion or exclusion from bar 1 of the opening four quavers in my transcription would result in an asymmetric bar 1.

Consequently, that Potts clearly uses a pick-up note here, further emphasises the case for holding all the lead-in sounding musical material within a single bar 1. In all of my transcriptions, including that from the Evans tape, bar 1 stretches beyond the symmetric four-beat bars which Ó Súilleabháin must retain to be in keeping with the terms of tradition and the traditional round. In fact, when Ó Súilleabháin documents Potts' own notation of "The Yellow Tinker", there is evidence that the fiddler occasionally did not facilitate a lead-in bar either.

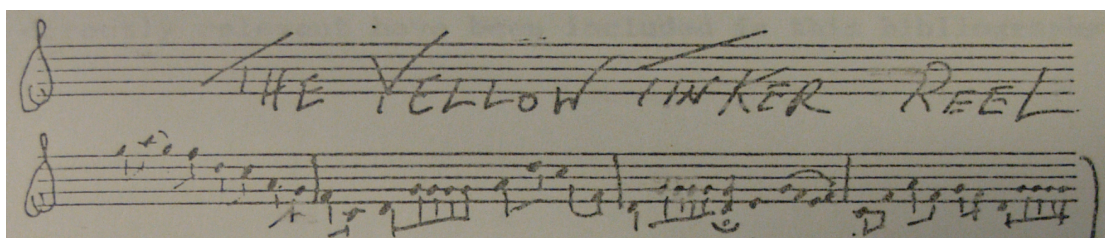


Figure 5.11: Potts' transcription of "The Yellow Tinker" in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987:146a.

It is not worth discussing this too deeply, as Potts was never consistent in his own notations and it cannot be used as a definitive reflection of how he interpreted his own musical performances. Potts' canvas was the instrument itself, not the staff notation. And in using the instrument, the pick-up note on the Evans tape denotes an asymmetric reading.

Elsewhere in the piece, Potts' discipline regarding a submerged traditional round as argued by Ó Súilleabháin is further questioned by the fiddler's asymmetrical "turning of the round". The first repeat of the round (in Ó Súilleabháin's transcription

as well as in both my RTÉ and Quinn tape transcriptions above) contains a 12-bar first part (see figures 5.1 & 5.2 above). This of course further confuses “traditional ears” and accentuates the transitory space claimed by the idiosyncratic performance as a whole. It also makes Ó Súilleabháin’s submerged round even more difficult to locate. He admits that “the effect of Potts 33–44 is one of a blinding deviation from any concept of the round” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 105). Yet, Ó Súilleabháin eventually provides an avenue toward understanding the submerged round on this occasion too.

For Ó Súilleabháin, the latter half of the fifth bar and all of the sixth bar of the sequence in question (bars 37–38 in figure 5.12 below) are places of considerable conflict with the traditional round. However, the subsequent bars 39–40 are relatively straight forward for his paradigmatic analysis.

### Potts’ “The Yellow Tinker” bars 33–44 (RTÉ Tapes)



Figure 5.12: Potts’ “The Yellow Tinker” bars 33–44 on the RTÉ tapes.

In Ó Súilleabháin, the melodic material contained within bars 39–40 is shown to correlate with the corresponding bars of the traditional round. Here, Ó Súilleabháin maintains the integrity of the traditional macrostructure by perceiving bars 37–38 as extreme micro-structural deviations within a consistent traditional round. Beyond this,



however, Ó Súilleabháin still must contend with the subsequent four-bar sequence which sits in between the submerged first part and the submerged second part of the traditional tune structure.

In the first instance, given that the melodic sequence of bars 41–44 represents a repeat of bars 13–16 (see figure 5.1 or 5.2 above), then these extra four bars belong to the first part of the tune, and not the second.

Potts 34–44, therefore, for all of its linearity, can be shown to be related to a submerged round covering the first part of that round (eight bars), skipping the next four bars (which would be the first half of the ‘repeat’ of the first part), and picking up with the round again for the second half of the ‘repeat’ of the first part. Against the perceived linearity, therefore, of Potts 33–44, the submerged round displays the effect of a telescoped form which still retains the formal logic, if not the actual formal duration, of the full round (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 106).

Ó Súilleabháin’s concept of a “telescoped form” is interesting. In many ways, what traditional cyclicity entails, in fact, is this same telescoped formula; however, spreading outwardly rather than inwardly. As I have already revealed above, the round defined by the terms of tradition is a constant singular presentation of specific musical material. This is then rather confusingly thought of as embodying cyclicity during performance when in reality it is repeated much like the rigid subsections of a telescope. Keeping with the imagery, this telescope is extended in performance to reveal its innate pattern of repetition. Its scope is unpredictable (theoretically the performer can continue to reveal the repetitive units of the telescope’s subsections infinitely), yet its structural design is both static and predictable.

For Ó Súilleabháin, what is threatened by Potts' performances is the traditional round's "audibility" (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 109). This means that where Potts breaks the traditional round, this is interpreted as a false perception made on "traditional ears". Ó Súilleabháin explains: "If, however, the round in these instances has been 'broken' as far as current traditional ears are concerned, the reality for Potts is one of a submerged round" (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 121). Here, Potts is still motivated by, or controlled by, the terms of tradition.

It is easily agreed that the "traditional ear" is left distraught because of Pott's complex reading of macrostructure. Most confusingly, he sometimes plays on a symmetric interpretation of the asymmetric. This was shown by the re-contextualisation of the musical material in his opening phrase, going from a lead-in to a bar 1. This meant that an expected seven-bar first part, all of a sudden re-emerged as a more traditional eight-bar part (that said, an elongated bar 1 still denies traditional symmetry). This process ruptures the comfortable predictability of the terms of tradition. Instead, it fosters a transitory understanding of musical performance that ultimately demonstrates a bold willingness to bring about a musical crisis.

Ó Súilleabháin's paradigmatic method of analysis relies on the permanence of the traditional round upon this transitory musical process. However, whereas the musical content of bar 1 can be disputed between both Ó Súilleabháin's and my own analytical approach when considering all available recordings of the "The Yellow Tinker" minus that of the Evans tape; I have demonstrated that Potts' bar 1 simply must contain an asymmetric count when considering the latter recording. This not only effects the primary marker motif (that is, the opening bar itself), but has many consequences for the performed piece of music as a whole.

In this section, I have provided an alternative approach to understanding Tommie Potts' music to that provided by Ó Súilleabháin. In this matter, I have demonstrated where Ó Súilleabháin's theories must rely on the terms of tradition, while my own do not. So far, Ó Súilleabháin has called upon the melodic content of the traditional "round" to help define Potts' musical process within the terms of tradition. Though this cannot be revealed when considering bar 1, Ó Súilleabháin still must insist on the metrical integrity of Potts' opening bar. I have contested this. Elsewhere, Ó Súilleabháin's concept of a telescoped first part where the opening four bars were omitted, is easily accepted owing to the very symmetrical manner with which said omission was achieved by Potts. However, there are other instances throughout Potts' repertoire where far more asymmetric reductions, extensions, or omissions occur. In the following sections I show how these pose difficulties for Ó Súilleabháin's approach as defined by the terms of tradition, yet help to complete my own theoretical understanding of Potts' musical processes as defined by the avant-garde.

## 5.22: Rhythm and the Negation of Structure.

Ó Súilleabháin was well aware of other instances in Potts' repertoire where the addition or omission of sections (either full bars or segments of a bar) resulted in a far more asymmetric composition of a part. The most accessible of these is found in the slip jig, "Top it Off". As Ó Súilleabháin also pointed out with regard to this particular example, "it is, in fact one of the few pieces to have been taken up by other players" (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 125). The alteration in question is found at the very

end of the first part of the slip jig where a 12/8 bar emerges, outside the regular 9/8 metre of the traditional Irish slip jig.

**Top it Off (1st part)**  
– performed by Tommie Potts (RTÉ tape)



Figure 5.13: Potts' 1st part of "Top it Off" on the RTÉ tapes.<sup>113</sup>

Also, at the very end of the second part of the same slip jig, a bar of 6/8 emerges, again outside the regular 9/8 metre.

**Top it Off (2nd part)**  
– performed by Tommie Potts (RTÉ tape)



Figure 5.14: Potts' 2nd part of "Top it Off" on the RTÉ tapes.<sup>114</sup>

With regard to the first part here, Potts adds an extra beat to the very end of the traditional bar, itself based on the musical material directly preceding it one beat before inside the same bar. With regard to the second part, Potts merely shortens the

<sup>113</sup> Transcription by the author.

<sup>114</sup> Transcription by the author.

length of the first note of the bar. In the traditional setting, this d note lasts a full eight quavers, however here Potts cuts the same note short to make up a combined duration of 5 quavers only.

Again, quite understandably, Ó Súilleabháin dismisses the significance of this particular addition and omission. He explains: “I have not included this [slip jig “Top it Off”], however, as one of the five central pieces representative of [Potts’] innovation because the deviation in question occurs only at cadential points, and even then in a predictable manner” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 125). This is a very acceptable point. Meyer, for instance, also highlighted the “frequent use of deceptive cadences in late-nineteenth century music” which although changes “the listener’s sense of the probability of their occurrence” does not change her/his “understanding of the syntactic function” of cadential figures *per se* (Meyer 1996: 19). As such, the rhythmical and macro-structural dimensions of Potts’ performance here cannot be so significant.

I have already examined one of what Ó Súilleabháin refers to as the “five central pieces” in his thesis above: “The Yellow Tinker”. There, Ó Súilleabháin elaborated on his theory of melodic deviation. In addition, Ó Súilleabháin analysed another reel, “Julia Delanay’s”, to investigate what he termed phrase deviation (see Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 109–120). This is where the traditional macrostructure is in fact retained, although some micro-structural elements disrupt traditional phrasing to the extent that, to “traditional ears” at least, the macrostructure is perceived as something fractured and thus made untraditional. In this instance, Potts essentially launches into a consistent out-of-phase rendition where the resultant symmetry of asymmetry is not as pertinent to the present study either (see *ibid.* 109–118). As Ó Súilleabháin testifies:

“Even in Potts’ ‘Julia Delaney’ where our analysis focussed on ‘phrasing deviation’, it was the non-synchronisation of phrases with the underlying ‘natural’ phrase units which was in question rather than any irregularity in the phrasing” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 190–192).

Therefore I will not examine “Julia Delaney’s” here, only to emphasise again that Ó Súilleabháin is operating from an analytical perspective which views Potts’ performance practices as something completely new to the Irish music tradition as a whole. In contrast, readers can refer to chapter 4 of this thesis where an equivalent of “phrase deviation” is discussed in the context of Con Cassidy’s performance of the double jig, “The Frost is all Over”; as well as chapter 2 where Edward Cronin presents similar difficulties for the “traditional ear”. It is therefore unnecessary in this thesis to examine another of Ó Súilleabháin’s “central pieces” where he further highlights both melodic and phrase deviation in the reel “My Love is in America”.

“My Love is in America” is a particularly fascinating chapter in Ó Súilleabháin’s work, and provides a suitable climax for his particular analytical approach. However, when Ó Súilleabháin examines the reel “Toss the Feathers” and the jig “The Rocky Road to Dublin” to expose both rhythmic and structural deviation respectively, his theory of a submerged round is less robust as the traditional macrostructure begins to fragment most significantly. As such, these require further attention here too, and are discussed in this, and the subsequent section respectively. The focus of attention inside the reel “Toss the Feathers” is the occurrence of certain bars in an uncharacteristic 3/2 metre.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> There are two ways of representing the metre of an Irish reel, either as 4/4, or as 2/2. This will have very little influence on how to perceive the melo-rhythmic movement of the music, but given that Ó Súilleabháin opts to represent the written notation in 2/2 metre, I will keep in with this for the sake of consistency during the following discussion.

Toss the Feathers  
- performed by Tommie Potts (Quinn tape)

The musical score is written for a single melodic line in treble clef. It begins in 3/2 time and changes to common time (C) at measure 4. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score is divided into measures by bar lines, with measure numbers 5, 9, 12, 15, 19, 23, 26, 29, and 33 indicated at the start of their respective lines. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together in groups. There are several trills and grace notes throughout. At measure 29, there is a triplet of eighth notes. At measure 33, there is a triplet of eighth notes. The piece ends with a double bar line at the final measure.



Figure 5.15: “Toss the Feathers” performed by Tommie Potts on the Quinn tapes.<sup>116</sup>

In my transcription of the piece above I maintain the metrical and structural presentation favoured by Ó Súilleabháin – I provide an alternative understanding of the same transcription further down in figures 5.30–5.35. Again, it is important to note that Ó Súilleabháin was surprised by what he terms the “multimetric” elements introduced by Potts, stating: “Tommie Potts has arrived at this system of multimetric development in what up to now has been a monometric tradition” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 141). By contrast, again this thesis cannot share in the surprise. The evidence gathered from the previous chapter especially, where John Doherty produces many multimetric sequences, is sufficient to dispel the myth of Potts as having been some kind of pioneer in this regard (see chapter four).

There are two main methods used by Potts to introduce the 3/2 metre into this particular rendition of “Toss the Feathers”. The first is by means of what Ó Súilleabháin categorises an “extension motif” occurring on bar 1 and its various

<sup>116</sup> Transcription by the author.



repeats throughout both the part and the repeated rounds (see Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 143). This is identified by Ó Súilleabháin as follows:

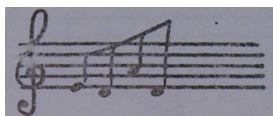


Figure 5.16: “Extension motif” in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987: 143.

The variant forms can be observed in the main transcription above and are discussed below (see figure 5.15 above and figures 5.18–5.20 below; see also Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 147).

Ó Súilleabháin was correct to state that the “extension motif” (and by association its variants) is designed out of the musical material within the same traditional bar it occupies. As such, it does not “disturb the other motifs within the metrical unit” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 143). More, “if it were omitted, the melodic flow would be uninterrupted” (ibid. 143). This makes it very similar to the extension motif seen in Potts’ first part of “Top it Off” therefore, where the motivic content of the final bar of the first part is extended (see figure 5.13).

Ó Súilleabháin’s decision not to examine “Top it Off” is on account of the comparative lack of importance given to the final (cadential) bar of the part in contrast to the central importance of the opening bar as a primary “marker motif”. Remember, this “marker motif” (or primary tune identifier) is what defines the whole of the traditional round and ensures the predictability of a symmetric traditional macrostructure. In sum: the extension of the first bar in “Toss the Feathers” is far

more dramatic to the “traditional ear” than the extension of the last bar in “Top it Off”.

As expected, Ó Súilleabháin stresses the melodic relationship between the extension motif plus its variants and the musical material found in the traditional metric unit:

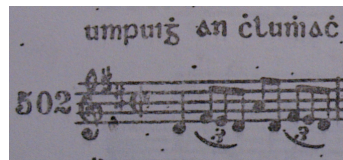


Figure 5.17: “Toss the Feathers” traditional bar 1 in O’Neill, 1907, cited in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987: 129.

However, unlike the opening bar of “The Yellow Tinker”, this time the melodic relationship is immediately audible for even the “traditional ear”. What is most interesting about bar 1 of “Toss the Feathers” is that it provides the listener with all the relevant information that denotes the traditional reel “Toss the Feathers”. That is, here bar 1 actually functions in a way that immediately sheds light on the traditional tune’s identity, and even encourages listeners initially toward a regular conception of the traditional round. However, contrary to “The Yellow Tinker”, it is through the rhythmical, metrical and overall macro-structural damage created by Potts’ manipulation of the musical material contained within the traditional bar 1 that the “traditional ear” is eventually left in crisis once more.

This is not primarily due to the immediate effect of an extended bar 1 itself, but due to how this irregular musical meter eventually permeates through to influence the entire performance of the piece as a whole. As Ó Súilleabháin noted:

It is, in fact, the marker motif, opening not only every performance by Potts [...] but every setting noted in the [manuscript] collections, which is the stabilising factor in the matter of model audibility or tune identification. In the first part of the Potts performances, this marker motif, or its variant, opens not only every doubling of that part, but also every natural sub-section within the part itself” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 154).

Though the melodic relationship with the traditional bar is always heard, the exact process toward Potts’ variations on the extension motif remains unclear. For instance, out of the extension motif itself:

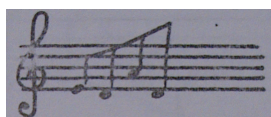


Figure 5.16b: “Extension motif” in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987: 143.

Ó Súilleabháin finds an obvious variant in:

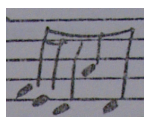


Figure 5.18: Variant 1 of “extension motif” in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987: 150.

Out of this, the link to a second variant is just as evident for Ó Súilleabháin:

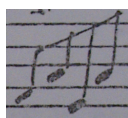


Figure 5.19: Variant 2 of “extension motif” in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987: 150.

It is directly through the latter variant that Ó Súilleabháin discovers a melodic link to the more challenging variant of the extension motif as:



Figure 5.20: Variant 3 of “extension motif” in Ó Súilleabháin, 1987 : 150.

He explains:

[Figure 5.20 above] does not appear at first glance to fit into the process already noted in earlier motifs. The extension motif in this case, however, can be shown to be indirectly related to the preceding motif in that it is a transposition of a motif which we have already seen to be a variation of that preceding motif (ibid. 148).

The musical logic of these melodic links is convincing at first glance. However, Potts revealed to Ó Súilleabháin that the origin of fig 5.20 under discussion can be found in Frédéric Chopin’s “March Funèbre” slow movement from the Second Piano Sonata in Bb minor (op.35). He outlined this as follows:

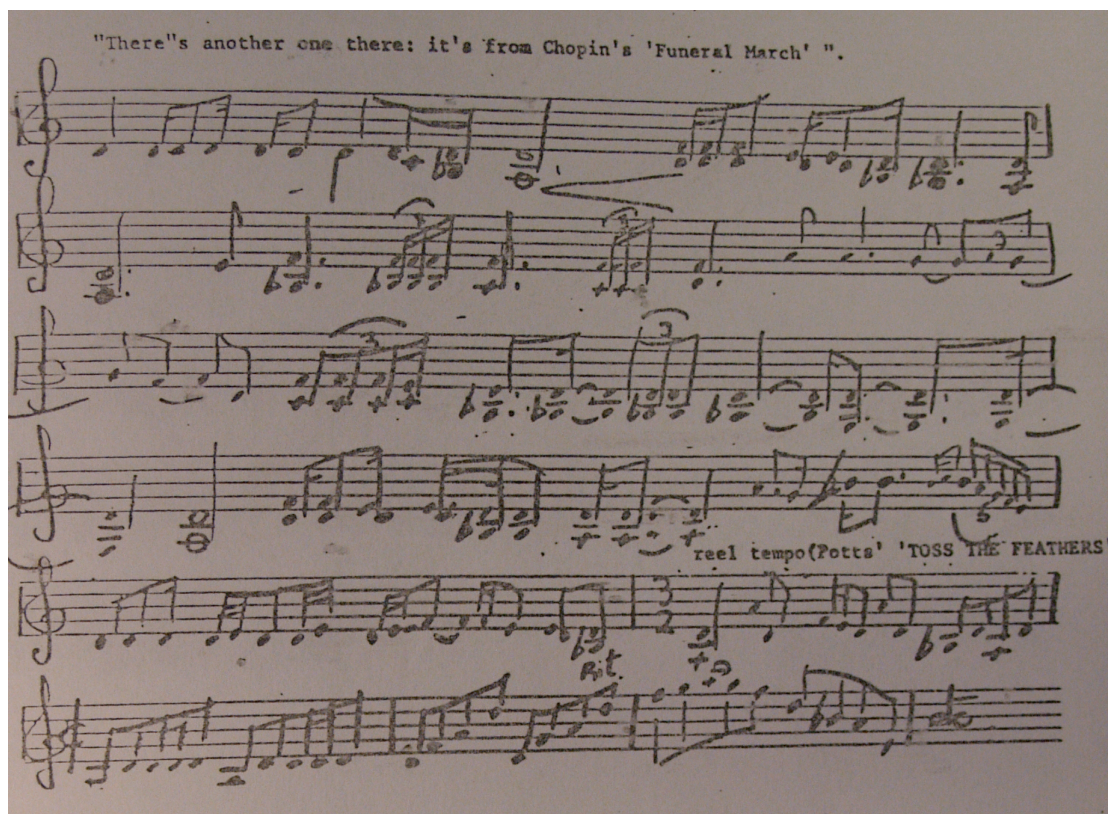


Figure 5.21: Potts' presentation of Chopin's Funeral March in Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 323, ill.81.

Here, there is a harmonic influence immediately apparent which Ó Súilleabháin is also quick to point out:

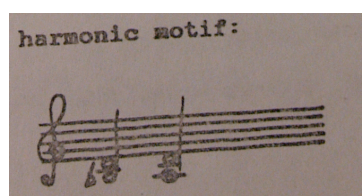


Figure 5.22: "Harmonic Motif" from Potts' "Toss the Feathers" in Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 327.

Potts performs non-metrical introductions to "Toss the Feathers" during some of his performances, and even here the same harmonic influence is present (see Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 328, ill.85). But of most interest now, is this same influence on the motif found in fig 5.20 above; that is, the most challenging variant of the extension

motif. This influence is both clearly revealed by Potts in his performance, and obviously accepted by Ó Súilleabháin later in his own thesis where he states that “there is an interesting carry-over of the [harmonic] motif – this time in melodic form – in the opening bar of the reel” (ibid. 329).

It is obvious at least that the Chopin influence “was not so much the melodic or rhythmic dimensions of the Chopin piece which impressed themselves on Potts but the harmonic ingredients” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 329). As such, Potts could salvage the greatest freedom in carrying over this influence into his melo-rhythmic developments as a solo performer. Now, however, the melodic pattern Ó Súilleabháin maintains toward the appearance of the most challenging variation of the extension motif (figure 5.20) is therefore inaccurate. If there is a transpositional link between both this challenging variant (figure 5.20) and the previous variant (figure 5.19), then this link would follow a route opposite to that maintained by Ó Súilleabháin’s main analysis. If Potts’ primary motivation behind his rendition of “Toss the Feathers” is borne out of a connection he exposes with the Bb,/D to A,/D harmonic combination inside Chopin’s piece, then any melo-rhythmic content coming out of this priority is both subservient and subsequent to this harmonic link.

It is obviously the sound – or “mood” as Ó Súilleabháin puts it – of Chopin’s musical texture that influences Potts. However, this need not remain an ambiguous feeling. It is clear that the Bb,/D to A,/D combination encapsulates the sound of the Chopin segment for Potts. However, Ó Súilleabháin seeks more concrete influences from Chopin that may permeate other areas of Potts’ “Toss the Feathers”. As such, Ó Súilleabháin becomes interested in an overlap of melodic content elsewhere in Chopin’s Funeral March with the traditional reel.



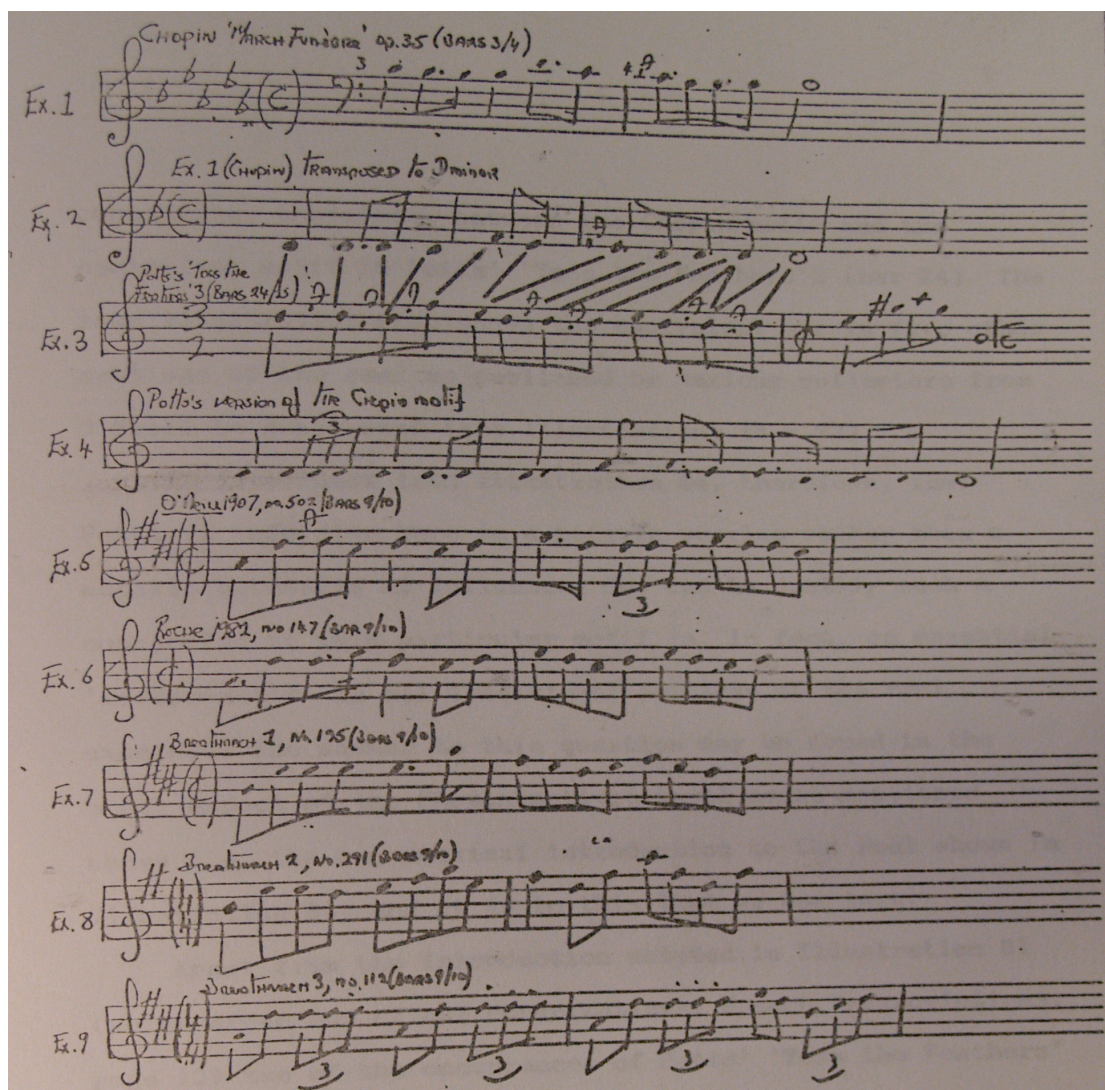


Figure 5.23: Melodic overlaps between Potts' Toss the Feathers and Chopin's Funeral March in Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 326.

As it happens, this melodic overlap between both Chopin's "Funeral March" and Potts' performance of "Toss the Feathers" also marks the second instance of a 3/2 bar, this time occurring in the second part of the traditional tune. Again, it was Potts who brought this new link with Chopin's composition to the attention of Ó Súilleabháin. In this matter, and considering the obvious melodic link to the traditional melody itself rather than any significant new "deviation" made by Potts himself, Ó Súilleabháin asks:

How can [Potts] justify such a connection [between Chopin and himself] if this particular motif is, in fact, an essential ‘marker-motif’ in all traditional settings of the reel examined? (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 327).

However, it is important to remember that initially Potts only pointed to a connection between the sound of the slow beginning of Chopin’s piece as an influence on his rendition of “Toss the Feather”. This new melodic connection was merely offered by Potts almost as a throwaway remark to further satisfy Ó Súilleabháin’s interest in the matter. Here is a transcript of the conversation between Ó Súilleabháin (Q) and Potts (Potts):

Q            But once you had finished with the slow beginning, did you make any use of the Chopin bits then?

Potts        No! But the only thing there is – I ask myself the question like your one there of me, but now it did strike me that there was some affinity between myself and Chopin [here, Potts reveals to Ó Súilleabháin the melodic connection outlined above] (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 322).

It should be obvious here that Potts declares that the opening harmonic effect is the *only* borrowing taken from Chopin. The later observation is presented as an interesting “motivic overlap rather than a motivic borrowing or influence”, which Ó Súilleabháin also clarifies (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 327). All the same, Ó Súilleabháin is forced to pursue this new melodic link to elicit an outside structural influence that would account wholly for Potts’ fragmentation of the traditional round – remember that it is important for Ó Súilleabháin to bring Potts back in line with the terms of tradition.



To answer his own question concerning the new melodic Chopin connection, Ó Súilleabháin returns to the initial harmonic influence highlighted by Potts. In doing so, Ó Súilleabháin places momentarily both the real Chopin harmonic reference and the coincidental Chopin melodic overlap on equal par for his analysis of rhythmic deviation. This allows Ó Súilleabháin to link both the harmonic reference and the melodic overlap to the exclusive appearances of a 3/2 metre. As such, through his analytical dependance on the terms of tradition, Ó Súilleabháin must rely on a melodic (though unreal) influence to explain and contextualise a harmonic (and real) influence elsewhere. He thus concludes:

We have now discovered that these rhythmic deviations are directly linked to an indirect borrowing from Chopin on the one hand, and to a perceived motivic overlap on the other. [...] Potts' mood as revealed in his use of the Chopin motif in his non-metrical introduction carries through into the reel itself in such a way as to effect the metrical structure at precisely those points where this influence manifests itself. [...] for him the important influence is one of mood rather than motif (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 331).

Essentially, there is a problem now given that the melodic overlap is not really an “influence” from Chopin. As per Potts' own testament, together with a clear connection to the traditional bar itself, there is no real melodic Chopin influence here. In addition, there are very many other examples where Potts uses the musical material within a traditional bar to extend that bar beyond its own metrical unit; this, without the need of non-metrical outside influences. This is very obviously shown in “Top it Off” above for example (see figure 5.13).

As such, relating the emergence of a 3/2 metre directly to Chopin's non-metrical influence – though necessary for the terms of tradition – is now misleading owing to the unreal nature of the melodic overlap influence. Even outside of Potts' performances, such treatment of a particularly repetitive metric unit has been explained before in this thesis, meaning that the process is neither unknown to the Irish fiddling tradition. The repetitive material contained over two bars in Doherty's performance of "The Boyne Hunt" (figure 4.1) works on a similar musical process only reducing the metrical content rather than extending it (see chapter four).

To sum up so far: Ó Súilleabháin does not define the deviation of the opening bar in "Toss the Feathers" using any rhythmic or metric equation. Instead, he bases his theory of rhythmical deviation on a non-metrical outside influence which he can now only validate via the unreal translation of melodic content from Chopin's composition to Potts' performance of the traditional reel. Ó Súilleabháin's theory of melodic deviation elsewhere in his thesis works well when traditional macrostructure can be enforced to stabilise the deviations. However, once traditional macrostructure is irrefutably broken and fragmented, Ó Súilleabháin's analytical process is itself less stable.

