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THE LITANY OF THE SAINTS
MUSICAL QUOTATIONS AND INFLUENCES
IN THE MUSIC OF TOMMIE POTTS

Mícheál Ó Súilleabhráin

In this essay I wish to turn the normal instance of a composer in a classical tradition borrowing ‘folk’ or ‘traditional’ music as material for symphonic development on its head. My case study here is that of an Irish traditional musician borrowing classical themes and motifs as an inspiration for the development of his revived traditional repertoire, and in the process stitching these borrowings so far into the fabric of the traditional material as to be unrecognisable – unless they are pointed out. Instead of the usual story of oral-traditional practice! What can this tell us about music and identity in general, and about music and identity in Ireland, in particular? If a classical composer might wish to make use of Irish traditional material in order to install an Irish identity into the compositional process, what might motivate a traditional musician to cross that action in the opposite direction?

In attempting to answer that question, I will also contrast the traditional fiddler Tommie Potts’ search for a musical voice with the Irish composer Seán Ó Riada’s search for what he termed ‘a native Irish art music’ (Ó Súilleabhráin 2004 [a]). Both Potts (1912-1988) and Ó Riada (1930-1971) engaged in crossing the worlds of traditional and classical music at much the same time from the mid 1950s to the later 1960s. While neither has any direct influence on the other, their emergence during the same period raises questions concerning the evaluation of traditional music in Ireland since 1950. In order to fully appreciate the nature of Tommie Potts innovatory style, it is important to situate him historically firmly within his inherited community of traditional music.

In Breandán Breathnach’s first volume published in 1963 of the now classic series entitled Ceol Rince na hÉireann, no less than 23 tunes are collected from the fiddler Tommie Potts. The volume itself is dedicated to Tommie’s father, John Potts, the piper, and a further 33 tunes are collected from him. In collecting tunes from Tommie it appears that Breathnach was not interested in an aspect of his music that the fiddler himself regarded as his most important contribution to the tradition of Irish music. While all of the tunes collected from Tommie in that volume are highly representative of his mainstream traditional playing, the nature of the task that Breathnach set himself could not include any examples of the innovative aspects of his musical style.

I have written on related elements of this style both in my PhD dissertation on Potts (Ó Súilleabhráin 1987) and in a more recent publication (Ó Súilleabhráin...
1996). Some excellent examples of the music itself may be heard on the recording *The Liffey Banks* issued by Claddagh Records in 1972.

My purpose in this present discussion is to show some of the influences that inspired Potts in the development of that style. While there is a frequent misconception among the Irish traditional music community that jazz was a primary influence in this, I will show that this is not the case, and that the main thrust came from the tradition of Western art music – in particular recordings of music form the Romantic era of the 19th Century.

**POTT’S MUSICAL IDEOLOGY**

Potts’ musical ideology emerged in the mid 20th century (probably settling into place in the 1950s) when the combined forces of modernisation and elitism created a low-status role for the traditional musician in Ireland. The ‘revival’ of the music was only beginning, and nobody could have predicted the role which forces such as legitimisation, urbanisation, institutionalisation, and the interaction with popular culture, were to play in the history of this music over the following century. In my opinion Tommie Potts is an important figure in this history, not so much because of any direct influence he had but because – as is becoming increasingly clear – his drive towards breaking the traditional boundaries of the music were prophetic of a new stream of musicians who have shown a similar motivation towards the evolution of musical styles which contradict the communal nature of the tradition in favour of forms of musical individualism. In this regard, I have pointed out elsewhere (Ó Súilleabáin 1996) that while Potts is held up as the epitome of tradition, he is equally the epitome of innovation. This very duality makes an examination of his music of particular interest at a time when a heated debate on the identity of this musical tradition is underway.

In my conversations with him, Tommie Potts spoke of a meeting he once had with Máirtín Ó Cadhain (one of the major Irish language prose writers of the 20th century):

**POTTS:** And he [Máirtín Ó Cadhain] said “well a lot of the intellectuals I’ve spoken to consider the folk music primitive”. And not denigrating, like, but primitive in the sense - like you see, the ballad is for the people. They can understand the story, and musically its not difficult. All join in and so too as I see it with the folk music. Most of us, including myself, can’t understand Cesar Franck or Beethoven. But we can understand a good fiddle player playing ‘The Flogging Reel’ or something like that. A good air too – and cry and weep, you know, and there can be that, but it doesn’t reach very far down.
The degree to which he leaned into this way of viewing the music is evident from the following letter:

First of all folk music (with ballads) is just as it says the music of the ‘people’ i.e. the peasantry, the masses or the common people – whichever you like – I do not say this in a derogatory sense, but it is a primitive form and at that, it is within the capacity of the ‘people’ to appreciate and understand. This because, generally speaking, the people have no training in the finer points and theory of music.

However the contradictory nature of his thought reveals itself in his willingness on the one hand to accept the view that traditional music is ‘primitive’ in his sense of underdeveloped, while on the other in his annoyance at the limitations of such a viewpoint:

Such comments reveal his motivation towards pushing the boundaries of the tradition to breaking point, and beyond. An excellent example of this emerged after he had performed his innovative setting of the reel ‘The Star of Munster’ in the course of a video recording I made of him in 1982:

MOS: Do you find it hard to play the ordinary version now? You wouldn’t ever do it, would you?

POTTS: No!

MOS: So, in fact if I asked you to play the ordinary ‘Star of Munster’ you’d find it hard to stop varying it? Would you be able to do it?

POTTS: I’d play it in a different key – if I was in a group, we’ll say for maybe an occasion. [Plays]. No, that’s awful now. [Plays again]. And so on. No. I couldn’t. I couldn’t stay on it.

MOS: I hope you didn’t mind me asking you that?
POTTS: No! No! Actually I wouldn’t play Irish music at all if it was just that. If I was the most proficient performer in the world, I just couldn’t keep at it.

MOS: Talking about that – playing the music just as it is, as you find it in ‘the book’ [O’Neills]: would you find it boring to do that?

POTTS: Yeah! Yeah! Well, in a manner of speaking – not to take from the ethnic thing or the culture at all – it’s just that one is entitled to one’s own opinion. It’s just primitive in that sense. It’s good. We’re proud of it. But its still in its limitations in that sense, like, primitive.
[Speech Transcriptions, p. 19 see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]

In his musical journey towards developing traditional music to “symphony heights”, we find a music coming through him that is a unique reflection of his own yearning to be other than what he finds himself musically. In this, the early radio broadcasts and 78 rpm recordings which he heard reflected the popularity of the romantic era of the 19th century – hence the borrowings as we shall later see, from Chopin, Liszt and others. It is possible that Potts’ music could be viewed as ‘the romanticisation of Irish traditional music’? His interest in the piano (where he can be heard on the ‘Domestic Tapes’ – see Ó Súilleabháin 1987 - trying chords of the 7th, 9th 11th and 13th), programmatic tune titles (sometimes referring to abstract emotional states such as ‘Ambivalence’, ‘Gratitude’, ‘Contemplation’ and ‘Contentment’), as well as the general rhapsodic nature of his musical expression itself as revealed in the irregular musical forms employed by him, and, above all, in the emotive quality which his music has acquired, all of these serve to indicate a process of ‘romanticisation’. Just as the baroque style of 18th century Europe gave way to a 19th century expression which cracked open, so to speak, the emotion contained within the more formal baroque structures, so Potts’ musical style either allows an already existing emotive layer within the dance music tradition a more overt expression, or – depending on your point of view in this matter – it suffuses that same tradition with an overt layer of emotive meaning.

One performer at the present time who continues to acquire increasing recognition is Martin Hayes, the fiddle player, who cites Potts as a prime influence in the evolution of his own musical style. Hayes is well known for the emotive flow within his musical style. For him it seems to be expressed through a focus upon the slow tempo and the ‘nea’ or emotive voice of his native East Clare especially as revealed in a telling upwards glissando at times (presumably the ‘nea’ itself) which evokes a kind of yearning somewhat akin to similar glissandi in a jazz or ‘blues’ style. But Hayes is content to lean
on this emotive voice already present within the tradition without disturbing its standard forms. On the contrary, he is a musician well know for an attention to detail within the strict confines of these same traditional forms.

Potts, on the other hand, breaks the banks of tradition through the development of irregular structures that place his music outside the bounds of the shared communal session. Here for the first time in the history of Irish traditional music we see the emergence of what is quintessentially a solo voice. This present article looks at some specific examples of musical borrowings and influences that have shaped that voice.

THE JAZZ INFLUENCE

My initial enquiries of Potts were in the area of possible jazz influences. Like many others I had spoken with, I wondered whether the linear improvised aspects of his musical style were not in fact in some way derived from jazz. As my study of his music progressed, I was to discover that the answer was much more interesting, more radical, and more important as far as the history of this tradition is concerned.

Examples of what in jazz are called ‘riffs’ are found occasionally in his innovative pieces. A riff may be defined as “the same melodic motif appearing in different consecutive accentual guises” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987). Illustration 1 shows three examples of ‘riffs’ (not a term used by Potts), one in his version of the reel, ‘Julia Delaney’ and two others in his version of the reel, ‘My Love is in America’, Potts responded to a direct question regarding a possible jazz influence as follows:

Illustration 1. Three examples of ‘riffs’ in Potts’ music
MOS: There were things in it ['My Love is in America'] which reminded me of things you’d sometimes hear a jazz musician playing [lilts examples 2 and 3 as in Illustration 1]. Is there anything in that?

POTTS: There is a little influence, because when I was young, there was the ballroom - the ballroom was popular - they did those jazz dances like the Foxtrot, and Slow Foxtrot. But it wasn’t the overall or deepest influence - no way! [Speech Transcriptions, p. 45 see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]

MOS: Have you ever played jazz yourself on the fiddle?

POTTS: No! No! I couldn't do that no more than I could play classical pieces. The note-making is different. Like I’m Irish and to a certain extent I know nothing else, you see. But there were certain jazz - a few things I heard a few years ago, and a few times I tried it on the fiddle. [Plays]. I couldn't go on with that. It's not my psychology. If I were younger perhaps, and had been influenced, I possibly might have gone into it. But I’m glad not. [Speech Transcriptions, p. 8 see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]

Interestingly, Eddie Potts, a brother of Tommie’s who Tommie described as a fine uilleann piper in his youth, turned from traditional music to jazz saxophone as a young adult and remained with jazz throughout his life.

Illustration 2 [sync]. The syncopation in bar 3 (bracketed) of Potts' 'My Love is in America'

In my conversations with Tommie, I came upon an interesting example of the kind of ambiguity that can arise in ascribing jazz influences where there are none. A syncopation in bar three of a performance of ‘My Love is in America’ where the primary accent at the opening of the bar is omitted through the use of a rest, is shown in Illustration 2. Missing a main accent in this manner - so typical of jazz styles - is never found in mainstream fiddle tradition to the best of my knowledge. Although this point in the Potts Manuscripts (attempts at notating variation in his tunes by Potts himself using an idiosyncratic form of music notation) is marked as ‘Sp’ - which Potts himself identified for me as meaning ‘syncopation’ - far from regarding it as a jazz influence, Potts perceived it as something emanating from the tradition itself:
POTTS: Well, there’s nothing terribly radical or alarming about that because flute players do it. And when a flute player loses the breath you see them playing - and in the inhale there is the note; but they come back in, and that’s syncopation on the flute.
[Speech Transcriptions, p. 36 see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]

Potts is here referring to the traditional flute technique of breaking the line to take a breath in such a way as to phrase the melody in an individual and interesting manner. Even here, however, missing the main accent is not common, and a typical example of a normal approach may also be seen in Ó Súilleabháin 1984, p5.

As against this, I have written elsewhere (Ó Súilleabháin 1996) about a specific influence on Potts of a 1950’s pop song, ‘Mambo Italiano’ (which I will refer to again later in this essay) as performed by Rosemary Clooney. In this instance the central repeated motif of the chorus finds its way his setting of ‘My Love is in America’ where it serves to generates one of the variations he employs. The integration of the motif is so deep, however, that its position and nature only came to light following ‘fieldback’ analysis (see Ó Súilleabháin 1987). Furthermore, this single instance turned out to be the exception that proved the rule in terms of the influence of ‘classical music’ motifs over those from ‘jazz’ or ‘pop’. In the end, Potts employed an eclectic approach to whatever he heard as far as potential influences were concerned.

ECLECTICISM IN THE MUSIC OF TOMMIE POTTS

Potts’ conversation was dotted with references to performers, composers, and to musical genres and pieces from the two music traditions other than his own with which he had come in contact throughout his life - namely, western art music and popular music (including pre-war jazz). Examples of performers referred to included John McCormick, Gigli, Caruso, Tito Skipa, Paganini, César Franck, Bach, Beethoven, and Vivaldi. Genres mentioned included Neapolitan love songs, Hungarian gypsy music, Moore’s Melodies, and Gregorian chant, while pieces specified included Toselli’s Serenade, Chopin’s Funeral March, Liszt’s Rhapsody No. 2, White Christmas, Black Eyes, Little Girl, and the ‘ora pro nobis’ response to the ‘Litany of the Saints’ in the ‘Forty Hours Adoration of the Most Holy Sacrament’ of the Roman Catholic Liturgy. Potts’ musically uncomplicated viewpoint is of a world of music within which he is a musical creator operating of necessity, if not by choice, within the general cultural confines of his inherited tradition. In this way he says of Chopin:

I try to play his wondrous variation ‘running it’ into ‘The Pigeon on the Gate’ reel in G; and for me, it is in order!
[Potts Correspondence, item 12: see Ó Súilleabháin 1987, 447]
I have selected eight examples of such influences on Potts’ music. The original discussion on these examples may be seen in Chapter 8 of Ó Súilleabháin 1987.

**Liszt’s ‘Hungarian Rhapsody’ and ‘Rakish Paddy’**

The first revelation that Potts made to me concerning motivic borrowing in his music occurred during our meeting in May 1982 at Glenstal Abbey, Co Limerick. During a video taping session, he expressed a willingness to demonstrate to camera some musically detailed points about his “variations”. While playing his five-part setting of the reel ‘Rakish Paddy’, he paused on a number of occasions and indicated at one point a borrowing from Liszt.

POTTS: There’s a variation from the Liszt Rhapsody. [plays]

MOS: That’s fascinating! What do you mean “from Liszt's Rhapsody”? That’s a variation that you heard in one of Liszt’s Rhapsodies?

POTTS: Yeah!

MOS: You don’t know which one?

POTTS: I think its no. 2 or 11. It’s in this one [long pause as he tries to remember the opening theme of the Liszt Rhapsody in question]. That one [plays the opening theme in a free semi-metrical style]. It’s from that particular Rhapsody of Liszt’s. Again, the purists would shoot me for that!

[Speech Transcriptions, p.15 see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]

Potts was aware of my own experimentations with Irish traditional music, and it was plain from his reference to ‘the purists’ that as far as he was concerned I did not fit into that category. This may have been of significant advantage in his helping me to identify these ‘foreign’ elements in his music.

The borrowing in question here is from Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in C Minor - perhaps the composer’s most famous piece, and one which has been subjected to countless arrangements (including some by Liszt himself). At any rate, it is the secondary ‘link’ motif on the Vivace section (see Illustration 3) which Potts uses in his setting of ‘Rakish Paddy’. Illustration 4 shows the context in which the Liszt motif appears in the Potts setting. ‘Rakish Paddy’ is widely known in the mainstream tradition as a two-part reel (see O’Neill 1907, tune no.749; and Michell 1976, tune no. 63). As I have already mentioned, Potts played a five-part version, with the additional three
parts all in the nature of ‘variations’ on the second part. It is significant that
the first half of the ‘second part’ is used by Potts in all cases for the
development of variations, with the music moving back into phase with ‘the
model’ for the second half. I have noted elsewhere (Ó Súilleabháin 1996) this
practice of Potts where he moves in and out of ‘phase’ with the received
traditional version (‘the model’) of the tune. What is important here, however,
is that the Liszt motif provides the inspiration for the fourth part of Potts’
‘Rakish Paddy’ in that it occupies the opening four bars of that part (bars 49 -
52). Following those four bars, however, Potts does not move back into phase
with the traditional model more or less immediately as he does in the other
two additional parts (i.e. parts 3 and 5). Instead, he inserts an additional two-
bar motif (bars 53 - 54) that continues the style of the Liszt motif before
linking with the model as usual (bars 55 - 58). The result is a ten-bar part
instead of the usual eight-bar one. In stitching the Liszt motif into the
traditional reel (note ‘rhapsody’ from the Greek rhaps: stitch), Potts creates
an irregular part, echoing the dictionary definition of ‘rhapsody’ as ‘an
emotional irregular piece of music’. This disposition of Potts towards the
rhapsodic within 19th century romanticism is something that is discussed in
Ó Súilleabháin 1987 (Chapter 9). At this point, however, it leads naturally to
our next example of musical borrowing.