That rhythmical or metrical "deviation" in this instance can be aligned by Ó Súilleabháin to an outside (melodic) influence demonstrates his dependance on the terms of tradition. For him, it is not that the permanence of traditional symmetric macrostructure has been negated, it is simply that an outside influence has corrupted it. By analysing Potts' music in this way, the effect of his "rhythmic deviations" are only temporary upon, and detachable from, the continuing permanence of the terms of tradition. However, as has been pointed out in this section already, analysing Potts'

music in this way can be questioned because of the importance attached to what is merely a coincidental melodic overlap.

As such, I will return to an ergonomic understanding of the fiddler's musical movements to attempt an alternative reading of the rhythmical/metrical crisis. Ó Súilleabháin noticed that the real Chopin influence is neither melodically nor rhythmically defined. It cannot be said that this musical influence is harmonically defined because we are dealing with a soloist performer coming from a modal music tradition which does not value harmonic progressions in themselves. What Potts has gone after in this instance, what he is seeking, is a translation of the "sound" of Chopin's introduction onto his performance of "Toss the Feathers". As such, the traditional analytical tools of melody and rhythm are no longer dependable.

As explained during the previous chapter, an ergonomic perspective can move beyond the typical separation between melody and rhythm that is so often forced upon musical performances in musicological and ethnomusicological studies. This approach relates both to the performer's perspective as s/he "handfully" (re)invents relevant musical patterns in the search for suitably musical sounds, as it does to the listener's perspective as s/he associates these "sounds" to the relevant musical instrument and to the success of the musical event as a whole.

For instance, the difference in pitch between the penultimate and the ultimate variation of Ó Súilleabháin's "extension motif" above (figures 5.19 and 5.20 above) is based on the fiddler's octave rather than any "significant [...] transpositional relationship" (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 151). As indicated by Potts, and correctly perceived by Ó Súilleabháin elsewhere, it is the "sound" of Chopin's slow movement that persists in Potts' rendition of "Toss the Feathers". An immediate relationship with

this “sound” is established in figure 5.20 (the most challenging variant), and only subsequently maintained in figure 5.19 by the fiddler’s octave. In each case, the “sound” made by the particular finger positions on the bottom string and their interrelation with the open string above is preserved in both instances.

In figure 5.15 above I have transcribed an additional recording of Potts’ “Toss the Feathers” to those worked on by Ó Súilleabháin. However, this outlines much the same interpretations of bar 1 by Potts that are also examined by Ó Súilleabháin.

### First three variations of bar 1 (Quinn tape)



Figure 5.24: First three variations of bar 1 in Potts’ “Toss the Feathers” on the Quinn tapes.

What is basic here, is that Potts is playing with the repetitiveness of the open string on the note D, together with a variety of intervallic crossings made between it and those strings that lie both above and below. The Chopin influence combines perfectly with, and encourages idiosyncratic readings of, this persistent D note; that is, both the Bb, and A, pitches give a new character to these repetitive D notes found naturally in the traditional reel. However, outside of the Chopin Funeral March, it is within “Toss the Feathers” itself where the constancy of the D note is already found. The D note remains the priority, out of which all other motivic content is built during the first part of the tune. This can be seen even by the extended D note which joins together the repeats of the first part elsewhere in the performance.

## Toss the Feathers - bars 19-25 (Quinn tape)

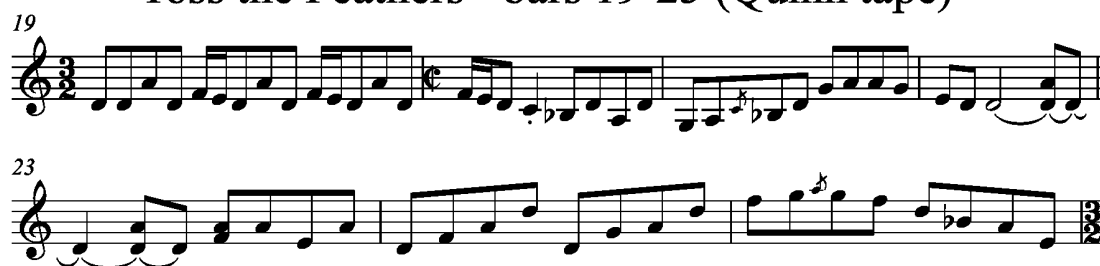


Figure 5.25: Potts' "Toss the Feathers" bars 19–25 on the Quinn tapes.

Here, the listener is caught between bars 22 and 23, unsure of where a new phrase is beginning or where an old phrase is still petering out. The effect is that of an obsession with the D note where the excited fussing of what to layer on top and below has only begun. Stalling for an instance, important choices are still only about to be made. There is no melodic priority though. There is, rather, the persistence of the "Toss the Feathers" D-note which very noticeably and idiosyncratically combines successfully with the sound (or basic harmony) of the Chopin Funeral March. From this, melody and rhythm are only subsequently formed. As such, both melody and rhythm are at all times influenced by the ergonomic hold which the D-note has upon the fiddler; that is, the open string is a domineering influence on melo-rhythmic development even above the colourful Chopin influence.

In Potts' own words, he remarks: "The thing I loved in that composition of Chopin's 'Funeral March', and then that it blended into my own" (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 332). The constancy of the D note already found in "Toss the Feathers" allowed for an immediate blend with the "sound" of the Chopin piece as it is characterised by the Bb, and A, pitches; taking advantage of their distinctive interrelationship with D. This combination is a particularly resonant one when played on the fiddle. As seen by

the elongated D over bars 22 and 23 above (figure 5.25), it is the persistent D within “Toss the Feathers” which is Potts’ obsession, and which exactly motivates Potts beyond the limits of traditional macrostructure at bar 1 and its repeats.

The result is a negation of the metrical symmetry that is a mainstay of the terms of tradition. Importantly, the non-metrical material of Chopin’s Funeral March does not foretell the metrical asymmetry of Potts’ “Toss the Feathers”. Yet for Ó Súilleabháin – bound by the traditional round in his music analysis – the result can only be a rhythmic deviation by way of an outside influence. Once more, the balance between innovation and tradition that Ó Súilleabháin sought in the performances of Potts encouraged him to align the new fragmented macrostructure with the old traditional one, come what may.

When demonstrating the idea of a submerged round through melodic deviation, Ó Súilleabháin could use traditional macrostructure to understand elements of melodic deviation/negation – here, macrostructure is at the background of the overall analysis. However, when demonstrating the idea of a submerged round through rhythmic deviation, Ó Súilleabháin could not use traditional macrostructure to understand elements of rhythmical/metrical deviation/negation – here, (radical) outside influences must only account for Potts’ deviations. Within Ó Súilleabháin’s theory, there are two main methods of continuity that maintain the permanence of traditional macrostructure when considering “rhythmic deviation” in Potts’ “Toss the Feathers”: 1) the pattern made by melodic marker motifs consistent with those found in traditional macrostructure; and 2) the pattern made by the idiosyncratic 3/2 metres consistent with a new symmetric permanent macrostructure (which owes its new design to outside influence).

1. Marker motif placement: Ó Súilleabháin relies on the strategic arrival of important “marker motifs” at important structural points of the traditional tune during Potts’ performance. Here, there are three: one which announces the second part, “M3”, and another two which help to frame the first part, “M1” and “M2”. There exists an additional “(M2)” which is an apparent inversion of the original “M2”. The regular alternation between it and its original version causes the lowest ebb in “model audibility” for Ó Súilleabháin (see Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 161). Ó Súilleabháin outlines the marker motifs as follows:

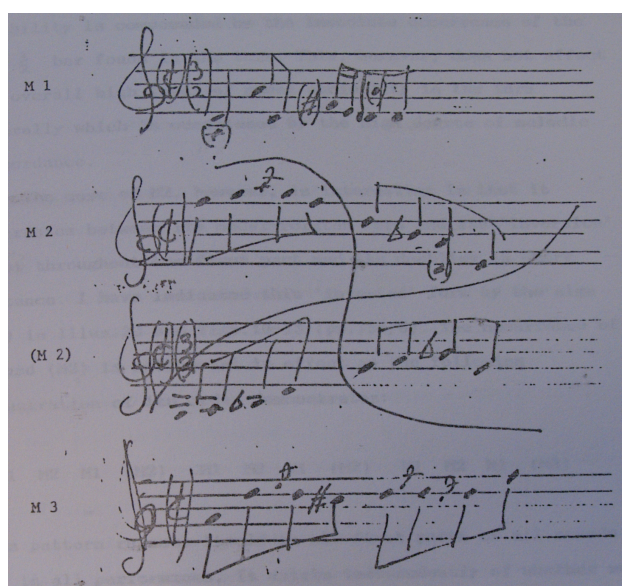


Figure 5.26: “Marker motifs” in Potts’ “Toss the Feathers” according to Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 160, ill. 29.

Ó Súilleabháin already acknowledged the difficulty in hearing the inverted form of M2 above (as (M2)). However, his motivations behind the creation of this link are clear.

Such a point is important if we are to suggest that the effect of ‘losing the way’ which Potts’ breaking of the round has engendered, is counteracted by a new

balance within the line. That this new balance may itself be influenced by the retention of a traditional system of marker motifs (even if they are at times turned on their heads) is of equal importance (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 159).

Already Ó Súilleabháin's argument for a regular and an inverted M2 are not consistent with my own ergonomic analysis. What is important throughout the first part of "Toss the Feathers" is Potts' obsessive play within the same pitch mood: that of D. Here, M2 offers a relief not equalled by (M2). In M2, the sound (and pitch mood) of the music alters from one four-quaver phrase to the next; whereas in (M2) this is maintained by the octave transference between both four-quaver phrases (accentuated by the octave double-stop performed by Potts in bar 14 in my transcription below):

### Marker motifs M2 and (M2) as outlined by Ó Súilleabháin

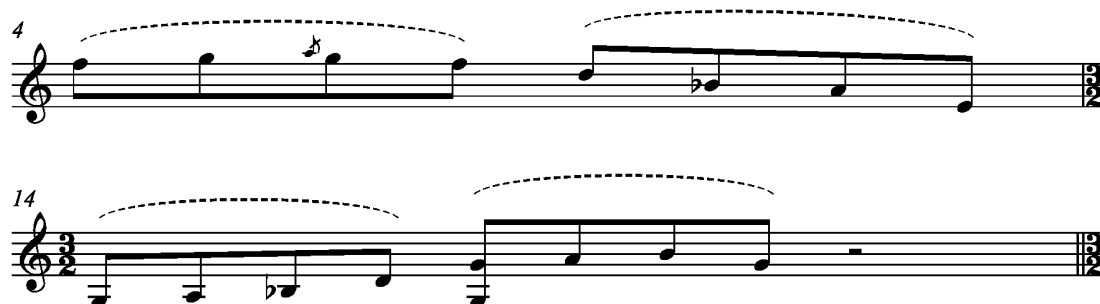




Figure 5.28: Marker motifs M2 and (M2) in Potts' "Toss the Feathers" as outlined by Ó Súilleabháin.

However, this is relevantly unimportant to the main issue. In effect, Ó Súilleabháin is relying on melodic means to understand the metrical unpredictability present in Potts' performance. Again, this is a solid analytical method that, however, does not carry over onto a rhythmical/metrical platform.



2. Idiosyncratic metre placement: Ó Súilleabháin sums up his findings regarding “rhythmic deviation” by declaring that an “analysis of the metrical lay-out revealed an internal logic within the piece” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 164). It is interesting how Ó Súilleabháin has arrived at this conclusion. Essentially, he relied on his own written representation of Potts’ performance where “the only other meter used in any of the performances is that of 3/2 time” (ibid. 136). Without going through all the process outlined by Ó Súilleabháin, he presses the conclusion that “for all of the apparent diversity, these 3/2 bars only occur in two different contexts – one of a group of four, as follows: 3/2 ; and one of a group of three, as follows: 3/2  3/2” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 139). However, upon closer examination it becomes apparent that to maintain a cohesion with the terms of tradition, Ó Súilleabháin is forced once more to impose the 3/2 metre upon Potts’ rhythmically fragmented performance.

For instance, Ó Súilleabháin’s own theory of a “reduction motif” is not represented in his transcriptions of “Toss the Feathers”. He states: “It is clear [...] how the effect of the reduction motif [...] is of a truncated 2/2 bar with the second half of the bar cut off” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 152). This conclusion contrasts significantly with how Ó Súilleabháin represents this musical effect in his notation.

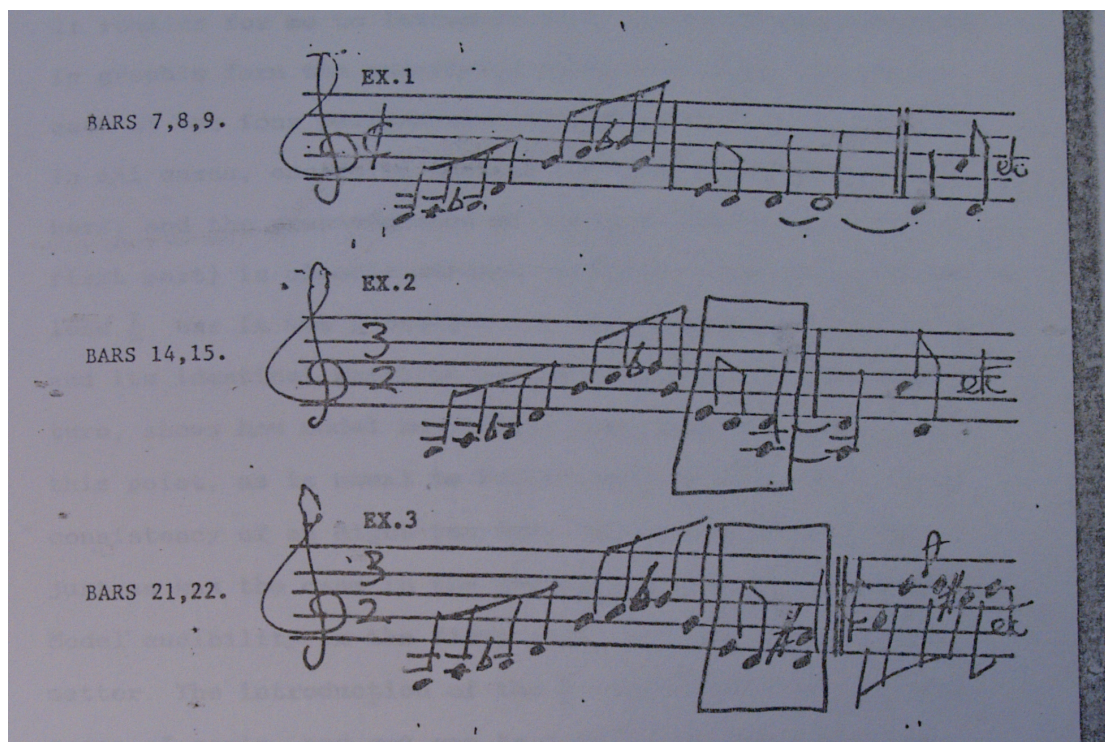


Figure 5.29: “Reduction motif” in Potts’ “Toss the Feathers” according to Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 153.

In seeking a musical symmetry consistent with the terms of tradition, Ó Súilleabháin has omitted the impression of a truncated 2/2 bar from his own transcriptions. Instead, readers are presented with an elongated 2/2 bar that results in yet another 3/2 bar. This serves to create an impression of a peculiar balance between innovation and tradition in Ó Súilleabháin’s analysis. Here, it is significant that as a result of this procedure the only deviation from the traditional metric structure in Ó Súilleabháin’s analysis is the presence of a selection of 3/2 bars. These are subsequently presented as “not an arbitrary matter, but instead a carefully controlled part of the overall structure” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 139). Essentially, this 3/2 bar must be fabricated to support a new kind of traditional predictability within macrostructure.

Out of his reliance on the terms of tradition, a similar kind of paradox arises in Ó Súilleabháin’s work that was shown in Ó Canainn’s statements before (see

chapter three). The boxed motifs in figure 5.29 above that reveal the 3/2 bar in question gain an importance in this instance that is not consistent with Ó Súilleabháin's analytical methods elsewhere in his own thesis. For instance, just as in the last bar of the "Top it Off" example earlier (see figure 5.14 above), this is merely a "cadential" truncation. Remember this is why Ó Súilleabháin dismissed any close analysis of "Top it Off" before. Ó Súilleabháin introduces his analysis of what he terms a "reduction motif" in "Toss the Feathers" with caution, stating: "the extension motif revealed itself not only through being a variation or repetition of a proximate motif but also by being dispensable as far as the even flow of the music was concerned, neither of these criteria is evident in [the reduction motif]" (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 152). However, this relates more to the method of transcription than to the sound of performance.

As such, the main concern here is as follows: why form a 3/2 bar out of a traditional bar plus untraditional half-bar? Obviously Ó Súilleabháin is being forced to build an alternative symmetry of macrostructure that positions Potts' "Toss the Feathers" in line with an overall traditional reading of music structure. Clearly, Ó Súilleabháin is struggling to bring his theory of a submerged round onto a rhythmical dimension. In reality, Ó Súilleabháin cannot unite the traditional (submerged) round with Potts' deviation from it once a direct analysis of rhythmic structure is undertaken. Ultimately, Ó Súilleabháin's melodic "marker motifs" provide a convincing means to support a paradigmatic understanding of Potts' "Toss the Feathers" where traditional modes of music structuring cannot.

In sum: there is a problem with Ó Súilleabháin's theory of a submerged round here. Informed by the terms of tradition, while Ó Súilleabháin wishes to highlight what he terms "rhythmic deviation" in Potts' playing, his only means of relating Potts' rhythmic structure with a traditional rhythmic structure convincingly is to rely on melodic content alone:

- using the repetitive melodic design of the deviation passages in question that can be excised by the "traditional ear" to maintain a traditional rhythmic flow;
- using the (unreal) non-metric melodic influences upon traditional rhythmic structures that apparently originate from outside (and so are ignored by) tradition;
- using the predictable placement of melodic marker motifs that frame a traditional structural layout.

Upon tackling the question of rhythm directly, Ó Súilleabháin must redesign the metric layout in a manner that cheats his own analytical processes to maintain a new kind of traditional permanence. The resulting conservatism in macrostructure is therefore conspicuous. As a result, Ó Súilleabháin attempted to reconcile his own term "rhythmic deviation" by comparing it with "melodic deviation" as follows:

Therefore, just as melodic deviation upsets the melody by interfering with those elements (set tones) which to a large extent identify the melody from one traditional setting to the next, so rhythmic deviation upsets the meter by interfering with those elements (the placing of accents) which identify the piece as one dance-form rather than another" (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 164).

However, the dance-form is undisputed in Potts' "Toss the Feathers". It remains identifiable as a "reel" even for the "traditional ear". Instead, that the reel persists as a

dance-specific form is what is disputed. “Rhythmic deviation” under the conditions Ó Súilleabháin outlines above hardly occurs in “Toss the Feathers”. Rhythmic deviation implies deviation at a micro-structural level; that is, the small clusters of notes within the metric unit. Throughout Potts’ “Toss the Feathers”, the traditional rhythmic design is maintained. For instance, the four-quaver long inner phrases of each metric unit are unharmed; that is, the rhythmic emphasis within is maintained as per the traditional reel.

For Ó Súilleabháin, rhythmic, as opposed to metric deviation occurs throughout Potts’ performance of “Toss the Feathers”. Instead, I believe that the opposite occurs. Metric deviation implies deviation at a macro-structural level; that is, the large clusters of bars within the part. Throughout Potts’ “Toss the Feathers”, the traditional metric design is negated at a macro-structural level. This means that the formation of the 3/2 bars remain suspect in my transcription also. These enforce a rigid interpretation of the interchange between the untraditional 3/2 and traditional 2/2 metres. I have already outlined where Ó Súilleabháin’s own premise of a “truncated” bar is misrepresented by his own transcriptions. In addition, I will re-examine the first line (or first four-bar phrase) below.

The fact is, it is impossible to notate the melo-rhythmic movement within Potts’ performance faithfully. Just as with “The Yellow Tinker” above, the metric layout is itself defined and redefined during the same musical event, only this time by way of rhythmic negation. For instance, once Potts begins his performance, the “traditional ear” will follow the expected metric count as follows:

### Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" I



Figure 5.30: Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" I.

Here, bar 1 is a play on the traditional bar 1. Subsequently, bar 2 is interpreted as an untraditional bar 2 that is nonetheless self-contained. The motif in bar 2 follows a very consistent ergonomic pattern where the falling scale (from Bb, – through A, – to G,) is constantly interjected by referencing to the open-string (D) above.

Subsequently, the four-quaver motif (moving beyond what is notated in figure 5.30 above) is directly related to the last four quavers of bar 2 in figure 5.30 above. This means that the "tradition ear" cannot settle on its initial interpretation of the metric layout as forecast by the terms of tradition.

### Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" II



Figure 5.31: Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" II.

In fact, this new motivic relationship supersedes that contained in bar 2 above. Therefore, bars 1 and 2 become redefined by the motif that follows them. As such, the metric layout has also become redefined as outlined below:

### Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" III



Figure 5.32: Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" III.

Even if one were to persist with the original metric units as outlined in fig 5.30 before, the musical motifs that follow would bring about a similar crisis. That is, the melo-rhythmic relationships between the emerging motifs would force the musical phrasing to run across the bar-lines each time, as outlined below:

### Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" IV



Figure 5.33: Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" IV.

However, even by keeping this untraditional phrasing, it remains impossible to maintain a traditional metrical layout as there are simply too many beats in this opening four-bar phrase. The listener would need to add these extra beats in somewhere along the line. To do so at the end of the four-bar phrase makes least musical sense.

### Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" V



Figure 5.34: Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" V.

In the end, at one point or another, the listener needs to allow the metric units to redefine themselves within the formation of the whole four-bar phrase. The most obvious final layout is as follows:

### Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" VI



Figure 5.35: Metric interpretation of Pott's opening bars in "Toss the Feathers" VI.

In this matter, the musical parts begin to redefine the musical whole inside the opening asymmetric phrase. In turn, the asymmetric phrase redefines the parts. We have seen this transitory musical process before in "The Yellow Tinker". What is important on this occasion is as follows: the primary factor contributing to the transitory musical experience this time is found in a metric crisis – not in a rhythmic deviation. In this instance, as elsewhere in Potts' "Toss the Feathers", melodic content cannot compensate the traditional metric permanence and symmetry lost by the direct destruction of macrostructure. That is, melody does not confirm a new kind of structural cohesion always. As outlined in my analysis of the opening four bars above,



melodic content actually contributes to the transitory experience itself, helping to define and redefine an untraditional metric layout.

That Potts' rendition of "Toss the Feathers" is rhythmically defined as a reel cannot possibly be brought into question. What is ultimately brought into question is the metric layout of the traditional reel itself. This type of deviation cannot rely on a paradigmatic analysis because metrically (and therefore macro-structurally) speaking, there is no traditional round submerged during Potts' "Toss the Feathers". Ó Súilleabháin does consider structural deviation elsewhere in Potts' repertoire. This is of interest and is discussed in the final section.

### 5.23: Structure and the Negation of Structure.

There are other examples in Potts' repertoire not discussed by Ó Súilleabháin where instances of metrical asymmetry emerge from elsewhere within the part. For example, Potts' inconsistency between a symmetric versus asymmetric rendition of the first part of the reel "The Steampacket" ensures that the asymmetric does not all of a sudden become symmetrical. The transcription below sketches out some of the musical possibilities found among three recorded renditions of Potts' first part performances of "The Steampacket". The various permutations of the macrostructure of the part are indicated by bracketing along the left of the figure:

## The Steampacket –performed by Tommie Potts



Figure 5.36: Various four-bar phrases from Potts’ “The Steampacket” on the RTÉ, Quinn, and Evans tapes.<sup>117</sup>

Here, it is important to make note of the half bar in 2/4 metre (what would be counted as bar 6 in my transcription). Not all performances of the part include this half bar, however. The possible permutations of the part where this half bar is used include: a seven-and-a-half bars part; or an eleven-and-a-half bars part. The possible permutations of the part where this half-bar is not used include: a twelve-bar part; or the customary eight-bar part.

Potts can therefore weave in and out of traditional symmetry (eight bars), idiosyncratic symmetry (twelve bars), and of course idiosyncratic asymmetry (seven-and-a-half bars and eleven-and-a-half bars) with relative ease. This ensures that the transitory state of his performances of “The Steampacket” record constant evolutions of structural crises. Potts of course brings this aesthetic to a micro-structural level also, something that is more defined by melody than by metre and rhythm.

Immediately noticeable is the asymmetric division of the fifth bar above where a cadence-like figure during the first half of the bar (ending on a G note) adds further to

<sup>117</sup> Transcription by the author.

the transitory progression of the part. Indeed, it is confusing to know whether this motif re-closes the preceding four-bar phrase or opens a new one. Of course, while listening, it can always signify one option before redefining itself as the other under my analytical process.

Ó Súilleabháin must avoid analysing Potts' deviations on a truly macro-structural level in his thesis owing to his reliance on a submerged round theory that remains dependant upon the terms of tradition. However, he discusses "structural deviation" in relation to the slip jig "The Rocky Road to Dublin". Here, he argues that "structural deviation involves a radical alteration of the traditional relationships between motifs or phrases, thus fundamentally affecting the overall sense of balance in the piece" (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 180). Again, this perspective is essentially based on the analytical interpretation of melodic content.

When I speak here of 'basic form', I am not, of course, referring to the individual notes of the piece, but rather to the inevitability of the repeated motifs which underlie the piece along with their strict relationship to each other. The piece, therefore, is shown in its basic form from a structural point of view (ibid. 181).

Where Ó Súilleabháin speaks of motifs, he is referring to melodic motifs. He asks, "in what manner does structural deviation manifest itself?", before continuing:

It may be best explained by stating that where the changing relationship between structural variation and structural concordance will produce different shades of traditional balance, structural deviation will produce a completely new kind of balance hitherto unknown in the tradition. In the case of Potts' 'Rocky Road to Dublin', this new balance is achieved through the omission of motifs rather than by

any mere variation process. Where and in what manner those motifs are omitted is of the essence in any new balance achieved (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 183).

As expected, Ó Súilleabháin relies on his submergence theory here also. As such, that Potts omits a bar in the second part (or turn) of “The Rocky Road to Dublin” (the third bar of a traditional four-bar phrase to be exact) means that structural deviation has occurred for Ó Súilleabháin (see Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 187). It is made clear by Ó Súilleabháin that the significance of structural deviation is itself defined by the interrelationship of melodic content within the traditional piece.

What [Potts] was, in fact, concerned with in the creation of this piece overall was the relationship between musical ideas. Instead of the traditional ‘classical’ balance of motifs, he allowed his mind free rein to search out new meaning in the old motifs. In the case of ‘The Rocky Road to Dublin’, this new meaning revealed itself in a subtle termination of musical ideas at natural ‘cut-off’ points, and in the linking of ‘split-ends’ in such a way as to mask the nature of the music-making process (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 187–190).

Without becoming lost in other details of “The Rocky Road to Dublin”, I will direct attention exactly toward where Ó Súilleabháin sees that structural deviation has occurred. Ó Súilleabháin uses his transcription below to outline where a bar has been omitted in the second part of the tune. The boxed bars below are inserted by Ó Súilleabháin to indicate the type of bar being omitted by Potts.



Figure 5.37: Omitted bars in Potts' 'The Rocky Road to Dublin' according to Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 188, ill.37.

It is immediately clear that the omitted bar, if reinserted, would amount to an exact repeat of the bar preceding it. Observe why for Ó Súilleabháin this is exactly where structural deviation occurs as opposed to rhythmic deviation outlined in "Toss the Feathers" before:

Potts' 'Toss the Feathers' disturbs the regular recurring accents of the piece in a way which his 'Rocky Road to Dublin' does not – with the single exception of bar 33 and its equivalent bar 55 [upon the beginning of the third round]. As already pointed out, the irregularity in 'The Rocky Road to Dublin' is the result of a form of motivic omission which does not disturb the regular accents.

The deviation in 'The Rocky Road to Dublin', therefore, is more subtle than that in 'Toss the Feathers' (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 192).

In fact, with regard to the structural deviation outlined by Ó Súilleabháin here, the “traditional ear” can very easily replace the omitted bar in “The Rocky Road to Dublin” and so continue unaffected by its omission. Ó Súilleabháin also realises that “Toss the Feathers” is the greater challenge for the “traditional ear”. He states that whereas “the listener can respond physically to Potts’ ‘Rocky Road’ with the normal, regular foot movement so typical of the response to this energising dance-music” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 193).<sup>118</sup> By contrast, “a similar attempt to physically respond to Potts’ ‘Toss the Feathers’ ends in frustration” (ibid.).

What has differed in both Ó Súilleabháin’s and my own response to the same musical processes in Potts performances until this point is as follows: whereas for Ó Súilleabháin “Potts’ musical chaos is a peculiarly ordered one” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 194); for me it brings about crisis. Ó Súilleabháin elaborates from his perspective:

Our investigation, therefore, into the connection between a traditional process of improvisation – interchangeable segments – and the innovatory process of improvisation found in Potts’ ‘Rocky Road to Dublin’ has been fruitful in that it shows a high degree of correlation between those motifs which are interchangeable and those selected by Potts for omission or transposition. This finding has a dual importance in that on the one hand it supports the theory that within any piece some segments have a degree of fluidity which others do not, while on the other it is a vindication of the underlying traditional logic within Potts’ musical thought (Ó Súilleabháin 1987: 199).

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<sup>118</sup> It is extremely common among Irish traditional music listeners to tap their foot along to the beat of the music.

Importantly, this is not in evidence when examining both “The Yellow Tinker” and “Toss the Feathers”, where the most important “marker motif” was initially removed from, or eventually extended beyond, traditional macrostructure with no chance of being repaired by the listener. It is interesting therefore that Ó Súilleabháin should choose “The Rocky Road to Dublin” as a basis for discussing structural deviation.

In reality, the structural “deviation” here is placid. Indeed, it has no detrimental effect on the traditional round, for the “traditional ear” can continue past the omission in question by replacing it just as Ó Súilleabháin has done in his own transcription (figure 5.37 above). This is very easily achieved given that the omitted bar is already performed in the bar directly preceding it; a common trait of a very traditional design. There are no significant surprises therefore. What is important from my own theoretical perspective is that there is no negation of the traditional round present. Interestingly, where Ó Súilleabháin points to structural deviation on this occasion, there is no structural negation according to my own investigation.

Instead, the musical result in “The Rocky Road to Dublin” is simply cheeky, just as a postmodernist parody of traditional macrostructure itself. Essentially, through the omission of this particular bar, Potts accentuates the repetitive design of traditional macrostructure as well as the facility with which said omission is acceptable owing to the constancy and shared ownership of the traditional round. Here, every “traditional ear” can replace the omitted bar with equal authorship. So why does Ó Súilleabháin choose the weakest impact on traditional structure as an analytical platform for demonstrating structural deviation?

One answer is that postmodernism is far easier on the “traditional ear” than the avant-garde; that is, postmodernism enjoys retaining elements of tradition whereas the

avant-garde negates every element of tradition. There is an understanding between tradition and postmodernism not witnessed in the avant-garde therefore. That the “traditional ear” has equal authorship in replacing the bar omitted by Potts demonstrates that the individual musician never actually performs these tunes in the first place. No, it is the terms of tradition that performs the tunes, just as it conducts Ó Súilleabháin’s analyses. The musician is only ever permitted the opportunity to showcase her/his creative talent through micro-structural variation.

What is most interestingly revealed by Potts in the peculiar musical equation of “The Rocky Road to Dublin”, is that traditional music naturally moves toward postmodernism as it is unnaturally forced toward purism. This is another fascinating musical phenomenon which contrasts the avant-garde, but unfortunately cannot be indulged but only briefly in the space afforded this thesis. For instance, outside of the most technically accomplished innovators, there are alternative types of adventurous traditional musicians who are exploring this kind of musical development (or de-development). This is not to say that said musicians are at all aware or at least fully appreciative of their own musical processes in this regard. For instance, so-called traditionalists often seek a performance aesthetic built upon a new kind of emptiness within traditional music interpretation. That they touch on the postmodern is something that they are often in-cognisant of, rather they may actively portray an aesthetic of radical purism instead.

This is another complex musical procedure that requires another form of bold musical analysis. It ought not to be overlooked, for instance, that often said musicians rely on an aesthetic of purism to compensate for a lack of technical accomplishment. Here, a process of musical simplification represents the only musical recourse instead



of a deliberate musical choice. For example, playing traditional tunes extremely slow with tiny amounts of micro-structural variation is not always representative of a deliberate musical choice, but something that lesser accomplished musicians often rather pretentiously boast of. Such an empty and lethargic exploration of traditional melody invites every listener to take an ever-more unnatural ownership of the musical event, thus becoming co-opted by the performing musician. This brings the musician closer to the brink of that small space which separates her/him from the contributing non-artists to the musical event.

Unsurprisingly, musicians who perform in this manner are often regarded as the most “interesting” musical interpreters within the terms of tradition (indiscriminate of technical accomplishment and the presence of real musical choice). This is because such a musical process flatters the terms of tradition. These musical “interpreters” are noted for bringing out the hidden melody of a traditional tune. Realistically, however, the melody is never hidden, it is always there; that is, each traditional musician is referencing the same melody just as the listener does. The difference is that the musician must do so with a technical accomplishment and/or artistic creativity beyond the capacity of the listener. Indeed, it is the constant “thereness” of the traditional melody that is highlighted to the extreme by the radical “purist”. They bring a traditional melody to an exaggerated pure state. It is a process of radically de-individualising the performer’s role insofar as it seduces all those belonging to the terms of tradition into a sense of hyper-authorship of the musical event itself. This is very attractive.

However, just as a proper consideration of the avant-garde in traditional music is required, so too would a proper consideration of this alternative musical (de-)

development be required. Even: where certain contemporary experimental traditional musicians decide not to play a tune melody at all and instead meander in sound, they seem universally oblivious to the possibility that they have never played tunes in the first place. That is, the tune has been performed by the terms of tradition all along, and so not by them even while they believed that they were. This needs some form of interrogation, be it artistic and/or academic.

Potts has revealed this musical phenomenon too through his performance of “The Rocky Road to Dublin”. Despite Ó Súilleabháin’s conviction, there is no real structural deviation, as traditional macrostructure continues and remains shared with any non-performing musical contributors to the musical event. Potts has also made significant inroads into the possibilities offered by simply meandering in sound as a traditional performer. For instance, he often incorporates lengthy non-metrical introductions that barely reference the traditional tune melody that he subsequently plays. That said, Potts remains distinct from more contemporary performers in that he remains the only convincing example of a true traditional music avant-garde exhibited elsewhere in his repertoire. This, I believe is the fiddler’s conceit. Though his cheeky omission of a bar in “The Rocky Road to Dublin” reveals interesting aspects of traditional music reception, his high level of transitoriness outlined throughout the preceding two sections of this chapter directly impacts current understandings of what traditional music is. His avant-gardist processes of negation bring the terms of tradition to crisis, which is a more aggressive form of revelation in this regard.

## Conclusion

Cowdery notices: “On the larger scale, we will see that musicians from all over Ireland agree that the general tune model has not been violated even when a tune is found in very different forms (slow air, set dance, hornpipe, and reel) and is played in different local and personal styles” (Cowdery 1990: 44–5). Essentially, once the permanent traditional symmetry of macrostructure remains intact, almost anything can be accepted by the “traditional ear”. Therefore, for a musical crisis to be reached, macrostructure must be breached, and to an extent that denies the “traditional ear” a bridge toward salvaging traditional macrostructure once more. Here Potts’ performances are significant.

I have demonstrated where the terms of tradition define the “traditional round” as a single contained musical entity, a permanent macrostructure that defines all musical content. Traditional individualism is found through the repeating of this constant structure using micro-structural variation that constantly references and supports the traditional round. Accordingly I have outlined how the primary tune identifier (or “marker motif”) is located in the first one or two bars of a tune’s melo-rhythmic design. As such, the traditional bar 1 defines the macrostructure before it defines itself. Even: it is thus inconsequential to itself just as it is assumed by the macrostructure thereafter.

Potts destroys the traditional round in “The Yellow Tinker” by making bar 1 consequential to itself over and again. Yet the macrostructure is relatively stable thereafter. However, in “Toss the Feathers” the macrostructure is destabilised by a rogue traditional bar 1, producing an untraditional asymmetric part. The traditional

round is thus negated on a metrical level here because the macrostructure is completely fragmented and rendered asymmetrically. Ó Súilleabháin continues to invoke melodic content as a stabilising force, but unlike “The Yellow Tinker”, this is not as convincing within a rhythmical, metrical, and overall macro-structural argument. Ó Súilleabháin’s “submerged” round theory allows him to relate Potts’ individualism back to the terms of tradition. I have provided an alternative theory by understanding Potts’ music within the terms of the avant-garde. Here, the terms of tradition are left at a loss.

Potts’ creation has been in the field of personal interpretation which frustrates popularisation and challenges comfortable acceptance by the dominant (nineteenth-century Romanticism-conditioned) conservative aesthetic of traditional music (Vallely 1999: 301).

Current Irish traditional music research methodologies, it would seem, are neither prepared for these challenges. Sociologist, Anthony Giddens, acknowledged: “No knowledge under conditions of modernity *is* knowledge in the “old” sense, where “to know” is to be certain” (Giddens 1990: 40). Having negated the terms of tradition, Potts has also removed from traditional music scholarship the certainty of relying on

what is popularly taken for granted: a permanent traditional macrostructure.<sup>119</sup> It is important to note that Potts' performance practices developed out of the Irish music tradition itself. There is no fusion to speak of that would allow the ethnomusicologist to pin all musical radicalism on non-Irish musical elements (see chapter one for a comparison with the Finnish music tradition). Well-regarded Irish journalist, Charles Acton, seemed to have touched on this aspect of Potts' music by stating:

Tommy Potts' fiddling is highly individual. Some will even query its being traditional fiddling. For me it both is and is a new personal development of it [...]  
But if fiddling is to develop or evolve, then this development or evolution must come from its own life, creating new styles and new techniques and new thoughts of its own genius (Acton 1972).

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<sup>119</sup> In the context of the Western art tradition, Nyman is critical of the emphasis placed on individual music structures in the avant-garde:

"This is as it is in classical systems where the listener is manipulated by a music that progresses as a series of signposts: listen to this here, at this point, in this context, in apposition to this or that; in such a way that your method of listening is conditioned by what went before, and will condition, in roughly the way the composer intends, what comes next. And what in experimental music (say a piece by Feldman) is almost a fact of living, that you should listen from moment to moment, was made by Stockhausen into a fact of structure (*Moment Form*) where the moments are not heard as-they-happen but as-they-are-structured (to happen)" (Nyman 1999: 28).

This is not absolutely representative of the avant-garde, as the analysis above has shown. Here, the listener is required to structurally redefine what went before out of what comes next unlike the classical tradition. This is a very serious difference that the avant-garde makes with what can be generally termed a classical system. Nyman also misses the point that even though experimental music avoids conditioning a method of listening, it is still conditioning a method of sound reception because it manipulates a system of conduct by using a prearranged novel "situation" wherein sounds are produced (see chapter one). Allowing sound "be itself" rather than a particular human expression is impossible if one is considering the human reception of sound (that is, sound contextualised by humans) – note the analytical process defined by Schiffer in chapter three as a "receiver-response". Here, sound is never itself. It is always an expression because it always means something under the human reception of it. Essentially, sound inherits meaningful significance upon being heard, which already constitutes a manipulation of the nature of sound. It is through a manipulation of the "situation" context (rather than the "sound" context) designed to make the listener hear sound that the experimental composer conditions her/his listeners. And although musical "style plays no role in the listener's understanding and experience of such pieces, the composer's behavior has style and can for this reason be evaluated" (Meyer 1996: 35).

Merriam ascertains: “We learn what kinds of sounds are satisfactorily fitted into our music without necessarily having any technical knowledge about it; music structure is carried subliminally and, since it is not objectified in most individual cases, it is resistant to change” (Merriam 1964: 297). Potts, however, eroded the sublimity of music structure, and instead highlighted this aspect of traditional music performance to bring about a most splendid musical crisis.

## Chapter 6: Tommy Peoples: Fluxing Structures

### 6.1: Finding Space

Tommie Potts' very individualised approach to Irish music has not continued into the present day. Though his influence on subsequent fiddle players can be noted in certain instances, this does not extend to his avant-garde treatment of macrostructure. Instead, it has become ever more difficult to find similar individualised musical space as Potts did within a "revived" Irish traditional music that – even in its innovations – increasingly owes allegiance to the terms of tradition. Given that Potts has so often been highlighted as the emblematic lone musician (even to the extent of being incapable of performing with others), it seems that the work of the soloist (rather than the ensemble participant) remains the only real avenue for exploring musical individualism to a similar extent. Yet, the opportunities for solo performance are becoming increasingly rare owing to the preference for ensemble playing today: be it in formalised groups; informal sessions; or in the current understanding of solo performance practice which nearly always includes some form of accompaniment.

MacAoidh claims: "Tommie Potts noted that the person he felt the greatest kinship with as a traditional musician was Tommy Peoples" (MacAoidh 1994: 202). Perhaps owing to Potts' obsession with macrostructure contrasting Peoples' obsession with microstructure discussed later in this chapter, the kinship may seem surprising. However, the negation of traditional modes of music structuring is evident in both cases, as I hope to demonstrate through my analysis of Donegal fiddler Tommy



Plate 6.1: Tommy Peoples.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Taken from private correspondence.



Peoples (b. 1948) later in this chapter. To this end, I open with a discussion of the contemporary ensemble context in Irish music versus a modernist solo context.

Obviously, musicians have played in ensemble contexts throughout Irish music history, both for dance and not for dance. It can only be presumed that where two or more musicians met, ensemble performance became a reality. Edward Cronin, on occasion, apparently also played “in concert with two young friends from Troy – Patrick Clancy on the flute and Thomas F. Kiley on the mandolin” (O’Neill 1987/1913: 394). Importantly, it appears that the mandolin did not provide harmonic accompaniment here. O’Neill praised Kiley’s “inconceivable” execution of dance tunes intact with all the “turns and graces” one would expect from a traditional performer (ibid. 394). Evidence of harmonic accompaniment beyond the musical capabilities of a particular instrument (for instance: the bass notes of the *cruit* or “harp”; or the regulators of the native Irish *uilleann* pipes) really begins during the early twentieth century. Here, for instance, the first “solo” commercial recordings of Irish music generally included piano accompaniment, such as those of Michael Coleman (see chapter three).

Just as it is today, a minimum level of musical individualism among participants in the earliest ensemble gatherings – such as those reported of Cronin – must have produced a heterophonic result. However, by contrast, during competitions held by *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann* (or CCÉ) where the ensemble size is that similar to the scene involving Cronin above, the emphasis is on “staying together”. This musical aesthetic is extended beyond the requirements of macrostructure to include even micro-structural variation. Down to the smallest ornament, duets and trios of traditional musicians within the competition setting are formulating extremely fixed

interpretations of traditional tunes where there is very little remnants of solo improvisation at a micro-structural level.

At the other side of the scale, and also advocated by CCÉ, the contemporary session today has grown beyond all proportion. Here, the heterophonic effect is equally diluted by the sheer mass of players sharing in a tune. A roll here or a triplet there does nothing to impact on the sound of performance. Logically, the bigger the informal ensemble, the less musical concentration required by each participant as each individual's contribution is muted by the single mass of sound. This view is shared by all the experienced musicians I know within the tradition. That is, to perform solo not only provides a greatest scope for the individual, but requires the greatest effort and highest level of concentration by the performer.

As expected, Cronin was certainly engrossed in his own playing while performing solo. O'Neill wrote that "his features while so engaged remaining as set and impassive as the sphinx" (O'Neill 1987/1913: 394). Cronin's expert manipulations of rhythm, melody and ornamentation must certainly require a suitable level of concentration. It has been revealed elsewhere in O'Neill's pages that "he could multiply compound numbers mentally and almost instantaneously" (ibid. 394). It would be of little surprise then that Cronin would use this same mental capacity during his solo performances.

To apply a similar level of intra-musical concentration during dance accompaniment, for instance, would serve only to tamper with that particular performance context. Here the musician must remain on constant lookout for when the dancers have ended their set-piece, or for when they require the musician to speed up/slow down the music. Primary focus is directed toward a constant favourable

tempo and symmetric form, meaning that the musician may sacrifice other musical areas that would put them at a higher risk of faulting on these main requisites. This sacrifice usually includes micro-structural variation. As such, to perform the same tune for dancers as for listeners, it is clear that whereas the former musical context will be relatively empty of micro-structural variation the latter musical context will be coloured by an indulgence in micro-structural variation. This goes some way in demonstrating the naturally volatile nature of micro-structural variation in and of itself. Indulging in micro-structural variation for the traditional musician results in an exploration of (traditional) ornamentation processes – a musically challenging undertaking that puts the integrity of the piece (that is, its macrostructure) at considerable risk.

Similarly, in small-scale ensemble performances (be it for concert stage or competition hall), the combined effort requires that each musician focus on musical cohesion before musical individualism. Here, rigid musical borders together with a more conservative approach to micro-structural variation help to manage and control sound production. The primary concern is, again, the integrity of the macrostructure which simply must be shared at all times. As already explained, during large-scale ensemble performances individualised micro-structural variation will go unnoticed regardless of any musical effort by way of micro-structural variation.

The large-scale ensemble therefore encourages the participating musician to become more musically complacent. This means that even though micro-structural variation can be added by each individual performer inside the ensemble, there is a natural impetus to become lazy in this regard. As a result, it is within solo performing contexts alone where the individual musician is allowed, encouraged, and/or

motivated to engage with micro-structural variation at the highest and most creatively challenging level. The initial question I attempt to answer throughout this part of chapter six is as follows: where can the contemporary musician find this level of individualised musical space (and be practised in it) within a musical environment that is completely dominated by the ensemble and/or an ensemble aesthetic? In the second part of this chapter, I will relate this issue to developments in the playing style of Tommy Peoples as he moved from an ensemble to a solo context.

### 6.11: Sound Blocks.

For the individual musician, a contemporary ensemble aesthetic outlined above constitutes a series of “sound blocks”. That is, what the individual musician meets with in today’s musical environment are large blocks of sound that dilute and/or refute musical individualism. This refers primarily to the audible macro-structural sets (here meaning the basic tunes) that assume inaudible micro-structural variation. Yet it can be observed both through a sheer bulk of musical sound (more evident in large-scale ensembles) and through a rigid sound aesthetic that is concerned with “staying together” in musical union (more evident in small-scale ensembles). All in all, a wall of sound is erected in the face of the individual musician, comprised of fixed “sound blocks”. Significantly, there is an important musical influence coming out of this situation that rebounds onto the performance practices of the contemporary soloist.

Though it has been made clear in the previous chapter that Tommie Potts was of course equally capable of performing in ensemble contexts as he was in a solo context, what is most important is as follows: he was not required to consider the

ensemble as musicians have been since CCÉ's competitions and giant informal sessions (beginning in the 1950s); nor since Ó Riada's formal concert-stage ensemble (beginning in the 1960s). CCÉ's developments in this regard have already been demonstrated in the introduction to this chapter as well as in chapter three. However, as Ó Riada's ensemble revolution within Irish traditional music – using intricate arrangements and accompaniment – has also enjoyed a lasting and continuing influence on the performing contexts of the genre, I will discuss this further below.

Interestingly, Ó Riada abandoned his own musical invention (the formalised listening ensemble) as he felt that it could not be developed further owing to the lack of available musical space (see chapter five). Essentially, as Ó Riada was locked inside the rigidity of traditional macrostructure as an arranger, he was left with little room to manoeuvre. Musically speaking, he was left without sufficient “space” both at a micro-structural level because he could not engage traditionally with the melo-rhythmic line, and at a macro-structural level because he could not interfere with the traditional tune as defined by the terms of tradition.

This should not be seen as a critique of the ensemble movement generally, and certainly not of Ó Riada's impressive work in this regard. What follows is a critique of the soloist, who has relied upon an ensemble aesthetic as the principal model for the expression of individual agency. This is immediately noticeable by the contemporary reliance on a constant form of instrumental accompaniment that was adapted directly from ensemble practice.

One modern fiddle player coming out of the ensemble revolution is Tommy Peoples. Not only in his youth had he experience of the CCÉ sessions in his native Donegal, but from the age of sixteen Peoples moved to Dublin and immediately

partook in the early defining ensembles in Irish music history – most notably the Bothy Band. This group of highly gifted musicians took Ó Riada's ensemble model and advanced it to a level that has been mimicked by nearly every other Irish music band since 1975. Peoples also became a fixture in the session calendar of county Clare for a long period, and he has toured with various accompaniment partners throughout his professional career. It is interesting to examine Peoples' place in this particular musical environment before discussing his later developments as a soloist without musical accompaniment.

Quinn has also noted what he terms “the conundrum” for the modern Irish traditional performer. He explained that “if the private traditional musician at home is a soloist, and yet the public traditional musician in the session and on stage is, ninety per cent of the time, an ensemble player, does this mean that their development as a soloist is constantly short-circuited, an insistent diversion of their energy into other forms?” (Quinn 2008: 35). The conditioning of the ensemble format upon prospective soloists encourages them to conform to the notion of “staying together” inside predefined musical time – whether there are others to stay together with, or not. To some extent, then, the phantom dancer has a new accomplice. Fundamentally, the ensemble format in Irish traditional music – constructed out of the large session or even re-imagined by Ó Riada – requires a similar level of rigidity in macro-structural form as that demanded by the phantom dancer.

In her doctoral thesis on the session, Fairbairn notes the following: “It is increasingly rare to hear unaccompanied solo monody; most melodic instrumentalists prefer to have some backing” (Fairbairn 1993: 103). The modern soloist carries forward the ensemble aesthetic through her/his use of instrumental accompaniment:

be it guitar, bouzouki, *bodhrán* or piano, etc. It is extremely rare that a dedicated traditional music accompanist would not punctuate the rhythm of the main dance beat, or its syncopated opposite. Just like in dance, instrumental accompaniment often provides a similar punctuation of macro-structural identifiers, thereby encouraging the musical event to conform to the terms of tradition once more.

However, Fairbairn's project "considers the ways in which the solo genesis of traditional repertory and style has affected the pursuit of and development of group performance practice" (Fairbairn 1993: 1). Alternatively, my concern in this chapter is the same process working in the opposite direction. Fairbairn, just as Ó Súilleabháin before, is working within the terms of tradition. She therefore assumes a musical past where the regularity and the symmetry of traditional macrostructure is taken for granted. As such, for Fairbairn, micro-structural variation as it originates in solo performance is successfully carried forward into ensemble practice regardless of its musical value in the latter setting compared with the former. Logically for her, heterophony represents the persistence of solo performance practices in ensemble contexts.

Here, as in almost all other academic publications on Irish music, micro-structural variation wholly satisfies "individualistic concerns" (see Fairbairn 1993: 306). However, within the context of the large informal ensembles Fairbairn is investigating, micro-structural variation by individual musicians cannot be deemed to ascribe individual musical agency since they are never sufficiently heard at an individual level (even by the same individual musician her/himself). Essentially, as an etic ethnomusicologist, Fairbairn uses a simplified understanding of a traditional performance practice (apparently stemming from a soloist heritage) to conceive of

wider sociological issues regarding cultural individualism. Here, the importance of individualism for Fairbairn is hardly as significant musically (the unheard sound of soloists within the sound blocks coming out of the session) as it is sociologically (this cultural environment experienced by the invisible soloist participant). She declares:

the importance of the individual is preserved in the session: the liberty to leave, the solo integrity of the participants and the absence of structural-musical hierarchies are all intrinsically linked and essential to session performance practice. It is the absence of pre-set musical roles and the existence of a body of shared and structured musical knowledge that enables music-making of an informal and spontaneous kind (ibid. 309).

Peoples, then, very nicely comes to represent the modern fiddle player at the end of the twentieth century. He is one of the soloist participants in Fairbairn's scene above who has landed into a musical environment that is shared out equally among all participants defined by a traditional macrostructure outlined throughout this thesis. Here, Peoples' traditional individuality is supported by the very sound blocks of ensemble practice as outlined above. He was at liberty to enter the Bothy Band (perhaps the most renowned traditional music ensemble of the twentieth century) and subsequently leave without causing the blocks to fall; he was also at liberty to enter the Kilfenora Céilí Band (perhaps the most renowned Céilí Band of our time) and subsequently leave without causing the blocks to fall; he was also at liberty to enter the session community in county Clare (perhaps the most renowned "home" for traditional music today) and subsequently leave without causing the blocks to fall.



However, here Peoples represents the socialised individual: an artist who is at liberty to move around within a sound community precisely because it masks his individualised sounds within an independent sound mass. Never fully heard as he would be in a solo context, Peoples is free to enter and to leave without causing musical distress. However, Fairburn's argument does not account for the musical individual who is subsumed within an ensemble sound aesthetic. Here, the musical individual is in fact immobilised within the same socio-musical environment that grants such liberty to the socialised individual. The following sections are an attempt to recover the musical individual out of this relatively challenging social context.

## 6.12: The Traditional Ornament inside Sound Blocks.

As a point of clarification, I would like to distance myself from the following perspective: purists who view ensemble practice as something that is “detrimental to a player's individual style” (Ó Canainn 1993: 45). It is often reported that “the restraint demanded in playing in a band or other ensemble kills the spirit which animates it” (Breathnach 1986: 122). I am not seeking to oppose ensemble practices. Instead, what is being set up here, specifically, is a moment of musical frustration for the soloist performer; that is, the musically defined individual who is restrained by the socially defined freedom of the ensemble environment. Ironically, the ensemble aesthetic actually fosters the terms of tradition despite the disdain shown the ensemble by many purist observers. This is an example of where the supposed failure to “suppress” actually safeguards the terms of tradition (see chapter three). Of course an

ensemble format can exist whereby macrostructure is not maintained within the terms of tradition. It just has not recognisably arisen in Irish music contexts thus-far.

In the first instance, the general ramifications of ensemble practice upon the musical individual must be acknowledged. It ought to be obvious, that at a general level of understanding at least, the musical individual can very easily become suffocated by the musical conditions of the ensemble. Pressing submits:

As a general rule, the larger the performing ensemble, the more restricted the scope for successful improvisation, and the more necessary a detailed referent to achieve overall coherence. [...] A soloist, either alone, or surrounded by fixed elements, is accorded the greatest latitude of action (Pressing 1984: 351).

I noted in my fieldwork diary from Donegal one particular occasion where, for a moment, the soloist peeped out from the ensemble context in a way that would reflect Pressing's line of thought.

Diary notes: May 27th, 2007.

A convenient night tonight as the music will be happening underneath my hotel room. The Highlands Hotel provides the venue for where things musical unfold on Sunday evenings in Donegal. [...] At the last of the session, it seems as though the musical individual begins to emerge, slowly. I witness the departure of three of the accordions and two of the three late-arriving fiddlers. From here, the session immediately continues with a version by Con Cassidy of "My Love is in America". It contains an extra beat in the first part. This forces the guitar player to drone rather than strum.

His usual array of chords that customarily dictate the rhythmic symmetry of the ensemble effort are rendered obsolete. Astonishingly, the chordal blocks that until this point controlled all the individual participants are suddenly unhinged, and really, it didn't take very much. Dare it be said, but the musical individual begins to peep out! But still, only just; and still, for but a moment.

By contesting the symmetry of traditional macrostructure, an ensemble aesthetic of cooperative alignment immediately begins to fall apart. Even though this remains a musical rarity, it only seems to emerge upon the reduction in the number of musicians partaking in the musical event. What remains obvious from the current ensemble format is that it has modelled itself entirely upon the terms of tradition. It is designed on the repeating traditional round, not the cyclical avant-garde round (see chapter five). As such, the chordal, rhythmical sound blocks that constantly accompany and thus envelope the modern traditional melody-player (even while performing a tune “solo”), thus logically reduce her/his opportunity for musical individualism at a macro-structural level. Even so, within the ensemble it is still the melodic cohort who primarily mute the musical individual's voice – it is impossible to stand out from the crowd even at a micro-structural level. This allows the accompanist to dictate musical progression. Yet, even outside the ensemble, the influence of a musical environment that is dominated by ensemble practice transfers into a very formalised musical aesthetic which is subsequently maintained by the prospective soloist.

Within the ensemble, macrostructure must be taken for granted. Regarding micro-structural variation, this can only be shared equally among the masses

partaking in the overall sound production. However, it is more a social experience rather than a “soundful” one. In this respect, audible musical variation is more accurately located within repertoire rather than within individual tunes; that is, musical variation is most noticeable once changing from one tune to the next, or once terminating one set (or suite of tunes) to move onto the next. The micro-structural variation interpolated within each tune by each individual melody-maker passes unnoticed, and certainly does not vary in style (or sound) from one tune to the next.

Variation, when considered as something musically audible rather than as something quietly experienced, has become reliant on such large-scale forms because micro-structural variation (proffered by the terms of tradition as a recourse toward individualism) cannot really be appreciated anymore. Rather than truly experiencing it, the musical participants only feel their fingers articulating micro-structural variation. This means that it remains a tacit musical experience, but can no longer be controlled and evaluated through sound.

Essentially, the musical event becomes less sonic, exclusively tactile; creating an imbalance in the very conception of what music is. The heterophonic mesh of sound makes completely irrelevant each musical individual’s effort at micro-structural variation. Here, musical union is “sounded out” instead of musical individualism. The tune itself, as defined by the repeating traditional round, takes precedent over how the tune is interpreted; a “roll” here or a “triplet” there by each individual makes little difference to the (re)presentation of the traditional round repeated.

Fairbairn admits as much by stating the following: “Most musicians consider it particularly important to cultivate a flexible and expanding repertoire of tunes and some even seem to value a large repertoire more highly than the quality of the playing

of the tunes within it” (Fairbairn 1993: 37). This level of enthusiasm for repertoire above any real engagement with the musical materials within seems potentially unmusical – this, more obviously with regard to the musical individual. It is a measure of the musical constitution of these sound blocks that they require such large-scale variation. Regardless of where Fairbairn may find the individual in the Irish music session, s/he cannot be a very content individual if one defines their individualism musically.

Another issue is this: the elevation of repertoire automatically raises the musical status of non-performing participants in the traditional music community. For instance, the music collector is all of a sudden granted central importance even among practising musicians. Given that musical creativity (thus musical worth) within Irish traditional music reportedly is found in the domain of performance, then the priority of repertoire over actual individual performance practices seems to make the musical elements of the genre dispensable.

Accordingly, the pursuit of repertoire flared during the later twentieth century. Even despite his considerable publishing output of traditional tunes – three books during his own lifetime and two more published posthumously (see bibliography) – Breathnach further fuelled the excitement over repertoire by suggesting that what has been recorded is but the tip of the iceberg. “Rich as is the material which has been published, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the best collections of our native music remain unpublished” (Breathnach 1986: 113). The enthusiasm for repertoire even motivated Irish musicians to seek further additions from outside of their native tradition while waiting impatiently for further native repertoire to surface.

The insatiable hunt for repertoire is a symptom of an ensemble aesthetic; an emptiness that was experienced by Ó Riada due to the rigidity of the musical macro-structure inside the terms of tradition matched by the suffocation of micro-structural possibilities. In this matter, Ó Súilleabháin was also aware of Ó Riada's distance from melodic practice. Ó Riada only ever provided harmonic (piano, harpsichord) or rhythmic (*bodhrán*) accompaniment in his ensembles. This denied Ó Riada access to the more prolific possibilities contained within traditional microstructure for instance. Of course, Ó Riada made some provision for soloists during performances by his group (though each time the same soloist all too quickly disappeared before he could claim any significant musical space). The individual musical possibilities found inside the traditional manipulation of microstructure are more severely challenged by the ensemble format. If the traditional musician already is left with no other recourse for individual musical expression other than to grapple with micro-structural variation, then his musical individualism is further diluted by ensemble practice.

Foy maintains: "The general aim of a session is to get the maximum number of musicians playing together on the maximum number of tunes" (Foy 1999: 14). As such, the modern session particularly requires vast hoards of tunes for it to be successful because, as Foy continues: "There's no "jamming" in Irish traditional music" (ibid. 13). Foy elaborates:

Irish music is very specific: specific tunes in specific rhythms, played in specific ways in specific keys on specific instruments. You can't walk into a session unprepared and unschooled and expect to bluff your way through it. You either know how to play this music or you don't (ibid. 13).

The session, being so particularly specific on so many levels, its sound blocks thus necessarily have a particularly short life-span. In discussing modern sessions with Fintan Vallely, the esteemed fiddle player, Ben Lennon, complains:

Sometimes I see now in sessions, they cannot get off the tune quickly enough to get onto another one. It's all about how many tunes they can play. And I hate that. I like to just play two or three tunes and play away at them and be in no hurry. And just savour this music ... that's the way I see it (quoted in Vallely 1998: 116).