Illustration 3. Motif from the Vivace section of Liszt’s Rhapsody No 2 in C Minor
(used by Potts in ‘Rakish Paddy’)

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parts all in the nature of 'variations' on the second part. It is significant that the first half of the 'second part' is used by Potts in all cases for the development of variations, with the music moving back into phase with 'the model' for the second half. I have noted elsewhere (Ó Súilleabháin 1996) this practice of Potts where he moves in and out of 'phase' with the received traditional version ('the model') of the tune. What is important here, however, is that the Liszt motif provides the inspiration for the fourth part of Potts' 'Rakish Paddy' in that it occupies the opening four bars of that part (bars 49 - 52). Following those four bars, however, Potts does not move back into phase with the traditional model more or less immediately as he does in the other two additional parts (i.e. parts 3 and 5). Instead, he inserts an additional two-bar motif (bars 53 - 54) that continues the style of the Liszt motif before linking with the model as usual (bars 55 - 58). The result is a ten-bar part instead of the usual eight-bar one. In stitching the Liszt motif into the traditional reel (note 'rhapsody' from the Greek rhapto: stitch), Potts creates an irregular part, echoing the dictionary definition of 'rhapsody' as 'an emotional irregular piece of music'. This disposition of Potts towards the rhapsodic within 19th century romanticism is something that is discussed in Ó Súilleabháin 1987 (Chapter 9). At this point, however, it leads naturally to our next example of musical borrowing.

Illustration 4. The Liszt motif (Bars 49 - 52) from Hungarian Rhapsody No 2 as used by Potts in 'Rakish Paddy'

‘Black Eyes’ and ‘The Boys of Ballisodare’

‘Black Eyes’ is a popular traditional Hungarian gypsy piece which Potts heard on a 78 rpm recording at the age of nineteen (see Illustration 5). The Hungarian Rhapsodies mentioned in the previous example of musical borrowing are a direct result of Liszt’s interest in the music of the Hungarian gypsies, and Potts’ interest in this area also came up in early conversations which we had. On one of the several ‘fieldback’ tapes which I made in 1982 while we viewed a video tape recording of his music which I had made the previous day, the following information emerged:

MOS: Were you happy with the speed there as you played it ['The Boys of Balisodare']? You mentioned that you bungled some notes earlier on.
POTTS: Well, it's a bit too fast for all the things. In that there - and again the purists would shoot me - there's a light classical piece called 'Black Eyes'. You know that, don't you?

MOS: Play a bit there for me.

POTTS: [Plays 'Black Eyes' in free rhythm]. You know that [continues 'Black Eyes']? Now, 'The Boys of Balisodare'.

MOS: Would you usually put in 'Black Eyes' before you'd go into 'Balisodare' there?

POTTS: Oh no! I'd play the - so to speak - correct version, and then use that for a variation. Yeah, from 'Black Eyes'. That's going back fifty years or more.

MOS: Was it a violin piece or a song? How did you hear it?

POTTS: I think it was a light classical instrumental piece.

MOS: And you don't know who the composer was?

POTTS: No, No. Its probably one of those Hungarian gypsy things, you see. I'm attracted to that. See, with gypsy players, and I've heard them - again that's going back over fifty years - on those recordings. We don't hear them now.... You'd have to say that the fiddle was near the voice hearing some of these gypsy players, with this pulsating throbbing.

MOS: And who owned these records? Did you have a record player in your house?

POTTS: No. This was friend of mine - a lad I knocked around with at the time, and he had that interest, and it was the old gramophone.

MOS: You were young now at this stage?

POTTS: I was nineteen exactly when I heard it. That's fifty years ago.

MOS: And was he into that kind of music?

POTTS: No. He wasn't interested in Irish music at all. But his musical interest was good - in the light of what I'm telling you.

[Speech Transcriptions, pp. 26-27 see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]
In the 1982 video recording, Potts plays the reel ‘The Boys of Ballisodare’ in the form A A A, B B A. It is in the first half of the third A (see Ó Súilleabháin 1987: Illustration 61, p.285) that the ‘Black Eyes’ influence is to be found. As in the previous example (‘Rakish Paddy’), the piece moves back into phase with the traditional model in the second half of the part in precisely the same manner.

Illustration 6 shows that the ‘Black Eyes’ influence is not so much one of direct borrowing as of melodic outline. This is shown most strikingly in Potts’ use of the E to B Flat augmented fourth which appears in inversion as well as in it original form in the reel (bars 18 - 19, Illustration 6).

This deliberate use of outside material to provide both emotional inspiration and actual melodic material for further development of the traditional melodic line is again found in a striking way in out next example.

**Chopin and ‘The Pigeon on the Gate’**

In a letter written to me dated July 1985, Potts alerted me to a further example of musical borrowing:

Another experience which deeply impressed me was when I first heard a Chopin record. I always ‘liked’ to play an air and finish with a dance tune.

In one of his compositions (I don’t remember the title) which I understand, however, is written in G sharp major, I try to play his wondrous variations ‘running it’ into the ‘Pigeon on the Gate’ reel in G; and for me it is in order. [Potts’ Correspondence, item 12 see Ó Súilleabháín 1987]

Potts was unable to be more specific about the Chopin piece, and a search did not reveal the original source. For that matter, his reference to the piece being in G sharp major is an error since his introduction to ‘The Pigeon on the Gate’ is in a ‘minor mode’, and, at any rate, Chopin does not use the key of G sharp
major for any of his piano pieces. The four piano pieces in G sharp minor (a Polonaise, an Etude, a Prelude, and a Mazurka) are not related to the Potts piece. The important thing here, however, is his reference to both pieces being ‘in G’. This is his way of referring to the overall ‘modal feel’ of the music, and it is evident that by playing through that Chopin ‘variation’ which attracted him initially he is inspired musically to move into his own setting of ‘The Pigeon on the Gate’ which continues to explore the same mode. We will find further evidence of this approach in a later example of musical borrowing (again from Chopin) where we will be in a position to compare the original with the Potts development. As it stands, Illustration 7 show the introductory section in ‘free rhythm’ which precedes ‘The Pigeon on the Gate’ on the ‘Domestic Tapes’ (tape 2, track 2, item 6). The extent to which such borrowings have influenced Potts’ music may be seen in the opening bar of his ‘Yellow Tinker’ reel which uses the same downward phrase before moving into a typical traditional motif with the characteristic triplet (or ‘bow treble’ as it is sometimes termed by traditional fiddlers). Illustration 8 show the relevant bars from both reels.

Illustration 7. Potts’ ‘Pigeon on the Gate’ (opening bars) with an introduction in ‘free rhythm’ influenced by Chopin

Before leaving this example, I wish to point out one further connection that illustrates the degree to which different pieces are related in Potts’ mind. This is something that he mentions in the same letter quoted from earlier, and he is following on directly from his reference to ‘The Pigeon on the Gate’:

Another tune to be somewhat involved in this way is - as I try to play it - ‘The Bunch of Keys’ reel. Albeit very remote, there is some link between the two ‘thinkings’. [Potts Correspondence, item 12 see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]

The ‘link between the two thinkings’ is indeed remote if Potts’ ‘Pigeon on the Gate’ is compared directly with his ‘Bunch of Keys’. This link is revealed to some extent, however, in ‘Domestic Tape’ 1, track 1, item 7 where he plays the air ‘An Raibh tú ag an gCarraig?’ and moves from that into the reel ‘The
Bunch of Keys’ without a break. The opening of Potts’ setting of the air is given in Illustration 9, and the same motif that opens his ‘Yellow Tinker’ and his ‘Pigeon on the Gate’ (see Illustration 8) reveals itself (see the bracketed motif in Illustration 9). Interestingly enough, this motif occurs in the mainstream traditional setting of the air and is not an insert by Potts. Whether this motif simply ‘followed on’ from his Chopin-influenced introduction to ‘The Pigeon on the Gate’, or whether an actual motif in the Chopin original reminded him of a related motif within his own tradition, it is not possible to say without having the Chopin source. Nonetheless, a similar instance in another Chopin-inspired motif, which we deal with presently, indicates that the latter is more likely. At first glance, the equation of this motif in both reels and in the air may appear somewhat arbitrary, but bearing in mind the relationship noted by Potts himself between his settings of ‘The Pigeon on the Gate’ and ‘The Bunch of Keys’ along with the pairing by him of the air and the latter reel on the ‘Domestic Tapes’, the connection must appear justified. A final clue to the interconnection of such motifs with certain ‘modal feelings’ is given in his commentary on the initial draft of the ‘Catalogue of Audio-Visual Recordings’ (see Ó Súilleabháin 1987) that I gave him in July 1985. Having identified the reel as ‘The Bunch of Keys’, he remarks on the coupling of air and reel as follows:

In the key of the air, the said reel followed harmoniously from it.  
[Potts Commentary, p.11 see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]

We will have further occasion to return to the repetition of motifs in Potts’ music and the bearing that outside influences has had in certain instances.

Illustration 8. ‘The Yellow Tinker’ and ‘The Pigeon on the Gate’ - the opening bars of the Potts setting compared
Our next example follows on naturally from the previous one in that it is another instance of general ‘modal influence’ rather than of direct borrowing. It concerns a recording by the Irish tenor, John McCormick, of ‘Angels Guard Thee’ which has a violin obligato part played by Kreisler. Potts refers to it as follows:

POTTS: ...and now I don’t know, and I’ve no training in music, but it seems to me that Kreisler was playing [plays]. Then he goes down to whatever the note was and then McCormick is in [plays]. Now they’re all different notes.

MOS: But how did you incorporate this into the dance tune?

POTTS: It was just like [plays - see Illustration 10]. I didn’t play that tune in a long time.

MOS: What’s the name of it?

POTTS: ‘Andy McGahan’s Reel’.

MOS: By putting that introduction to it, does that set the mood for you Tommie?

---

Illustration 9. The opening of Potts’ setting of the air ‘An Raibh Tú ag an gCarraig’ with the possible Chopin-related motif bracketed.
POTTS: Yeah! And then, it also makes a piece of music out of it. The reel is limited, like not up above the first position, you know. It’s not that I have a chip on my shoulder, or inhibitions, but it’s a desire that’s in me, like -and what ‘ear hath not heard’! [Speech Transcriptions, p.24 see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]

Illustration 10. Introduction and opening bars of Potts’ setting of ‘Andy McGahan’s reel’

Illustration 11. Potts’ version of the introductory violin obligato (as played by Kleisler) to ‘Angels Guard Thee’

Potts’ memory of the vocal line of ‘Angels Guard Thee’ is accurate. His version of the introductory violin part played by Kreisler, however, is very different from the original (see Illustration 11). Nonetheless, his verbal description of the interplay of violin and voice in the above extract is exact, and there can be no doubt that his own version has developed over the years without him realising the extent to which the thematic material had changed. Illustration 9 shows the Kreisler inspired introduction in the context of the opening of ‘Andy McGahan’s Reel’ into which it leads. The repeated chordal motif which links into the reel by establishing the meter and tempo is a ploy also used by Potts to link the Thomas Moore song, ‘Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms’ with the slip-jig ‘The Rocky Road to Dublin’ (see Ó Súilleabháin 1987, 429). What is important here, important here, however, is that the introduction sets a particular mood for Potts which inspires him to move into his setting of ‘Andy McGahan’s Reel’. Whether this inspiration finds tangible form in motivic development is something that we cannot say. Certainly, Potts is not conscious of any, and it would serve little purpose to
point to incidental motivic overlapping since such overlapping would most likely be inevitable in two pieces operating around the same ‘modal structure’, or ‘key’ as Potts puts it.

‘Mambo Italiano’ and ‘My Love is in America’

Our next example, however, is one of direct musical borrowing where a theme from a 1951 pop song is incorporated into his setting of ‘My Love is in America’. Again, this information emerged during the recording of ‘fieldback’ tapes while viewing the 1982 video previously referred to. The following conversation took place immediately after viewing his performance of ‘My Love is in America’ that we had recorded the previous day:

POTTS: Well now, if I only played it like that, it’d be nice.

MOS: Now did we capture it there?

POTTS: Yeah! It’s just a matter of pointing out the variation.

MOS: You had put in some different ones from the recording there? [The Liffey Banks, 1972]. You have some more in stock?

POTTS: There were one or two more there. But there’s one in it there - and I don’t know whether we should let Siobhan [a student observer] hear this or not! It’s from an old jazz song a few years ago. Maybe it’s before your time. There was some Italian motif in it, and I can’t remember the words of it, but it was [ilits]. That was the beginning of that jazz thing, so it fitted into ‘My Love is in America’ [plays - see Illustration 12]. That's the jazz bit! [plays] [Speech Transcription, p.33 see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]

Of the five available Potts recordings of ‘My Love is in America’ (see Ó Súilleabháin 1987: Chapter 6, and Ó Súilleabháin 1996), all but one makes use of this jazz motif. Potts referred to the songs as ‘Hey Mambo’ but could supply no further details. His reference to the ‘Italian Motif’, however, helped to locate the recording in question. Entitled ‘Mambo Italiano’, it was recorded by Rosemary Clooney in 1951. Illustration 13 shows the opening chorus that contains the ‘Hey Mambo’ motif used by Potts.
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POTTS: Well now, if I only played it like that, it'd be nice.
MOS: Now did we capture it there?
POTTS: Yeah! It's just a matter of pointing out the variation.
MOS: You had put in some different ones from the recording there?

Illustration 12. Potts' demonstration of the 'Mambo Italiano' motif in his setting of 'My Love is in America'

Of the five available Potts recordings of 'My Love is in America' (see Ó Súilleabháin 1987: Chapter 6, and Ó Súilleabháin 1996), all but one makes use of this jazz motif. Potts referred to the songs as 'Hey Mambo' but could supply no further details. His reference to the 'Italian Motif', however, helped to locate the recording in question. Entitled 'Mambo Italiano', it was recorded by Rosemary Clooney in 1951. Illustration 13 shows the opening chorus that contains the 'Hey Mambo' motif used by Potts.

Illustration 13. The chorus from 'Mambo Italiano' as sung by Rosemary Clooney

An interesting detail may be seen in the way in which Potts' perception of the motif in question involves a move into a definite 'swing' which is not present in the original recording. This 'swing' comes through at the appropriate point in his 'My Love is in America', and Illustration 14 shows the context in which this occurs. There is, of course, the normal traditional 'swing' in all of Potts'
rhythms that is not reflected in my transcription of his pieces. Nevertheless, there is a definite shift in the extent of this ‘swing’ in some performances—precisely at the point where the ‘Mambo Italiano’ motif is used. This is something which I had included in my transcription without the foreknowledge of the ‘Mambo Italiano’ connection (see Ó Súilleabháin 1982 which was written six months before my first meeting with Potts and in which I notated the ‘swing’ as a dotted quaver, or eight note, followed by a semiquaver, or sixteenth note, rather than by the triplet I used in later transcriptions). This ‘variation’ therefore, has a particular rhythmic ‘feel’ that makes it stand out from the others and thus betray its origins in the ‘Mambo Italiano’ original motif, even though Potts himself was unaware of this. He was, however, aware of the ‘taboo’ aspect of mixing the ‘modern’ with the ‘traditional’ as was shown in his brief comment which occurred immediately after the ‘fieldback’ revelation:

POTTS: Well, I don’t think I should have said that really. I’ll be shot down altogether. [Speech Transcriptions, p.13 see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]

Potts’ enjoyment of playing the secret role of ‘enfant terrible’ is obvious here, and this reflects similar comments already quoted in this essay where he refers to ‘the purists’.

Ex. 1 opening of ‘Mambo Italiano’ chorus (see Illustration 13)

Hey Mam-bo! Mam-bo I-tal-i-a-no, Hey Mam-bo!

Ex. 2 Potts’ demonstration of the ‘Mambo Italiano’ motif (Illustration 12)

etc.

Ex. 3 Potts’ ‘My Love is in America’ 1 (bars 33 - 35)

etc.

Illustration 14. The change in rhythmic swing in the ‘Mambo Italiano’ motif from the original (ex. 1) through Potts’ demonstration (ex. 2) and in Potts’ ‘My Love is in America’

A final point to note in this example is the connection between moving in and out of phase with the traditional model already noted in the first two instances of borrowing discussed in this chapter. In this instance, once again the borrowed ‘Mambo Italiano’ motif coincides with an ‘out-of-phase’ segment, and is followed immediately by the customary moving back into phase with the model.
Gigli’, Neapolitan Folksong, and ‘New’ Notes

We have already seen how at least one recording by John McCormack influences Potts’ music, but there are further examples of similar influences as the following extract from our conversations demonstrates:

POTTS: But I’ll give you an instance now of taste. I heard James Galway playing this recently….. I forgot the name of it but it’s an Italian thing… and I heard Gigli sing this with a nice orchestral accompaniment. It’s just to draw your attention to the ending in Gigli’s case and the ending in Galway’s. I don’t play this thing very often – it’s like the jazz [plays]. Now you hear the ending to that. Now all Jim Galway does is [plays]. Wasn’t that a lovely end?

MOS: Right. But I can’t follow it completely because you understand that in a way that I don’t. It’s a complex piece.

POTTS: And I’ve also some of my own thing into it.

MOS: It’s almost like an air then. What is it?

POTTS: Its like Toselli’s Serenade. Its one of the Nocturnes or Italian things – and another one I heard then was sung by Gigli. It’s a Neapolitan folksong and it appealed to me – like you could say there was a similarity between the two musics… I don’t play this every day of the week, but…. [plays: see Illustration 15]

MOS: Now tell me. Are there not pieces in those songs that you were able to work into the airs, because when you play those songs you bring in some of your own as well?

POTTS: Well I think I’ve improved on the Italian composition, putting it modestly! [Speech Transcriptions, pp10-11, see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]

What is important here is the extent to which the particular idiom displayed in Potts’ ‘Gigli-inspired’ performance (Illustration 15) permeates so much of his musical expression. I have marked particular motifs in Illustration 15, which appear in several of Potts’ airs. One of these, ‘The Dear Irish Boy’ appears on ‘The Liffey Banks’ recording (1972, side 2, track 8) and the sleeve note by Seamus Ennis is relevant here:

‘The Dear Irish Boy’: In this well-loved old air the technique and mood-vagaries of Tommy Potts reach his peak in slow-air playing. It will be noticed that where a phrase of the basic melody occurs plainly in its brevity it does not receive the
prominence of its value as a phrase and some would therefore maintain that his music could be fully appreciated only through an acquired taste. To my mind his is away over some of our heads and has achieved something very worthwhile. This item is the clearest indication of that. (Ennis 1972)

Illustration 15. Potts' version of a 'Neapolitan Folksong' as sung by Gigli (with borrowed motifs bracketed)

Ennis’ reference to the need for “an acquired taste” is a clear indication that he (as a traditional piper of great authority) experienced this air as being, at least to some extent, ‘outside’ of the tradition. Certainly he would have been very familiar with the various traditional settings of this air, which was always a favourite among pipers, and he had obvious difficulty in relating the Potts setting to the traditional model. Illustration 16 show the opening the ‘The Dear Irish Boy’ as Potts plays it on the ‘Domestic Tapes’, and Illustration 16 shows
Illustration 16. The opening of Potts’ ‘The Dear Irish Boy’
There is, however, a second motif in the ‘Neapolitan Folksong’ that bears examination, and Illustration 18 shows a selection of possibly related motifs in other pieces. I have demonstrated elsewhere (Ó Súilleabháin 1987, Chapter 7) how aspects of the overt ‘emotive meaning’ in Potts’ music is directly linked to specific motifs and melodic contours of a ‘non-traditional’ kind, and that these are in turn traceable to pieces of music outside of the tradition.

Before leaving this example, however, I wish to point out that it is not just the contour or intervallic structure of these motifs which mark them apart: the matter of context is most important. For example, in the case of the first
‘Neapolitan’ motif as show in illustration 17, I have already pointed out that its occurrence in Potts’ ‘An Raibh tú ag an gCarraig?’ is generally in keeping with a similar motif in the mainstream tradition. As against that, the type of motivic development shown in the case of the second ‘Neapolitan’ motif (Illustration 18) introduces interval combinations that are not found in the tradition. In a sense, what we have here is a slowed-up version of the type of motivic usage found in his dance tunes.

Ex. 1 Potts' 'Neapolitan Folksong' (Illustration 15, Line 4 / 5)

Ex. 2 Potts' 'The Dear Irish Boy' (Illustration 16, Lines 1 and 6)

Ex. 3 Potts' 'Toss the Feathers' 1, Bar 21

Ex. 4 Potts' 'My Love is in America' 1, Bars 11 / 12

Ex. 5 Pott's 'Yellow Tinker', Bars 21 / 22

Illustration 18. A second motif from Potts' 'Neapolitan Folksong' with some related motifs in other pieces

A slight digression may serve to clarify this point further. In the 1982 video tape, Potts in talking about the ‘variations’ in his setting of the reel ‘Rakish Paddy’ referred to “those ‘new’ notes not so much in our music at all”. Illustration 19 shows the musical context within which this comment occurred, and Illustration 20 compares the first eight bars of Potts’ ‘Rakish
Paddy’ with the traditional model (as played by him). Potts’ reference to ‘new’ notes, however, must not be taken to refer to specific notes in the examples given. Illustration 20 shows the complex manner in which Potts keeps contact with the model, and some of these contact points have been indicated in the illustration for the first six bars. The synchronisation of Potts’ setting with the model in the final two bars is a further example of phasing process discussed in Ó Súilleabháin (1987, Chapter 6). There are, however,
particular notes which Potts uses to open out the melodic line in such a manner as to create an untraditional sweep to the line, and these may be the ‘new’ notes to which he refers. An example of this would be note ‘F’ in Bar 1 (Illustration 20: Potts’ setting) that occurs in the context of an F major triad shape. A further example is the B flat in bar 2 which again occurs within a triadic pattern, this time B flat minor. This may appear to be imposing harmonic concepts on the music, but a later discussion on ‘harmonic thought’ within Potts’ musical creativity will support the use of such terminology.

Illustration 20. The first eight bars of Potts’ ‘Rakish Paddy’ compared with the traditional model

The Litany of the Saints and ‘The Morning Dew’

With that digression into ‘new’ notes, we leave our ‘Neapolitan Folksong’ example with its evocative motifs and turn to the quieter work of Gregorian chant for further instance of outside influence at work within Potts’ music.

There are several instances of references to “monks chanting” and “ecclesiastical music” in Potts’ speech (Ó Súilleabháin 1987, Chapter 7). A further reference is found in the letter that forms part of the introduction to his manuscripts:

It is having in some way a sense of infinity, utterly serene and humble of course and this is to be found in some of the greatest
music: in some of Bach and Cesar Franck, for example, or of Beethoven of the last quartets.... You find it in the music of the Mass, when the “alleluia” traces its’ pattern of sound on the last vowel saying nothing yet saying everything. [Potts MSS, p.V see Ó Súilleabháín 1987]

This letter was written to the piper Paddy Maloney in 1972. It was, however, in a letter to me dates July 1985, responding to several specific queries concerning his music that the following information emerged:

As a young boy, my father (R.I.P) often brought me to church and I was always attentive to the various ceremonies performed there. In those days, for instance, there was the Confraternity or Sodality (of the Sacred Heart) which took place monthly. It was always well attended; some members wore ecclesiastical vestments and were most proficient in their chant – Latin responses as, for instance in the Litany of the Saints: this was always with organ and choir accompaniment. I will never forget this experience. In fact, Micheál, a variation of mine in the ‘Morning Dew’ reel is from the chanting: ora-pro-nobis and ora-te-pro-nobis of the above. [Potts Correspondence, item 12 see Ó Súilleabháín 1987].

Having located the ‘Litany of the Saints’ in question (see Illustration 22) I asked him to mark that part of the reel as contained in his own manuscripts (page 51) which had been influenced by the chant. His response indicated that the influence might be detected at the opening of the third part, and also that the additional responses, ‘parce nobis Domine’ and ‘te rogamus audite’, had interested him musically. Illustration 21 show the part of the manuscript marked by Potts in response to my query, while Illustration 23 is a transcription of the appropriate section of the piece as performed by him on the ‘Domestic Tapes’. The fascinating thing about this example is that what appears to be a coincidental synchronisation of motifs between his setting and the chant, is identified by him as something of seminal importance. Illustration 24 shows the only possible motivic relationship in question between the chant response and that segment marked by Potts in his manuscripts. It should be noted from Illustration 22 that while he brackets a two-bar stretch he also places an X mark over the stave in such a way as to cover five notes. These are also the notes that correspond with the –ora-pro-nobis response.
Illustration 21. Pott’s ‘Morning Dew’ – the manuscript marking indicating the section influenced by ‘The Litany of the Saints’ (Ó Suilleabháin 1987, p.318)
Illustration 22. ‘The Litany of the Saints’ with the responses marked from The Holy Ghost Hymnal 1926, pp134-156 (Ó Súilleabháin 1987, p.317)
Furthermore, this five-note segment is precisely the point in the two-bar stretch marked by Potts that deviated from the traditional model before moving back into phase with it in the manner noted in earlier examples. The central role played by the ‘ora pro nobis’ motif in moving out phase with the model is also shown in Illustration 24. The connection between this motif and ‘The Morning Dew’ reel is made even more obscure by the fact that it appears in tonality other than that of the reel. That is to say, if the notes of the motif had occurred in the reel as F sharp, E, F sharp, G, rather than B, A, B, C, then the connection would be more easily discernable — although only if this had been pointed out beforehand. All of this information is a further indication that Potts, in reaching out for new motifs and ideas, is able to take his own meaning out of borrowed material in such a way as to integrate it into his settings at a deep level of musical consciousness.

Illustration 23. Potts’ ‘Morning Dew’ (third part) as performed on the domestic tapes

Illustration 24. The ‘ora pro nobis’ motif in Potts’ ‘Morning Dew’ shown here in the context of ‘phasing’

**Chopin’s ‘Funeral March’ and ‘Toss the Feathers’**

Our final example is an important one in that it brings together several modes of influence on Potts’ musical thought. It concerns a connection between his setting of the reel ‘Toss the Feathers’ and the ‘March Funèbre’ slow movement of Chopin’s Second Piano Sonata in B flat minor (opus 35).
POTTS: There’s another one there. It’s from Chopin’s ‘Funeral March’ [plays slow introduction into reel – see Illustration 25] ‘Toss the Feathers’! It’s from Chopin’s ‘Funeral March’ – so God help me!

MOS: 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 is – I ask myself the question like your one there [hesitates] I don’t think it’s conceited of me, but now it did strike me that there was some affinity between myself and Chopin. Because you see… in the band, in the full military band, like where the silver trumpets – and there’s one part in it, the trumpets, just the trumpets, play [plays - see Illustration 26 for speech/music interplay].

[Speech Transcriptions, p.13 see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]

"There's another one there: it's from Chopin's 'Funeral March'.

Illustration 25. Potts' introduction (influenced by Chopin's Funeral March) to his setting of 'Toss the Feathers'
"And there's one part in it where the trumpets, just the trumpets, play:"

(ex. 1)

"and then"

(ex. 2)

reel tempo (ex. 3)

"and that's it"

’Toss the Feathers’

Illustration 26. Potts’ demonstration of a motivic overlap between his setting of ‘Toss the Feathers’ and Chopin’s ‘Funeral March’

Illustration 27. The opening of the Lento movement (Marche Funebre) from Chopin’s Piano Concerto No 2 in B flat minor (op.35) (Ó Súilleabháin 1987, p.325)
There are two separate points here: the slow introduction to ‘Toss the Feathers’ (Illustration 25) and the motivic connection within the reel itself (Illustration 26). I will deal with the latter first by pointing out that Example 1 in Illustration 26 is an obvious reference by Potts to the Chopin motif in bars 7 and 8 of the ‘Funeral March’ (see Illustration 27), while Example 2 (Illustration 26), is Potts’ version of the main theme (see bars 3 and 4 of Illustration 27). The connection between the motif which he plays from the reel (Example 3, Illustration 26) and the main theme of Chopin’s piece is somewhat clearer when that motif is examined in its full context within the actual performance (see Ó Súilleabháin 1987, Music Transcriptions 6, 7, 8 and 9, pp. 398-407). The motif occurs at the opening of the turn (or second part, for example, bars 22 and 23 of ‘Toss the Feathers 2, Transcription 7, in Ó Súilleabháin 1987, 401) and in all cases it moves up to an F sharp or F natural in the second bar of the motif. Illustration 28 shows the connection, therefore, between the Chopin motif and the equivalent motif in Potts’ ‘Toss the Feathers’ (bar 24). The same illustration also shows the equivalent bar in five other setting of the reel as published by various collectors from O’Neill to Breathnach (see Illustration 18-22 in Ó Súilleabháin 1987 for full versions).

It is evident from Illustration 28, therefore, that Potts is referring here to a motivic overlap rather than a motivic borrowing or influence. How can he justify such a connection if this particular motif is, in fact, an essential ‘marker motif’ in all traditional settings of the reel examined? The answer to this question may be found in the other aspect of the Chopin motivic involvement mentioned above – the non-metrical introduction to the reel shown in Illustration 25, and it is to this that we now turn.
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Apart from the introduction noted in Illustration 25 (which arose out of our conversations: see Speech Transcriptions, p.13) two of the occurrences of Potts’ ‘Toss the Feathers’ on the ‘Domestic Tapes’ use brief introductions or link passages. The two non-metrical passages in question are shown in Illustration 29, and a comparison of these examples in Illustration 25 shows that the common link is to be found in the harmonic motif: \[\text{Illustration 29. A non-metrical introduction (ex. 1) and link passage (ex. 2) in two performances of Potts’ ‘Toss the Feathers’ which are influenced by the Chopin ‘Funeral’ motif} \]

At first hearing, the connection between the slow introduction in Illustration 25 and Chopin’s piece (Illustration 27) seems somewhat obscure. The harmonic link between the three introductions, however gives us a vital clue to the way Potts’ mind operates in this instance. It was not so much the melodic or rhythmic dimensions of the Chopin piece, which impresses themselves on Potts, but the harmonic ingredients. An examination of the harmonic structure of the ‘Funeral March’ shows that for the first fourteen bars (which cover the main theme, bars 3 to 6, and its subsidiary motif, bars 7 to 8 – both of which are mirrored by Potts: see Illustration 26, examples 1 and 2) the harmony oscillates between an open B flat chord (which rapidly acquires a B flat minor association with the introduction of D flat chord in the melody in bar 3, beat 4) and a chord on D flat giving the second inversion of G flat major. The important pivotal movement of the F to G flat with every harmonic shift is reflected in Chopin’s chordal texture in that this is the only note doubled. The morbid, hypnotic effect of this harmonic scheme is vital to the piece, and Illustration 30 shows how Potts has focussed on this harmonic element in his own music. In order to demonstrate the connection more clearly, I have transposed the Chopin extract into D minor.

Apart from the obvious influence in the non-metrical example 2 of Illustration 30, there is an interesting carry-over of the motif – this time in melodic form – in the opening bar of the reel. It is at this point that we can refer back to our earlier question – how can Potts justify the making of such a connection if the
motif in question is already strongly and consistently present in all the various traditional settings of the reel?

Ex. 1 Chopin (bars 1 - 3, transposed)

Ex. 2 Potts (see opening of Illustration 25)

Ex. 3 Potts (opening of 'Toss the Feathers'): see Illustration 25

Illustration 30. A harmonic-motif in Chopin's 'Funeral March' (op.35) as found in Potts' 'Toss the Feathers'

Some vital clues point us to the answer. Every time the melodic form of the harmonic motif occurs in the reel, Potts invariably moves into a non-metrical 3/2 metrical format, and in at least one occurrence of the motivic overlap (Illustration 26) in every performance he also moves into 3/2 meter. In Ó Súilleabháin 1987 (Chapter 4) I demonstrated how these 3/2 time bars play a vital role in the rhythmic alteration process. We have now discovered that these rhythmic alterations are directly linked to an indirect borrowing from Chopin, on the one hand, and to a perceived motivic overlap on the other. Indeed, we have seen earlier in this essay how in no less than four instances, Potts’ innovative melodic alteration could be directly linked to outside borrowing. In the present case, the connection is obviously much deeper, and the indications must lead us to the conclusion that 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. Potts himself is unaware of the surface details of this influence within the reel. His openness to outside influences allows him to take his own meaning from what in this instance is a Chopin ‘Funeral March’ – but for him the important influence is one of mood rather than of motif.
When I pressed him further for a more detailed explanation of how the Chopin piece affected his own playing, his response was particularly revealing – not just because of his inability to pinpoint the precise musical manifestation of this influence, but because of his description of the ‘moment of translation’ in his works: “and then, in this desire I have for music, I make some music for myself”. Here we feel that we have approached the point where the outside influences become ‘translated’ into his own musical system in the deepest possible manner.