This is something Foy notices also, where the “trend clearly has been toward fewer and fewer repetitions” (Foy 1999: 24). However, Foy neither shows much admiration for “recordings from sixty or seventy years ago, when the norm was to repeat a melody so many times that it practically wore a hole in the seat of your pants” (ibid. 25). His only concern with regard to fewer repetitions of each individual tune is toward the successful collecting and sharing of repertoire in and of itself.

The tendency to abandon a tune after only two repetitions may reflect the shorter attention spans and lower boredom thresholds that have taken hold since the advent of television. Treating a tune this way, as if it will bruise if handled too much, may provide some cheap thrills, but there is almost an element of hostility to it, as it virtually precludes a musician who doesn't know the tune from getting a handle on it in the short time allotted (ibid. 25–26).

The dependency on repertoire for musical variation becomes self-generative. Expanding the repertoire allows for more audible changes in the session, thus substituting an earlier reliance on micro-structural variation alone – the latter now

only accounts for musically inaudible changes. Less repeats, however, becomes a musical challenge for the participating musician who must get to grips with a new tune quickly or risk falling out of the session community altogether. Here, Fairbairn views this development as indicative of an “expanding communality” where a “larger repertory ‘qualifies’ a player to participate in more sessions, thus exposing them to more tunes” (Fairbairn 1993: 37).

This expanding repertoire requires newly-discovered old tunes as well as new compositions that are easily distinguishable from their more well-known counterparts. The writer, Christy McNamara, ponders poetically when stating:

Maybe there are no new tunes. Maybe we’re just remembering the thousands of old tunes we’ve forgotten” (McNamara and Woods 1997: 2).

However, new tunes today are more often designed specifically for ensemble formats such as the session or professional band, providing a ready-made solution for the problem of large-scale variation. Therefore, many of the newer compositions incorporate such rhythmic anomalies as those found in Cronin’s individualised performance of “Banish Misfortune”, for instance. A main difference here is that older tunes are eternally unfinished (what Bayard would include in his concept of “a flexible and modifiable stock of tunes” [Bayard 1982: 11]) while newer tunes are already finished (what Bayard may reduce to a “simplification and banalization” of tunes [Bayard 1982: 12]).

To sum up so far: the reliance upon an expanded repertoire for musical variation cancels out the significance of the musical individual more than ever. Importantly:



once the musical individual returns to a solo setting, the influence of this particular ensemble aesthetic reinforces the terms of tradition – functioning therefore much like the phantom dancer before. In all: while the musical individual's only recourse to musical individualism remains micro-structural variation, there is now simply less opportunity for this to be “sounded out” and developed.

As a result, an ensemble aesthetic is of more benefit to the terms of tradition than to the avant-garde. It still carries forward a rigidity of macrostructure that is still taken for granted. More: having thus conditioned prospective soloists, traditional micro-structural variation gains a heightened sense of individualism owing to its inaudibility within the dominant ensemble format. Here, the traditional “ornament” that is hidden by the ensemble, is made novel simply by becoming exposed in a solo context. The demands on the traditional ornament to highlight individualism are thus reduced to a minimum; that is, mere replication of traditional ornaments at their most mundane is all that is required when accounting for musical individualism outside the ensemble.

However, given the heightened level of musical concentration by the individual musician upon micro-structural variation alone, the traditional ornament (what is the defining feature of micro-structural variation within a contemporary Irish traditional music context) may still provoke a musical revolution beyond its own bounds (once inside the right hands). The following section discusses this possibility before relating the overall theory to Tommy Peoples' musical development in this regard.

### 6.13: The Traditional Ornament as Sound Blocks.

As stated previously, it is generally understood that traditional ornamentation (whether audible or inaudible) is the primary tool for individual expression in Irish traditional music. Here, I would like to explore where individualism is manifested in the use of (and within) the micro-structural detail itself. Rice notices that “two notions seem to be central to the Western concept of ornamentation” (Rice 1980: 58). He elaborates:

One is that it is peripheral and inessential, especially when compared to the main structural importance of the melody or harmony. The other is that its main function is to beautify, to vary, or to bring to life this same stolid melodic outline (ibid.).

This is brought to light for Rice while contrasting the Bulgarian music tradition. He notices that “*tresene*” – the Bulgarian closest equivalent to the term “ornamentation” (lit. “shaking”) – is mentioned “whenever it is structurally important, not peripheral to the style” (Rice 1980: 58). It is important to notice that *tresene* neither defines structure in this equation; its occurrences at structurally important points within the style would at most imply that it *aids* structure. Rice acknowledges that in learning an instrument in the Bulgarian tradition, native practitioners will often seek the “total sound of the instrument” rather than piecing together melody, rhythm and ornamentation separately (Rice 1980: 67). However, he still assumes that native practitioners equally dissect the whole into its relevant parts on some cognitive level or other, at least on a “tacit, nonverbal” level (Rice 1980: 66).

Even here, the differentiation between what is ornament and what is not may not always be clear. Meyer highlighted this difficulty in relation to the Western art tradition, which one would imagine would make the distinction somewhat clearer owing to the primacy of the written work.

Even within a single culture the same device may at one time be classified as an ornament and at another time may simply be part of the style of the performance or may be incorporated into the body of the composer's score. For example, the vibrato, which was once classed as an ornament, became an aspect of traditional string performance; while the *appoggiatura*, once an ornament, became part of the composer's basic plan (Meyer 1961: 205).

Musicologist, Frederick Neumann, helps to clarify an understanding of ornament versus structure by using a continuum between an extreme concept of ornament and an extreme concept of structure. This allows the analyst/theorist to bring the issue onto a more productive analytical platform.

Ornament and structure complement one another, and theoretically they can appear in their pure state: structure in no need of additions and ornaments as dispensable decorations. Practically, however they will usually combine in mixtures that deny clear separation yet will mostly permit an estimate of either structural or ornamental predominance (Neumann 1993: 294).

This is a useful and very productive layout, whereby the predominance of one variable over the other can also result in different musical outcomes: an ornamental limitation by way of structure; or a structural flux by way of ornament. On this

occasion, the latter situation is of most interest. The ornament is defined by Neumann as a rather fragile entity with dynamic properties. He points out:

An ornament is like an organic substance and as such is in constant flux. It has no rigid shape, and cannot have one if it is to do its work (Neumann 1989: 121).

It is precisely through this state of constant flux that micro-structural ornaments may eventually burst their own bounds to all of a sudden frustrate a canonic understanding of macrostructure.

This is highly intriguing given that within folk or traditional music, ornamentation is the bedrock of an individually stylised performance. Remember, that it is within performance where “composition” occurs for traditional music. As far as contemporary folk music theory goes, to make a traditional melody one’s own (to re-compose it, as it were) is to make idiosyncratic use of traditional ornaments; “in the case of folk material, successive deviation is also successive embellishment” (Meyer 1961: 253). The potential for individualising music structure out of the inherent flux of the ornament requires much attention in this chapter.

With this in mind, using Meyer's discussion of what he would term the strategic use of secondary parameters that characterise a particular music style, I would like to judge where the traditional ornament would lie in his overall theory. First, however, the following quote from Meyer will serve to explain his use of the terms “primary” and “secondary parameters”:

Secondary parameters tend to be described in terms of amounts rather than in terms of classlike relationships (antecedent-consequent melody, authentic cadence, or

anapest rhythm) as the primary parameters are. That is, dynamic levels, rates of activity, and sonorities are characterized as being more or less, greater and smaller, and the like. In fact they can be measured and quantified in ways that melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic syntax cannot. Thus, if the primary parameters are said to be *syntactic*, the secondary ones might be labeled *statistical* (Meyer 1996: 15).

It is important to note that within this definition, although “a mode of activity implies its own continuation”, without syntax:

such processes cannot specify definite points of termination. As noted earlier, they may cease, but they cannot close (Meyer 1996: 15).

Therefore, an ornament would seem to be classified as a secondary parameter given that it is without syntax. It ceases, but does not provide closure in the structural sense Meyer intends. The only closure an ornament provides is contained within itself; that is, the traditional ornament brings about its own closure but only ceases to influence musical structure beyond itself. Though they can be “understood as being processive” (ibid.), ornaments ought to be relegated to a secondary parameter when defining musical style because they cannot bring about (but only somehow aid) musical closure.

For Meyer, closure defines the interrelationship between primary musical segments as it does the musical whole. As such, it is a vital defining measure of style. What is interesting, is Meyer's discussion of “a weakening of syntax (somewhat during the last half of the nineteenth century, and often radically in the twentieth) [where] secondary parameters became more and more important for the generation of

musical processes and the articulation of closure” (Meyer 1996: 16). This is fascinating when translated onto a traditional music context.

When considering the place of the ornament in Irish traditional music – as a secondary parameter without syntax – it still both defines the style of what we call “Irish traditional music” and defines the primary musical recourse toward individualised “style” *within* Irish traditional music. As such, the traditional composer-performer does not control any significant *syntactic* choices, but only *statistical* ones; and yet it is through the traditional ornament that structure is articulated in any significantly individualised manner (that is, recomposed). If the traditional ornament, as it stands, is defining of individual style in Irish music, then its significance (and more, its potential) in defining true individualism must be investigated more thoroughly.

Before continuing any further, I will briefly outline where the traditional ornament (as a secondary parameter) lies within Meyer’s overall “Hierarchy of constraints” (Meyer 1996: 13). He sets out his hierarchy as follows:

- Laws: transcultural constraints, such as physical and psychological ones.
- Rules: intracultural constraints, those which “specify the permissible material means of a musical style” (Meyer 1996: 17).
- Strategies: “compositional choices made within the possibilities established by the rules of the style” (Meyer 1996: 20).

Meyer makes it clear: “For any specific style there is a finite number of rules, but there is an indefinite number of possible strategies for realising or instantiating such

rules” (ibid.). It is equally clear that where traditional macrostructure is a finite rule in Irish traditional music performance, micro-structural variation accounts for (re) compositional strategies on an individual basis. Given the previous account of the relatively weak syntactic influence the traditional ornament holds over any structure beyond its own (including macrostructure), it is interesting to examine how these micro-structural elements can become themselves (that is, within themselves) finite.

I am referring here to the creation of *traditional* ornaments (as opposed to individualised ornamental practice *per se*). Under such conditions, the potential of the ornament (considering its inherent flux) is severely limited. Meyer elaborates:

Novel strategies are continually being devised, though the rate of such devising varies, depending on stylistic and cultural circumstances as well as on the personality of individual composers. But only a small fraction of such innovations become part of the ongoing, traditional practice of the style. Those strategies that do survive – that are replicated – must possess properties such as symmetry and coherence, stability, and a degree of redundancy. Because they are especially memorable and their fundamental structure can be readily replicated, such patterns can be significantly extended and elaborated without losing their identity and the ability to shape musical experience (Meyer 1996: 23).

Meyer’s list of properties (“symmetry and coherence, stability, and a degree of redundancy”) define what the traditional ornament becomes under a process of classicism (see chapter three). Indeed, there are now countless written examples of a standardised format for each Irish traditional ornament designed for each Irish traditional instrument. I have outlined the more common finger ornaments in my note on transcriptions preceding this thesis. I have also outlined the main traditional fiddle

ornaments in footnote 67 inside chapter three (see p.167). I argue, that just as with traditional macrostructure, to standardise ornamentation into a catalogue of traditional ornaments reduces their potential for defining individualism.

Meyer cautions that “the distinction between the expressive deviations made by performers of all cultures and the devices which the various cultures systematize as ornaments is very difficult to draw” (Meyer 1961: 204). That said, ornamentation makes up an important (pseudo)individualising mechanism within the terms of tradition. Normally, there is a clear segregation between traditional ornament and main melo-rhythmic line within each tune. Indeed, within traditional or folk music, ornamentation can become the primary distinguishing factor between regional or national styles. Meyer clarifies:

Ornamentation might itself be said to be a partial basis of musical style. Within a cultural area style is not so much a matter of fundamental tunes but of differences in ornamentation (ibid. 287).

This exemplifies another pathway toward the stagnation of individualism. For instance, the so-called regional styles of Irish music lay down certain expectations regarding the use (and distribution) of traditional ornaments; for example, the primacy of the roll in county Clare relative to the primacy of the triplet in county Donegal. Fiddlers can now actively seek to emulate one particular regional style as defined exclusively by the formation and interpolation of selected traditional ornaments. Thankfully, there are others who do not.

It is within the possibility of significantly extending, reducing or elaborating upon the fixed identities of traditional ornaments themselves that the ornament may



return to its more naturally volatile condition. In the process, the musical individual may reclaim a more significant musical space. In this instance, the traditional ornament is once again ripe with the kind of potential that invites a more radical interpretation of musical individualism. Tommy Peoples is a case in point. He is a Donegal fiddler who has significantly developed (through an idiosyncratic ergonomic re-invention) traditional finger ornamentation (including the roll) as well as bowed ornamentation (including the triplet). His capacity for devising new, and manipulating old ornaments in this regard is discussed in the second part of this chapter below.

## **6.2: Pushing Space**

Perhaps surprisingly, how a traditional piece opens (in contrast to how it closes) is how the traditional ear would better comprehend the unity, wholeness, and completeness of a full piece of music (see chapter five). This contrasts Meyer's analysis of the Western art tradition for instance where he prioritises "closure" (see Meyer 1996: 326). What Meyer would designate "syntactic closure" occurs right at the opening of an Irish traditional piece. From this moment, the opening statement (or primary tune identifier – see chapter five) makes the pursuing segments, together with the whole, a foregone conclusion. Even if the traditional melo-rhythmic line is unknown to a particular listener, its macrostructure is always certain together with its interrelated patterns, rhythmic-count and symmetric parts. I am sure that this can be related to much of Western art musical form also, though perhaps never to the same degree.

Following on from this, while discussing Meyer's hierarchy of constraints above it is interesting to note that the avant-garde's negation of the terms of tradition directly contests this hierarchy. For instance, unlike experimental music where new rules are devised (that is, the creation of a new "situation" to specify the permissible material means of a musical style under which musical strategies unfold), the avant-garde actually negates the traditional equation of constraints. Here, for instance, rules are made into strategies. This can be seen in the previous chapter where Potts' "The Yellow Tinker" is understood on its own terms, and not those of the traditional model. There are no new structural rules devised, because each micro- and macro-structural conduit is itself a musical strategy.

All in all, there is radically less clarity between the traditional realms of rules and strategies here. During the following sections, I will try to observe this process of negation from the other direction: where strategies move toward the traditional realm of rules. Though not a means of devising new rules *per se*, this elevation from a place of musical strategy to one of musical rules merely contributes to the disintegration between both levels of traditional constraint. Remember, as Meyer in one of his revealing footnotes added: "ornaments are intelligible in nonreferential music only when there is functional differentiation between structural and nonstructural tones" (Meyer 1996: 194). In discussing stylistic changes already during the Romantic period of the Western art tradition, Meyer discloses the following:

syntactic relationships were also weakened by the durational stretching of nonchord tones, especially appoggiaturas. Not only did the frequency of appoggiaturas increase, but to enhance their palpability and expressive power, so did their duration relative to the chord tones they embellished. Psychologically,

however, longer tones seem more important than shorter ones, and for this reason, they tend to be understood as structurally and syntactically more significant. As a result, durational stretching may make it doubtful whether a particular tone embellishes harmony (is an *appoggiatura*) or is a structural component of the harmony. The functional relationship among pitches becomes more ambiguous (Meyer 1996: 281).

The *appoggiatura* is hardly a characteristic element of Irish traditional music, not least because there is little sense of harmonic development here. However, the plethora of Irish traditional ornaments deserves special attention to surmise what potential, if any, they hold toward the creation of an avant-garde of traditional music. What is being analysed here is where ornament can become a syntactically significant structural component (as opposed to a mere strategy). This would bring it closer toward the realm of rules. However, in this sense, it is not that it replaces or devises new rules, but it blurs or breaks down the traditional division between rule and strategy by syntactically influencing macrostructure. Essentially, given that Irish traditional music is often represented by a rigid macro-structural system, I will investigate how this fixity can be alleviated in favour of an organic flux by way of the ornament.

## 6.21: Soloist Push.

To begin with, this project relies on an emic distinction between musical beat and musical pulse. Given that the traditional ornament is a compact microstructure that cannot be audibly regulated by equal rhythmic division, the concept of pulse is an

important one for my later analyses. One of the most celebrated *sean-nós* singers of the twentieth century, Joe Heaney, denied the presence of a “beat” in Irish traditional song altogether. In recalling his own father’s advice, Heaney informed Cowdery:

‘in folk music there is no beat, it’s just got a pulse; and the minute you lose that pulse you’re dead, the song is dead. You can lose a beat,’ he said, ‘and still survive—but the pulse, no.’ That’s the advice [my father] gave me (cited in Cowdery 1990: 35).

Cowdery was surprised that Heaney related this same concept to the instrumental tradition, even with regard to dance music. Cowdery’s own efforts at understanding Heaney’s concept of “pulse” in the instrumental format is interesting.

the difference here is not between strict and free rhythm, for any melodeon player would naturally be expected to keep a strict rhythm for dancing. Rather, the difference is in emphasis: by emphasising the downbeat with his foot, the player was producing music which projected too much aggressiveness and urgency (ibid. 35).

Interestingly, Irish traditional music is defined by beats within the terms of tradition. Beats are the only tangible rhythmic method of ensuring symmetry. Heaney may not have been referring to pulse as something that would allow for the missing beats within bars already uncovered by this thesis – though this phenomenon brings into practice Heaney’s contention of a constancy of pulse as opposed to a constancy of beat. The customary representation of traditional performers by most academics shows the Irish musician always – and by way of necessity – taping her/his foot. For

them, this demonstrates where the musician embodies (or dances) to her/his own music making.<sup>121</sup>

By contrast, Heaney insists that such a practice was in fact discouraged during his own youth. “You don’t beat it; you just play it”, he explained to Cowdery (cited in Cowdery 1990: 35). What exactly Heaney meant by pulse is somewhat unclear, or at least not wholly tangible. He attempted to elaborate:

A pulse, you know, it’s something that goes evenly more or less, you know, with no sort of loudness all the time, or no sort of down all the time. It’s a thing that keeps going, and when it stops that’s dead, whatever they’re doing is dead. It keeps the same *moment*, you know; going the same way all the time. You don’t run away with something. You don’t beat (ibid. 35).

The same “moment” is therefore measured not by the rigours of musical beat, but by the “more or less” – thus imprecise nature – of musical pulse. Cowdery remained convinced that “the difference is in emphasis” (see above). However his reliance on “strict rhythm” in this regard is far too conservative. It obviously cancels out the essential difference in musical space that separates what is a musical pulse from what is a musical beat. Cowdery simply cannot comprehend the idea of “pulse” beyond the requirements of the phantom dancer. He therefore forces the pulse to comply with the same rigidity as that found in the beat. This, despite Heaney’s segregation of both musical concepts as outlined above.

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<sup>121</sup> Interestingly, Tommy Peoples will tap his foot in a very asymmetric manner on occasion. This can be heard in live performances or live recordings such as those of the Fiddlesticks Concert series recorded in 1991 at University College Cork.

The composition of musical space within the “same moment” (or musical event) as defined by a pulse (this being only “more or less”) motivates a unique response inside microstructure: itself becoming both expansive and/or reductive. In this way, pulse can push against the rigours of beat. It is here – within the subtle flux which the idea of a musical pulse calls for – where the modern fiddle player may reclaim an individualised musical space. A unit of pulse, as such, can be considered as a minute musical structure that holds a certain independence from subsequent though interrelated pulses. This independence is revealed only by each pulse’s interrelation with those that frame it. To bring the concept of pulse (with its unique definition of musical space) onto an analytical platform, the state of flux naturally enjoyed by the “ornament” provides a tangible musical unit in this regard. The ornament is a miniature musical moment held within that “same moment” described by Heaney above.

Significantly, where the traditional ornament is not always an improvised structure, its manipulation of musical space is certainly more improvised than macrostructure and more volatile than any main melo-rhythmic note. Indeed, if it is inside this flexible musical space (defined by pulse and advanced in practice most dramatically through the traditional ornament) that the traditional musician encounters traditional macrostructure (that is, touching or scratching upon its limits): then a real and tangible potential for, and pathway toward, an avant-garde of contemporary traditional music is near. Here, the borders of a strict symmetrical macrostructure that are usually veiled by ornamental practice, can instead be contested using the syntactic potential inside the ornament itself.

The following sections will explain this process as it has developed in the fiddle playing of Tommy Peoples. That is, first considering the fiddler's intense musical concentration centred upon micro-structural details alone whereby the constant flux of the traditional ornament eventually bursts its own bounds and impinges on (thus better reveals) macrostructure; and second, where the resulting instability within the radicalised micro-structural detail eventually induces a macro-structural crisis. However, before reaching these sections, it is important to prelude them with a consideration of Peoples' practical journey from ensemble performer to soloist.

Holman asserts that the violin, as an instrument suited to ensemble practice "was made from the first as a family in several sizes" (Holman 1993: 4). In the context of the Irish music tradition, the violin came to be the fiddle without such family ties to an ensemble format. Yet during the later twentieth century, it was adopted by the ensemble and features prominently in the most successful Irish music groups. Born in 1948 in St. Johnston (Donegal), Peoples was thus introduced to an instrument which had already become a central component of a contemporary ensemble aesthetic. During the 1950s, his grandfather and granduncle ran a dance hall where two fiddlers were hired as a pair to accompany dancers. At this time, CCÉ sponsored large sessions in the county. Peoples frequented one such session in Letterkenny.

Yet, Peoples had to endure a certain musical isolation also, travelling miles to meet other musicians within a typical rural setting. In this matter, Peoples recalled one particular session that was not affiliated with CCÉ activities: a session where soloists still performed. During an interview at my home in Madrid, he informed me about these sessions.

There was another guy who used to come back to the area from Glasgow. He taught classical fiddle in Glasgow all his life. He'd been born in the area but went there with his parents when he was three. So he used to come on holidays every summer, and he took a special interest in me. Kind of learning at the time I was probably the only one in the area that was taking up the instrument. He'd call, and one thing or another it kind of developed from there then that each and every house would hold a get-together. Sam Nesbitt was the man's name.<sup>122</sup> So there might be a night in your house tonight and all the older fiddle players would arrive. What would happen would be that Sam's fiddle would invariably be used, it was maybe a better quality instrument as well. It would just pass around from one to the other, and each one would play maybe two tunes and pass it on to the next guy and so on. So that was interesting as well because you got to hear each one individually. (Interview with Tommy Peoples, June 2009.)

Despite his central involvement in the overall popularisation of modern ensemble performance practices in Irish traditional music described earlier, Peoples is always thought of as a musically individual fiddle player with one of the most distinctive imaginative styles. As such, the perception is that his "extraordinary prowess as a fiddle player, regardless of music genre" developed despite an active participation in renowned ensembles (Curtis 1994: 88). This is on account of Peoples' micro-structural developments that evolved regardless of ensemble practice. His ornaments

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<sup>122</sup> Peoples later states they were great friends for the duration of the three years that they used to meet (Sam Nesbitt was already in his 80's at the time). Peoples also mentions that Nesbitt tried to spark his interest in classical music. However, he was already content with the vastness of traditional music and abstained from any classical music training altogether.



in particular were, and continue to be, executed with astounding proficiency and variety. These had already been developed by the time Peoples was recording with the earliest and most renowned traditional music ensembles.

Just as the session of soloists described above, Peoples of course played solo on other occasions. For instance, one of the earliest commercial solo recordings of Tommy Peoples during this time was basically gathered via a collection of live performances in various folk clubs and sessions titled, “An Exciting Session with One of Ireland's Leading Traditional Fiddlers”. Released in 1976, Peoples can be heard performing completely solo; that is, without any form of instrumental accompaniment. In fact, this particular recording was released by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, which goes some way toward declaring their approval of Peoples’ performance aesthetic at this period. Peoples has, at this point, introduced traditional audiences to a highly stylised interpretation of traditional practice; that is, he exploits the traditional method of applying ornaments to traditional tunes to achieve an extremely individualised (though as yet traditional) sound.

Peoples’ individualism in this regard, together with his capacity to perform completely solo, has always been appreciated by the keenest listeners. However, there is an important change in Peoples’ playing style from those earlier ensemble dominated years to the present where he has returned predominantly to solo performance (without using an accompanist). Quinn is also aware of this.

When musicians disconnect from the requirements of typical ensemble playing – a certain approach to arrangement, structure and form – we can hear it in their playing. It has been evident in the performances of Tommy Peoples of late (Quinn 2008: 35).

What Quinn does not provide is an account of this change. Though the traditional audience may have perceived a height of traditional individuality inside of Peoples' earlier fiddle playing, it seems that the musician himself was unsatisfied by this degree of individualism which he himself attained inside traditional boundaries. In the final sections of this chapter, I will attempt to explain the resulting transformation by analysing the most important aspects of Peoples' musical changes going from a defining ensemble musician to a defining solo fiddle player. To this end, it is important firstly to provide an in-depth analysis of Peoples' approach to the traditional ornament together with his devising of new methods of ornamental practice during the period under question (the mid 1970s) before reaching the concluding side of the developmental process being expounded (at the very end of the twentieth century).

## 6.22: Micro-Structural Push.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Potts exploited the creative potential of an individualised macrostructure; whereas Peoples achieves something similar out of individualised microstructure. To illustrate, where the opening bar of Potts' "Toss the Feathers" immediately implicates macrostructure in his musical crisis, Peoples' interpretation of the same tune does not. Instead, Peoples invests a great deal of musical energy upon the potential of the ornament to relieve the constancy of the D-note that so infatuated Potts in the creation of his macro-structural negations exposed in chapter five.

## Bar 1's of "Toss the Feathers" as performed by Tommy Peoples



Figure 6.1: Bar 1's of Peoples' "Toss the Feathers" on the album "The High art of the Road", 1975.<sup>123</sup>

During the first round of "Toss the Feathers", Peoples battles with the constancy of the D-note inside the traditional melody in a way that is very different from that of Potts. His effort is to vary the persistent D note, and through its varying, kill the monotony of it. The manner with which he accomplishes this, is ironically to enhance the pitch for all its worth by making use of particularly rough triplet ornaments. The diversity of this procedure is found in the different permutations of the triplet ornament itself and its interpolation inside the main melo-rhythmic line of the traditional tune. Both the opening of the part plus its repeat (that is, bars 1 and 9 respectively) use the more common (or expected) method of incorporating a triplet ornament into the musical line. It should be no surprise then, that this ornamental pattern is used during the primary tune identifier itself, as well as its principal repeat; that is, where the whole eight-bar part begins again at bar 9.

Yet, this traditional ornamental practice is not transferred onto the intervening and subsequent bars within the part where the musical content of the metre is also repeated. Instead, at bar 3, Peoples attacks the D-note immediately by beginning with the triplet instead of flowing into the ornament. The effect is then softened somewhat

<sup>123</sup> Transcription by the author.

by a firmer reliance on the traditional melo-rhythmic line (bar 3). At bar 5, Peoples again accentuates the D-note by sliding toward the pitch on the 4th string to meet with the open-string D above it. Following on from what happened previously at bar 3, he then relies on the traditional melo-rhythmic line once more to bring relief to the emphasis of the D-note inside the metric unit.

During the repeat of the part (again, after re-introducing the more expected or more comfortable presentation of the repeating triplet idea at bar 9), Peoples further forcibly accentuates to the D-note at bar 11. On this occasion, the triplet is followed by a cut on the D-note. This lends incredible weight to the opening of this bar, manipulating the very D-note that saturates the melo-rhythmic line of the part. The triplet and cut combination produces a musical effect like that of a long “cran” ornament, more familiar to the piping tradition.

The intricacy of the ornamental presentation of the D-note at bar 11 is further exacerbated by the triplet on D which closes the same bar. This final triplet, though appearing at a more expected point within the metric unit, is contrasted by Peoples’ surprising use of the triplet-to-cut combination just before. As such, in this instance it is a surprise addition in itself. Bar 13 reproduces bar 11 and Peoples’ traditional ornamental figures begin to explode on top of the traditional melo-rhythmic line. Already there is an impression of the tune in flux. The performance it is of course – unlike in Potts – still contained by the best conventions of macrostructure within the terms of tradition; but still, only just.

Below I have transcribed another recorded performance by Peoples from the same period. This time a double-jig “Port an Bhráthar”. Note the use of square-shaped note-heads throughout this score to outline where notes are transformed into noise:

# "Port an Bhráther" as performed by Tommy Peoples



The musical score is written for a single melodic line in 6/8 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation is as follows:

- Staff 1:** Measures 1-4. Includes a triplet of eighth notes in measure 1 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 2.
- Staff 2:** Measures 5-8. Includes a triplet of eighth notes in measure 5 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 6.
- Staff 3:** Measures 9-12. Includes a triplet of eighth notes in measure 9 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 10.
- Staff 4:** Measures 13-16. Includes a triplet of eighth notes in measure 13 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 14.
- Staff 5:** Measures 17-20. Includes a triplet of eighth notes in measure 17 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 18.
- Staff 6:** Measures 21-24. Includes a triplet of eighth notes in measure 21 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 22.
- Staff 7:** Measures 25-28. Includes a triplet of eighth notes in measure 25 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 26.
- Staff 8:** Measures 29-32. Includes a triplet of eighth notes in measure 29 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 30.
- Staff 9:** Measures 33-36. Includes a triplet of eighth notes in measure 33 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 34.
- Staff 10:** Measures 37-40. Includes a triplet of eighth notes in measure 37 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 38.

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Figure 6.2: Transcription of Tommy Peoples' performance of "Port an Bhráthar" on the album "The High Part of the Road", 1975.<sup>124</sup>

Already, at bar 1 Peoples indulges in a traditional manner of obscuring the division between the main melo-rhythmic line and the ornament:



Figure 6.3: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bar 1.

The nature of the traditional short-roll would already weave inside a tune's melo-rhythmic line. However, here Peoples almost transforms the short-roll into a strange long-roll by (almost) touching the B note before the second beat of the bar which introduces the ornament. Further on in his performance, Peoples alters the placement of the short-roll within a repeat of the same metric unit. On this occasion, he facilitates a particularly dense ornamented passage that is especially cluttered by varying examples of traditional ornaments:

<sup>124</sup> Transcription by the author.



Figure 6.4: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bars 5–6.

Again, the short-roll (though shifted to an idiosyncratic place within the bar) is executed in a typical traditional style. That said, just as in the previous example, Peoples takes the traditional ornamental process beyond itself. Here, the whole passage (bars 5–6) forms a continuous series of ornamentation, thus significantly blurring the structural distinction between ornament and the main melo-rhythmic line. This confusion between ornament and main melo-rhythmic line is further exaggerated toward the very end of his performance:



Figure 6.5: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bars 93–4.