POTTS: Being untrained, I’m so limited. And we talked about sound. And I like monks chanting and sad things. I like minor keys. And as you were putting that personally to me like that, it wouldn’t be so much, like, Chopin or that. But I loved Chopin’s ‘Funeral March’ you see. And….the only way I can play it – it may be in that key, on the piano, per Chopin’s composition in D minor – but if not it doesn’t matter, see. But ‘Toss the Feathers’ for me is in D minor. And then in this desire I have for music, I make some music for myself. The thing I loved in that composition of Chopin’s ‘Funeral March’, and then it blended into my own.

[Speech Transcriptions, p.13 see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]

HARMONIC THROUGH AND POTTS’ MUSICAL PROCESS

It may well surprise us that a musician like Potts, operating as he did out of a monophonic non-harmonic tradition, should focus on harmony in the manner just described in the Chopin examples, but there are additional indications which must convince us of the importance of harmonic thought in his musical process. One of these came through in a conversation in January 1986:

POTTS: Like, in respect of ‘Julia Delaney’, it’s only in the last three of four months that I’ve been ending off the part which I think is in a D minor key… now I use two notes – I use F natural and E. Now the reason I do that is, like – no, it’s D and E – it would be for – it could be for the harp or the piano, in the appropriate chord for the melody. And in that chord, like, as you know, D and E is a discord – but in that lovely wondrous sense – it makes me cry.

[Speech Transcriptions, p.45 see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]

In another part of the same conversation, he attempts a further explanation of how he perceives his music “chordwise”:

POTTS: There were two instruments that I would have an interest in and that would be the piano and the harp. Because even I tried to do that myself, like say, in ‘Julia Delaney’ [whistles softly]:

Now, these two notes are so near each other, the F and the E, like that in harmony in respects of the F, it’s be a D minor chord on the piano and then in the whole – in the context chordwise [hesitates] chordwise resultant tone, notes E and D can be made, you know.

[Speech Transcriptions, p. 53 see Ó Súilleabháín 1987]

His confusion in the last two quotation from his speech as to whether he is dealing with an F/E or an E/D relationship would indicate that what he is attempting to describe is essentially a minor chord of the ninth as follows:

\[ \text{It is the harmonic tension between the E and D on the one hand, and between the D and F in the other which characterised this chord. In his case, however, what he perceives as a harmonic colour/mood/feeling (“I’m shrivelled”, Speech Transcriptions, p. 54) becomes translated into his perception of a melodic equivalent (“and then in this desire I have for music, I make some music for myself” – as quoted above).} \]

The importance of the piano as a creative aid in all of this emerges both in his conversation and in the ‘Domestic Tapes’.

POTTS: And then that in turn, you see, I got quite a lot of what I’ve done or what I’m doing from going over to my piano

[Speech Transcriptions, p.53 see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]

On the ‘Domestic Tapes’, there are four instances of Potts experimenting at the piano (see Potts’ Catalogue 7/10, 8/13, 9/22,23 and 14/2). His piano playing is very hesitant, but nonetheless certain themes and harmonic ideas emerge clearly. Illustration 31 shows relevant extracts from three of these. Example 1 was clearly identified for me by Potts as being related to his setting of ‘Julia Delaney’, and in fact, the opening phrase of this example corresponds with the opening of the reel. While the chords used do not include a tonic ninth, the harmonic colouring in bars 3 and 4 (a first inversion of the super tonic diminished, and dominant minor-ninth) includes the note E. Examples 2(a) and 2(b) are typical melodic motifs used by him, with the latter showing his interest in the major/minor harmonic dichotomy which finds such effective expression in his use of F sharp and F natural as melodic variable notes in such pieces as his setting of ‘My Love is in America’iv. Example 2(c) has a similar harmonic scheme to Example 1, and Example 3 is identified by Potts himself in his annotations to my catalogue as “possibly towards a variation to the ‘Morning Dew’ reel”.

Apart from what these examples tell us about the musical intelligence at work within Potts’ music, what else can we learn from this case study? Firstly, it can hardly be a coincidence that the Irish composer Seán Ó Riada (1930-1971) created his innovatory band, Ceoltóirí Chualainn, at more or less the same time that Tommie Potts was experimenting with his received tradition. Both Potts and Ó Riada were attempting to create what Ó Riada called ‘a native Irish arts music’ (Ó Súilleabháin 2004 [a]). This is not how Potts...

Illustration 31. Extracts from Potts’ piano playing on the domestic tapes. Details of the Catalogue referred to may be found in Ó Súilleabháin 1987

POTTS, Ó RIADA, AND THE SEARCH FOR AN IRISH MUSICAL IDENTITY

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Ó Riada created a new concert format of the music through the organisation of extended ‘arrangements’ of traditional tunes. The fact that he organised these in such a manner as to showcase the individual styles and voices of his musicians only serves to prove the point that the creative process lay in the hand of the performer. Furthermore, because Ó Riada choose to work in ensemble, he was constrained in terms of the received agreed structural pattern of the ‘round’ and its eight bar ‘parts’. Potts, on the other hand, was working as a solo musician. In this, he was operating in at the heart of the tradition itself, without any constraint. With no obligation to synchronise with anyone else, and embodying the creative essence of the tradition within his hands, it is in a sense not surprising that he would subvert the tradition in a manner not open to Ó Riada to accomplish. On the contrary, part of Ó Riada’s mission was to honour tradition by holding it up to scrutiny before new audiences. As against that, Potts was operating in private (hence his ‘Domestic Tapes’ marked by him as “experimental” in the 1950s), with the innovatory aspects of his music known only to a relatively small number of aficionados, mainly in the Dublin circle of the traditional music community. The prime collector of traditional music of the time, Breandán Breathnach, was disinterested in that aspect of Potts’ creativity, and sought instead to highlight the mainstream repertoire that Potts had inherited from his father and from others. While Ó Riada’s ensemble version of traditional music was warmly received by the traditional music community, Potts’ music has continued to perplex listeners even up to the time of this writing. For
example, Tony McMahon in his shared Keynote Address to the Crossroads Conference in 1996 hailed Potts as the epitome of tradition, choosing to invest a greater weighting to that side of Potts’s music than to the innovation side:

He was one of the great innovators, but to define his art in terms of the innovation he brought to a small part of his repertoire is to misunderstand the main message on [sic] his music… [Mac Mahon 1996,112 – 120]

Potts would undoubtedly have disagreed. For him, the extension of his received tradition into new forms was the essence of his artistic journey.

Another interesting contrast between Ó Riada and Potts is to be found in Ó Riada’s disdain for some aspects of the classical music tradition as quoted in White (1998:125-150) from an interview with Ó Riada by Charles Acton about a year before the composer’s death:

Ó Riada’s disdain for the European tradition of art music is particularly shrill:
“Beethoven couldn't write a tune to save his life and most of the European composers likewise. And when they did they were but cheap vulgar tunes”. (Acton in ibid., p.199)

Acton also remarks in this interview (published in Eire-Ireland in 1971, the year of Ó Riada’s death), as White points out, that:

Nomos 2 can be considered a young composer’s farewell to the European tradition of his formal training via a pessimistic text from Sophocles.

White furthermore remarks that this ‘farewell to classical tradition’ reading of Nomos 2 was “apparently authorised by Ó Riada himself”.

Potts, on the other hand, was attempting to embrace aspects of the classical tradition. For him the ‘great composers’ were in a sense musical ‘saints’. In rehearsing a litany of them within his own musical borrowings and inspirations, Potts was aspiring to musical sainthood himself. However, in moving towards classical tradition, he felt obliged to position traditional music from what might be viewed as a post-colonial standpoint. We have already quoted from this letter written by Potts, but it bears repetition here:

First of all folk music (with ballads) is just as it says the music of the ‘people’ i.e. the peasantry, the masses or the common people - whichever you like - I do not say this in a derogatory sense, but it is a primitive form and at that, it is within the capacity of the ‘people’ to appreciate and understand. This because, generally speaking, the
'people' have no training in the finer points and theory of music. [Potts MSS, p.V see Ó Súilleabháin 1987]

This dis-ease that Potts felt with the tradition is quite obviously one which he picked up from “the intellectual sphere” as he put it himself (see the earlier quotation). Whatever the reason, it met with a deep desire within him to ‘develop’ his received tradition “to symphony heights” (earlier quotation). This desire was ignited and confirmed through his haphazard exposure to classical music in his late teens (through the 78 rpm recordings of a friend: see Ó Súilleabháin 1987 and throughout his life (marching band arrangements, radio, cinema, and liturgical settings among others). The effect upon Potts was not to cause him to leave down his inherited tradition and pick up on a classical repertoire. Instead, for a variety of complex musical, historical, and social reasons, he remained with his tradition and faced the cultural conflict within himself. The extraordinary result manifested itself in his innovative fiddle style and improvisatory process.

There is an essential difference between Potts and Ó Riada: while Potts was journeying out from the ground of traditional music, Ó Riada was journeying into that same ground. I have suggested elsewhere that Ó Riada was also involved in another ‘criss-cross’ movement where I compare his movement in the 1960s towards the non-literate oral-tradition world of Irish indigenous tradition to the movement by the avant garde German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen towards a world of aleatoric composition with his orchestral musicians where he attempts to bypass musical literacy (Ó Súilleabháin 2004 [a]).

Within the world of Irish traditional music, however, while Potts embarked upon his journey alone with his fiddle in hand, Ó Riada formed a band of traditional musicians to complete his task. The essential success or failure of both of their efforts is still a matter of contention. Ó Riada felt he had taken his ensemble idea ‘as far as it would go’. Potts’ music was so idiosyncratic as to be unplayable in an ensemble context. Furthermore, he did not generate any immediate successors.

What does this criss-crossing of cultural worlds tell us about music and identity in Ireland during the second half of the 20th century? If Heaney speaks of a ‘redress of poetry’ within English language tradition (Heaney 1995), can we view Potts and Ó Riada as being involved in some way in ‘a redress of music’? What came up and out of music in Ireland during that period that made traditional music so central to a resurrection of an Irish psyche? Has some imbalance been redressed? Certainly, the ‘mainstreaming’ of traditional music in Ireland that has occurred since 1950 is significant - in media, in education, in cultural institutions. An international flowering of Irishness has been carried across the world on a stream of sound which at times seems like the very earth of Ireland singing. Because it has come out of
the ‘agriculture’ of Irishness, the ground is the sound. Furthermore, because of this local grounding, whatever redress of music has been in process has landed on the beat of the turning process of cultural globalisation (see Ó Súilleabháin 2004 [b] and Ó Súilleabháin 2004 [c]).

In all of this it is important to realise that the redress of one imbalance may highlight yet another. This is central to an important growing debate in Ireland at this time concerning the musical voice of Ireland within a contemporary classical music context (White 1998, Cox and Klein 2003). Ó Riada has a pivotal role in that debate - perhaps as much to contextualise what he is not as much as what he is. Potts, on the other hand, because his creativity resides within the domain of oral-tradition, is seen – if indeed he is seen at all – as outside the debate. Until the idea of ‘contemporary music’ in Ireland is widened to include Irish traditional music – as it should be – any attempted understanding of music and contemporary identity in Ireland can only fly on one wing.

Nonetheless, both Potts and O Riada, may yet be seen to have been prophetic of a process which released Irish traditional music into a new world on its own terms. Ó Riada’s awareness of global music traditions was indeed prophetic of the decades that followed his death. The seeds of his vision, while they may not have rested within his compositional activity within his own lifetime, may yet find a surprising fruitfulness carried by the wind of succeeding generations. With regard to his search for a ‘native Irish art music’, his awareness in the final years of his life of Potts’ music may have been an indication to him that the indigenous tradition was itself striving to generate out of its own organic dynamic a movement towards those very fields of intrinsic innovation which he envisioned.

In the three decades since his death, the hidden world of Potts has become more apparent, and new generations of traditional players firmly grounded in tradition have continued the search for inventiveness beyond the boundaries of the received tradition itself - Máirtín O’Connor, Eileen Ivers, Mel Mercier, Martin Hayes, and Niall Keegan are just some of increasing number of names which spring to mind. Many traditional musicians on the innovative side of the spectrum cite Potts as a significant influence on their musical style - not least Martin Hayes.

Again, we might note here that the release of the recording, Ó Riada’s Farewell in 1972 coincided with Potts’ one and only recording release, The Liffey Banks. Indeed, both were issued by Claddagh Records, and both were released at the same press event in Dublin. This synchronic intersection of Ó Riada’s and Potts’ music is indeed an interesting one. While the Ó Riada legacy within the traditional music community led directly to the encouragement of new ensemble forms of traditional music, the Potts legacy lay like a prophetic utterance of a desire within the traditional creative process itself to stretch the
limits of the received tradition. Ó Riada’s search for ‘a native Irish art music’ may not in the end have sufficiently satisfied his own hunger for personal artistic expression, but in combination with a similar desire as enshrined within Potts’ music, both Ó Riada and Potts contributed something essential to the release of that music into a renaissance of international dimensions.

Works Cited


Clooney, Rosemary (1954) *Mambo Italiano*, Columbia Records, RHCO 33234


End Notes:

i A fieldwork technique where a recording is made of the response of the musician to a previously made filed tape of his own playing. In this case, ‘fieldback’ consisted of an audio recording of Potts and I viewing a video tape I had made of his playing the previous day. I encouraged him to have his fiddle to hand, and on occasion I paused the video tape to allow him to comment (and play as a further means of elucidation) on some aspect of his music. ‘Fieldback’ was the key that allowed Potts to unlock the information concerning his musical borrowing.

ii Defined in O Suilleabhain 1987:82 and 135 as: “Certain motifs which tend to remain unchanged, or to undergo little change, in the various settings of a piece in the tradition”.

iii See O Suilleabhain 1996: 175 –199 for details of the concept of ‘alteration’ as distinct from ‘variation’ and ‘deviation’.

iv See Ó Súileabháin 1996:175 –199 for a detailed analysis of this piece.
"GEOGRAPHIES OF MOVEMENT" i

J’aime Morrison-Petronio

What is your body now if not a famine road?
Eavan Boland

Roads have always held a particular fascination for me. Perhaps it is because they hold the promise of movement, travel and escape. Certain roads remain embedded in my memory: the roads off the bluffs of Santa Cruz where I was inspired to choreograph my first dance; Tioga Road in the Sierra Mountains of California where I drove as a 20 year old and watched shooting stars from my VW; and the Wicklow mountain roads I explored as a student hoping to commune with the literary spirits of Samuel Beckett, J. M. Synge and James Joyce. Roads run deep - they inscribe themselves in us. Roads are invested with historic, economic, political and spiritual significance. They can suggest motion or enact a boundary, provide a connection between distant places, beckon a journey without end or disguise a secret route. This essay considers roads as vital cultural spaces that give rise to scenes of performance and which at times might be seen as performances themselves. Roads direct and redirect our movements and sometimes play with our perceptions of reality and illusion, shifting our perspective as they change direction. Like the ‘perils of Dublin pavements’ that confronted Bloom as he headed through the city’s streets, roads are gestures, intersecting with our bodies and our thoughts as we negotiate the uncertainties of the ground (Gilbert 1955, 237). Rather than view Irish roads as inert or static cultural tracts, I see them as conduits for movement and memory operating within the larger spatial history of Ireland and in conjunction with a repertoire of cultural practices.

Pictures of Irish roads register traces of embodiment (or disembodiment), and so offer alternate routes for accessing those areas of cultural experience that may seem recalcitrant to historical inquiry. When we study bodily or spatial histories, subjects that can elude traditional methods of historical analysis, we must look for traces of the past in images, in words, and in the broader repertoire of embodied cultural practices. Performance theorist Joseph Roach suggests that such a project must attend to ‘counter memories’ or ‘the disparities between history as it is discursively transmitted and memory as it is publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences’ (Roach 1996, 26).

Roads run at the intersection between history and memory because they offer material evidence of movement: cracked concrete, pot holes, signage, mile markers, lane dividers, landmarks - while they also reference a wide range of embodied practices and behaviors: road bowling, road racing, cycling, dancing, walking, marching, praying, hitchhiking, smuggling. What do images of roads tell us about cultural, social and political conceptualizations.

of space: about how space is ordered, controlled, measured and moved through. What do images reveal or conceal about the politics of movement? Perhaps roads make legible what and who has past by and passed on, referencing bodies that no longer exist. In this sense roads are haunted spaces of kinetic memory that bear the traces of many forms of movement – those of exile and homecoming, invasion and insurrection, pilgrimage and performance.