The long-roll on the second beat of each bar here is uncharacteristic in the manner in which it weaves into the main melo-rhythmic line. These long-rolls are both inspired by, and yet also influence a more detached rhythmic approach signalling the closure of the performance. It is clear that a traditional long-roll has been performed in each case (this cannot be questioned), but their execution within the melo-rhythmic line make them less distinguishable from the traditional tune than what would be customary. Unlike the short-roll, traditionally the long-roll embellishes long



notes within the main melo-rhythmic line, or altogether replaces the original melo-rhythmic movement where necessary. Essentially, the traditional divide between the main notes of the tune and its ornaments is thus obscured. In this example, both the long-roll and the original melo-rhythmic movement of the tune are somehow heard concurrently instead of one on top of (or replacing) the other.

Peoples would often incorporate traditional ornaments in what would seem like impossible locations within the tune. For instance, he chooses to divide a quaver at bar 3 using a simple cut:



Figure 6.6: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bar 3.

Typically, traditional musicians would only employ the cut before a quaver note, or to divide what would be a crotchet-length note of the jig. It must be remembered that the pace of Peoples' performance is considerable to say the least. To manipulate a quaver-length note in this fashion adds tremendous complexity to the musical result. The traditional tune essentially is bursting at the seams. Peoples also uses impossible combinations of traditional ornaments, wherein an impossible ornamental density almost creates new idiosyncratic ornamental figures:



Figure 6.7: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bar 23.

At bar 23 above, Peoples completes a traditional long-roll ornament as expected, but then unexpectedly follows it with an upper mordent.<sup>125</sup> Because the roll ornament is sounded toward the end of the main note upon which the ornament is produced, and because the upper mordent precedes its main note: then effectively Peoples builds an ornamental figure that almost combines both distinct traditional ornaments into one especially long and complex idiosyncratic ornament. Peoples radically tests the durational limits of what is an “ornament” in this example. Just as where the *appoggiatura* in the nineteenth-century Western art tradition became so extended in Meyer’s analysis above that it questioned the classic differentiation between structural and nonstructural tones, here Peoples’ idiosyncratic combination of traditional ornamental figures extends each beyond itself to almost become a syntactically significant structural component in its own right.

I have mentioned before where the ornament manipulates the rigidity of musical space that is not enjoyed by larger-scale macrostructures. Peoples’ interest in this aspect of the ornament produces quite radical results. This, together with his effort at squeezing ornaments into impossible spaces is marked very clearly by the sequence of long-rolls at bar 19:

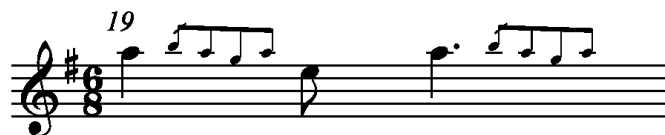


Figure 6.8: Peoples’ “Port an Bhráthar” Bar 19.

<sup>125</sup> As there is no traditional terminology for this ornament in an Irish context, I am relying on Western art terminology instead. It ought to be mentioned that there is no real resemblance between a mordent and a cut. The pitch of a mordent’s main ornamental note can be distinguished; whereas the pitch of a cut cannot as it very briefly dampens (instead of alternating with) the main note upon which the ornament is produced.

In the above example, Peoples first uses the musical space of a crotchet to execute a long-roll, and then subsequently uses the musical space of a dotted-crotchet to execute what is the same long-roll again. On each occasion, a traditional long-roll has been performed. However, each example manipulates a distinct musical space held within the same tune, or within the same metric unit: one using a crotchet; the other using a dotted-crotchet. Although the terms of tradition are not violated yet (the ornaments are traditional), by exaggerating the liberal manipulation of musical space innate to the ornament, a precedent is set for similar manipulations upon larger (and more significant) macro-structural units. There is an elasticity inherent in the ornament (related to the pulse found in individualised performances) that may evolve beyond the constitution of the ornament itself. Essentially, Peoples has allowed the ornament to spill beyond its syntactic/structural scope that is accorded it as secondary parameter.

Before analysing the result of this transference, I would like to highlight where Peoples' intense concentration on the traditional ornament is musically volatile. The fiddler's efforts in this regard can produce significantly uncharacteristic musical effects. Indeed, at bar 72, listeners are treated to an interesting example:



Figure 6.9: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bar 72.

I have exposed Peoples' use of the idiosyncratic triplet plus cut combination earlier in this chapter. It is difficult to execute as it is complex to the ear. In the example above

it is used on the final beat of the first part of the tune (that is, the second beat of bar 72). Typically, this final beat would be left plain by the traditional performer as a kind of cadential signal. Peoples therefore is relentless in his use and combination of traditional ornaments even at cadential points of the tune. On this occasion the fiddler plucks the open E-string with his “cutting finger” to produce an uncanny use of left-hand pizzicato (marked by the traditional + sign above the bar). This is not a deliberate manoeuvre, but because Peoples essentially is tearing the melo-rhythmic line apart through a complexity of ornaments he becomes an increasing menace to the integrity of that traditional melo-rhythmic line.

Of course, not all of Peoples’ micro-structural idiosyncrasies are so fleeting. Peoples also very deliberately breaks with traditional norms in the execution of ornaments. During my interviews with Peoples, I tried to adopt an alternative method for understanding these famous recurring ornamental patterns. Instead of seeking a practical breakdown on their execution (which has never been a fruitful interview method), I sought to elicit the ways in which these emerged.

After speaking about the fiddler Joe Cassidy (Peoples’ cousin and his only fiddle instructor), I asked: “and would you have picked up a lot of the style of your cousin then?” He replied: “Yea, Joe played ... he had a pretty straight style without that much ornamentation or anything like that” (Interview with Tommy Peoples, Madrid, June 2009). Obviously Cassidy did not influence Peoples with respect to his intense focus on ornamentation. Later, I (EN) asked the master-fiddler about his time in Dublin (where he moved to when only sixteen years of age). A clearer image of Peoples’ (TP) instrumental development began to emerge.

TP: You could meet every and any sort of style, so that was great. I'm sure whatever style I ended up with is a mix, a liquorice all-sorts!

EN: Both from your early time in Donegal, and then even in Dublin, there might have been influences there too?

TP: Whatever little flourishes or different ways of doing things that each individual had you would try and emulate, mostly from the sound rather than by direct instruction or whatever, do you know? (Interview with Tommy Peoples, Madrid, June 2009).

The “sound” of the traditional ornament is a musical product to which Peoples added an alternative (idiosyncratic) process. Basically, he has devised highly personalised ergonomic routes toward accomplishing the sounds of traditional ornaments. However, in doing so, these idiosyncratic ornaments adopt an alternative potential to their traditional counterparts. For instance, the fiddler's lower mordent technique is neither what it seems in the transcription. That occurring at bar 29 is exemplary:



Figure 6.10: Peoples' “Port an Bhráthar” Bar 29.

What the notation hides in this instance, is the violent nature of the lower mordent in Peoples' hands. It is not so much mapped by the fingers as it is pounded out by the fingers. He hammers down his third finger on the initial a-note for it to

bounce in its place like a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil. He thus produces the lower mordent inside a powerful snapping texture. Here, the lower mordent becomes a singular ergonomic movement rather than a sequence of pitches that require a corresponding sequence of ergonomic movements. Even more exciting (and aggressive) is Peoples' use of the bowed-triplet, which is discussed at length below.

During a fiddle workshop by Peoples which I organised in Madrid (June 2009), students were asked if they had any specific questions for the Master. The boldest of the students responded: "No! I suppose the question everybody asks: how do you do your triplets? But, I understand not even you can explain that". Peoples has developed micro-structural ornaments on his instrument with far more intrigue than any other fiddle player of the twentieth century. Of these, his idiosyncratic triplet receives most interest among fellow instrumentalists. Again, I used my interview sessions with Tommy Peoples to explore *how* these idiosyncrasies might have been formed. Therefore, I returned to the idea raised by Peoples earlier concerning the "sound" of traditional ornaments upon which he later developed distinct (untraditional) ergonomic processes.

EN: I'm kind of curious about the idea of you grabbing sound, and then trying to emulate it. Because in a way it would kind of bring you very close to your own instrument because you are kind of searching within its possibilities to replicate a sound that you are after hearing. I'm sure you've often heard of people questioning about your certain approach to certain ornamentations – like the triplet and all these – that they're very idiosyncratic to a lot of people's ears as well. Would you say that

kind of might have come out of that fact that you were kind of memorising sounds and then looking for a way to reproduce sound?

TP: I dare say maybe the main thing that – I would say in some kind of clouded hindsight – that the main thing that tended towards the style that I now have is that when starting out the idea was to give a bow direction to each note kind of thing. So there was no sort of embellishment whatsoever, or rolls, or maybe if there was anything it might be a triplet kind of thing – which I found very hard to execute anyhow. So my way of doing it developed from trying to bow the actual thing but never succeeding to do it to my own satisfaction. So I kind of developed a system that works occasionally and doesn't on other occasions. It's more like if there was tenseness or certain things it mightn't work so well, and then sometimes it works easily enough. (Interview with Tommy Peoples, Madrid, June 2009).

As such, the ergonomic limitations experienced by Peoples in producing certain musical effects forced the fiddler toward alternative personal ergonomic methods to help him achieve the particular sounds he was looking for. It is obvious that Peoples' playing does not have one particular source, it comes out of what he amusingly defines as a "liquorice all-sorts" combination of fiddle players and other instrumentalists both from his time in Donegal and in Dublin. Importantly, these influences were never a clean copy-and-paste appropriation by him. He explains that his own inability to reproduce ornamental techniques accurately (that is, mimicking exactly how they would be usually executed), led him to seek alternative methods that

could at least correspond with the “sound” of what he heard. Without the benefit of a teacher to instruct him, Peoples was left “following that sound”.

This master-fiddler necessarily developed a unique system that both obscured his apparent inability to “properly” execute ornamental techniques traditionally, and in turn bred an independent ergonomic reliance on the capacity of his instrument as held by his own hands. In all, this facilitated a highly individualised approach to traditional micro-structural details which also employed facets of instrumental practice that would remain exclusive to the only bowed instrument in the Irish tradition.

Basically, Peoples’ idiosyncratic triplet is made with a flick of the bow, whereby his small finger on the bow hand strikes (or flicks) the bow. This sends the bow into a temporary wobbling motion which makes it wriggle minutely across the string. In effect, it ricochets on and off the string at an incredible pace to produce a very original-sounding (though somehow familiar) triplet. It remains a triplet in that three rapid ornamental notes share a single main melo-rhythmic note value. It remains a fiddle triplet in that three separate bows achieve the characteristic fiddle triplet sound: unlike the normal down-up-down bowing (or up-down-up), Peoples achieves an up-up-up (or a down-down-down) bowing caused by the flickering action of the bow when it skips on and off any notable sonorous sound of the string. I will therefore refer to this idiosyncratic triplet as a “flicked triplet”.

Peoples’ flicked triplet (once it “works easily enough”) actually better facilitates his highly ornamented style. For instance, with regard to “Port an Bhráthar” above (see figure 6.2), Peoples can introduce a sequence of triplets which would be beyond the capabilities of the vast majority of his contemporaries who use the traditional method for the ornament. Bar 45 is a good example:



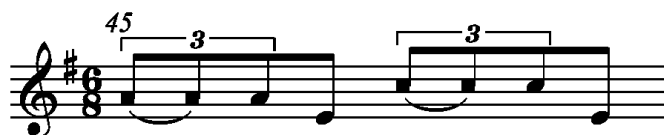


Figure 6.11: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bar 45.

Obviously the reduction in bow changes required by the flicked triplet facilitates the intricate sequence above. This would be more often out-of-reach to most of those fiddlers using the traditional method.

It is worth noting at this point, that traditional ornaments bring the instrumentalist closer to noise than to sound (that is, to non-tones than to tones). The cut and the rolls are best executed when the ornamented "pitches" do not sound their pitch. That is, on the fiddle, these pitches should not be pressed by the fingers upon the finger-board (because this produces a melodic pattern), but instead used to dampen the string (because this produces a rhythmic interchange between sound (the main note) and non-sound (the ornament)). This "non-sound" is thus more musical noise than it is musical sound. More: it is not only musical noise, but it is precisely fiddle noise.

As such, the bowed triplet for instance can become the noisiest of traditional ornaments on the fiddle without ever disturbing the traditional ear. I recall during a CCE organised fiddle workshop that I was instructed to "lighten" the traditional triplet and avoid the "scratchy" tone that I was producing. However, with Peoples' idiosyncratic triplet, the natural musical impetus would run contrary to this advice. Given that Peoples essentially is crunching the bow upon the selected note, the

ergonomics of the process would guide the performer toward the noise potential of the triplet ornament rather than toward the sound potential of it.

Indeed, Peoples often exaggerates the noise result of his flicked triplet. This allows him to vary the texture of his performances. This is a particularly useful method of introducing dynamics to an already densely ornamented style of fiddle playing. In fact, noise becomes an exclusive means of advancing the melo-rhythmic line at various points of “Port an Bhráthar” (see figure 6.2 above). One good example of this idiosyncrasy occurs during bars 8–10:



Figure 6.12: Peoples’ “Port an Bhráthar” Bars 8–10.

Remember that the square note-heads indicate the predominance of noise of sound. Essentially, Peoples uses a particularly noisy flicked triplet here to advance the metre of the musical passage in question (bars 8–9). It is an essential musical attribute in this case as the traditional melo-rhythmic line is blurred by the constancy of an elongated A note. Basically, Peoples ends the first part of “Port an Bhráthar” using a double-stop on A which lasts a full crotchet length. However, he subsequently begins the repeat of the part from the last quaver of bar 8, again upon the note A. This extends into the opening of the repeat of the part at bar 9 where the A note is maintained across the double bar-line that separates the repeated part from its original counterpart. His noisy flicked triplet thus features prominently in defining the metrical

forward motion of a melo-rhythmic line that is blurred by the sonorous open A string which links the transition between the part and its repeat.

Later in his performance, Peoples blurs the divide between the second and first parts of the tune further still, as bars 32–34 help to demonstrate:



Figure 6.13: Peoples' "Port an Bhráthar" Bars 32–34.

On this occasion, Peoples again doubles the A note on the second beat of bar 32. However, this time he does not relinquish the sound until reaching the far end of the first beat of bar 33. It is already impossible to distinguish three separate notes upon reaching the triplet at bar 33 because the extremely long double A notes claim the opening note of the triplet too. That Peoples can at all achieve this feat is down to the fact that he does not require a bow change to produce his flicked triplets. But even more exciting, there is neither any separation between the subsequent two notes of the triplet on the note B. What Peoples produces here is in fact pure noise (again, represented in the transcription by a square note-head). That his finger placement retains its position while this noise moves into sound on the second beat of bar 33, serves to clarify where this noise is located on the instrument.

Of most significance here: the only means of understanding Peoples' musical progression in this instance is out of the alternative potential of his idiosyncratic flicked triplet. It is clear that the flicked triplet's proximity to noise permits the traditional ear to perceive that a triplet has occurred at this juncture. The ergonomic

design of the flicked triplet means that Peoples' challenging musical progression coming out of the long double A notes is made possible in practice; the elongated double A notes can serve as a launchpad for the idiosyncratic ornament.

As such, by means of the fiddler's idiosyncratic focus on micro-structural details, Peoples is discovering new ways of realising "Port an Bhráthar" outside of the potential foreseen by the terms of tradition (either macro- or even micro-structurally speaking). From the pure sound of the fiddle (the double A's) to the pure noise of the fiddle (somehow devised as a triplet ornament) a peculiar means of structuring the musical passage in question emerges. Clearly, Peoples is cheating the terms of tradition out of the very conditions which the terms of tradition have set the contemporary individual music practitioner.

The traditional divide separating primary parameters from secondary ones, separating rules from strategies, are thus contested. Peoples freely explores the use of noise (borne out of an idiosyncratic use of the traditional ornament) to advance the macrostructure of certain passages inside the traditional tune. He makes specific use of noise during difficult cross-phrasing sections (where traditional bar-lines are assumed as above) as an idiosyncratic means of providing structural continuity (see also bar 21; bar 41; bars 48–49; and bars 56–57 in figure 6.2 above).

In sum: the traditional triplet ornament is re-sounded as something unexpected (by cropping up in impossible musical combinations and impossible locations within the main tune); it is re-defined it as something less formalised and mundane (because it arrives at, and excites the melo-rhythmic line in unexpectedly individualistic ways); it is broken (as its ergonomic potential has been altered, even negated); it is enhanced

as musical noise (where the primacy of musical sound in defining music structure is negated); and, most importantly, it is in tremendous flux.

The ensemble aesthetic reinforces the terms of tradition, retaining a traditional reliance on microstructure for realising musical individualism even while rendering this musical process less individualistic or completely inaudible. Yet still, Peoples has found his own individual music space inside (perhaps despite) the terms of tradition. He constructs very intuitive, indeed acrobatic ways of rendering traditional ornaments. This increases their complexity despite Peoples' own motivations for discovering them. His active search within the instrument's capabilities is built out of a desire to replicate the "sound" he hears. In the process, though, Peoples is radically undermining a traditional reliance on classicism to incapacitate the instrument.

Peoples' openness to musical sound at a micro-structural level is contrasted by its confinement within the sound blocks of an ensemble aesthetic. Still, he vigorously explores the only apparent avenue toward musical individualism by focussing exclusively on micro-structural details. However, he does this to such an intense degree that it eventually aggravates the musical mould of tradition itself. In the end, his idiosyncratic ornaments yield an alternative (individualised) potential that is outside of the terms of tradition. These micro-structural intricacies – as exploited by Peoples – exacerbate the inherent flux of the ornament to eventually spill over onto macro-structural forms. The musical result is illustrated in the following section below.

## 6.23: Macro-Structural Push.

It is becoming increasingly clear that within a performative music tradition at least, an analysis based exclusively upon melody and rhythm is not sufficient. The ergonomic aspects of instrumental performance practice provides a more inclusive theory of general musical and specific (re)compositional processes. Here, the instrument ought not to be thought of as the bearer of melody and rhythm, but instead as the source of a musical continuum from silence to noise (wherein sound lies somewhere in between). Typically, sound will be the subject of the bulk of musical analysis, but not necessarily to the exclusion of noise and silence.

Peoples' idiosyncratic ornaments, particularly the flicked triplet, more radically explore areas of noise than their traditional counterparts. They are substantially more aggressive toward the traditional tune. Regarding the extent of flux Peoples brings to the ornament, it is possible to examine his ornaments as miniature macrostructures in their own right that produce another form of avant-garde negation. Indeed, it is interesting to note the relationship between Peoples' idiosyncratic ornaments and so-called "extended techniques" in the avant-garde of the Western-art tradition for instance.

Interestingly, the terms of tradition cancel out noise from a general understanding of music. This can be observed from the customary guides toward ornamentation which avoid noting the inherent (and essential) noise contained inside of them. Regarding the fiddling tradition, that the terms of tradition value Michael Coleman's style above all others demonstrates a preference for clean confident tones rather than scratchy ones. These scratching noises (that are often exacerbated by cheap

instruments) are never really explored as something that “belongs” to the Irish music tradition either. Certainly, noise is not valued as a musical quality worth exploring in academic publications on Irish music either.

Definitely, noise is another fruitful area that is particularly suited to an avant-garde of traditional music. Even by virtue of exploring, producing and advancing noise, the instrumentalist finds additional means of negating the terms of tradition. Certainly, unconventional techniques together with idiosyncratic sounds and noises, help identify the avant-garde of other music genres.<sup>126</sup> It may easily become a feature of an avant-garde of Irish traditional music also. Obviously, this aspect of musical avant-gardism is too vast for the current project. In keeping with my primary analytical process in this thesis, I examine both noise and silence structurally. Essentially, my interest in noise and silence is where these extremes of musical sound expose and transform traditional macrostructure.

Noise has already been declared as part of the terms of tradition where the ornament is often composed of a mixture between sound and noise – regardless of whether or not this is recognised or indulged by tradition itself. Likewise, silence is also a natural aspect of traditional flute playing, for instance, due to the necessary intakes of air throughout performance. In what is termed the “closed-style” of piping, the Irish *uilleann* piper renders his repertoire staccato (thus using silence to break the constancy of musical sound).

In most cases like these, silence occupies minute spaces inside a predominantly “soundful” melo-rhythmic line. Here, silence is unobserved: it helps to define a sound

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<sup>126</sup> In experimental music of the Western art tradition, the exploration of noise is often based on developments outside of the relevant instrument of each instrumentalist. This is not examined in connection with any of the performances under discussion in this thesis. Instead, I confine my analytical focus of musical noise to the capacity of a specific instrument that defines the particular instrumentalist.

style without itself becoming a foregrounded aspect of musical exploration. Further, it would seem that especially with regard to the dance music tradition, to maintain a continuous sound throughout instrumental performances is a priority. Here, a constant musical sound is merely subdivided (and accentuated) by beats. Again, this condition is shared with an ensemble aesthetic whereby silence is most often absent by virtue of the instrumental mix which dilutes the minute spaces discussed in these paragraphs. Even, the social priority of the session builds a prerequisite for a constant sound to avoid the responsibility (or social embarrassment) of being heard individually.

Just as Peoples provoked the extremes of noise to a catastrophic effect inside the micro-structural detail, he equally provokes the extremes of silence in a way that is catastrophic for traditional macrostructure. I argue that one (the density and extreme flux of these micro-structural details) led to the other (a corresponding respite as a musical silence which brings macrostructure itself into flux). To demonstrate the result of an intense idiosyncratic micro-structural push against traditional macro-structural markers, this final section will analyse two performances by Peoples of the same reel, “The Spike Island Lassies”. The first is taken from a recording made in 1985, the second from a recording made in 2002. Both are available on the same commercial CD “Waiting for a Call”. Below, I present transcriptions of the first “round” of each version:



## Spike Island Lassies – performed by Tommy Peoples, 1985



Figure 6.14: Transcription of Tommy Peoples' performance of the first round of "The Spike Island Lassies" taken from a 1985 recording.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Transcription by the author.

## Spike Island Lassies – performed by Tommy Peoples, 2002



Figure 6.15: Transcription of Tommy Peoples' performance of the first round of "The Spike Island Lassies" taken from a 1985 recording.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Transcription by the author.

As an initial comparison between the first part of the tune from each recording, it is apparent that there are a significant number of exaggerated rests throughout the 2002 version which are missing from the earlier version. This can be observed in the second transcription through the appearance and dispersion of longer note values. These long notes actually take further durational liberty than the staff notation permits; they move beyond their allocated musical space. Yet in comparison with the earlier recording, there is not a decrease in the number of ornaments either. In fact, on occasion, there are even more instances of idiosyncratic ornaments by Peoples in this later version.

This can be observed by counting the number of flicked triplets in each transcription. As my focus here is on silence instead of noise, the flicked triplet is represented in the notation by the sign “▼▼▼” either above or below the relevant notes. This helps differentiate it from the traditional finger triplet which Peoples also uses here. Compare, for instance, bars 5–9 in both transcriptions where the occurrence of this particular ornament in the 2002 version far outweighs its use in the 1985 version:



Figure 6.16: Peoples’ “Spike Island Lassies” bars 5–8 from the 1985 and 2002 versions.

Peoples has thus noticeably increased his focus on idiosyncratic micro-structural elements during later performances of the same tune, forming evermore intense phrases that further exhaust their traditionally allocated space within the tune. These

obviously contribute to the perception of massive ornamental clustering inside the traditional melo-rhythmic line. Also, Peoples continues to push traditional ornaments into idiosyncratic spaces within the tune; this also becomes more severe in the later version. However, in the 2002 version, Peoples' use of idiosyncratic spaces within the tune through ornament (and noise) is further complicated by his use of empty sounds and silences. For instance, examining bar 4 in the 2002 version, there is an unusual minim note A at the very beginning of the bar:



Figure 6.17: Peoples' "Spike Island Lassies" 2002 version bar 4.

In traditional practice, such a long note value would usually occur (if at all within a reel) toward the very end of this bar to broadly announce the end of the initial main phrase of the tune (as in bars 1–4). Adding to the confusion, this minim is then contrasted by the long-roll on the d note which follows. This is thus placed – again quite uncharacteristically – at the far end of the bar at what should be considered the final cadential point of the opening main phrase. Of course this gives the impression of the beginning of a new phrase. It also gives the sensation of a densely ornamented rendition of the reel despite the musical respite coming just before.

Here, traditional points of rest (at cadential closures for instance) are contested through the use of complex traditional ornaments. In addition, this is offset by uncharacteristically long note values at non-traditional points within the tune's macrostructure. Indeed, even though Peoples uses his relatively more complex flicked

triplet in the 1985 rendition at the same bar, the ornamental effect is less dense because it occupies a traditional space within the tune’s macrostructure. In addition, this is framed with a (less drastic) moment of musical respite by relying on the original non-ornamented melo-rhythmic line to close the bar (and the main phrase):

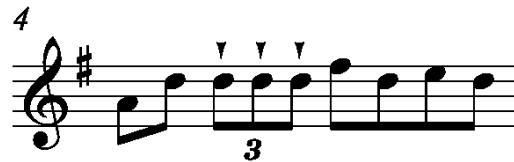


Figure 6.18: Peoples’ “Spike Island Lassies” 1985 version bar 4.

Therefore, the 2002 version causes a sudden propulsion at a juncture of the tune where exactly the opposite musical effect would traditionally be expected. Thereafter, Peoples continues with the same level of micro-structural intensity at the beginning of the second main phrase of the part (bars 5–8). Bars 5 and 6 also maintain the sense of musical dislocation produced in bar 4:



Figure 6.19: Peoples’ “Spike Island Lassies” 2002 version bars 5–6.

Here, Peoples adds a flicked triplet on the open string D at the very end of bar 5. However, this subsequently connects with the open string D crotchet in bar 6; by comparison, then, a far less intense interpretation of the same note pitch. This almost forms a distinct musical segment across the bar-line. As a result, what should be the main beat of bar 6 is made substantially weaker than what should be the weakest beat

of bar 5. The intensity of the flicked triplet on the D note preceding the open crotchet on D in effect pulls the main beat of bar 6 toward the end of bar 5. Despite this, the macrostructure still appears to retain its symmetry up to this point of the analysis – the eight bar parts remain intact (at least while examining the transcriptions above).

I will now continue with a comparative analysis of bars 6–9:



Figure 6.20: Peoples’ “Spike Island Lassies” 1985 and 2002 versions bars 6–9.

In contrast to the traditional finger triplet (using a continuous bow) in the earlier version, Peoples employs a flicked triplet at bar 6 and bar 7 in the 2002 version. However, he seems to counter this relative micro-structural intensity by playing a minim (on d) at the end of the main phrase (at bar 8). By contrast, he performed a shorter dotted-crotchet in the same bar of the earlier version corresponding with less micro-structural tension preceding the bar. Though the minimum on d occurs at an expected cadential point, Peoples begins the next main phrase (at bar 9) with an unexpected dotted-crotchet. It is as if Peoples required two “breaths” instead of one to compensate for the higher degree of ornaments preceding the long notes in the 2002 version. Again, the traditional allocation of ornament versus cadential points within the tune is ignored.

Peoples employs similar musical strategies throughout the rest of the 2002 version. As can be observed in figure 6.15 above, he continues from the latter half of

bar 9 using highly complex micro-structural details that do not let up until the natural call to rest by the melody at bar 17 (here being a dotted-crotchet on the notes A and D). For example, notice that a flicked triplet opens the two bars preceding bar 17 where the natural respite within the traditional melo-rhythmic line occurs:

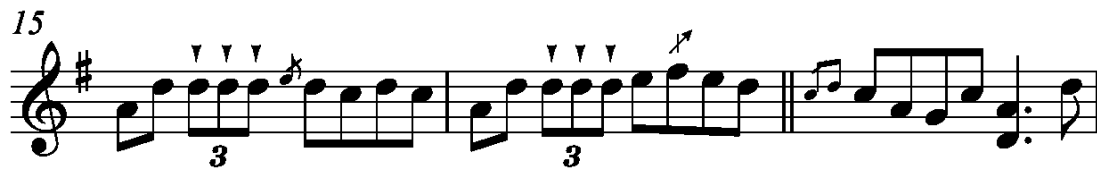


Figure 6.21: Peoples' "Spike Island Lassies" 2002 version bars 15–17.

The first flicked triplet in bar 15 is supported by a cut directly afterward. This cut then almost fashions a slowed-down short-roll ornament out of the main melo-rhythmic line itself throughout the second half of bar 15. The continuous ornamental effect connects with the opening of bar 16 with the use of a second flicked triplet.

Peoples later follows the natural respite at bar 17 with an exaggerated minim at the end of bar 18:



Figure 6.22: Peoples' "Spike Island Lassies" 2002 version bars 17–19.

Both long-notes are informed by the traditional melo-rhythmic line on this occasion – though Peoples fashions an uncharacteristic minim out of the traditional dotted crotchet at bar 18. Peoples then continues from the uncharacteristic minim at bar 18 into an unexpected dotted-crotchet at bar 19. In all, Peoples has dramatically

uncluttered the traditional melo-rhythmic line over a period of three bars (see figure 6.22 above). This compensates for an extreme build up of intensity preceding (and then following) this elongated repose. Significantly, where Peoples has further developed his intense use of ornaments in the 2002 version, he has also necessitated periods of musical calm using unusual combinations of uncharacteristic long notes.

Most significant of all is as follows: Though Peoples quite obviously introduces an asymmetric reading of traditional phrasing, the transcriptions still hide the fact that these long notes do not obey the beat of the reel. Instead, their allocated durational space is prolonged beyond their notated value. Very often, in fact, these notes drift away into silence; a silence that is then broken too late by Peoples' return to a highly ornate musical line. Of course the same musical "moment" persists, however, it is no longer unified by beats. Peoples actually introduces a truly asymmetric reading of macrostructure where the idea of a beat is replaced by that of an extremely liberal pulse. He draws from the inherent flux of the ornament to produce a similar effect on macrostructure. Indeed, the flux of the micro-structural detail has impinged on the traditional macrostructure out of necessity. As such, the fiddler reclaims an individual musical space that is defined by the incalculable (thus unpredictable) measure of the musical pulse.

In all, functioning as the musical individual's only recourse toward musical individualism within the terms of tradition, here Peoples has fully exploited the inherent flux inside the ornament. He has either used idiosyncratic ornaments borne out of the natural qualities of the instrument, or has placed traditional ornaments idiosyncratically so as to bring the overall traditional melo-rhythmic line to the verge collapse. The intensity exploding from Peoples' treatment of microstructure has



finally impinged on the once taken for granted, once indelibly marked, traditional macrostructure. Here, Peoples has found sufficient musical breathing space to become at last a “musically defined individual” once positioned outside a musical environment that was defined by an ensemble aesthetic.

Peoples, through a highly complex rendering of microstructure, eventually leans across and exposes macrostructure (makes it audible) through silence; not, therefore, through sound. It is within the liberal rests after longer note values rather than within these micro-structural embellishments themselves where the fiddler pushes most ferociously against the bounds of macrostructure. The individual micro-structural detail (the ornament) has to some important extent been the cause: but the liberal longer notes and silent rests have effected the result.

In the end: Peoples has come to an asymmetric reading of macrostructure via a highly individualised ergonomic reading of microstructure. He has confounded the terms of tradition, and has most outrageously brought them to crisis. The very means for pseudo-individualism, traditional ornaments (as a method of hiding the reality of a permanent traditional macrostructure) have been so severely used by Peoples that the confines of the terms of tradition are eventually revealed and brought to flux. I specifically asked Peoples about these liberal silent spaces in his playing of late.

EN: Your style is still developing and still has some kind of changes and that?

TP: You have to allow for the pains and aches!

EN: I mean I find listening to your later stuff – even though it can be even more intense at times – there seems to be space after creeping in as well. Kind of rests or something.

TP: Yea, I would agree with you there. Sort of little breathing spaces, although it's not a wind instrument.

EN: Yea, but it's almost like that. An intake to recover and then back into...

TP: ...a more intense focus and so on, yea. It also kind of leads to, or gives a... breaks up the tune into phrases or whatever. Rather than just a straight-through 50 mph.

EN: Yea, I get you. Did you find yourself developing that way as a result of playing completely solo for a while?

TP: Probably, yea. After a stint with maybe the Bothy Band and Kilfenora Ceili Band and so on, I never really teamed up with anyone after that. I did a lot of sessions around county Clare. It was a kind of thing where anyone could come in and join in, there was never amplification or anything, so anyone could join in, and did. That made it interesting. And so maybe there were occasional nights where you would be almost on your own – maybe a guitarist or a singer or whatever. So it's probably a little different than playing with a group or whatever, because then you have to almost make it interesting for yourself as well as... But, I'm sure the whole thing is a matter of taste, and what appeals to me I'm sure mightn't appeal to the next Tommy or whatever, and vice versa (Interview with Tommy Peoples, Madrid, June 2009).

Peoples is obviously very much aware of the “breathing spaces” in his more recent performances. His humorous comment regarding the “pains and aches” actually corresponds with the ergonomics of performance, where the instrumentalist’s physical changing conditions that are in contact with the physical stable conditions of her/his instrument can provoke new musical results. He also emphasised the unique phrasing that comes out of these spaces. I enquired further about this particular musical result.

EN: You were saying with those breathing spaces, they emphasise little sections of the tune within as well. And I like the way when you do those breathing spaces, they’re not regular either, you know? It’s like you are actually selecting little places within the tune.

TP: Yea, it mightn’t be the same place second time round?

EN: Yea, exactly, or it’s not even regular as in every two bars or something?

TP: No, no. No. Again some tunes might lend themselves more to that idea than others.

EN: Yea, definitely. Actually, in the latest CD there that came out – the “Waiting for a Call” one –<sup>129</sup> a lot of people were interested to hear that the “Spike Island Lassies” were on from the earlier recording and then a newer recording of it. And you can actually appreciate the differences there all right and the development in your own personal style.

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<sup>129</sup> This solo album combines previously unreleased recording sessions from 1985 with additional recordings from a 2002 recording session. Released by Shanachie Records (Shanachie 78052).

TP: Funny thing, I hadn't heard that. Both tunes on that CD, no. Yea, it's probably a difference. There'd always be a difference a year later or whatever (Interview with Tommy Peoples, Madrid, June 2009).

This particular reel, "The Spike Island Lassies" would lend itself more to the kind of irregular phrasing that we were discussing at this point of the interview. Figure 6.23 below illustrates the phrasing of the Peoples' 1985 performance of "The Spike Island Lassies" (highlighted by blue phrase-markings) against his 2002 performance of the same tune (highlighted by green phrase-markings):

## Spike Island Lassies – skeletal outline



Figure 6.23: Skeleton transcription of “The Spike Island Lassies” exhibiting Peoples’ phrasing in the 1985 versus 2002 version.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Transcription by the author.

The above figure demonstrates the irregular phrasing found in Peoples' later performances distinct from that found during his earlier career. The 1985 version actually maintains the symmetrically equalised phrasing expected under the terms of tradition. This is despite the fact that the accompanist on this occasion – bouzouki player Alec Finn – performs using less rhythmically defined contrapuntal lines that allow for greater flexibility in melodic phrasing. This contrasts the accompaniment style on the later recording – provided by guitarist John Doyle – who performs with metronome precision and a very rhythmical tie to the beat. Of course the third part of the traditional tune naturally calls for a less typical phrasing structure – yet this is also contested in Peoples' 2002 rendition.

On listening to the 2002 version, Peoples' accompanist seems somewhat put off by the liberty of the fiddler's "breathing spaces" which not only produce irregular phrases but interrupt (or negate) the traditional beats. Doyle is a guitarist very much of the modern ensemble era, heard strongly punctuating the melo-rhythmic line in ways that frame (enclose) the melody player within a symmetric interpretation of the traditional tune. The pacing of the performance thus continues relentlessly from one beat to the next, unwavering throughout.

Though Doyle does seem to have some success in ignoring the irregularity of phrasing used by Peoples, he has less success joining each phrase to the next. Against the liberal silence created by the "breathing spaces", the accompanist is left exposed without the traditional beat. Whereas before the accompanist's manner of performance would dictate the style of performance through her/his musical command over the traditional beat, here Doyle's guitar playing is audibly jeopardised by the inconsistency of an individualised pulse.

Another guitarist of equal measure and a close friend of mine, also commented jokingly to me after a session with Tommy Peoples in Boston: “I don’t know, it was a bit weird! He can’t keep time man!” For accompanists, then, still reliant on the terms of tradition, Peoples’ irregular phrasing and liberal “breathing spaces” are a very perceptible musical nuisance. Even when Peoples performed in a hugely successful solo concert in Madrid (June 2009), some traditional music enthusiasts admitted finding his style frustrating on the ear. It came as a surprise to them that the great fiddler had allowed these idiosyncrasies to creep into his playing. Though his later performances can obviously aggravate the “traditional ear” (that has been moulded to react obediently to the terms of tradition), Peoples seems not to recognise the disconcerting impact his stylistic liberties may have on the modern accompanist and “traditional ear” alike.

EN: Would you find it a bit of a challenge now after playing and developing in that kind of direction where you have a kind of liberal breathing space and phrasing like that? If an accompanist does come on board – or in an ensemble kind of mood – do you have to try and rethink your musical pathway with the fiddle?

TP: I wouldn’t think so Eoghan. It’s like everything, it’s kind of like even a casual conversation. It might work easier with some than with others. It depends. Even the breathing spaces like, it doesn’t alter the... The tune is still holding a regular tempo even though there may be breathing spaces. So in that sense it wouldn’t interfere with someone else. I find that some people you can sit down and play with, and they

kind of work off each other even though they do bring their own taste to the individual presentation. But they can – each one listening to the other or hearing the other – can blend around each other sort of thing. It makes it an even more complete and enjoyable experience. Same with accompanists. It's definitely easier to play with an accompanist by and large because it alleviates a nervous tendency, if one suffers that. It's nice when it works, the way that two people playing together kind of give, and take to each other. But at the same time don't over-rule the other. You know what I mean?

EN: I do yea, I get you. I suppose kind of actively listening to the other...

TP: And can compliment each other.

EN: But you mentioned there the beat is maintained always anyway. Do you find though – I mean even while the beat will of course be always maintained even when you're playing solo or in a group format – do you find the beat can be more strict under an ensemble format rather than on a solo one. Are you a little bit more liberal to...?

TP: It would I'm sure, yea. It wouldn't actually be that it's more strict but there would be a more constant sound kind of thing. You wouldn't pick up on those little spaces, or breathing spaces or whatever. In some ways I do it because it's like deliberate – whilst not deliberate sort of thing – it relates to emphasising little passages. And maybe a solitary long note is its own beauty at some points, do you know? I also use rolls almost as a rhythm sometimes in some places in some tunes or whatever where it might be applicable. [Illustrates



whereby a rhythmic roll is followed by a rest using a raised bow before following with a series of two or more rolls again.] (Interview with Tommy Peoples, Madrid, June 2009.)

Obviously Peoples does not recognise the difficulty for the accompanist (or even the “traditional ear”) brought on by his quite radical breathing spaces. I introduced the term “beat” to the conversation. Importantly, Peoples does not use the term himself. “The tune is still holding a regular tempo even though there may be breathing spaces. So in that sense it wouldn’t interfere with someone else”. This would seem closer to the concept of pulse than to that of beat. And, evidence suggests that despite holding a regular tempo, the breathing spaces do “interfere” within an ensemble aesthetic which enforces the more fundamental properties of the terms of tradition. Obviously the “constant sound” (or the sound blocks) of the ensemble (perhaps even the accompanist) would somehow overrule the individual breathing spaces, disguising them to the extent that they are not appreciated. Nonetheless they do remain disturbing for the accompanist, and they do become disturbing for the traditional ear once allowed their freedom in a solo context.

It is interesting that for Peoples, the accompanist serves to offset stage fright. However, the “beat” of the accompanist does not sit well with the “pulse” of the fiddler. “In some ways I do it because it’s like deliberate – whilst not deliberate sort of thing – it relates to emphasising little passages. And maybe a solitary long note is its own beauty at some points, do you know?” It is when this beauty carries over the “beat” that the musical space of the soloist pulsates with a peculiar violence against the terms of tradition.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have viewed macrostructure as a musical border in traditional practice under an ensemble aesthetic; and microstructure as a surprising musical catalyst that eventually ruptures the bounds of tradition. With an established structure of two parts (each of eight bars subdivided into equal symmetric phrases), macrostructure disappears into the background of musical consciousness while continuing to define every aspect of its content. As a given, micro-structural ornaments become disproportionately fore-grounded in solo contexts, perhaps like never before. Peoples is a good example of a fiddle player emerging from this environment, a fiddler who has developed an incredible variety of highly individualised and complex micro-structural ornaments.

Peoples contests traditional macrostructure in a very distinct way from other fiddlers discussed in this thesis. Positioned at the other side of the traditional frontier that is marked by a revivalist preoccupation with authenticity (beginning in the 1950s), he is very different from, say, the fellow-Donnegal fiddler John Doherty. Doherty contests the historical relevance of traditional macrostructure by using asymmetric macro-structural units that rupture traditional limits. In this way, Doherty moves melody “soundfully” beyond the traditional border. On the other hand, Peoples contests the very sustainability of traditional macrostructure. In contrast to Doherty, he necessarily focuses on micro-structural details. The intensity of his ornaments (traditional or idiosyncratic) requires compensatory periods of relief. These manifest as unstructured rests – or “breathing spaces” – between symmetric or asymmetric phrases, disjoining them and thus reintroducing an overall element of asymmetric

form. The constancy and permanence of traditional macrostructure is contested in this way. As such, Peoples moves melody silently beyond the traditional border.

This is not to say that Peoples is influenced by John Doherty. Their geographic proximity does not really transfer to a musical proximity. Peoples did reveal to me that he was very interested in how Doherty arranged sets of tunes, for instance. During one conversation, he also recalled meeting Simon Doherty (the son of John's brother, Mickey). During the exchange, Peoples noticed the scroll of a tin fiddle protruding through Simon's overcoat. He asked him to play some music. Peoples admitted that "he would be leaving out bars, and putting in bars, and you wouldn't know where you were!"

Peoples was already cut off from a musical familiarity with, and manipulation of, asymmetric macrostructure exhibited by the Dohertys. Very much of a post-revival, post-ensemble time, Peoples had to come upon his own methods of individualisation out of the limits imposed by the terms of tradition (as fostered by an ensemble aesthetic). His eventual discovery of macro-structural individuality lay, rather surprisingly, in his obsession with, and immense concentration upon microstructure – the ornament in particular. Through the capacity of his peculiar use of his instrument in defining idiosyncratic manoeuvres that "follow the sounds" around him, the fiddle has thus also aided Peoples' tremendous silent push against the bounds of traditional macrostructure. In the process, Peoples has revealed an alternative route toward the avant-garde out of the very limits imposed on the fiddle player by the terms of tradition. The resulting crisis may herald an avant-garde proper of the Irish fiddling tradition.

## **Conclusion: The Confines of Freedom**

Nóra, my daughter, not yet two years of age, bursts into my study. This is because I am no longer turning out ideas about music using my computer keyboard: tapping a silent rhythm of zeros and ones. I am, instead, turning out musical ideas using my fiddle bow and fingerboard: mapping a soundful rhythm of ones and twos. Delighted, she grasps the bow at its base, clenching little more than the screw below the frog. She puts into motion her own soundful impulses. The bow under her control draws and slams across all of the strings just as it does all other areas of the instrument.

As such, she investigates that which comes before – though perhaps also that which goes beyond – those ones and twos her father was so dedicatedly spinning. I am still there, of course; my bow-hand now guided by hers; my left-hand continuing loosely upon the fingerboard to follow (instead of lead) the wavering bow, trying to combine with it. Her child's reach does not allow her to apply herself to both parts of the instrument at once. So, she momentarily leaves the bow to adopt a new position at the fingerboard. Here, she plucks rather than fashions finger placements upon the tired strings – without a bow, what other way is there to command their sound? Yet it is the bow that delights her most, not only sawing with it, but also invariably bouncing it with assorted levels of force.

She wants to have it all now, to investigate by herself, knowing that there lies more beyond those limits enforced upon her by her father who

now so anxiously protects the instrument from too much of her effort. But this does not mean her confinement as such: she knows the existence of these boundaries that keep her from where she would like to go. She sees the boundaries, fiercely sees them; not for a moment taking them for granted. The possibility to move beyond them, therefore, already a reality. If ambitious enough, she can eventually cross over, perhaps not right now, but for sure she can move beyond the boundaries that animate her now in a frustrated tantrum by my feet.

It is within the confines of permanent traditional macrostructure, and through the implication of inherited terms of tradition that make any effort at individual expression in Irish traditional music a challenge. In the end, this is so mainly because the traditional musician is normally unaware of it. Quite simply, s/he takes this for granted until it becomes her/his lot.

Here, micro-structural details take on all the trappings of musical individualism, but they are effectively under macro-structural quarantine. Varying micro-structural triggers only ever amount to the reiteration of a greater common sentiment held within a standardised macrostructure. If musical individualism exclusively manifests inside traditional micro-structural ornaments that are inconsequential to traditional macrostructure: then the musical individual becomes a structural contributor to her/his own confinement. (Those “ones and twos” Nóra’s father was so dedicatedly spinning, like a spider beautifully outlining the inner-dimensions of a sealed glass jar.)

Yet there is no tantrum, because there is – at that moment – no “visible” (audible) confinement. Jacques Attali noticed: “Although training and confinement are the

heralds of repetition, confinement is no longer necessary after people have been successfully taught to take pleasure in the norm” (Attali 1985: 125). But with all pleasure lost within the norm that is administered by the terms of tradition, in my conclusion I open the lid of the jar and introduce “the fiddler” anew.

For the fiddler, microstructure becomes a kind of drip-feed of distraction wherein as an innovator s/he innovates and as a purist s/he purifies; each process taking equal pleasure in the “norm” of macro-structural confinement. To reveal the shared confinement and the musical boundaries that engender it can arouse greater displeasure than pleasure lost. But for the fiddler, at least on this occasion, there lies a practical pathway back through the chapters of this thesis to emerge with pleasure found, at the vanguard of antiquity.

**Passing through chapter six (“fluxing structures”):** the fiddler considers the musical space afforded her/him inside the micro-structural detail: the traditional ornament. S/He considers this intensely until the innate flux of the ornament is radicalised. Instrumental virtuosity is of great importance here. The traditionalist creed of discovering the intangible aspects of music is, right now, nothing short of a cop-out. The fiddler is a fiddler because of her/his association with the fiddle, and thus s/he becomes everything “tangible”.

But to “touch” the traditional ornament is not enough. It is already rendered soundless by a contemporary ensemble aesthetic: either becoming inaudible inside mass sound blocks (the session); or becoming annulled along-side cohesive sound blocks (the band). So the fiddler recluses to hear the traditional ornament for all its worth, in a solo context, where individuality is defined musically before it is defined socially.

But to “hear” the traditional ornament is neither enough. It is already – by way of its being traditional – doomed to “symmetry and coherence, stability, and a degree of redundancy” (Meyer 1996: 23). So the fiddler must hear “that sound”. S/He brings a personalised ergonomic process to traditional sound products. And so the traditional ornament mutates into an idiosyncratic treatment of “ornament” with new potential.

But it is not purely “that sound” because it is also “that noise”. Noise has not been categorised by the terms of tradition. It offers new potential for the fiddler’s idiosyncratic development of the idea of “ornament” which runs contrary to, or even assumes, its traditional counterparts. Inside “Port an Bhráthar”, the micro-structural intensity is becoming unbearable and already the ornament impinges on traditional macrostructure (figure 6.2). As if all of a sudden, the ornament becomes a syntactically significant structural component as opposed to a mere inconsequential strategy.

But that it has become unbearable does not mean the end of the ornament’s potential, for now it has a consequence beyond its own. Inside “The Spike Island Lassies” the ornamental flux is pulsating more than it has ever done before. It is exactly through this musical “pulse” where the fiddler finds respite; and respite is not only found in pure sound, but in musical silence too (figure 6.15). As in true respite, time is a luxury. The traditional musical beat is negated, and now macrostructure is in flux too.

In the end: the fiddler comes to an asymmetric reading of macrostructure via a highly individualised ergonomic approach to microstructure that exploits the inherent flux of the ornament. S/He confounds the terms of tradition, and brings them most outrageously to crisis. The very means of pseudo-individualism – that is, traditional

ornaments employed as a method of concealing the reality of a permanent fixed traditional macrostructure – are so severely “used” by the fiddler, that the confines of the terms of tradition are eventually revealed and brought into flux.

**Passing through chapter five (“fragmenting structures”):** The fiddler’s macro-structural flux now reveals the potential of an individualised musical space. Moving beyond microstructure, s/he clears chunks of redundant macro-structural repetition: an irrelevant inner-bar from “The Rocky Road to Dublin” (figure 5.37). But here, the musical result is placid. Owing to the constancy and shared ownership of the “traditional round” every “traditional ear” can replace the omitted bar with equal authorship. True individuality is questioned.

The fiddler then returns to micro-structural details in “Toss the Feathers” and obsesses over smaller units of traditional repetition. Obsession moves from the ornament in flux, to the melo-rhythmic line itself: a relentless D-note that defines the traditional tune. Importantly, any outside sound influences (coincidental and deliberate) aid, rather than claim, the musical effect of this obsession. Nothing beyond the intense focus on the D-note itself can assume its radicalism. It is the obsession over the D-note that is prioritised above traditional divides separating the repeating parts of the tune (bars 22–23 in figure 5.25).

This obsession eventually fragments traditional macro-structural markers: specifically, metre. Exploring the sound potential of the incessant D-notes forces traditional metric units to rupture beyond themselves (figure 5.15). Furthermore, each metric unit is no longer constant. Instead, each one is transitory as it is only ever temporarily defining of itself and of the musical whole. This is because each subsequent metre requires a conceptual change of the former (figures 5.30–5.35).



Already, the fiddler may be drafted by either innovator or purist alike, but desires neither: both perspectives rely on a traditional understanding of the musical round and therefore threatens the fiddler with symmetry and permanence once more. For here, upon each repetition of the largest of musical units (the round), the traditional round itself is a conceptual mainstay which is consistently referenced and supported by all other musical attributes. The fiddler's avant-garde round instead represents a transitory musical motion; that is, the "round" can define and redefine (or itself become defined and redefined by) both itself and its parts throughout the progression of the musical event.

Accordingly, the traditional round has a primary tune identifier that is the traditional bar 1. The traditional bar 1 defines traditional macrostructure before it defines itself; it marks the whole as a foregone conclusion and is thus inconsequential even to itself just as it is assumed by traditional macrostructure thereafter. The fiddler thus negates the traditional bar 1 in "The Yellow Tinker" through radical melodic invention that can never align with the musical material of the traditional metric unit, even under an innovative paradigmatic analysis (figure 5.5).

Here, the musical material of the fiddler's idiosyncratic bar 1 can ultimately relate back to itself, only; thus negating the traditional round as a constant musical reference. More: the constancy of the whole is negated by the mutation from an introductory bar to a bar 1 of the idiosyncratic bar 1 itself; just as the constancy of the idiosyncratic bar 1 is avoided by the mutation from an asymmetric macrostructure to an (almost) symmetric macrostructure of the round. The idiosyncratic bar 1 becomes consequential to itself and to the whole over and again; just as the surprise arrival of the traditional bar 1 elsewhere becomes consequential to itself as well as to the whole.

The fiddler erodes the sublimity of traditional music structuring, and instead highlights this aspect of traditional music performance before bringing about a most splendid musical crisis. Here, undoubtedly the terms of tradition are in crisis. They are forever negated by the individualised transitoriness of a macrostructure that is ultimately controlled by the fiddler her/himself.

**Passing through chapter four (“fracturing structures”):** The fiddler deliberately chooses an intimate performance space suitable for the soloist, thus side-stepping various socio-cultural burdens such as ensembles and playing for dancers. There is a professional effort to become a “fiddle expert” with an individualised repertoire to support this status (see Nic Suibhne 1995: 722). Now, every time the fiddler plays is “a practice” (see Packie Manus Byrne: above).

The ergonomic tie between instrumentalist and instrument is heightened in this musically focussed space. This is not only seen through the development of expanded techniques (such as the “floating bow” and the “up-bow accentuation”), or through unorthodox sound effects (such as programmatic noises, the addition of foreign objects onto the fiddle, the construction of artisanal tin-fiddles, and the mimicry of other instruments); but through a reliance on the natural influence of the instrument’s capacity over traditional musical processes.

The fiddler embraces the unique sound that identifies every distinct “place” where s/he bears upon the fiddle. As such, s/he discovers the natural (yet idiosyncratic) dynamic that emerges from the various combinations of these fiddle “placements” inside the traditional melo-rhythmic line. Regardless of traditional music priorities in “The Frost is all Over”, the fiddler indulges in the natural weight of

each finger-and-bow placement to expose a non-traditional asymmetric phrasing out of the traditional line itself (figure 4.2).

In addition, the ergonomic facility of certain musical passages as those found in the “Boyne Hunt” allows for an increase in tempo as it does the dramatic manipulation of the instrument’s register (figure 4.1). More: it also facilitates the removal of ever-smaller repetitive sections within the metrical unit; thus building further upon the metrical asymmetry of before.

Alternatively, the natural ergonomic limits of the fiddle also influence the fiddler’s interpretation of “King of the Pipers” (figure 4.4). Instead of cancelling out repetitive portions of the traditional melo-rhythmic line, the fiddler must add musical content at the behest of the fiddle instrument. Specific musical priorities (or desires) coming from the fiddler are forced to share with the fiddle in the creation of the final musical result. In an effort to combine two ergonomically incompatible musical ideas, the fiddler opts for an asymmetric interpretation as required by the fiddle. The basis of the fiddler’s musical interaction with her/his fiddle is that both human and artefact follow (thus become influenced by) the procedural dimensions of each other.

**Passing through chapter three (“fixing structures”):** The fiddler realises that as s/he explores the capacity of the fiddle instrument, its central place within the terms of tradition begins to decentralise that very tradition through an increasing potential for idiosyncratic musical invention. Classicism represents a process of (re)compositional stagnation guided by an aesthetic of restraint and a respect for a perceived musical oneness with an idealised musical past. Though its suppression of capacity can lead to revolt, the apparent failure of classicism in this regard is instead

its success; the filing of the musical past is taken for granted and it is from here where classicism validates (and controls) the suppression of the forward impetus of capacity.

In this instance, the sacrifice in retarding the instrument's capacity is not compensated for by the privileging of an alternative (re)compositional platform. Instead, the classicism project markets the terms of tradition (as administered by the music community Establishment: *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann*) as the saleable product of a (fabricated) music revival. In return, the classicism project gains the significant weight of popular cultural support. Herein lies the challenge for the fiddler.

The capacity of the fiddle is successfully “incapacitated” inside classicism using the following methods: controlled schooling (which begets classicism); controlled competitiveness (which validates institutionalisation); controlled social etiquette (which stunts individualism); and finally controlled idolisation (which authenticates the terms of tradition). It is through this final measure where the classicism project secures the fiddle as a centralising force within the terms of tradition.

Even though the fiddler is set up to promote and embody classicism (that is, become its hero), the fiddle cannot. The fiddle still challenges the terms of tradition by provoking an almighty clash between capacity and classicism. As it preserves the complexity of its performance characteristics together with its own life history, the fiddle – which is the “salient emitter” in Schiffer’s three-role model of sender-emitter-receiver – materialises within the unpredictability of the receiver-response.

Two heightened moments of musical tension between fiddler and fiddle are observed as follows:

- i) the “mistake”: where the fiddle asserts its position by severely undoing the intent of the fiddler during “The Sligo Maid” and provokes a heightened moment of both consternation and reliance between instrumentalist and instrument.
- ii) the “idiosyncratic moment”: where a deliberate manipulation of irresistible unique sonic idiosyncrasies by the fiddler during “Lord McDonald’s” demonstrate the capacity of the fiddle as an artefact of sound, rather than one of traditional music production.

The fiddler’s intentions may be viewed as standardised, and even the fiddle s/he uses may be viewed as standardised; but the capacity of both, together with the potential in their ergonomic interaction, cannot be accepted as standardised.

**Passing through chapter two (“flexing structures”):** The fiddler re-capacitates the potential of the musical past. As it stands, the musical past is the provenance of the phantom dancer who dons the cloak of antiquity and administers a predetermined symmetric macrostructure that controls instrumental capacity. While becoming aesthetically revered, the fiddler is still underestimated. Her/His technical capacity is entirely unexpected. It is of great surprise, then, that the fiddler is well and truly “uncommonly brilliant”. S/He thus spoils the taken-for-granted terms of tradition with a very modern approach and ancient reputation.

In this matter, the fiddler demonstrates an accomplishment in traditional practice (including a mastery over traditional and idiosyncratic ornaments) that rebukes contemporaries and later generations alike (figures 2.2 – 2.10). In addition, the fiddler produces asymmetric phrasing that undoes the phantom dancer once and for all (figure 2.14). Furthermore, and like no other, the fiddler negates the constancy of

traditional metre. Regardless of traditional design, s/he generates a poly-metric reinterpretation of traditional materials (figure 2.13).

Clearly, conservatism is diminished to that dusty stuff of literate representations of sound. Though the fiddler too can write her/his own music, s/he is appreciative (unlike most others after her/him) of the fact that the pen swings differently to the bow. In this matter, the fiddler does not (cannot) notate her/his most outrageous individualisms. All that is left is an “impression” that is buoyed by potential.

It is obvious that conservatism takes hold of the written note until the significance of recomposition as a complex performative process is castigated to the mundane. To the contrary, the fiddler’s scribble must now outline her/his potential inside the sound of the past that is fitting her/his status. Here, “adaptation” of the traditional tune climaxes with the creation of an elaborate individualised “turn” in “Banish Misfortune” (figure 2.1).

To this end, the fiddler plucks from obscurity a musical passage that accommodates her/his stylistic asymmetric rhythmic invention inside the first part of the tune. S/He then refashions out of this a radically individualised “turn” as a new third part for the tune. “Banish Misfortune” is therefore reconstituted as something that represents extreme individualism above mundane conservatism.

The phantom dancer, therefore, seems to be a recent apparition rather than a ghost from the musical past. Regarding the fiddler, the ancient thus reveals itself through the sounds of modernity.

**Arriving at chapter one (“the avant-garde in Irish traditional music”):** The fiddler has, actually, done just that: s/he has arrived at an avant-garde of traditional music. Here, Irish traditional music is no longer a musically precise system; the

“summarised constant” on top of which socio-cultural concerns can be freely formulated and expanded. Instead, music is made transitory, unpredictable, and under the control of the musical individual. What was “basic” to the tradition is no more. Musically, it cannot be classified and reduced to a banal summary, nor can it form fundamentals that are to be taken for granted. Therein lies a new challenge for the ethnomusicologist: the musical individual.

The avant-garde of Irish traditional music is neither primarily borne out of any outside influence, nor can its radicalism be attributed to (thus be detachable from) any innovative fusion. The avant-garde is not so distant from what musically matters most to Irish traditional music. As such, the musical past is no more instructive to traditional music. The musical past remains intrusive but it has also lost its myth. Where tradition makes contemporary the past into a cloud of reverence, the avant-garde negates the past into explicit crisis.

The avant-garde effectively concerns itself with the negation of the banal (either as tradition or as *kitsch* which are both mass audience-based aesthetics) in favour of the challenge of the individual artist. Its three main ingredients are

- i) its extreme negation of the past;
- ii) its propensity towards crisis;
- iii) its transitory as opposed to permanent character.

Here, the fiddler’s primary musical concern is music structure. The reason being: structure (and its aesthetic treatment), is what most defines the terms of tradition and what most defines those of the avant-garde. Tradition’s understanding of structure is found in permanence, whereas the avant-garde’s understanding of structure is found in

transitoriness. Meaning: tradition makes music structure disappear; the avant-garde highlights music structure.

As a creative individual, the avant-garde fiddler actively negates that continuum between confinement through formalisation (meaning: a lack of argument or generative potential inside a repetitive closed medium) and freedom through formalisation (meaning: argument and generative potential inside a metaphorical supra-communicative medium). For the avant-garde fiddler, all of this represents pseudo-individualism; a micro-structural subservience to a macro-structural whole. S/He explores, instead, an individualised means of music structuring where both macro- and micro-structural permutations are mutually defining of a transitory whole.

Ethnomusicologist, Lawrence Gushee, rather alarmingly stipulates: “The fact is that for all art in which the acquisition of a consistent personal style and technique are primary, there is a kind of built-in limit which is rarely or never gone beyond, and thus an inevitable end to innovation so far as the individual is concerned” (Gushee 1998: 323). Obviously, the ethnomusicologist here neither suspects the real possibility for the traditional performer to “move beyond” these very “limits” as they are perceived and taken for granted. Indeed, it is the permanence of traditional macrostructure that makes so inevitable every creative individual’s end.