Tim Robinson, mapmaker and geographer of the west of Ireland, begins his study of Inis Mór by describing his own ‘circuits’ around the island. For Robinson the Irish landscape is saturated with ‘geologies, biologies, myths, histories and politics,’ and his steps, which retrace those early pilgrimage circuits, embody a momentary congruence ‘between the culture we bear and the ground that bears us’ (Robinson 1986, 277). Robinson lets this movement guide his writing: his narrative wanders between cartographic observation and poetic reverie, imaginative recreation and oral history in order to evoke the contours of the land. Irish topography has long been associated with historical accretions, the sediment of a culture dispossessed of its land and language. As soil, ground, territory and landscape Irish land represents what Australian geographer Paul Carter refers to as a ‘folded ground.’ Carter
invokes the image of fieldwork - the literal unfolding and folding of the earth - and metaphorically refers to the ground of convergences, departures and coincidences that shape our movements (Carter 1996, 4). For Robinson and Carter the ground is not static, but active, producing a resonance between foot and earth that animates the bodies in the landscape.

In *The Lie of the Land* Carter posits a theory of movement within the landscape of colonized territory. He counters Paul Valéry’s remark that, ‘[t]he state of mind of a man dancing is not that of a man advancing through difficult country of which he is making a topographical survey’ by asserting that because of his leveling and clearing gestures, ‘the explorer precedes the pirouetting dancer’ (*ibid*, 291). In this statement the dancer occupies the firm ground, a landscape from which the obstacles have been removed. Viewed as ‘difficult country’ by colonial cartographers and would-be invaders, the topography of Ireland did not yield easily to such leveling operations. As noted by Irish map historiographer J.A. Andrews, [t]he roughly articulated terrain of Ireland presented numerous obstacles for surveyors as did Ireland’s acts of rebellion’ (quoted in Boogaart II 1999, 162). Ireland’s porous, soggy and often un-chartable terrain invites the challenge of moving (or pirouetting) on an uneven ground.

In ‘That the Science of Cartography is Limited’ poet Eavan Boland aligns the colonial map with authority and with the flattening lines and imposing grid of empire, but the poem also alludes to the palpable unseen presence of those who disrupted the colonial plot.

1847, when the crop had failed twice,  
Relief Committees gave  
The starving Irish such roads to build.

Where they died, there the road ended.  
(Boland 1994, 7)

Boland interrogates the map to unfix it so she can view it choreographically as a space for movement’s trace. By challenging the authority of the official map she makes visible the lost movements of those who built the roads. In 1831 the Irish Board of Works (established by the British Government) sought to promote the economic development of Ireland by providing paid relief work for famine victims through the construction of new roads. Yet these roads often went nowhere. As described in the poem, they end where the bodies of the starving gave out. Her poem refigures Ireland as a wooded grove, a space of contours and curvilinear forms that has been disciplined to fit a topographical grid. Yet the linear, flattening outlines of the official map cannot be read because these roads disappear. Unfinished and often without a fixed destination, famine roads function as fragmentary geographies of resistance.
During excavation for a new M3 motorway from Dublin to surrounding communities, workers for the Irish Roads Authority discovered what is believed to be a prehistoric ceremonial site at Lismullen, County Meath, between the ancient hills of Tara and Skryne. In a reversal of Boland’s image, in which the straight line of the surveyor obfuscates the contours of the earth, this new highway cannot bury the power of the submerged ritual landscape – the proposed Tara Road will offer residents of the area a more direct and quicker route into the city center - indicating that buried histories do resurface, reminding us of their presence and their continuing influence. Digging is an important motif in Irish cultural narratives. Seamus Heaney recognizes the significance of digging as an embodied cultural practice akin to writing. In his work he unearthed mythic, political, and personal histories, ‘by striking inwards and downwards’ (Heaney 1998, 42). When the past rises up, or as in the case of the Tara road is inadvertently dug up, or accidentally on purpose dug up, the absent past becomes present. Roads literally bring to the surface the complexities of Irish identity. Building roads requires digging, does it not? In this sense roads function as double gestures: on the one hand, they are essential to modern life, to commerce, productivity, and transport; yet in order to build a road one must dig, thereby exposing the past, which must be confronted. The multi-layered archeology and intricate genealogy of Irish roads advance a critical imperative for movement that cannot be repressed.

Almost 20 years ago American scholar Cheryl Herr wrote ‘The Erotics of Irishness,’ a provocative essay in which she considered what she saw as an inherited distrust of the body and physical expression in Ireland. Herr concludes her analysis of various forms of bodily censorship with a reference to Irish topography – the mounds, cairns, tumuli, and massive circular field monuments which she sees as bodily disruptions in the landscape which upset traditional notions of geographical fixity, cultural paralysis and stillness. She writes, ‘the cairns might operate as mediators to a register of meaning that accommodates concepts of other symbolic orders, an alternativity, a visual semiotic that could foster new ways of looking and moving’ (Herr 1990, 32). Representations of Irish land as a body, particularly a female body, persist in both colonial and nationalist discourse. Ireland has been identified visually as mysterious territory or as virgin land in need of protection. In the Victorian journal Punch, Ireland was frequently allegorized as a young woman, Hibernia, in need of protection from Irish anarchists, or as a demure young girl who is being seduced by Britain (Pery Curtis Jr. 1997, 41 & 68). The image of women in need of rescue from colonial oppressors served as a popular nationalist motif in songs and poems. Cultural geographer Catherine Nash has identified the feminization and eroticization of Ireland as an important cultural trope, which served to uphold oppressive gender identifications that aligned Irish women with passivity, obedience and stillness (Nash 1997, 108-27). But Herr re-conceives the ancient (feminine) geographical forms embodied in the landscape as sites of movement and
cultural agency. This feminine or feminist geography asserts a vision of the land-as-body as a powerful force that can reroute roads and thus reveal the past or revivify ancient systems of movement that have been buried. As part of this kinetic geography, roads offer new pathways for thinking about manifold systems of cultural mobility.

‘I was off. I was going down the road of my dreams...I wanted as quickly as possible to get on the strange roads where Romance wearing gold earrings was waiting for me’ (Kavanagh 2001, 223). In his series of autobiographical essays, published as The Green Fool, Patrick Kavanagh quite literally sets out on the road to becoming a poet. In ‘A Visit to Dublin’, he informs his bemused mother, ‘I’m walking to Dublin.’ He poet acknowledges his inheritance of ‘road-hunger’ from his grandfather, who set out on ‘the road Queen Maeve took’. Kavanagh’s own steps echo with the reverberations of history and myth. His long walk to the door of the poet George Russell becomes a literary pilgrimage to the works of admired writers, but his steps also take him on a journey into himself. When we walk along a road that is dense with personal, mythic, or national memory we join our steps with those that have gone before. Maybe this is what Kavanagh meant when he wrote that when we walk our feet are ‘tapping secrecies of stone’.

Half-past eight and there is not a spot
Upon a mile of road, no shadow thrown
That might turn out a man or woman, not
A footfall tapping secrecies of stone.
(from ‘Iniskeen Road, July Evening’, Kavanagh 1972, 18)

Whether divining the secrets of the road or weaving an idea in to a larger fabric of story, writers have invoked roads to chronicle the movement of thought. Declan Kiberd ascribes the original impulse for the twinning of words and movements to medieval Irish culture, a time when ‘the rhythms of poetry were linked to the delight which people took in the act of walking or riding, as their bodies moved through the world’ (Kiberd, quoted in Mulrooney 2006, xi). John Millington Synge was an Irish writer who knew intimately the ‘secrecies of stone’ and in his work paid tribute to the knowledge that could only come from physical movement through space: ‘Man is naturally a nomad...and all wanderers have finer intellectual and physical perceptions than men who are condemned to local habitations. But the vagrant, I think, along with perhaps the sailor, has preserved the dignity of motion’ (Synge 1982, 195-6). Roads beckon us onwards with the promise of companionship – they bear witness to our innermost thoughts and dreams and offer solace or distraction from what we have left behind. Synge was an avid walker himself and most likely recognized the ‘dignity of motion’ that a tramp might come to know. Another devoted walker, Samuel Beckett, set his play Waiting for Godot – in which two tramps divert themselves while waiting-on a country road that could be anywhere and nowhere: ‘A country road. A
This might be a famine road, a traveler road, or an imaginary road, but it is primarily a space that is enlivened by the tramps’ performances of everyday existence.

For these writers the act of walking a road- or the movements of the road itself – suggest that a kinetic consciousness rewards those who move. To acknowledge this form of embodied knowledge is not to disregard the importance of language and orality in Irish culture, rather, it allows us to attend to what the body writes. Poems, plays, and stories do register movement, but movement also articulates what Michel de Certeau called ‘spatial stories,’ in which act of walking becomes as eloquent as a spoken or written narrative (de Certeau 1984, 115). ‘Every story is a travel story,’ de Certeau observes, referring to the enunciation of physical and spatial stories through narrative structures: ‘...whether everyday or literary, [stories] serve us as a means of mass transportation’ (ibid, 115).

In his account of walking the border that divides Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland, Colm Tóibín observes many rituals and ceremonies of the body that define this contested region. In addition to his own ruminations on the legacy of the Troubles made visible on his walk, Tóibín reports on the marches, parades, funerals and protests that take place along the border roads. With a surveyor’s sense of geographical perception he encounters a diverse landscape of historical trauma and geopolitical division, which he registers in his body. At the outset Tóibín acknowledges his strategy:

I went out and stood on the road. I had made certain arrangements with myself about walking. I had made rules. All progress along the border must be on foot, I had agreed...every move toward my destination, Newry, must be on foot, except if there was danger, and then I would do anything. (Tóibín 1994, 4)

During his journey, Tóibín encounters dangerous roads, smuggling roads, prayer roads, abandoned roads, and roads that have become graves. He tries to adhere to the official border, but at times does not know if he is actually in the North or the South – his map does not register the intricacies of the divide as accurately as his own stride. At other times his location is clearly marked by checkpoints, flags, or emblems painted directly on the roads. In the North it is not uncommon for inhabitants of a town to paint the roads in sectarian colors as a way of laying claim to certain streets and neighborhoods. When Tóibín stumbles across the word ‘Paisley’ painted on a road in a predominantly Protestant area, he becomes acutely aware of the unspoken laws of place that govern the roads of the North. To transgress these spatial codes would be to invite suspicion and perhaps violence.
The rhetoric of the road has offered the public, media and politicians spatial
tropes for political engagement and retreat. In May 2007 Reverend Ian
Paisley invoked the metaphor of the road to signal political progress: ‘We’re
on a road, and we’re not turning back’ (Millar 207). Known for his ideological
intransigence, Paisley’s comment registers a perceptible shift from his usual
tactic of non-engagement with Republican government officials. His words
spatialize a historic moment by referencing opposing factions who occupy the
same road, and he brings history into a new spatial dimension by
acknowledging the possibility of a shared political space. In making such
comments perhaps Paisley was acknowledging that even opponents must
share the same battleground. Referring to the concept of a ‘rift’ such as a
stream or a river, Martin Heidegger reminds us that even a divided space
‘does not let opponents break apart; it brings the opposition of measure and
boundary into their common outline’ (Heidegger 1971, 63). Geographic
fissures are recognized as both a separating boundary and a conjoined space
that gestures beyond the vicissitudes of nature to refer to the potential for
shared economic, political, and social aspirations. The space between
contested sites becomes a place for engagement, negotiation, and exchange.
Crossroads, a familiar image in Irish culture, also serve as spaces of
intersection that demand our acknowledgment of choice and forward an
imperative for movement.

Dancing, worshiping, or meeting at the crossroads were popular activities
that brought people from neighboring villages or parishes together. If, as Paul
Carter alleges, ‘straight lines that form crossroads offer emblems of hope,’ the
movements of dance performed at the crossing of two roads promise a
collective celebration that transfigures the multifaceted metaphor of the road
into a figure of embodied joy(Carter 1988, 222). No longer imagined as a route
for escape, exile or confrontation, Irish roads that cross mark places of
connection, continuity and celebration. In popular memory Éamon de Valera
is reputed to have invoked the image of dancing at the crossroads to express
his vision of the new Irish Free State as a stable national entity, and indeed it
would be through bodily and spatial codes that Irish culture would declare its
presence and define its cultural and political trajectory: meet, retreat;
encounter, engage, depart, circle, reverse. Our bodies are our very own roads
and we can take them anywhere.
Works Cited


Millar, Frank (5th May, 2007) ‘We’re on a Road and We’re not Going to Turn Back,’ *Irish Times*.


End Notes

‘This essay is an excerpt from a longer work. To view the full text please refer to *Crossroads: Performance Studies and Irish Culture*, eds. Sara Brady and Fintan Walsh (London: Palgrave, 2009).
The cultural construction of Irish step dance embodies diverse performative meanings: meanings which are shared by different communities of step dancers. From informal, improvisatory performances to formal, stylised and highly structured performances, step dance adapts, is adapted and appropriated to give meaning and kinaesthetic expression to both the individual step dancer and the group within these diverse dance communities. In this paper I look at notions of conceptual and aesthetic boundaries in Irish competitive step dance and at how step dancers attempt at negotiating these boundaries. In particular, the paper focuses on one
particular step dancer, namely, Colin Dunne, and explores the artist’s attempts at negotiating the aesthetic and structural boundaries in Irish step dance performance practice and the artistic strategies employed by him to assist in this negotiation process.

However, before addressing this particular issue I would like to locate myself. Having trained in Irish competitive step dance from a young age; having performed most of my life; and currently course directing the MA in Ethnochoreology and the MA in Irish Traditional Dance Performance at the Irish World Music Centre, University of Limerick, Ireland, I am close to, and indeed, directly involved in, some current developments in Irish traditional step dance practices on a day-to-day basis. This paper then is theoretically framed based within performance practice and draws on both my own experience as an Irish step dancer, teacher, and researcher, and my observations of one dance artist’s creative attempts at interpreting the doxaic, conservative and shared aesthetic system within Irish competitive step-dance practice for artistic and theatrical purposes. As Barnes states: “We need to watch these systems……in action, to study tactics and strategy, not merely the rules of the game” (Barnes:1980). This paper briefly looks at the relationship between the dance artist as human agent and his attempts at negotiating the rules and aesthetic concepts inherent in the Irish competitive step-dance system of performance in which he had been trained.

Similarly for the majority of Irish competitive step-dancers’ training everywhere, competition is a significant motivating factor. Mastery of a specific technique and aesthetic through years of training is the ultimate goal and winning championships such as the World Championships (Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne) is the ultimate achievement. Within the competitive context, step dancers perform their particular step dance choreographies within specific conceptual and aesthetic parameters: parameters which are taught within the dance classroom context and which are assessed in competition; these parameters include concepts of timing, execution, carriage and steps. These concepts will be discussed below and examined in relation to Colin Dunne’s artistic and strategic processes in his choreographic piece, Piano One.

Time

Time within Irish competitive step-dance practice is paramount; that is being on time to the accompanying, metrical, Irish traditional dance music. Indeed, it is inconceivable for an Irish step dancer to progress beyond the basic level without having internalised the significance of metrical time in Irish step-dance practice. Through teachers’ vocalised, repetitive mantras to particular rhythmical and kinaesthetic motifs, step dancers steadily acquire an understanding of the importance of timing in relation to music.
Execution

The second concept in which competitive step dancers are assessed is execution. When looking at the execution of a step dance, adjudicators focus on how the step dancer delivers or performs the actual step dance in question. Is the dancer performing the choreographed movements accurately? Is she crossing her feet? Has she good positions? Is she pointing her toe? Is she bringing her feet back? Is she bringing her legs up behind? Has she a nice turn-out? Is she bringing her legs up high enough in front? Is she using the stage space well? Is she dancing gracefully and musically? These are some of the questions that arise when looking at execution but which adjudicators automatically assess due to their own years of training and internalising the aesthetic knowledge of Irish step dance practice.

Carriage

Carriage is the third concept within the assessment of the aesthetic. Carriage alludes to the posture of the dancer and within Irish step-dance practice the posture is held erect and hands are held still at either side of the body. I am not going into the semantics of the posture here since I just wish to categorise it as an aesthetic concept, one which Irish step dancers generally take-for-granted. The carriage is a constant and slight deviations are inadmissible within Irish step dance competitions. Different strategies are used by different teachers in the classroom to instil this “correct” use of carriage: walking with books on heads in the classroom; raising a fallen shoulder with a shoulder pad on a dance costume in competition; or velcro-ing sleeves of a dance costume to the actual dance dress in competition. These are some of the strategies employed to give the “correct” visual impression of the Irish competitive step dancer.

Steps

Steps are the fourth category within the assessment of the Irish step-dance aesthetic. Steps comprise a combination of traditional and novel kinesthetic movements in keeping with the particular genre of dance in question. In other words, there are Reel steps, Jig steps, Hornpipe steps, Slip Jig steps, etc. These are generally 8 bars long in keeping with the accompanying structure of the music and comprise traditional and innovative, syntactic, rhythmical and kinaesthetic arrangements. The actual movements selected for these step dance choreographies depend on individual choreographer’s artistic and conceptual preferences. Steps are continuously being created, developed, altered or adapted depending on dancers’ skills and actual dance performance contexts, but what does not change within the competitive context is the 8-bar structure of the step (excluding solo set dances). Within the context of competitive adjudication, steps are assessed according to their
interest value, their rhythmic and kinaesthetic interaction with the music, and their adherence to the current conceptual and aesthetic understanding of a good step.

The four categories, as discussed above, of time, execution, carriage and steps are the four categories of aesthetic assessment within competitive Irish step-dance practice. The next section looks at Colin Dunne, as a dance artist but also as an experienced Irish step dancer with nine World Championship titles to his name, and his attempt at negotiating aspects of this aesthetic system for performance and artistic purposes.

With the advent of Riverdance- the Show (1995), Irish step dancers were exposed, not only to the professionalism and the theatrical world associated with Riverdance but also to other dance genre. Riverdancers were scheduled to perform eight shows a week and over long periods of time, and this had consequences for Irish dancers. In an interview with Colin Dunne he had the following to say concerning his introduction as principle dancer to Riverdance:

“I was very unprepared as a performer and as a dancer....I knew nothing about theatre and etiquette....or about warming up...I never even thought of diet. I never really considered my body to be the body of a dancer in the same way as a ballet dancer......or a contemporary dancer or a jazz dancer. I mean in most other (Western theatrical) dance forms one is trained in performance skills as you go along......With Irish dance we were really only ever taught skill and it was about perfecting that skill as best you could in order to win the biggest cup that you could or the biggest title that you could. Beyond that there was very little”

(Colin Dunne, interview with Catherine Foley, 2001).

Dunne felt that as a dancer he had little notion of proper training, injury prevention, body awareness, etc. aspects taken-for-granted by other Western theatrical dancers. It was this awareness that motivated Colin Dunne, and other step dancers, to develop Irish step dance further as a theatrical dance form and to acknowledge the whole dancing body, as opposed to what Dunne considered Irish step dance to be at the time: “a dance form from the waist down” (Colin Dunne, ibid).

With the hope of developing as an overall and individual dancer, using and being aware of the whole body as opposed to the feet, Colin Dunne immersed himself in classes in yoga, pilates, elementary ballet classes, jazz classes, martial arts, and in 2002 completed an MA in contemporary dance at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance. Dunne was not the only Irish step dancer to extend his Irish step-dance experience into other dance genre. Jean Butler, lead female dancer with Riverdance, also completed an MA in contemporary dance at the Academy. Also, in 1988, Breandán de Gallai,
another lead dancer with Riverdance, joined the Gus Giordano’s Dance Academy in the US where he studied Ballet, Jazz, Modern and Tap. He subsequently choreographed Balor, an emotion driven story interpreted through the fusion of ballet, Irish percussive step dance, and martial arts. In 2009 he completed an MA in Ethnochoreology at the Irish World Academy of Music and dance where he choreographed another Irish dance work, Firebird, to the music of Stravinsky’s Firebird, for the MA Irish Traditional Dance Performance students; Breandan is currently enrolled at the Academy doing a PhD in Arts Practice Research. Maire Clerkin, Irish step dancer and choreographer, established The Hairy Marys (renamed Clerkinworks in the 1990s, and later Kick) in London to develop Irish dance theatrically; and Liam Harney well known Irish step dance teacher and performer in America was also a company member of the New York City Ballet. So, generally speaking, from the 1980s, we see individual step dancers taking steps to extend both themselves as dancers and the boundaries of Irish step dance. But, why was this?

Historically, prior to Riverdance, the only realistic option for many trained competitive Irish step dancers, was teaching, and very few continued to perform since a career in step dance performance was not a realistic option. However, with the advent of Riverdance step dancers continued to perform longer and for Riverdancers and dancers in the other stage shows, they were now also professional dancers who worked within a theatrical context. But did Riverdance create another void? At the end of a paper I published in Dance Research Journal (2001), I asked the question “And what is the future for the Riverdancers after Riverdance? Do we see the establishment of small Irish step dance companies or free-lance individual Irish step dance performers?” (Foley, 2001: p. 43). Or, indeed, do we see a return to ‘tradition’ as in looking at traditional dance practices outside the organisational structures of the Irish competitive step dance context. For some Riverdancers today, this is a question that they are asking themselves. Where does an Irish step dancer go after Riverdance? With the establishment of the MA Irish Traditional Dance Performance programme at the Irish World Academy in 1999, this programme offers another choice for Riverdancers and others who wish to develop further as performers of step dance and to avail of the academic, choreographic, performance, and interdisciplinary opportunities offered at the Academy.

Colin Dunne wished to explore ways of extending as a dancer by acquiring different knowledge, dance vocabulary and tools through other types of movement classes. In attempting to do this, Colin Dunne aspired to constructing a way of moving as a dancer that would allow him to express something through his body about himself, about the individual Colin Dunne. Within the competitive context and also within the stage shows, Colin stated that much of the dance material was created onto his body, was inscribed, and this left him with the creative urge to choreograph work from the inside-out,
as opposed to from the outside-in. Indeed, for Colin Dunne, he wished to rid himself of the label ‘Irish dancer’, and to be simply a dancer. This involved not only negotiating the aesthetic boundaries within Irish competitive step-dance practice but also questions relating to his own identity as an Irish step dancer born and raised in Britain. The next section briefly looks at one choreographic piece by Colin Dunne in which this negotiation process may be seen.

In Piano 1, a solo choreographic piece choreographed by Colin Dunne, for Colin Dunne, and to the piano music of Micheál Ó Súilleabháin, composer, pianist and Director of the Irish Word Academy of Music and Dance, we can see the aesthetic of Irish competitive step dance being loosened to allow for a play with issues of space, dynamics, and the dance’s relationship with the accompanying music. The piece commences with an a cappella percussive section with much dynamic play. The section continues while the piano enters with an Irish slow air; the feet create their own music against the slow air; there is no effort to be on time with the music, the music provides the soundscape for the virtuosic solo. When the piano section eventually leads us into a 6/8 time jig rhythm the dance continues but in lieu of doing simply jig steps to the jig music, Colin Dunne performs in a tap-like, virtuosic manner; not performing actual full 8-bar steps, not repeating movements with the left leg; not holding his carriage totally erect; not holding his hands still to his sides; but moving in a seemingly natural way, allowing his body to move with him as his feet percussively beat out his selected taps, glides and leaps, and allowing himself, to listen to the music differently: differently from the way he had been trained as a competitive Irish step dancer.

Choreographically, Piano One hinges on the relationship of the percussive foot movements to finger movements on the piano. In the first section of the Jig, Colin selects the spatial relationship of the fingering of the tune on the piano as a way of directing his body and foot movements spatially; in effect, the fingering provides the road map for the feet. For Colin, this worked choreographically and although his training in Irish step dance is still very much visible, also noticeable are his attempts at re-interpreting aspects of the Irish step-dance aesthetic through his play with structure, body and spatial attitude, movement dynamics, and dance and music inter-relationships.

In relation to his choreographic work and his attempts at negotiating the boundaries of Irish step-dance performance practice, Colin Dunne states, “the process in those pieces has changed hugely for myself – in terms of how I think about use of space or use of music – use of my body - use of rhythm – but I think, at the end of the day, once those pieces are finally presented, it still… looks like Irish dance” (Colin Dunne, interview with Catherine Foley, 2003).
Works Cited


Dunne, Colin (July 2002), Piano One, Performed at the University Concert Hall, University of Limerick, Ireland.


Foley, Catherine (2001 and 2003) audio and audio-visual recordings of interviews with Colin Dunne.

End Notes:

i This is a revised version of a paper presented at the 23rd Symposium of the ICTM Study Group on Ethnochoreology in Monghidoro (Bologna), Italy, July 2004.
THE PARAMETRES OF STYLE IN IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC

Niall Keegan, University of Limerick

Style is an important but elusive concept in the world of traditional Irish music. As a young traditional flute player growing up in St. Albans, England, I heard the words of flute style bandied about at fleadhhs, concerts and sessions but didn’t really understand them despite being exposed to a rare generation of musicians in and around London. In 1990 I took the opportunity to undertake a research degree at University College, Cork with the stated, naive and far too ambitious idea of producing an account of the different regional styles of flute playing within traditional Irish music. My initial period of research was by far the most fun and I travelled the country and received the seemingly limitless generosity and hospitality of many flute players. However, my initial goal of establishing a categorical structure where certain regional styles could be defined in much the way musicologists would define historical styles of classical composition by the use of certain of techniques very quickly proved to be unattainable. One man’s east Galway style, was another’s Clare style was another woman’s Sligo style. Very soon I realised that the problem wasn’t with the words and conceptual structures of traditional musicians and their inadequacies (as is implied in the findings of musicologists such as George List (1994, 1997) and closer to home, Fionnuala Scullion (1980)). I concluded that the problems was my expectation of discovering a scientific, Aristotelian categorical structure where every category has a limited list of attributes and a well defines border to separate it from others. I wanted to science about music, and music says something different to science and what it does say it says it very differently too! This discussion is for a different article but the essence of my argument is that we may build scientific structure to organise our musical world but all it takes is for one creative musician, a Miko Russell, a Seamus Tansey, a Johnny Carty to, in the words of the song ‘come down from the mountain’ and not make music according to our ‘science’ and we must start again (or, as it is dangerously more easy to do, discriminate against and discount them). Too many times have I sat into conversations and presentations and heard people talk about West Clare music and either ignore or skirt the performing styles of Miko Russell, a man certainly idiosyncratic, and inspirationally so, in his performance styles but also quintessentially of Clare – or also say that Johnny Carty isn’t really a North Connaught fiddler or Paddy Carty’s genius put him

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1 I would like to thank Sandra Joyce for all her assistance in the completion of this article. I also would like to offer my special thanks to Jack and Jimmy Coen for the use of the excerpt from their wonderful recording Traditional Irish Music on Flute and Guitar, available from Ossian USA (http://www.ossianusa.com).

Keegan, Niall. The Parametres of Style in Irish Traditional Music.
outside East-Galway. To discuss the categorical structuring of styles we have to develop more sophisticated tools to understand such organisation in its linguistic, aesthetic, socio-geographic and cultural contexts.

Alternatively, one way we can talk about style in traditional music performance practice is to breakdown and examine the technical aspects of any individual performance, examining how the musicians deploys selections of technique to make their own performance style, essentially examining the physical interaction of the musicians with their instruments. This occurs in several of the many instrumental tutors published in the Irish tradition over the past two centuries in a pedagogical fashion. However, what would be more useful and reflective of the performance based conceptual gestalt of the tradition would be an examination of those groups of techniques as they are presented cross instrumentally. This of course removes these concepts from the embodied context of the specific instrument but it is more reflective of a multi-instrumental community with shared aesthetic, political and other conceptual structures.

This has been done in an analytical and academic contexts by musicologists such as Micheál Ó Súilleabáin, (1986, 1990), Sean O Riada (1982), Brendan Breathnach (1971) and Lawrence McCullough (1977) and indeed Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (an international organisation charged principally with the role of promoting traditional Irish music, in particular through a structure of competitions) asks adjudicators to engage this type of analysis every-time they are put to work (I will discuss the structure of an adjudication form later in the article) so what I am presenting here is hardly new in anything but it’s extent and comprehension. Brendan Breathnach writes about this sort of analysis that are apparent in a set of performance ‘rules’ he says

> The performer playing a tune or singing a song is not conscious of these rules, just as, when we speak, we are not conscious of the rules of punctuation or of the spelling of the words we are using. (Breathnach 1996, p.90)

This is reinforcing the common cultural convention that musicology can be taught but musicality, as expressed through performance, is somehow intangible, unintellectual and reliant on innate gifts that cannot be taught. This convention has saved generations of politicians having to invest in music education as there is no point spending money on what no amount of resources can develop, which is the case if musicality is ingrained rather than acquired. Most would argue that exceptional musicians engage in a constant process of analysis, even in performance and the more conscious they are of aspects of style and have developed their own structures for evaluating their own style and others, the better performers they will be. I do think that this style of analysis can be very important to the development of the musician rather than just the style analysis of the student at University College, Cork or
the University of Limerick and indeed this is the context where analysis has the most significance.

Of course, this mode of examining a music practice does smack of traditional musicological analysis, a style of musicology that seems to become increasingly unpopular. Ethnomusicologist and ‘new musicologists’ tend to reject the study of object against process but very often it is they who generate such a dichotomy. Dale Harwood works around these concepts when he writes;

...perhaps we ought to look at how people learn to listen to – and how they learn to play – their community’s music, rather than to focus on what it is they listen to or play. The process of understanding and engaging in musical behaviour may be more universal than the content of musical knowledge or action. (Harwood, 1976, p.523)

Certainly, to view music as process rather than use the metaphorical structuring of music as a thing to be analysed is far more productive. But that productivity is severely limited if an examination of the actual auditory event in which music is manifest is ignored. If we decided not to engage in a careful and reflexive examination of the music itself (whatever that is) we loose an important dimension in the study of the process and run the risk of building arguments on the tired paradigms of both traditions of musicology and the tradition under examination. The problem is the mutual exclusion and polarisation of process and product. Product, object, event or what ever way we construct the moment seen as performance or artefact produced in a culture must be seen as part, but not necessarily an ultimate part, of process. Like any examination we must always be aware of the motivations for the structuring and structurings of cultural actors whether they be performers, commentators or musicologists.

My current motivations for the sort of analysis presented below come from my professional life as the course director of an MA in Irish Traditional Music Performance at the University of Limerick. In this I am eager to illustrate to students intellectual tools to structure their own musical experience in the world of traditional music practice, both their own and that of others. I am also eager to illustrate that this process is intrinsically un-musical in itself and in it the gestalt and aesthetic imperatives of an actual performance are invariably lost. Robert Cristgau expands the problems of writing about music in his article ‘Writing about music is writing first”.

...all art is magic – and that as we’ve been told ad infinitum from Saussure on down, nothing can be reduced to words, not even words. Writing about writing is also like dancing about architecture.” (Christgau 2005, p.416)
However, there is a very human imperative to write, or more basically, to speak about music to contextualise, structure and inform our practice. The structure presented below is intended to inform the way we perform and listen to our music. It is not entirely new, as we have stated previously, and is part of an academic tradition most manifest in the work of Ó Suilleabhain (1990) and McCullough (1977).

However, as I have indicated, this process of structuring is not one coming from the academy or researcher but comes principally from the sound community of traditional music itself. Much of the terminology presented below is taken from the words used by performers to account for traditional music practice, not from theses. It is important to note that the aspects of performance listed below are not overall aesthetics for performance but are instead the tools that musicians (although rarely would all be consciously manipulating all of the below in performance) use in the service of those aesthetics.

An important theme of any examination of what can be called the technical parameters of style in traditional Irish music is the politicisation of each one. The use, non-use, type of use and perception of the elements outlined below can be political acts, placing the performer in one or many aesthetic camps tied into ideas of region, tradition, contemporaneity and progression. Of course these camps are not fortified positions but rather sites or nomadic travellers who will up-sticks and move their position according to the aesthetic needs of the moment.

Style can be broken down into the following components that we will discuss shortly.

1. Ornamentation
2. Phrasing
3. Articulation
4. Variation
5. Intonation
6. Tone
7. Dynamics
8. Repertoire
9. Duration
10. Emphasis
11. Speed
12. Instrumentation
13. Instrument specific techniques

The list above in itself is a categorical abstraction of groups of techniques used by instrumentalists playing Irish traditional dance music. The members of these categories which tend to relate more to the musician's physical
interaction or perceived metaphorically hypostatized nature of the sounds made differentiate according to the instrument played and background of the musician. It is interesting to see ‘musicological’ traditions developing within the traditions according to the interaction of contextual elements such as aesthetic, exposure to other traditions and embodiment. Indeed we must be acutely aware that this article in itself is an extreme facet of this influenced by the environment of the University, my own background as a listener and embodied performance practice.