But the fiddler’s artistic will, at least, must not die so soon. Loath to repeat her/his artistic end over and over again – stuck at that “built-in limit” so mundane as it would be until s/he too cannot go any further – there must lie more beyond traditional micro-structural variation and symmetric macro-structural innovation. To this end, and while looking back over this thesis, one pathway (out of many) is relayed to the fiddler who



for the first time sees her/his boundaries and does not like them; and “thereby hangs a tale”.

The avant-garde fiddler throws her/his tantrum: “I am a fiddle player, ergo I play the fiddle!”

## Appendix A:

### **A general history of music in Ireland before the Famine.**<sup>131</sup>

Music in Ireland has enjoyed considerable recognition throughout history. For example, Eugene O’Curry (1794–1862) – that diligent nineteenth-century Irish historian – discovered evidence of the country’s “preëminence in music” dating as early as the sixth century (O’Curry 1873: 241). Music in Ireland has been either presented as the only grace of an otherwise backward people, or as the mark of excellence of an altogether distinguished nation. In both instances, the passion and skill of the Irish musician is celebrated. Thomas Davis (1814–1845), the Irish nationalist writer and composer, was quick to point out: “No enemy speaks slightly of Irish Music, and no friend need fear to boast of it. It is without rival” (Davis 1862: 216).<sup>132</sup> That Ireland was noteworthy for its musical expertise both at home and abroad is a constant theme in very different accounts. As the following anonymous quote suggests:

That Ireland was pre-eminent in music for many centuries beyond the nations of Europe, can be established on the authority of the most distinguished historians. It

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<sup>131</sup> *An Gorta Mór* or The Great Famine principally lasted from 1845 to 1852. It caused the dramatic depletion of the Irish population (to almost one quarter its size) owing to starvation and disease, as well as mass emigration. The famine has continued to play a significant part in the Irish psyche to this day, the current population still remaining only at half that of before the famine. The period therefore has formed a defining line in Irish history, often referred to in terms of pre-famine and post-famine Ireland.

<sup>132</sup> Thomas Davis was a central figure of early nineteenth-century nationalism in Ireland. He was a cofounder of *The Nation* newspaper and the author of such well-known and influential songs as “A Nation Once Again”.

may not, perhaps, be generally known, that as early as the 6th century the Welsh and Britons studied music under the Irish Professors in the great College of Armagh (Anonymous 1852: 7–8).

The well-known Irish antiquarian, P. W. Joyce (1827–1914), mentioned too that the Welsh received musical instruction from Irish bards until the eleventh century. He later added: “Ireland was long the school for Scottish harpers, as it was for those of Wales” (Joyce 1913: 596; see also 573). Even in less complementary representations of Irish culture generally, critics too noted the qualities of Irish music in particular. Perhaps the most oft-cited and infamous of these is one Giraldus Cambrensis, who published his *Topographia Hibernica* (or “Topography of Ireland”) in 1188. A clergyman, and obviously biased chronicler, Cambrensis was brutal in his scathing attack on Irish culture. He presented to his readers “a barbarous people, literally barbarous” who “cannot be said to have any culture” (Cambrensis 1982: 102; 101). Yet Cambrensis did commend the “natural qualities” of the Irish, and particularly their musical abilities, being “incomparably more skilled in these than any other people that I have seen” (ibid. 103–4).

Cambrensis went into much detail on the profound quality and virtuosic skill of the performing musicians. However, to accept the one compliment may lend too much voice to the multitude of disparaging statements. In Cambrensis’ case, it is difficult to account for the clear motives (if any) that lay behind his comments on Irish music. Joyce also refers to the sixteenth-century writers John Major and Richard Stanihurst in his report; Scottish and Anglo-Irish writers respectively who also spoke of the

country's "musical art [...] in terms of rapturous praise" (ibid. 574).<sup>133</sup> Further examples of the foreign acknowledgement of Irish music can be found in Thomas Mooney's ambitious two-volume publication on the history of Ireland (see Mooney 1846: 99). Of course, all of this not only reveals an outside admiration toward Irish music, it also reflects upon native Irish attitudes and their commitment to this particular art form. One of the earliest Irish music theorists and frequently quoted historian, Joseph C. Walker, has suggested:

A musical taste, (so early do we discover it), seems to have been innate in the original inhabitants of this island, and to have gradually strengthened and refined with the progress of society. This we can only attribute to the early introduction of the Bardic order amongst them. But the study of the science of music was not long confined to that order; every hero, every virgin, could touch the harp, long ere the useful arts got foot in this country (Walker 1786: 85).

Joyce surmised: "Everywhere through the Records we find evidences that the ancient Irish people, both high and low, were passionately fond of music" (Joyce 1913: 571). The accumulation of evidence forces Michael Conran to agree with Walker "that the finer arts were cultivated to a greater extent by the ancient Irish than the more useful arts" (Conran 1846: 107) – though he later insisted that those useful arts were neither neglected by the Irish. Twentieth-century commentators continued to observe this high level of musical expertise. As esteemed musicologist Professor Aloys Fleischman agreed: "From references in early medieval MSS it is clear that music played an important role in the life of the ancient Irish" (Fleischman 1952: 1).

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<sup>133</sup> Richard Stanihurst, though perhaps better acclaimed as an alchemist and theologian, was a historian of little repute.

Prominent genealogist and historian, Edward MacLysaght, borrowed from “the words of Good, written as far back as 1566” where it was already confirmed that the Irish were “mighty lovers of music” (MacLysaght 1969: 33).<sup>134</sup> Again the English agriculturalist and travel writer, Arthur Young (1741–1820), reiterated the same sentiments two centuries later. “All the poor people, both men and women, learn to dance, and are exceedingly fond of the amusement [...] the love of dancing and musick are almost universal amongst them” (Young 1970: 366). These later commentators report on a relatively distinct or a newly emerging music tradition to that of the ancient Irish bards. With the dramatic decline of the Gaelic order during the seventeenth century, this ancient strand of music making was lost.<sup>135</sup>

It is impossible to know what the music of Ireland sounded like before the seventeenth century. Historical musicologist and composer, Brian Boydell, bemoans the “lack of any but the most fragmentary evidence, apart from references in literary sources, for the origins and style of the music that was an extremely active and socially influential element in Irish life” (Boydell 1999a: 542). It is generally believed that musicians – specifically harpers – occupied a very prominent position within the social structures of Irish life during this era. So much so, that the country obtained “the honourable title of A SCHOOL FOR MUSIC” (Walker 1786: 92).

There have been those, such as Mooney and the early Irish musicologist W. H. Grattan Flood (1857–1928), who have claimed for the ancient Irish a knowledge of counterpoint and harmony, as well as chromatic scales (see Mooney 1846: 97; Joyce

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<sup>134</sup> MacLysaght also notes additional reports, including one by Tadhg Rody (see MacLysaght 1969: 22).

<sup>135</sup> The *Flight of the Earls* of 1607 saw the last of the Gaelic nobility flee their native lands; an ill-fated year that introduced an equally disastrous century which saw the implementation of the Penal Laws. These were designed by the occupying English to carry out a ‘legitimate’ decimation of Ireland’s religion, culture, music, and general well-being.

1913: 587–9; Flood 1905–6: 18–19).<sup>136</sup> Since there is limited evidence concerning a harmonic consciousness in Ireland, their assertions lead to a disjointed interpretation of the history of Irish music. As the respected Irish music scholar Seán O’Boyle pointed out: “Just at the beginning of the seventeenth century when music in Europe was feeling its way out of the modes, Irish music was outlawed” (O’Boyle 1958: 50). The musical developments in Europe would not have had opportunity to join an existing Irish harmonic base. In a similar fashion, Irish musicians would not have had opportunity to form an integral part of these contemporary European developments. That modern Irish traditional music does not prioritise any harmonic conception, makes it difficult to imagine the musical results to support these claims.

Unfortunately, virtually nothing of the most ancient strand of Irish music has been recorded, although there is some evidence of the poetic forms that it reportedly accompanied. The Penal Laws during the seventeenth century eventually brought forth the final collapse of this “type of verse that [was] cramped with rules and swathed in technicalities” (O’Sullivan 1952: 32).<sup>137</sup> Irish traditional music scholar, Donal O’Sullivan, thus continued as follows:

The Irish poetical spirit burst its bonds and rhythmic, assonantal poetry came into its own. Thenceforward it was the medium not only of the unknown composers of our folk songs but also of the learned poets who were the successors of the bards; and it is true lyric poetry, intended to be sung (ibid.).

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<sup>136</sup> It must be added that despite arguing for a knowledge of harmony within Irish traditional music, Henebry insisted that “the Irish harmonised not the note but the musical phrase as a whole. ... The melody was supreme in Irish music...” (Henebry 1903: 23). Melody has always reigned supreme in theories regarding the antiquity of Irish music also, and Henebry’s concept of harmonising a whole phrase seems to allude to a modal base too.

<sup>137</sup> Refer to footnote 135 above.

The more popular verses from this era probably better reflect the character of the remaining compositions performed by harpers at the collapse of the elaborate Irish harping tradition. This was marked by the Belfast Harp Festival of 1792.<sup>138</sup> Brian Boydell states: “The bulk of what now survives as traditional Irish dance music took its characteristic forms under strong outside influences some time after the final decline of Gaelic civilisation in the seventeenth century” (Boydell 1999a: 567). Still, it is somewhat inappropriate to overemphasise outside influences given that the island had supported such an impressive musical culture for many centuries before. It is more prudent to assume a continuation of central stylistic elements despite the introduction of new influences.

In this matter, O’Sullivan declared that the popular form of poetry mentioned above “has in fact been traced so far back as the thirteenth century”, its absence from recorded documents simply reflects the dismissal shown it by the “scholar poets” (O’Sullivan 1952: 31). Outside influence – though very much apparent at this time – cannot indicate a radical cut-off from the musical sounds of previous centuries. Modern Irish traditional music is without doubt distinct, but can neither be completely cut off from a more ancient native ancestor.

Theories of Irish music from the seventeenth century are easier to develop due to the increased availability of literature on the subject. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century critics – who were sympathetic toward the Irish poor – perceived “doleful lamentations as those of a conquered people” (see MacLysaght 1969: 317).<sup>139</sup> In

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<sup>138</sup> Edward Bunting, a reputable organist, was commissioned to notate the music of the last of the old harpers who performed at this festival. It was a project which motivated further collecting by Bunting in the field and, in all, three distinct publications (1796, 1809, and 1840) forming *The Ancient Music of Ireland* (see bibliography).

<sup>139</sup> Taken from an anonymous MS. (no. 1.1.2.) in Trinity College Dublin describing Co. Kildare during 1683.

addition, John Dunton's letters from the end of the seventeenth century indicate that the majority of the Irish airs "were melancholy and doleful as suited the humours of a people always in subjection" (cited in MacLysaght 1969: 344).<sup>140</sup> This perception was later adopted by nineteenth-century romantics and antiquarians, including Joyce, who accepted that the "music of Ireland [...] has a considerable tendency to sadness" (Joyce 1913: 592); and concluded that this was "the natural outcome of the miseries endured by the people" (ibid.). Mooney agreed that the "music of Ireland is all her oppressors have left her" (Mooney 1846: 88).

Cultural nationalists perpetuated the reported melancholic character of Irish music as a reflection of a damaged society. In this way, they often subscribed to the sorrowful representation of music making proposed by non-native writers. Joyce, at least, was quick to assert that it would be "a mistake to suppose that the prevailing character of Irish music is sad: by far the largest proportion of the airs are either light-hearted dance-tunes or song-airs full of energy and spirit, without a trace of sadness" (Joyce 1913: 592). This was more recently echoed by the music commentator Cathaoir O'Braonain, who insisted: "It must not be supposed that the airs constructed on those [minor] scales [of *re*, *mi* and *la*] have always that plaintive character which we now-a-days associate with the minor scale. Many of our liveliest dance tunes are written in the minor scales" (O'Braonain 1993: [v]).

A specialist in Anglo-Irish relations, Joep Leerssen, questions the notion of the melancholic music of Ireland. He noted both William Rufus Chetwood and Charles Topham Bowden who wrote in a similar vein to that of Dunton above: "For, by the way, the *Irish* musick has something peculiarly sweet and melancholy, and the whole

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<sup>140</sup> The Bodleian Library, letter no. 3.



Nation seem to have a Turn that way” (Chetwood 1746, cited in Leerssen 1996a: 68); referring to a peculiar musical “talent of soothing woe” (Bowden 1791, cited in Leerssen 1996a: 73).

One important setback concerning these documents is as follows: the commentary is often informed by the external condition of the Irish poor rather than provided by an overview of Irish music itself. Walker already accepted the notion of a melancholic sound while he accounted for the minor modalities found in Irish music (see Walker 1786: 182–3). Considering more contemporary scholarship, Leerssen is adamant that the “characterisation of the native Irish was utterly heedless to the attitudes and self-image of the native Irish themselves” (Leerssen 1996a: 380). He thus criticises the antiquarian practice of equating historical contexts with a romantic impression of musical construction (see Leerssen 1996a: 373).<sup>141</sup>

To sum up so far: historical sources point to the admiration and quality of Irish music, yet theoretical constructions of the music itself have often been guided by the social conditions that beleaguered the country throughout earlier centuries. Alternatively, there are other instances where the complexity of music examples or instrumental design inform theories of social structures (see Mooney 1846: 92). Through his efforts in creating replicas of Irish prehistoric horns and trumpas, researcher and performer Simon O’Dwyer concluded:

In every instance great skill and many hours of work were required to match the excellence that had been achieved by prehistoric craftsmen. [...] It was very

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<sup>141</sup> Leerssen’s interpretation of Anglo-Irish relations is interesting. One other example of an English representation of ‘Irishness’ is found in theatrical representations of Gaelic “amorousness”, especially in London productions of the time. Even Conran later spoke of “the remarkable susceptibility of the bard to those emotions inspired by the tender passion of love”, thus sighting this as another reason for the reported “plaintive expression of the Irish music” (Conran 1846: 183–184).

gratifying when each instrument proved to be sweet sounding and a pleasure to play. If music is to be seen as an indicator of a society and its complexity to be estimated through the excellence of the instruments, then there can be no doubt that early Irish society was both cultured and civilised. Musical performance must have had a vital role to play in the lives of the people (O'Dwyer 2004: 12).

A focus on musical instruments may help to both ground the sappiness of romantic literature and unravel the incongruity of negative propaganda. At this point, however, it is fair to conclude that Ireland enjoyed a particularly rich musical past. That said, its musical details remain uncertain despite a relatively large number of representations in the historic record.

## **Appendix B:**

### **The historical position of song in Irish music performance.**

Generally, instrumental music is represented as traditionally subservient to song and dance throughout contemporary music discourse. Accordingly, the following discussion explores the evidence pertaining to this argument regarding song, with specific reference to the fiddle.

Language is often an important issue in the history of Irish song. Political historian Stephen Small regarded the lack of linguistic knowledge of the Irish language among most nineteenth-century collectors as a significant defect in their otherwise commendable efforts, where “the music was often preserved without the words” (Small 1998: 164). Fleischman also noted that during this time “the vocal folk tradition became progressively weaker, but the instrumental continued to flourish” (Fleischman 1996: 508). Though highlighting the instrumental performance of song airs, he regarded that “it was for the dance that the instruments were mainly used” (ibid. 508). Despite this, it remains somewhat dubious to consider every instrumental air as having its origin in song.

Breathnach stated emphatically: “Dance tunes are not song airs” (Breathnach 1996: 151); before continuing:

It is straining credulity, however, to declare that upwards of 8,000 songs (the number of dance tune titles recorded) have disappeared from folk memory while the associated airs survived among traditional musicians or in notation (ibid.).

Likewise, it is not unreasonable to assume that the fine instrumental tradition of slow air playing also enjoyed a degree of independence from song text. For instance, a fiddle player could just as easily compose an instrumental air (with no text) as s/he could a dance tune (with no text). Good examples of airs exclusive to the Irish instrumental tradition include: *Port na bPúcaí* (or “The Phantom’s Tune”), *Fánaíocht Pheadaí Tríd an bPáirc* (or “Paddy’s Rambles Through the Field”), as well as the slow sections of the famed descriptive piece “The Fox Chase”. Much of these melodies were believed to have been captured (not really composed) from otherworldly sounds and experiences altogether devoid of words.

The question remains: during the performance of non-metric melodies with texts, were instrumentalists informed by the aesthetics of vocal performance? Harvey, who like many others believed most of “this style of music is for the dance, to encourage it and to accompany it” (Harvey 1995: 183), later continues of slow air playing:

Witnesses of the older tradition speak of dancers who listened quietly to the fiddler’s slow air and then, when the fiddle had established the rhythm to the dancers’ satisfaction, joined in for reels, polkas, and the like (ibid.).

The conclusion that dance music was exclusively performed for dance is questioned throughout the main body of this thesis. However, what is interesting here is that Harvey thus provides a unique musical place for the slow air inside the instrumental

tradition. That said, in slow air performances the instrumentalist still must follow an aesthetic that is vocally conceived. From personal experience, I can vouch that instrumentalists are very often instructed to have the words of an air in their minds during the performance of slow airs. The basis for this argument seems rather scant, though it is claimed to have its origin in antiquity.

However, many song texts share a single melody; a melody whose origin can hardly be traced accurately to one set of words. So the question then becomes: which set of words should be imagined by the instrumentalist? Even: many of these song melodies could have developed from an instrumental precedent like the examples of instrumental slow airs mentioned above. Indeed, a melody may stray from its original text in the hands of an instrumentalist only to be recycled again by another songsmith, who might not be aware of the original words. There is little logic here in instrumentalists retaining the texts of songs.

Leersson reflects on the abundance of tune recycling during the eighteenth century where there “was a stock of favourite airs which would serve even for new texts [of poetry]. In such cases, poems as written texts should be seen as mere transcripts of performed song-lyrics” (Leerssen 1996b: 173). Slow airs, therefore, inherit an independence from text by virtue of their blatant infidelity to specific texts.

Baring this in mind, it is worth noting that instrumentalists within the Irish tradition have continually demonstrated a complete lack of concern for text even when it comes to according a dance tune its “proper” title. As a result, many tunes have multiple titles, even within a relatively small geography. To Christen a tune independently, even while shedding all former titular attributes, is a matter of little consequence to the native instrumentalist. Musicians demonstrate a great flippancy

when asked the title of a particular tune. Titles are therefore of little musical consequence when it comes to melodic content, at least for the instrumentalist.

Again, tunes and titles are not related musically. The name is merely a tag to help one recall the associated tune. It does not represent verbally a sentiment allegedly expressed in the music (Breathnach 1996: 151).

It seems somewhat inconsiderate therefore to demand that a musician be familiar with the entire text of a slow air when not even *au fait* with its title. Though text can be judged nonessential to the instrumentalist, this does not mean that a familiarity with an original text (or story) can aid a more provocative interpretation. The point is this: despite the relationship between singer and instrumentalist, the former cannot claim to have precedence over the latter. Essentially, instrumentalists cannot be tied to texts since the material culture of their tradition involves the negotiation of specific artefacts that determine musical practice.

Regardless, the slow air still conforms to the aesthetics of antiquity. Its relative lack of popularity in comparison with Irish dance music already assumes an air of “yesterday” that is usually treasured by those who share an interest in traditional music preservation. That the song tradition is in more danger of dying out lends even more credence to the cause of the purist in curtailing instrumental development with regard to the slow air. Folklorist, archivist, and Irish music specialist, Ríonach Uí Ógáin, follows this lead:

As regards instrumental music and Irish culture, the most audible change is that fewer slow airs are played today. [...] One reason may be that music for dancing is

much in demand due to the set-dancing revival. Another reason is, doubtless, the decline in the Irish language and its song tradition.

Obviously, social change has affected the performance situation of music and song. They are nowadays no longer associated with a domestic setting and are performed for the most part at festivals and formal occasions. This kind of public performance leads to a less intimate and less personal form of communication in music (Uí Ógáin 1995: 96).

The proposed decrease in slow air performance does not tally with recorded sources (both audio and literate) from earlier centuries compared with today. The demand for dance (owing to the set-dancing revival mentioned above) as somehow aiding the popularity of dance music is ill-considered. Many of these set-dancing clubs used mediated sources (such as a boom-box) or drew upon a dedicated group of instrumental performers that excluded most others. This was counterbalanced by public performances of music in formal settings as Uí Ógáin highlights in her second paragraph.

A decreasing familiarity with the Irish language could not have exerted such a profound affect upon the instrumentalist either. As outlined previously: for many instrumentalists text is not essential to the successful realisation of slow airs. Typically, Uí Ógáin imagines a “domestic setting” (that is, an “ancient” setting) for the performance of slow airs. This implies that dance tunes do not require a similarly delicate setting. Given the thousands of examples of distinct dance tune melodies, it is unfair to dismiss their musical value in comparison with slow airs. At least as far as the instrumentalist is concerned, any favourite tune (be it of a metric or non-metric nature) is worthy of an intimate setting. The main point here is that the expert

instrumentalist is guided ergonomically by the instrument being performed. Text or song aesthetics can only be a secondary consideration; they cannot become prerequisites for instrumental practice either inside the musical present or the musical past.



## **Appendix C:**

### **The historical position of dance in Irish music performance.**

Iconographic sources attest to the significance of the fiddle in Irish music and in Irish life generally. A quick examination of the paintings shown in Claudia Kinmonth's publication demonstrates this during the late eighteenth century (see plates 146; 155; 189; 190; 196; 200; 202; 203; 206; 208 in Kinmonth 2006). Where the fiddle is shown in performance, it is usually depicted explicitly or implicitly in a dance context.

However, it cannot be claimed that visual art accurately represents a sound portrayal of social norms from the past. For example, paintings featured in Kenneth Neill's publication place the fiddle at the periphery, rather than at the centre of, large social gatherings during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see Neill 1979). As a figure on canvas, the Irish fiddler simply inspired little interest for the visual artist.

As Kinmonth argues, the "stereotypical stage Irishman seen twirling a shillelagh above his head" was commonly preferred by painters (Kinmonth 2006: 192). This is not to say that the fiddle player is never shown outside of a dance context. The lone fiddler in Edmond Fitzpatrick's painting "All Hallow-Eve – A Sketch in KilKenny" is presented without any dancers. Perhaps here, the fiddler is accompanying a singer or storyteller to his right holding a pamphlet – though this would also seem out of place to a non-literate tradition (see plate C.1 below):



Plate C.1: “All Hallow-Eve – A Sketch in KilKenny”.<sup>142</sup>

This is a wood engraving which featured in *The Illustrated London News* (6/11/1858) which was accompanied by a text that does not fail to mention the inevitability of a dance at some point during the night. However, the painting itself suggests that music can easily occur outside of a dance context too. Interestingly, Kinmonth regarded this scene as authentic, down to “the drinking glasses on the table [being] characteristically Irish” (Kinmonth 2006: 196). Given the rarity of this level of accuracy seen in most other paintings, the separation of the musician from the dancer in this scene questions the established visual representation which highlights a symbiotic relationship between fiddler and dancer.

<sup>142</sup> As appeared in *The Illustrated London News* (6/11/1858).

Of course, musicologist, and specialist on the history of stringed instruments, David Boyden, acknowledged the widespread use of the violin as an instrument particularly well suited to an evening of dance.

From its birth the violin seemed fated for the embrace of dance music, and each was drawn to the other by the ardour of a natural and mutual attraction. The rhythmic demands of dance music were eminently satisfied by the violins [...] The piquant gaiety, penetrating tone, and power of the violins were particularly suited to the demands of dancing at the court and elsewhere (Boyden 1965: 52).

However, the introduction of a new instrument will need to satisfy all the requirements of a musical tradition. It follows that the use of the fiddle in dance would be tempered by alternative musical considerations. Like Walker and O'Curry before him, O'Sullivan noted the "surprising fact that mediaeval Irish literature contains no references whatever to the subject of dancing" (O'Sullivan 1952: 48; see also Walker 1786: 214–5; O'Curry 1873: 406). Both words used in early modern Irish – *rince* and *damhsa* – probably come from the English word "rink" and French word *danse* respectively, thus dating from the late sixteenth century. Furthermore, most dances that exist today are of a later provenance again (see O'Sullivan 1952: 50–1).

Many melodies that are usually attributed to dance predate actual contemporary dance forms. Breathnach ascertained that "when quadrilles were introduced into Ireland the musicians preferred the native tunes to those included in the numerous

selections issued on the printed music sheets” (Breathnach 1986: 62).<sup>143</sup> In turn, dance steps were adapted to native melodies.<sup>144</sup>

Despite limited historical evidence, O’Sullivan insisted that it is erroneous to accept that dance was unknown in ancient Ireland. He stated: “It would conflict with the practice of primitive peoples in general and it is out of harmony with what is known of the musical attainments of the Irish in early times” (O’Sullivan 1952: 49–50). It would seem equally erroneous then to speculate that instrumental music was subservient to dance, even if dance were a significant part of the music tradition generally. Using O’Sullivan’s words: this too would be “out of harmony with what is known of the musical attainments of the Irish in early times”. In contrast to claims made by modern theorists of Irish music, it remains highly unlikely that a dance aesthetic determined instrumental performance before the twentieth century revivals (beginning in the 1950s).

As stated previously, new musical forms entered the music tradition during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Yet, original musical strains were not forgotten, but merely moulded into new casts. For instance upon the arrival of the *jig* to Ireland (some speculate this to be as early as the sixteenth century), older marches were adapted just as new compositions were inspired (see Breathnach 1996).<sup>145</sup> As such, there is continuity between both instrumental contexts, where the latter example is hardly exclusive to a dance context. Thomas Davis wrote with considerable pride, “the Irish jigs and planxties are not only the best dancing tunes, but the finest quick

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<sup>143</sup> Indeed, most Irish musicians would neither have been musically literate.

<sup>144</sup> These steps were grafted to such a specific degree that Breathnach regarded the style found in modern schools of dancing (that often remain ignorant to the vast repertoire lying outside of the instructor tape) far removed from that of the original dance masters.

<sup>145</sup> One example is found in the Donegal tradition, a jig commonly titled “Gallagher’s March”.

marches in the world” (Davis 1862: 216). Written at a time when Irish music collections were becoming numerous (and their priority was on a formalised presentation of musical content), the implication is one of a music tradition appreciated both for its instrumental beauty as for its suitability for dance. By extension, a twin-track of musical provocation and dance provision already was in evidence.

## **Appendix D:**

### **The historical position of instrumental practice in Irish music performance.**

By attempting to satisfy requirements of dance where there are no dancers (see appendix C), or song where there are no singers (see appendix B), the instrumental tradition is made to look a second-rate transmitter of traditional music values; an instrumental tradition which “has to do” in the absence of dance or song. O’Connor, for instance, comments:

In addition to having a folk music tradition which can be described as “music of the people”, Ireland also has two other highly developed musical forms. One of these, the harping tradition, now defunct, was never folk music. The second, the “Sean Nós” tradition, drew some of its elements from the mediaeval bardic poetry that was the preserve of a scholarly élite. These forms are as complex and sophisticated as classical or European art music. In their highest forms of expression, they are inaccessible to many performers and listeners (O’Connor 1991: 3).

This reflects negatively both upon the music tradition as a whole (including song and dance) and upon the instrumental tradition in particular. The belief that instrumentalists could have ever resisted indulging selfishly in their craft is irrational as it is prevalent in twentieth-century writings. In comparison to a perceived idyllic

past, O'Sullivan points to relevant instrumental performances during the twentieth century as follows: "In general, it may be said that Irish dance music is played too fast and the song music too slowly" (O'Sullivan 1952: 57). Meaning: too fast so that the dancer cannot keep up; and too slow so that the singer cannot hold her/his breath. Breathnach went so far as to offer general tempo markings for Irish dance music (see Breathnach 1983); and further commented:

To play the music at a quicker tempo detracts from the melody; to play it somewhat slower can do no harm. It was customary for many of the older musicians when playing for themselves to adopt a slower pace than that demanded by the dancers (ibid. ix).

These opinions restrict the progress of an instrumental tradition by using alternative aesthetics (those of dance or those of antiquity) that enforce the terms of a tradition. The relative stability of both the dance and the song traditions provide a useful constraint over instrumental practice. As my focus in the main body of this thesis is on metric tunes, I will briefly examine the argument for not playing fast below.

It is one that is often used to curtail virtuoso performances that negate the conservatism of tradition. The argument for not playing fast is not only proffered by way of the dancer, but also by way of "antiquity". Breathnach, for instance, implied this when equating a slower pace with "the older musicians" above.

Ethnomusicologist, Hazel Fairbairn, argued that "jigs and reels are now played much faster than they were ever danced, and musicians have to adapt their normal playing style quite substantially if music is required for a dance" (Fairbairn 1993: 28). As such, she links the dance aesthetic with the traditional aesthetic of "antiquity".

That said, the argument for not playing fast is a very flimsy one. Breathnach's concern (among many others) for what "was customary for many of the older musicians" implies that instrumentalists perform slowly as a point of musical principle; to be in keeping with the "masters of tradition". By extension, those who perform at a faster tempo are viewed by like-minded music theorists as somehow lacking in musical morals.

However, it is very often the case that those who perform exclusively slowly are incapable of performing fast. Logically, therefore, these instrumentalists cannot make a musical choice in the matter (whether this choice is considered a moral one or otherwise).<sup>146</sup> Those who perform fast can more often perform slowly as well. Logically, therefore, these instrumentalists can make a choice in the matter. Only when the latter instrumentalists perform either slowly or fast, can it be concluded that a musical choice regarding tempo has been made. If this is to reflect a musically moral choice inline with an aesthetic of antiquity, then such a choice exclusively lies in the hands of the instrumentalist who can do both.

To suggest that fast tempos are musically meaningless is already to acknowledge that speed in traditional music provokes a discussion regarding meaning in music. To base a musical aesthetic upon a practical quality that is musically out of reach for a majority of performers very nicely incapacitates the capable and re-capacitates the incapable. The effort is to maintain mediocrity and prohibit instrumental advancements. The musical individual is thus subsumed by the familiar terms of tradition.

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<sup>146</sup> By performing "fast", I am assuming that a quick tempo does not sacrifice any other aspect of the performance. Those who perform fast, though do not perform well, are not considered here.



## **Appendix E:**

### **An organology of the bow in Irish music history.**

Among many others, instrument maker and musicologist John Dilworth has pointed out that the “bow has a far longer history than the violin” (Dilworth 1992: 24). There are many examples of bowed chordophones in Europe dating from the tenth century. The origin of the bow is, however, placed by most scholars in Central Asia during the ninth century, and “from early in its history, was strung with horsehair” (see Kolneder 1998: 69; see also Remnant 1978: 43). It apparently surfaced throughout Europe sometime during the eleventh century, to Spain and parts of Italy the century before (see Remnant 1978: 43; see also Dilworth 1992: 5). Conductor and musicologist, Walter Kolneder, made the logical assertion that on the bow’s emergence in Europe “all bowed instruments were originally plucked” (Kolneder 1998: 67–8). Simply put: the bow came before the violin, and had already associated itself with older chordophones ever before the violin was invented. A mutual relationship between bow and chordophone no doubt developed at later stages of instrumental design: the violin forming one of these results.

The modern violin bow, for instance, only took its final shape some time during the late eighteenth century owing to the work of one François Tourte (1747–1835). Musicologist, Robin Stowell, confirms: “Tourte [...] standardised the dimensions, materials, final design and construction of the bow” (Stowell 1990: 18). Stowell later adds: “Apart from [...] additions and numerous unsuccessful attempts to improve the

bow, Tourte's bows were universally imitated as the virtual blueprint for all subsequent bow makers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They have never been surpassed" (ibid. 23).<sup>147</sup>

Any exact date for the bow's arrival to Ireland is as yet impossible to determine. Ann Buckley, the Irish historian and musicologist, finds "two pieces of evidence" related as follows:

A fragment of a bow [made of dogwood] was recovered from a mid-eleventh-century level during excavation of Christchurch Place, Dublin. It shows evidence of Scandinavian influence, having an animal-head carved terminal in Ringerike style [...] By this time Irish art represented a fusion of local and Scandinavian styles and thus it is impossible to determine whether the object in question was an import or the product of local manufacture. From about a century later survives the stone carving of a musician playing a bowed lyre among the Church ruins on St Finan's Island, Lough Currane, Waterville, Co. Kerry<sup>148</sup> [...] The instrument appears to have six strings, in which respect it precisely conforms with the older plucked lyres, and with the Welsh *crwth* which survived into modern times (but for which no medieval predecessor has been identified with that number of strings) (Buckley 1990: 22).

Though the former artefact represents the earliest known bow found anywhere in Europe, what can be surmised is that bowing became a reality some time during the eleventh century in Ireland as it did in other parts of Europe. Even then, bowing was perhaps not embraced as fervently as it would have been in other European regions.

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<sup>147</sup> For more information on the evolution of the violin bow see Stowell 1990.

<sup>148</sup> See Plate E.1 below.

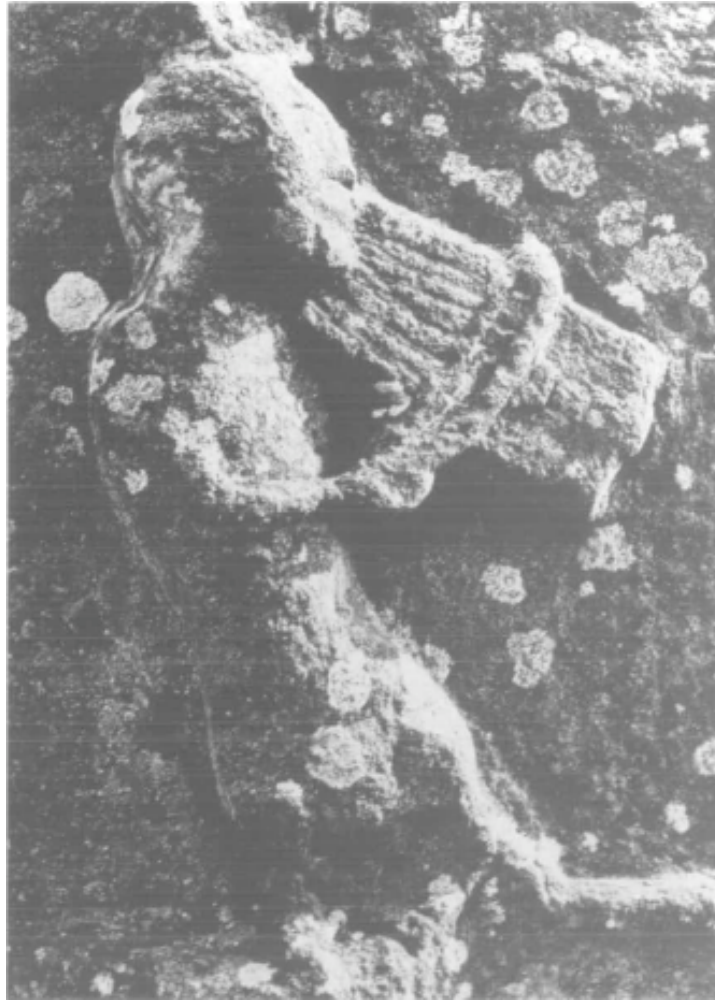


Plate E.1: Twelfth-century stone carving of early Irish chordophone, Co. Kerry.<sup>149</sup>

Concerning the earliest evidence of the bow in Ireland, Buckley continues: “All of the objects excavated attest to an essential interconnectedness with Britain and continental Europe” (Buckley 1990: 48). Despite this, the use of the bow in Irish instrumental practice is remarkably under represented in the historical record. The first use of bowed instruments in Ireland is subject to conjecture. An instrument known as the *crwth* (or *creamhtine cruit* in Ireland) was apparently shared by both

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<sup>149</sup> Taken from Buckley, 2000:169.

Ireland and Wales.<sup>150</sup> As Kolneder found, there have been many music historians “eager to declare the sixth-century *crwth* a bowed instrument” (Kolneder 1998: 67). The *crwth* probably accompanied bardic song. Kolneder maintained that it would have been played “in the manner of a gamba” (ibid. 71). He then continued:

In its late form the *crwth* displayed several structural elements of the violin, so that it has been called its immediate predecessor. Actually it is more likely that the *crwth* was refined after the violin family had begun to evolve, so that some of its details were incorporated in the *crwth* (ibid. 72).

As Peter Cooke highlights, the *crwth* was eventually superseded by the fiddle (*ffidil*) in Wales “as the principal bowed folk instrument” (Cooke 1989: 129). Before this transfer was complete, folk instrumentalists must have increasingly incorporated elements of the violin’s construction to modernise their older stringed instrument. The *crwth* does not seem to have directly preceded nor aided the adoption of the violin in Ireland. In contrast to where the progression is seen, Walker’s contention that the instrument was “the parent of the violin” is doubtful in an Irish context (Walker 1786: 101).<sup>151</sup> Before the arrival of the violin, any bowed instrument in Ireland would have played second fiddle, as it were, to the harping tradition. In this matter, it escaped any

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<sup>150</sup> This despite Walker claiming an Irish origin for the instrument (see Walker 1786: 100–1).

<sup>151</sup> Walker’s was one of the earliest major publications on Irish music. Though an important historical reference, Walker’s musical scholarship has been questioned. Harry White describes Walker’s methodology as “an admixture of learned reference, antiquarian speculation and rhetorical persuasion” (White 2001a: 286). White also highlights one of Walker’s contemporary critics, Charles Burney, whose review of Walker’s “Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards” appeared in the *Monthly Review* on December 1787. In it, Burney regards Walker’s “knowledge of music to be small and his credulity in Hibernian antiquities to be great” (cited in ibid. 287). In all, Walker can become over zealous in his account of Irish music, behind which, however, are many valuable insights regarding the musical past.

extensive documentation.<sup>152</sup> Conran, just as Walker before him, presented the *Coinar Cruit* as a ten-stringed instrument that would have been performed using either the bow or a plectrum (see Conran 1846: 102; see also Walker 1786: 100).<sup>153</sup> Another Irish instrument known as the *timpán* also employed the bow. However, Fleischman remained sceptical about its earliest manner of performance, the three-stringed *timpán* as either plucked or bowed.<sup>154</sup> He contested O’Curry’s understanding of the *timpán* in practice during the eleventh century.

From an article in the [Brehon] Laws by which, if the top of the finger were cut off, the timpanist would be entitled to a wing or quill (i.e. feather) nail by way of compensation, O’Curry surmises that if the timpan were three stringed, one of the strings may have been played with the bow, while two additional deeper strings may have been plucked with the thumb or thumb-nail, so that if this were injured an artificial one would have to be substituted. This deduction, however, is fanciful. It seems more likely that at the time when the Brehon Laws were drafted the timpan-strings were plucked with the finger-nail (just as the early medieval psaltery was plucked either with the finger-tips or a goose-quill plectrum), and that by the time the tales already referred to had come to be written the bow had been introduced, as it had for most types of stringed instrument in western Europe by the eleventh century. No illustration or detailed description of the instrument has been located, though it is mentioned in literary sources up to the seventeenth century (Fleischman 1965: 82–83).

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<sup>152</sup> Ann Buckley argues: “Bowed instruments did not achieve the same status as harps in those areas peripheral to central Norman administration: such as Ireland, Scotland and Wales” (Buckley 1990: 21).

<sup>153</sup> Conran does not give clear dates for the instruments he documents. Of the *Coinar Cruit* he simply states that it “was the Canora Cythara of the mediaeval times, and the origin of the modern guitar” (Conran 1846: 103).

<sup>154</sup> For an organology of the *timpán* see Buckley, 1972.

Since O'Curry's influence upon historical research is profound, later scholars accepted his views regarding the *timpán*.<sup>155</sup> Again, probably reading from O'Curry, Joyce mentioned the poem *Fair of Carman* found in the Book of Leinster (twelfth century) as containing a reference to a "*fidil* or fiddle: but we cannot tell what was its shape or how it was played" (Joyce 1913: 586; see also O'Curry 1873: 328–9). That the violin continues to be referred to as a "fiddle" within the contemporary Irish traditional music community may indicate the existence of a corresponding bowed instrument fitting its description and that pre-dates the violin's entry into Ireland.

In this respect, it would not be uncommon for the violin to adopt a local term once it replaced an older bowed instrument (see Cooke 1989: 129). However, whether this *fidil* was indeed a bowed predecessor remains unknown. O'Sullivan regarded it "a rustic instrument used by the peasants probably for dancing only" (Sullivan 1873: dxxvii). Alternatively, Buckley hastens to caution against assuming the instrument was ever established in Ireland at the time of writing.

As the fair was an occasion of commerce, it is feasible that the instrument was newly in circulation and noteworthy for that. Or, together with the reference to 'foreign Greeks', this may be an instance of inclusion topical to the eleventh century, consequent upon the settling and integration of the Vikings. Doubtless, this latter sequence of events generated fresh patterns of trade, with exotic goods on offer, or otherwise in evidence (Buckley 2005: 752).

The appearance of the *timpán* in early Irish literature far outweighs that of the *fidil*, and as such remains the most likely bowed precursor of the violin.

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<sup>155</sup> This included P. W. Joyce (see Joyce 1913: 578–579). For a review on the influence of Eugene O'Curry on subsequent historical studies of Ireland see Ó Madagáin 2008.

Documentation on the *timpán* remains sparse with no real description of its construct. Though it seems to have gained a status just below that of the native Irish harp, this position was as a *distant* second and “probably the instrument of the crosán or buffoon” (see Buckley 2005: 750–2; Buckley 1972: 55).<sup>156</sup> The relative disinterest in historical documents shown towards the bow during these earlier times may simply indicate the high status accorded the plucked chordophone: the harp. As Buckley argues:

The shift from plucked lyre to plucked harp was clearly a technological improvement, offering greater musical possibilities and therefore flexibility of expression to performers; but a shift from plucked harp to bowed fiddle was a change of medium of expression and probably not suited to all repertoires and styles. Bowing did, however, make its presence felt in the development of bowed lyres; but these instruments always remained secondary, never achieving the eminence of their plucked antecedents or seriously challenging the triangular harp (Buckley 1990: 21).

Buckley finds evidence of the *timpán* “in a source dating from the ninth or tenth century, whence a trail of comments leads through to the seventeenth; presumably this indicates that the instrument was obsolete by that time” (Buckley 2005: 750; see also O’Curry 1873: 264–5). It is thought that the bow was added to the *timpán* some time around the eleventh or twelfth century. Whether the *timpán* accounts for the initial uptake of the bow in Ireland remains unclear.

It therefore seems quite reasonable to assume that any bowed instrument did not necessarily share a direct relationship with the emergence of the violin in Ireland. The

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<sup>156</sup> See O’Curry 1873:359-66 for a description of the *timpán*.

*timpán*, though apparently also “held on the left shoulder under the chin” (Buckley 1972: 55), was reportedly of a different sound to the bright tone of the fiddle; instead “referred to as sweet, pure, plaintive, soothing, and inducive of sleep” (ibid.). Its musical potential possibly indicates a different function to that of the fiddle (which was especially suited to dance accompaniment as it was to musical interpretation).

In sum, concerning a native Irish bowed chordophone and the non-native violin, Breathnach agreed that it “is not possible to say whether earlier forms of bowed instruments were used in Ireland immediately before [the violin’s] introduction, nor can we say when it was first used here to play traditional music” (Breathnach 1986: 79–80). O’Boyle included the *timpán* in his list of other instruments “known to have been used but which left no recognizable trace in the national music and are therefore of only archaeological interest” (O’Boyle 1958: 49). The Irish fiddle may be best understood as a new addition to the Irish music tradition through and through, despite the historic presence of distant native bowed chordophones (refer to appendix F).



## Appendix F:

### An organology of the violin in Irish music history.

Musicologist, and specialist on the history of stringed instruments, David Boyden, describes the possible evolution of the violin as follows:

The earliest violins were an amalgam of the features of certain well-known instruments in vogue about 1500: the rebec, the Renaissance fiddle and the *lira da braccio* [...] The violin combined the sonority and efficient playing potential of the *lira da braccio* (whose middle bouts made the instrument easier to bow than the rebec) with the musical advantage and simplicity of the rebec's three strings and uniform tuning in 5ths. The viols, on the other hand, were not ancestors of the violins in any decisive aspect of construction, tuning or playing technique (Boyden 1989: 17).

Dilworth stated that as “early as 1508, the first depictions of violins appeared in Italian art” (Dilworth 1992: 8–9); while the “earliest surviving violins date from 1564, and come from the same area of Northern Italy, covering Lombardy and the Veneto” (ibid.). He did note Polish violins in the National museum in Warsaw claiming an earlier production date of c.1515. The repertoire of these earliest violinists remains obscure, owing in part to the instrument's peripheral role in the music tradition of the time.

On examining the musical functions of the violin's ancestors in Europe, Boyden found "that occasional playing for 'profane' dancing and feasting, similar 'public festivities', sacred music, and recitation of epics were among the functions of bowed stringed instruments before the appearance of the violin. These same functions were undoubtedly shared by the violin in varying degrees during the course of the sixteenth century" (Boyden 1965: 51). Commentators in this instance, including Boyden, have relied on the theoretical writings of Jambe de Fer (1556) that were published in *Épitome Musical*, where he ascribes a "low social esteem" to the violin in contrast to the bowed viols of the time (see Boyden 1989: 36).

Apparently the violin had until the seventeenth century to permeate "all ranks of society" (Boyden 1989: 38). Kolneder questioned the assumptions of earlier commentators by highlighting the caliber of eminent instrument makers during the sixteenth century who produced quality violins at the time. Of these, the famous Andrea Amati unlikely "created such fine specimens only to sell them cheaply to "beer fiddlers" and to those who played for dancing" (Kolneder 1998: 81). Kolneder thus continued:

Jambe-de-Fer's "mommeries" and "noces" seem to have involved only the lower classes, but this would leave totally unexplained the developments, over decades, that finally led to the violin. He surely was also referring, and perhaps primarily so, to great festive events of the Renaissance. For these, all professional and other competent players would be enlisted, not only locally but from neighbouring courts and towns. To create the necessary instruments for such large events must have been what makers were challenged and commissioned to do (ibid.).

During the seventeenth century, the violin attained a more definite position within the Western art music tradition, with many pieces composed for the instrument and made available in print. This naturally influenced further developments in instrumental design and influenced a wider distribution. As Boyden maintained, however, in “the 17th century and most of the 18th, the tradition of violin making did not change radically from the norms already established by 1600” (Boyden 1989: 22). Although alterations occurring after this date were quite limited, they were significant when considering how they dictated performance practice.<sup>157</sup>

Likewise, the morphology of the violin was equally important in its adaptation to folk music. As Cooke makes clear, no other musical instrument “has until recent years been so widely used among all classes throughout the world as the violin” (Cooke 1992: 234). Generally speaking, during the seventeenth century Boyden makes clear that “as a dance instrument the violin was much sought after, whether played in the meanest tavern or in the palace of a king” (Boyden 1989: 22). A specialist in early instrument history, Mary Remnant insisted that the violin family “had, in the words of North, ‘bin little in England except by comon fiddlers’ until the reign of Charles II. This monarch, who came to the throne in 1660, ‘set up a band of twenty-four violins to play at his dinners, which disbanded all the old English music at once’” (Remnant 1978: 57). This date is subsequently contested by Peter Holman, a musicologist and Early Music specialist, who suggested that the violin was already present in amateur musical circles much earlier. He stated that the instrument was performed by “all classes of professional musicians [...] by 1600” (Holman 1996: 443).

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<sup>157</sup> Efforts at increasing the volume of the violin for solo performances against the backdrop of the orchestra demanded a raised pitch, tighter strings, a stronger bridge, a sound post and a bass bar, together with a leaning neck and longer fingerboard for the instrument (see Remnant 1978: 59; see also Boyden 1989: 22–23).

It is unlikely that the violin shared a similar degree of crossover between folk and art music genres in Ireland. That said, it would seem logical that the violin came to the neighbouring island before arriving to Ireland, and that it reached Irish soil by way of travel movements among the higher classes of society. The instrument's introduction to Irish traditional music is often thought to have come directly from Scotland where the musical and cultural links could have facilitated the necessary exchange. Traditional fiddle player, Dianna Boullier, certainly maintains this, dating its introduction to "around the year 1700" (see Boullier 1998: 52) – a rather conservative estimation. However, the earliest references to the violin in Ireland still occur in art music contexts rather than folk music contexts.

As early as 1565, it is thought that Sir Henry Sidney (1529–1586) brought some violins with him to Ireland when appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland in October of that year (see Holman 1993: 125). In 1604, another was apparently imported into the country from London by the Earl of Thomond (see Carolan 2010: 6–7). By the following century, the instrument was established and featured prominently on the concert stages of Dublin and throughout most of the "Pale".<sup>158</sup> The musical life of this area is described by Brian Boydell:

The fact that so many distinguished foreign musicians did brave the very considerable discomfort of crossing the sea, some of them settling permanently in Dublin, and that it could support these professional musicians with the remarkable extent of activity revealed in this calendar from about 1740 onwards, reinforces the city's reputation as an enthusiastic and vital centre of musical activity (Boydell 1988: 11).

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<sup>158</sup> The "Pale" is that region dominated by the Anglo-Irish, an extended area including and surrounding Dublin.

Of these distinguished foreign musicians, one of the more significant was Francesco Geminiani (1687–1762), an Italian composer and virtuoso violinist who arrived in Dublin in December 1733. The city also hosted his pupil Matthew Dubourg (1707–1767), who reportedly led the orchestra for the premiere performance of Handel's (1685–1759) *Messiah* in 1742 (see Harvey 1995: 182). A Stradivarius is listed in the possession of one David Ker from County Down, Ireland in 1794 (see Sánchez-Penzo). Ker came from a wealthy Scottish Presbyterian background and made a tour of Italy in 1775. He then eloped with a Venetian singer, Madalena Guardi Portavo, but it is unlikely that he possessed any significant skill (if at all) on the violin (see Carr 2005). Of course Ireland's own highly regarded instrument maker, Thomas Perry (c.1744–1818), was also active by this time.

It is interesting to conjecture the musical interaction between foreign musicians and the local Irish peasantry in this regard. It is clear that native musicians freely availed of non-native musical materials to enrich their art throughout many centuries of colonialism. In turn, non-native colonisers often promoted the native tradition through employment and publication. Only after the Battle of Kinsale (1601) was the edict to hang all the harpers and bards serious enough to significantly reduce the colonisers' interest in Irish music.<sup>159</sup> Despite this, as a successful mediator between the coloniser and the colonised, itinerant harper and prolific composer, Turlough Carolan (1670–1738), blended the native tradition with a Baroque influence and became considerably popular in both native and non-native circles.

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<sup>159</sup> Kinsale is a coastal town in the southern county of Cork. The last great stand of the so-called Nine Years War against the English took place in Kinsale and its environs. It was conducted mainly by the Ulster clan-leaders Hugh O'Neill (principle orchestrator of the Nine Years War) and Hugh Roe O'Donnell, together with a Munster contingency led by Donal Cam O'Sullivan Bere and the central involvement of Spanish forces. Their defeat at the hands of the English ultimately destroyed the Gaelic Order. The Irish chieftains largely fled to Spain, an exodus known as the Flight of the Earls.

Irish music and history specialist Leith Davis suggested that the publication *A Collection of the Most Celebrated Irish Tunes* by John and William Neal in 1724 indicates a firm interrelationship between art music and traditional music (see Davis 2006: 26). He argues, “the collection’s claim that the tunes are the ‘most celebrated’ also suggests the existence of a wide variety of popular native Irish tunes from which the editors were able to choose and implies an active interest by Anglo-Irish musicians in Irish tunes” (ibid. 34).

Although Boydell insisted that it was “no more than a veneer” (Boydell 1999b: 570), “The Beggar’s Opera” is another example of this intersection between a native “folk” and European (or British) “art music” tradition. The origin of this musical is outlined by Flood as follows: “[O]n the suggestion of the great Irishman and writer Jonathon Swift (1667–1745), a Newgate pastoral in the form of a ballad opera was produced by John Rich at Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre on January 29th, 1727–8” (Flood [1906]: 31). Flood insisted that “The Beggar’s Opera” featured a number of Irish tunes. In his influential study of the Opera in the *Journal of the Irish Folk Song Society*, he calculated that twelve of the sixty-nine tunes were of Irish origin.<sup>160</sup>

Regarding Irish folk music performed in Dublin during the eighteenth century (the centre of art music performances in the country at the time), Boydell confirmed:

It was undoubtedly to be heard in taverns and on the streets in Dublin, but, as it belonged to an oral tradition unconnected with formal occasions of a kind that would be reported in the news-papers, there is little firm evidence that it influenced the musical life of the urban gentry more than superficially. That polite society did

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<sup>160</sup> While Alice C. Bunten did question some of Flood’s more extravagant findings in a later edition of the same journal (see Bunten [1907]: 16–21), it is obvious that the overall form of “The Beggar’s Opera” allowed for the inclusion of folk melodies, be they of an Irish or a non-Irish provenance.

pay limited homage to native Irish music is shown by the popularity of Éileen Aroon and some other folk songs in Dublin concerts (Boydell 1988: 11).

It is precisely this lack of firm evidence that makes the history of the violin in traditional music so difficult to assess. Despite a lack of any firm evidence, native fiddlers may have experienced some musical links with violinists of the art music tradition too. In a report published in *Harding's Weekly Impersonal Newsletter* (August 1721) concerning Lord Mayo's harper, David Murphy, who had returned to Ireland, the musician is described as "the famousest man in all the world for the Irish harp, and thought not to be much less on the violin" (cited in Boydell 1999a: 560). Given that Irish harpers were combining elements of Baroque music in their playing, David Murphy's repertoire on the "violin" then possibly allowed for a similar crossover between genres.

However, already by the second half the seventeenth century contemporary commentators referenced the violin or fiddle in rural Ireland among the peasantry. One such account is provided by Richard Head (1674):

Their Sunday is the most leisure day they have, on which they use all manner of sport; in every field a fiddle and the lasses footing it till they are all of a foam, and grow infinitely proud with the blear eye of affection her sweetheart casts on her feet as she dances to a tune, or no tune, played on an instrument that makes a worse noise than a key upon a gridiron (cited in MacLysaght 1969: 36; also cited in Breathnach 1986: 55).

Perhaps the first unfavourable description of Irish music, it does confirm the fiddle's presence amongst traditional musicians by the end of the seventeenth century. Continuing into the very beginning of the eighteenth century, further sightings exist (see Carolan 2010: 6–7). However, fiddlers do not receive the customary adulation accorded other instrumentalists even at this point in time (see appendix A). Breathnach cited one account from the era detailing “the citizens of Cork, even when they could afford nothing else, brought their children up to dance, fense, and play upon the fiddle” (Breathnach 1986: 79).<sup>161</sup>

Certainly, it seems that the violin was taken quite seriously by this time in a native music context, even though perhaps it remained at a “coping” stage of musical development (see Introduction). By the second half of the eighteenth century, the violin in traditional music began to grow in status where it was considered a more useful instrument in the accompaniment of dance to the native pipes.<sup>162</sup> Turning to an examination of instrument distribution in traditional music contexts: that Boydell lists one Thomas Dunne as *fiddle*-maker in Christ Church Lane from 1740 makes it tempting to conclude that there existed the local manufacturing of the fiddle specifically for the native music tradition.<sup>163</sup> Naturally, native musicians had already developed a natural gift for the manufacture of elaborate home-made instruments.

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<sup>161</sup> Dancing masters were believed to have included lessons in fencing, though this was probably a later development (see Breathnach 1969/70: 2). However, Breathnach insists that the “instrument in question was undoubtedly the violin, which had emerged in the middle of the previous century and which is referred to invariably among traditional players as the fiddle” (Breathnach 1986: 79).

<sup>162</sup> This status was attained despite Walker's belief in the demise of music in Ireland where he suggested: “Music, however, is sometimes the subject of conversation amongst us, and is still cultivated by a few; but it is no longer a favourite topic, nor a favourite study” (Walker 1786: 229).

<sup>163</sup> A specialist in historical violin makers, Brian Harvey, does bemoan in Scotland that “the few pre-1750 Scottish instruments inspected give the impression that their makers had the dance-floor rather than the court in mind” (Harvey 1995: 176). He later considers the Irish fiddle in this context and states as “is the case with Scotland, the demand for folk-fiddle music manifested itself throughout the rural parts of the whole island and encouraged both local making and the importing by retailers of cheap instruments from France and Germany” (ibid. 183).



As a step in between the home-made and the manufactured, the *kit* or *pochette* was a welcome discovery for dancing masters throughout the country. For example, the musicologist Barra Boydell refers to the instrument as being “widely used for dance music in the 17th and 18th centuries” (Boydell 1985: 68). Indeed an example of such an instrument by Thomas Perry (see above) can be found in the National Museum of Ireland dating from the latter half of the eighteenth century (see Gogan 1952: 303). It is most likely that the native tradition was catered for by home-made examples, cheap importations and limited native professional manufacturing.

By the late eighteenth century, it is apparent that Irish traditional musicians were beginning to master the violin to a level that would again receive respect among contemporary critics. Young mentioned “blind fiddlers” who accompanied dance-master in what he termed “an absolute system of education” (Young 1970: 446). By the very beginning of the nineteenth century, the fiddle began to dominate the Irish musical landscape. Described as “honest and painstaking” when writing about the Irish, the travel writer Edward Wakefield wrote the following in 1812: “Music and dancing are very common; the fiddle may be heard in various directions as a traveller passes along. The Irish seem at all times to have been fond of music” (cited in Carty 1949: 18; 14). As far west as the remote Aran Islands, Irish music scholar Deirdre Ní Chonghaile notes the existence of professional fiddle players around this time. She notes in particular a “native with the Cromwellian name of Michael Brabson (60yrs) of Cill Éinne, Árainn [who] listed his occupation as ‘fiddler’ [in the 1821 census]” (Ní Chonghaile 2008: [18]).<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> It is a pity that the most famous Italian virtuoso, Nicolò Paganini (1782–1840), left out his own set of variations on the melody *St Patrick’s Day* for violin and orchestra – composed “especially for his Irish visit” in 1831 – during his performance at *The Dublin Grand Music Festival* (see Boydell 1999b: 613). Perhaps on hearing of the island’s own musical prowess he thought better not to!

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the fiddle in Ireland is easier to research, both in terms of its musical repertoire and sound practices (see chapter two of this thesis). How it reached a high level of proficiency among traditional music practitioners by this time is not clear. Perhaps its adoption by the Irish music tradition is a process that is as varied as the methods used in its performance within the Irish music tradition itself.

## Glossary

**Etic:** A process of examining a music genre musicologically, coming from the outside in.

**Antiquity:** A traditional trope referring to an idealised permanent musical past and its aesthetic in contemporary contexts.

**Avant-garde:** A negation of the terms of tradition mainly through a transitory interpretation of macrostructure that amounts to a musical crisis.

**Capacity:** A measurement of artifactual potential; for instance, the fiddle as a musical artefact capable of producing “new” sounds.

**Classicism:** A process of (re)compositional stagnation guided by an aesthetic of restraint and a respect for a perceived musical oneness with an idealised musical past. In the Irish context, this classicism has been central to the formation of the contemporary terms of tradition during the later twentieth century.

**Ergonomics:** The physiological interaction between a musician and a primary musical artefact that influences musical output: by way of genre-related habitual anatomical patterns; or individual limitation and expansion of artifactual potential.

**Filing:** The removal of certain elements of capacity to reflect an idealised musical past that is more ordered and pure in design.

**Emic:** The process of examining a music genre musicologically, coming from the inside in.

**Innovation:** An idiosyncratic process of micro-structural deviation within the terms of tradition.

**Macrostructure:** The large-scale structure of a single piece of music. Under the terms of tradition this translates into the overall structure shared by every metric traditional Irish piece; that is, the “dance tune” and its constant symmetrical division into “parts” (usually two) and “phrases” (typically two-bar phrases).

**Microstructure:** The small-scale structures within (and under the terms of tradition, defined by) the macrostructure; such as, single or small groups of notes and traditional or idiosyncratic ornaments.

**Musical event:** Signifies more *and* less than a “music system”. That is, one single contained musical performance that involves the following salient ingredients: music maker(s), primary music tool(s), and the ergonomic interaction between these producing a musical continuum of silence–sound–noise.

**Primary (musical) artefact:** Any tool manipulated by a creative artist in the direct production of musical sounds.

**Purism:** A conservative process of micro-structural deviation within the terms of tradition.

**Round:** A traditional term that denotes one through performance of a single tune, or the complete macro-structural layout of a single tune that may be repeated.

**Sound blocks:** In an ensemble context, this refers to the audible macro-structural sets that assume inaudible micro-structural variation: either through mass blocks of sound (more evident in large-scale ensembles); or through a rigid sound aesthetic of “staying together” (more evident in small-scale ensembles).

**Suppression:** A process of restraining the forward impetus of capacity.

**Terms of tradition, the:** The taken for granted (contractual) conditions under which a traditional performer undertakes his musical actions, serving as a point of subconscious consensus among purists and innovators alike.

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