Before we discuss them it is important to note that their importance in any individual performance is dependant on a number of factors including the individual aesthetic of the musician (e.g. most traditional musicians, to various degrees, would be conscious of not over-cluttering their performance with ornamentation and some, for various reasons, would omit certain types of ornaments) and the context for the performance (e.g. most musicians would play differently in a concert than for dancers). Also we should also know that an ever-present theme of the performance of traditional dance music is, of course rhythm, and the deployment of technique is very often for rhythmical effect. This last point I will try to illustrate as we go on.

Ornamentation

Ornamentation is a term used by all traditional musicians but as a concept is again not easy to define. Some of the ornaments we will discuss are easily defined as such, like cuts, rolls and crans, but ‘ornaments’ such as single note triplets as used by fiddle players or accordionists could strictly be regarded as articulation but generally would not be so defined. A working definition could be the addition of extra tones to (or the division of) a main tone which is regarded as being embellished. Central to the idea of ornament is that a note is being ornamented and as such no ornament has any life beyond the context of the ‘main—tone’.

Travelling in Europe and North America it becomes apparent that the traditional musicians of those countries see ornamentation as central to what it is traditional music in this geographical context and, although not always central, it certainly is perceived to be more prevalent in the performance of traditional Irish music as opposed too say English, Welsh or much Scottish music. It is essential to remember that there are conventions of ornamentation that are held across the Irish tradition but the terminology is often not. Sure enough the pipers, perhaps because of the literacy and urbanity of their tradition, seem to have a reasonably well defined vocabulary for their ornaments and indeed this vocabulary is borrowed throughout the tradition. Some vocabulary is now very common. All know what a roll is however the distinction between a long roll and a short roll is not so easily made and the terminology begins to loose its regularity (the long-roll, short roll distinction was first published by Breathnach, a piper (1971)).
A long roll is usually represented as below in fig.1 although the rhythmical structuring of it can vary between it and what you can see in fig.2. Generally the rhythmical structure tends to concentrate on the end of the tone being ornamented. The structure is of five tones in the following sequence; the main-tone; a tone above; the main-tone; a tone below.

![Fig.1](image1)

![Fig.2](image2)

The intervallic relationship (i.e. the distance up and down) between the main tone and the two others (one above and one below) can be changed because of the nature of the instrument or the aesthetic judgement of the musician. For example many B/C accordion players who like using rolls are forced to play upper and lower notes which may be only a semitone away from the main tone to avoid a change in the direction of bellows while some south-Sligo flute players (notable Seamus Tansey and Peter Horan) will choose to have wider intervals to make a more audible and rhythmical effect.

The short roll (sometimes called a half-roll) is generally described as being the same as the above but with the first note missing so can be represented as follows;

![Fig.3](image3)

Unlike the long roll this ornament occurs at the beginning of the note being ornamented so the note of the ornament with longest duration is the last. This ornament works particularly well in smaller spaces but there are problems if the tune is coming from a tone above.

Rolls tend to occur over notes of longer duration that are usually represented as having a duration of a crotchet or dotted crotchet but in recent years, and particularly on the pipes, whistle and flute, some virtuoso players have been getting them into much smaller spaces. Of course this can also lead to a further complication of the terminology used to describe these ornaments with musicians talking about ‘short long rolls’ and ‘small short rolls’ etc.

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The overall effect of a roll is invariably rhythmical where the tones above and below can often not be distinctly heard – what can be heard is the punctuation of the main tone. There are also other words used for roll, notably in west Clare the word beril would be used (as in the title of the tune recorded famously by Mrs. Crotty, ‘The Reel with the Beril’) which would also have been used to describe a turn or curl in someone’s hair. Interestingly enough the term is used in Scotland to account for a piping ornament that is not dissimilar to a roll. These terms have an obvious metaphorical root when we conceptualise the sound of these ornaments as spatial entities.

Single or double notes ornaments from above and below are given a variety of names. The word cut is used most often to describe a single note ornament from above which can be represented as in fig. 4. A pat is often used by traditional musicians to describe a downwards double note grace note as is illustrated in fig. 5. These ornaments tend to occur at the beginning of the tone being ornamented although the Sligo flute player June McCormack illustrated to me how she would sometimes use them towards the end of a main tone. Again, usually the emphasis is on their rhythmical effect, accentuated to start of the main tone which often occurs at the beat (see figs. 6 and 7 where I show how they could be used in the first bar of Willie Coleman’s Jig) but again occasionally they can be used to take up to over half of the duration of the main tone to suspend or hide cadence points. Fig. 8 shows how this can be combined with a short roll in the first bar of the second part of Willie Coleman’s (the first four bars are illustrated together in Fig. 9).

Fig.4

Fig. 5

Fig.6

Fig.7
Another popular ornament (again from the pipers) is the cran which is popular on pipes, flute and whistle but now can be heard used by fiddlers and accordion players although some would argue that for the sake of traditionality they should be left to the pipers. A cran is multiple note ornament which includes at least two notes, usually above the main tone and none below\(^2\). It is often represented as follows;

Fig.10

They are most popularly used by pipe, whistle and flute players on a D where most often there is not the facility to play a roll on the D but it is more and more common to hear musicians using crans on other notes (I often hear flute players referring to crans on other tones as flutters). Indeed Sean Donnellan mentions a disagreement in the letters page of the Evening Herald in 1930 between pipers Séamus Mac Aonghusa (the father of Seamus Ennis) and Leo Rowsome about the appropriate notes on the pipes to cran (Donnellan 1988, p.133).

The above is just a few examples of the ornaments used by traditional musicians and the names they use to classify them. In recent years it is fair to say that the technical complexity of ornamentation and the sheer quantity of its use has increased and there is much argument as to whether is trend is to welcomed or not. It would not be uncommon for a young flute player to play a complex ornament as illustrated below that incorporates aspects of the cran, long roll and double note ornament going down!

\(^2\) The notable exception is when whistle and flute players cran a high D with their top finger off which produces at least two Cs below the main note ornamented.

For this sort of newer and more innovative ornament there is no standard terminology but such terminology does flourish, even if is not standardised. For example in my teaching I would call the above a ‘tapped-cran-roll’ whereas Grey Larson in his encyclopaedic The Essential Guide to Irish Flute and Tin Whistle (2003) would refer to it as a variation of a ‘double cut roll’.

Of course some instruments lend themselves to more ornamentation than others (notably the flute, pipes and whistle) and some do not lend themselves to crans and rolls at all (e.g. the banjo and mandolin). Also the way that ornaments are executed is very instrument specific. For example what concertina players call a roll could be any one of a number of ornamental sequences but often not the five note ornament shown above and usually either something that more resembles what above is a cran or a single note triplet with a single grace note added to one of the notes of the triplet. Individual tones on specific instruments lend themselves to certain types of ornaments and give different levels of ornamental possibility depending on the way we physically interact with the instrument. For example, rolls are virtually impossible on an open string on a fiddle where getting the tone below means swapping strings, something that cannot really happen at the speed required. On a C sharp on a flute, where none of the tone holes are covered ornamentation, which is largely dependant on the fingers of the player interacting with the holes on the instrument, is extremely difficult. However there are no absolutes in these situations and a performer will always show you how that get over the apparent and assumed embodied limitations of their instrument.

Single note triplets would usually be regarded as ornamental techniques rather than articulation, which is perhaps a less prominent stylistic parameter in the mind of the average traditional Irish musician (if such a thing exists). These are associated with fiddle playing - more recently the banjo, accordion and most latterly whistle and flute. This ornament is perhaps motivated by a desire to ornament a note where it is otherwise difficult to use other ornamental tones at speed. Of course on different instruments the effect is produced through different ways of interacting with the specific instrument. On the fiddle it is achieved through rapid changes in the direction of the bow; on the banjo by a quick succession of single strokes with the plectrum; on the accordion (both the button and piano) by the rapid successive tapping of a single button or key, usually by different fingers; on the flute by using something akin to classical triple tonguing techniques or rapid successive glottal stops. This is usually used

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on notes characterised as being of crotchet or dotted crotchet length seen below in bars one and three of Willie Coleman’s Jig.

![Image](image_url)

**Fig.12**

These ornaments are usually called triplets and, less frequently, perhaps to distinguish from multiple note triplets, trebles.

Some traditional musicians would consider the use of multiple note triplets as ornaments. These often happen in contexts where the melody involves a jump of tones of a third or more.

For example, again in the second part of the jig, ‘Willie Coleman’s’;

![Image](image_url)

**Fig.13**

The triplets that fill up intervals of a third or over can be seen in bar 3 and 4. A common ornament especially used by older flute and whistle players can be seen in bar 2 above. It is a type of ornament that would have been used by Micho Russell but in a modern context would be very often replace with a cran, roll or single note triplet depending on the instrument and aesthetic preference.

It is important also to remember that ornamentation is used in the vast majority of cases to accentuate rhythm. When the ornamentation becomes so overcrowded or complex to interfere with rhythm then many would say that the playing is cluttered and unmusical.

An important issue for these ornaments and their performance is the proportion of duration given to the individual tones. This tends to change according to the particular instrument, the place in the melody and the aesthetic of the performer. For example, some flute players like to play rolls as represented in Fig. 9 above but perhaps it would be more popular for them to give the first tone of the ornament a longer duration, aspiring for something that would perhaps be represented as;
Fig. 14

The flutes, pipes and whistle lend themselves to this sort of uneven roll that gives a type of rhytmical push to the tune (it is often combined with a dynamic push to the end of the ornament). However, this sort of uneven structuring of the ornament is not as easy on the accordion and fiddle and is less common or extreme. The single note triplets above also rarely have equal triplet and quite often are played in way more accurately represented as;

Fig. 15

Or;

Fig. 16

Also the place in the tune and the type of tune plays a part in the rhytmical structuring of an ornament. For example in a reel, a roll that starts on the beat will usually be structured differently than a roll that starts after the beat.

As is intimated above, the use and nature of ornamentation is essentially politicised within the tradition. It is common to hear musicians to complain about the sheer amount of ornamentation used by some musicians and others to disregard the performances of others who eschew the use of much ornamentation as being too plain. The Sligo flute player June McCormack would encourage the even spread of the notes of a roll of the tune been ornamented (justifying it as being more traditional) whereas I personally would prefer pushing the ornament to the end of the tone. Also some musicians would disregard some ornaments as being part of another instrumental or regional tradition despite them being able to use them. I mention above that some flute players refuse to use crans as they are piping technique. A notable example of this is the virtuosic Cork flute player of a North Connaught style, Conal O Grada who said to the author in an interview “if you want to cran I reckon play the pipes altogether” (Keegan, 1992, p.40). Indeed, Conal does play the pipes and does use crans on that instrument but prefers not to on the flute even though the motor movement for the technique on both instruments is very similar. Some ornamental techniques also associated with particular stylistic categories. For instance, one of the

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paradigms of Donegal fiddle music is that they use a lot of single note triplets. Also some techniques are seen to be more traditional or authentic in certain instrumental contexts. Again it is traditional for a Donegal fiddle player to use single note triplets but not for a flute player.

Phrasing

Phrasing is a concept important to every flute and whistle players in one way or the other but many other musicians can sometimes disregard it and often do not consider its effect (whether good or demeritorious) on their performances. It is essentially when spaces are made in the tune to shape phrases, often seen as musical sentences. Thus for flute and whistle players phrasing is always important as we have to breath. The way we shape our phrases is often considered an essential part of our performance practice, whether the phrase are natural or irregular / long or short.

All of our tunes can be divided into 2, 4, or sometimes 8 bar phrases that tend to follow a basic call and response pattern. These Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin calls ‘natural’ phrases (1990, p.120). Look at version 1 (first staff of the system) of the Boyne Hunt below which is structured in 2 bar phrases and version 2 (second staff of the system) which is structured in 4 bar phrases. Both are consider by Ó Súilleabháin and the wider traditional music community as natural (ie. fit the melodic and rhythmical shape of the melody).
Version 3 gives examples of how the phrasing can be made irregular. The natural phrase breaks that can be seen in versions 1 and 2 are avoided and the breaks that are made in bars 1, 4, 5, 6 and 8 are away from the natural phrase breaks and produce a punctuating effect (again, rhythm is an underlying aesthetic). Version 4 gives another possible phrasing structure for the tune. For flute and whistle players phrasing is always very obvious as there is a breath which does make the phrasing structure obvious to the listener, although it can happen, if rarely, that these players would make a break in the melody without taking a breath. Flute players such as Conal O Grada would use their breath as a technique to break up the phrasing even when strictly speaking they don’t have to breath, whereas players such as East Galway’s Paddy Carty would stick to the natural phrasing of the tune so as to maintain the uninterrupted flow of the melody. When there isn’t the imperative to breath sometimes the phrasing structure is harder to identify. Sometimes a fiddle player like Martin Hayes will not actually stop the melody but imply a phrase break by playing a long note with a definite dynamic structure (a phenomenon we will revisit). This sort of technique produces a complex phenomena of ghost phrasing that is difficult to account for and produces a
multi-layered approach to phrasing which, though effective, is doubly difficult to account for in such a blunt tool as a transcription.

Next time you listen to John Carty on banjo or fiddle, listen to where he occasionally hides the natural phrase break with a variation or, when listening to June McCormack on flute, listen to where she plays through the natural phrase break, stealing a breath to great effect somewhere else. However, when listening to Johnny Doherty on fiddle notice the way he maintains the uninterrupted flow of the tune with his motoric rhythm, hardly breaking up the phrases at all, let alone irregularly. For Johnny, not breaking or stopping the phrase was an important part of his style.

The melodic shape of the tune plays a roll in the shape of phrases in performances. The tune encourages the musician to take breaks in certain places - many melodies extend over places that would be usually natural phrases ends. The creative interplay of artist and melody (which are often characterised within the tradition as things in themselves) is very apparent in the structuring of phrases in performance which combines with processes of variation to create new and individual versions or settings of tunes. Extreme examples of this can be found in Micheál Ó Súilleabháin’s study of Dublin fiddler Tommie Potts (1987). One notable example is the way he conjoins the two first parts of the reel, ‘My Love is in America’ (Potts 1972 and see Súilleabháin 1987, p.206-248).

Another example of a flute player with a very creative approach to phrasing to a tune is seen is the transcription below of Jack Coen’s recording of the first round of The Blackthorn.

The Blackthorn (reel)

\[ \text{Fig.18 (transcribed from Coen & Coen, 2002, track one, 0.00-0.24)} \]

The breaking of the phrase (which can see where there a rests) is used here for very obvious dramatic effect, building an impetus through the first round of the tune where the phrase lengths become more likely to be regular.

Perhaps an important aspect of phrasing structure (as with anything) is to avoid repetition. If the break is made always at the same point of the tune, as in version one of the Boyne Hunt above, the performance would often be seen as being affected detrimentally. However, in the performance of dance tunes by far the most popular place for making the break in the tune is the quaver value immediately after the quaver value on the beat.

Articulation

Articulation is a very important parameter of style when we examine the categorisation of different styles by traditional musicians. Articulation is the way we make breaks between notes and the frequency with which we do it. For pipers it is central as their world is very often and most basically split into open and closed piping where the open of legato style is associated with the travelling community (particularly performers such as Johnny Doran, Paddy Keenan and Finbar Furey) and the tight pipers who tend to use much more staccato passages are associated with an urban, Dublin community (particularly associated with Seamus Ennis, Andy Conroy and Mike Smyth). This is a criminal over simplification of the way pipers see themselves but it does illustrate the centrality of articulation as defining stylistic parameter.

For flute and whistle players the frequency of articulation is also important. For the flute, legato playing is more associated with the flute playing of Galway and Clare, staccato with the playing of Leitrim and northern players such as Desi Wilkinson. Articulation is central to the whistle playing of players such as Miko Russell and Sean Ryan but in very different ways. However also important for both instruments is the way articulation is made. Articulation by tonguing is not uncommon among an older generation of flute players (such as Vincent Broderick or, again, Miko Russell) but today throat articulation (the glottal stop) is the norm and young flute players (such as Brian Finnegan) that do use their tongue to articulate, and go as far as imitating the staccato triplets of box and fiddle players, are seen as stretching the boundaries of what is traditional.

For fiddle players articulation is achieved by changing the direction of the bow and obviously this is central to the style of many Donegal fiddle players who play in a very articulated fashion. Fiddle players from Sliabh Luachra, Clare and Sligo will be much more likely to bow across the beat, hiding the rhythmical impact of the note on the beat by slurring onto it but this would be a rhythmical technique found to some extent everywhere and on may
instruments. However, as with all the technical parameters listed here, their importance is specific to certain instruments. For example, articulation is not central to banjo performance as the instrument itself has little capacity to produce a legato effect.

Again the effect of changing the use of articulation is rhythmical. The use of lots of articulation tends even out the duration of quaver progressions. Tight piping does tend to slow the music down and make the overall sound seem much more controlled whereas open piping tends to be louder and faster, incorporating more multi-tonal ornamentation. Generally the use of much articulation tends to preclude the use of ornamentation with the exception of pipers who have invented their own ‘tight’ ornaments (such as Patsy Touhey’s ‘back-stitching’ (Mitchell & Small, 1987)). Conversely, the highly articulated style of Donegal fiddle players such as Johnny Doherty, is associated with speed and an urgency in performance but does, as in piping, preclude certain types of multi-tonal ornamentation. The extensive use of articulation also can often effect the sense of ‘swing’ in a performance where articulation of consecutive quavers can give them a more equal duration.

**Variation**

Variation is another difficult concept to articulate. It lies anywhere between composition and improvisation and of course is an aspect of all the other technical parameters of style we speak of (ie. the way a player will ‘vary’ the use of ornamentation, phrasing, articulation etc.). However what we will talk about here is the deliberate changing of main melody of the tune for aesthetic effect. How much this process is compositional or improvisatory (two intrinsically interconnected ideas) is very much down to the musician and in an Irish context the word variation seems to cover both. It is important again to emphasise that the use of variation is a stylistic choice. Many musicians choose to use very little variation, often concentrating on the delivery of a single setting (for a good example of this see Brendan Taaffe’s work on Patrick Kelly from Cree, Co. Clare, (2004, 33)).

Categorising variation into various ‘types’ is always dangerous but I do find it useful in a teaching context to list variation as having 4 aesthetic and embodied orientations in its motivation. These I list as rhythmic variation, melodic variation, harmonic variation and phrase variation. Below is the first part of the reel, ‘The Boys of Ballisodare’, presented in a system with four different versions, the first being a basic model of the tune. The second system is an illustration of variation where the motivation for varying the tune is phrasing, the third rhythmical and the fourth melodic and the last harmonic. For the purpose of brevity I have condensed many examples of variations into this first part of this reel; however, for the majority of
performances, even by musicians noted for their use of variation, there would rarely be this sort of intensity variation.

On the second stave you can see how the phrasing is altered as in the examples above and how, in order to facilitate this, the melody is changed also. In bars 4 to 5 especially, the phrase end is hidden by a radical change in the melodic line. This is discussed above but this is an obvious example of how interactive all of these stylistic parameters are and the problems of presenting them as a categorical structure and its implications of the bounded nature of members which is not applicable here.

In the third system you can see examples of how a musician would attempt to enforce or alter the rhythm of a tune through variation. In bars 5 and 6 the tune varies by refereeing back to the ‘D’, a strong tone for most flute players or pipers who would be able to force the note to great rhythmical effect, reinforcing a beat. Flute players therefore, in the production of an effect in line with their own aesthetic sense are utilising the physical nature of the instrument and the way they can kinaesthetically interact with it. In bars 7 and 8 the melody is structured in steps of 2 notes going downwards, forcing tension with what usually is the base rhythmical structure which is split-common time. Essentially most people play reels where the emphasis is 1234 1234 but by changing the melody to produce a stepping, sequenced effect we naturally make more of a 12 12 12 12 feel. It is important thought not to see a one way process of the aesthetic exploiting the physical, when the aesthetic is arguably derived from the possibilities offered by our physical interaction with the world as would be argued by modern cognitive linguists and philosophers such as Mark Johnson, Mark Turner, and George Lakoff.

In version 4 I have presented ways musicians may be motivated to change the melodic shape of the tune. So in bars 1 and 2 the stepped progression of the tune is replace by a wide arc into the second octave and this occurs again in bars 7 and 8. This does also have obvious rhythmical effect by destroying the original 4/4 of the tune again, highlighting the problems of categorical structure. This is the reason I have characterised these types of variation as having aesthetic and embodied motivations as it would be wrong to try and account them as being things that are melodic, rhythmic etc. To attempt to account for motivations for process is a far more flexible tool.

Perhaps less traditionally in bar 4 we have the introduction of a chromatic variation which again would illustrate how these technical parameters would place the performer politically within the tradition. However it is important to point out that this political location has to do with not just the way aspects of performance such as chromatic variation are used by the musicians but also the context they are in. For example, the travelling piper Johnny Doran, the North Tipperary accordion player Paddy O’Brien and contemporary
concertina player Niall Vallely all use chromaticisms in different contexts and it is these contexts play the larger part of their positioning politically and aesthetically within the tradition – there are very few members of the traditional music community who would group them together stylistically. In version 5 the motivation is harmonic so is either to reinforce or transform the underlying harmonic implications of the tune. Straight away in bars 1 and 2 arpeggiated sequences representing different inversions of the root chord are introduced but implicitly reinforcing the dominant role of the root in those two bars. Again we move into what would generally be considered a less traditional mode in bars 3 and 4 where, in bar 3, a G major seventh is implied in the second group of quavers progressing immediately and unconventionally into a F major triad which would be considered quite untraditional. In the final four bars of the last system I have a bit of fun and show how these different types of variation can combine. Here I hide the natural phrase break and create a break in bar 7. I go on to introduce a movement of groups of three quavers that undermines the rhythmical structure and changes the melodic shape of the tune.

The Boys of Ballisodare (reel)

Fig.19

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Micheál Ó Súilleabháin (1990) has approached variation and improvisational practices from a different perspective and proposed mechanisms traditional musicians use to generate variations. He mentions phrasing and the need to present and vary motor rhythm but does mention two dimensions for variation and improvisation that should be included here. These include what he calls “the pitch dimension – set accented tones” (Ó Súilleabháin, 1990, 123) where the musician plays off a hierarchy of tones, produced by rhythmical placement, to produce variations, versions and settings. Also he presents “the structural dimension – interchangeable segments” (Ó Súilleabháin, 1990, 127) where he illustrates how traditional musicians will quote internally within tunes to create variations at appropriate points, perhaps most often unconsciously. By not attempting to present an overarching structure for understanding variation and improvisation in traditional dance music practice, he has greater capacity for looking at individual process for the creation and understanding of the creation of variation. However, in focusing almost exclusively on this singular process the tension between what is perceived in the process of creation and the analysis of the process by the musicologist is most apparent.

Another important issue that I have avoided here is the relationship between improvisation and variation, the implication being that the later is a much more composition, premeditated process. This is further complicated by the fact that the later term is one current in the tradition for both processes while the former is one that is seen as coming from outside the tradition and belongs to other musics and musicians. One personal anecdote that illustrates this comes from an improvisation class I have ran with post-graduate students. When introducing the students to the idea of improvising and some of the processes that can be involved I asked students to indicate to me if they thought they were now improvising. One student, who was perhaps the most successful in my eyes, failed to put his hand up and when I asked him why not he declared he was not improvising ‘but making up variations on the spot’! So part of our problem in the examination of improvisation and variation as perhaps separate but highly interrelated processes lies into the fact that in the Irish tradition improvisation is a part of variation and indeed is perhaps not considered traditionally as an entity in itself to juxtapose against variation. This returns us to the problems of categorical structuring of musical experience but it is evident that much research has yet to be conducted regarding the various processes of variation in traditional Irish music practice and how they are conceptualised and expressed by the community that engage them.

Intonation

The four stylistic parameters listed above are normally the major important considerations in any individual’s style. Another element which also is often
an important factor for a performance is intonation and this concept plays a parting the traditionality of a performance. The online music dictionary Dolmetsch defines intonation as:

In tuning, the degree to which a pitch of a note heard is what is correct but not to the degree that the note heard is the wrong note (www.dolmetsch.com)

In western art music there a number of structured tuning systems (just intonation, pythagorian tuning, meantone, well, and equal temperament) but in traditional music there seems to be at least two orientations for intonation that stray from general western practice and they are based perhaps on perception and embodied factors (as in fact all systems of tuning must). The first is embodied in the experience of the musician who seems not to either notice or value normal, contemporary western consistency in tuning (this is most often true of some our most esteemed, older performers). The second is perhaps based in the physical and kinaesthetic properties of the instruments and the bodies that interact with them. Many instruments are, purposely or otherwise designed to generate different structures of intonation which can prove to be the focal point of performance for duets. The most obvious recent example of that being the playing of Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh and Mick O’Brien where Caoimhín deliberately focuses on the intonational properties of Mick’s flat pipes (2003). Other musicians produce certain types of intonation because of the way they physically interact with their instruments. Jos König writes about the way that East Clare fiddlers manipulate the tonal structure of the music through left hand (fingerboard) technique rooted in the physical restrictions caused by the way the left hand of the fiddler interacts with the neck of the fiddle. He writes;

It seems to me that the individual freedom in performances, allowed to the player, enables him to manipulate according to his personal taste the musical results of physiological restrictions (König 79, p. 84)

A prime example of this manipulation of the tonal nature of the performance is apparent in virtuoso East Clare fiddler player Paddy Canny’s most recent album where his own tonality contrasts sharply with that of accompanying piano and guitar (Canny 1998).

What resonates with me in a discussion of intonation is Charles Keil’s concept of ‘participatory discrepancies’ where he writes

The power of music is in its participatory discrepancies, and these are basically of two kinds: processual and textural. Music, to be personally involving and socially valuable, must be “out of time” and “out of tune” (Keil 1987, p.276)
Although Keil understood this is having a far more abstract life than literally one of intonation, appropriate (for a traditional context) variations in intonation set real tensions in the appreciation of our music that are enjoyed as well as placing the performance in time, out of time. However, as musicologist we must be conscious that this perception of tension and ‘out of tune’ -ness is one created in a modern listening experience and the aesthetic that created such tonal practice is unlikely to be the one that sustains it in a modern western environment.

Within the community of traditional music practice there is a belief that variations of intonation is a very ‘traditional’ practice that is on the wane because of the influence of fixed pitch instruments (such as the much maligned accordion), ensemble playing and the pervasive environment of western music and it’s fixed tonality. However, as a practice it is rarely taught and in instruments where it is possible to manipulate much emphasis in early development is usually given to playing ‘in-tune’.

Instrumentation

A stylistic parameter that has perhaps had greater significance in modernity is the type of instrument a musician wants to play. There are all different models of flute, whistle, fiddle accordion etc. many of which have distinct tonal qualities. In past days the selection of instruments may not have been so good. A fiddle player would have started on a house fiddle, left up on the wall and then may have progressed to buying their own fiddle when the opportunity and financial ability arose. The woman who in the late eighteenth century went into a market town shop to exchange some of her income from selling eggs and dairy products to buy a free reed instrument would have not have had the choice of instrumentation that musicians today have. Today there is a network of instrument makers throughout Ireland, and internationally, that will supply and sometimes custom make instruments for musicians who have much greater financial ability to invest in instruments than their predecessors. Instruments may now be expense but musicians have greater capacity to buy them, of course depending on their own income and desire to own instruments but it would not be uncommon for musicians today to own multiple instruments.

Sound quality may not be the only criteria for choosing an instrument. The sheer size of an instrument and the physical effort that may be needed to put into playing an instrument may be a factor. Accordion may be too heavy and have too many reeds for some to play effectively, some flute players may prefer flutes that are harder to ‘fill’. Certain types or instruments are often engendered – I often hear students talking about ‘girl’s flutes’, ‘a man’s box’, ‘a lady’s fiddle’. There may also be certain other properties of an instrument

that are not directly linked to sound quality. For instance, I prefer a flute that has keys that are ‘pin-mounted’ because I think the action of those keys is faster and more consistent than the normal ‘block-mounted’ keys whereas another flute player may prefer a flute with no keys at all. This physical nature of my preference for a flute with keys may not effect the tonal qualities of the instrument but does allow me to play certain types of repertoire and use more chromatic variations.

This parameter also includes, for some instruments, materials that are used in performance as part of the instrument or used to prepare the instrument for performance. Therefore, for banjo players and fiddle players the make, type and quality of strings used will be part of what informs performance style, for pipers the same goes for reeds, for banjo players the type of plectrum.

I would argue therefore that very often the choice of a type of instrument is as much a part of a musicians playing style as the choice of a roll or particular phrase in performance. Although it is not a stylistic parameter that can be manipulated in performance (although many musicians would use several instruments in performance depending on the repertoire they are playing and the mood of performance they want to create) it still plays an active roll in the life of the musician who may choose a certain instrument for aesthetic reasons at various stages of their performing lives. It must be emphasised that this is not always the case and people inherit instruments that they stick with and don’t actively think about choosing instruments to suit their own playing style or may quite simply be unable to afford to do so. These people do not engage instrumentation in the way others do which is analogous to the way some musicians would not think of other stylistic parameters.

Tone

Tone as a stylistic parameter is closely associated (but not identical too) instrumentation. It is the quality of the sound produced (and the variety of qualities) by a particular instrument. Though the term timbre in this context may be better to use to avoid confusion with intonation, tone is the term that would used most often in the tradition.

Among flute players some will create a very narrow wide embouchure to produce a hard, raspy sound while others might make a slightly more open and round embouchure for a softer, less aggressive sound (notice me grasping for metaphors!). Fiddle players will use different parts of their bows on different places on the strings to produce different or certain sound qualities as banjo players will strum the strings at different places to make brighter or more muted tones.
On some instruments, such as accordions, piano and others that tend to be more mechanical in nature (i.e. the human body is in some way more removed from the actual sound production) there is less scope (but rarely none) for manipulating the quality of sound. It is interesting that this ‘mechanical’ nature of certain instruments and the inability of manipulating the tonal quality of the sound are often presented as reasons for the non-traditional nature of some instruments. A good example of this is Sean Ó Riada’s attack on the accordion in Our Musical Heritage. Writing on the importance of ‘making’ the note he writes:

“This the accordion player cannot do. He does not make the notes, they are already there, ready to sound at the pressing of a button, produced in an almost entirely mechanical fashion. He has only to press a button and pull or push the bellows. The tone and even the intonation of the ensuing note has already been decided for him by the maker. Because of this individual musical expression becomes extremely difficult if not impossible for him” (Ó Riada 1981, p.69)

Although Ó Riada is certainly incorrect in assuming that an accordion cannot influence to tonal quality of their instrument, the sentiments expressed above are common, but paradoxically not often applied to the concertina, just as mechanical an instrument as the two-row button or piano accordion.

Dynamics

Breandán Breathnach writes;

Intensity, the varying of loudness and softness of sound, is not a feature of traditional music. It is not possible, in fact, to vary the sound in such manner on the pipes. Crescendo and diminuendo are terms for which one finds no use in the notation of the music, and this rule applies equally to singing and to playing. The use of dynamics betrays the non-native (Breathnach 1971, p.90)

He is undoubtedly right that the use of terminologies such as the Italianate ones he mentions would have little use in the notation for traditional Irish music. Indeed their use in classical music has an operational role in that it is a performance instruction and I would argue that the notation of Irish music for Irish musicians does not have this role at all and certainly dynamics, like many other stylistic techniques, do not make it onto the page. Also the implication of the broad sweeping and above all gradual dynamics implied by the use of the long ‘hairpins’ used to indicate these terms in a classical score rarely occurs in the performance of traditional music. However, the varying of intensity is an important part of many musicians performance style and can
manifest in a number of different ways. The fiddle players of East Clare use small dynamics on long tones which will include a slight movement of pitch and a dynamic movement instead of an ornament such as a roll. Many older generation musicians would play the repeats of entire parts at different intensities of volume and use crescendos over one or two bars to ‘lift’ the music into a phrase or part change. Indeed, Breathnach’s own instrument’s lack of capacity for making different dynamics that he claims as a justification of his account of their absence in traditional music is not strictly true as pipers create a dynamic by occasionally using their drones and regulators.

Repertoire

The dance tunes we choose to play are also part of our performance style. This is manifest in a number of ways.

Certain tunes are associated with certain instruments and this is usually based on the ergonomic capacity of the instrument, or perhaps, more importantly, what is perceived to be the ergonomic opportunities and disadvantages offered by the instrument. For example, tunes that go consistently below the D above middle C would not be regarded as flute, pipes or whistle tunes (as these instruments don’t have these notes) but will more likely be associated with the fiddle, accordion and banjo. Certain tunes just sit well on certain instruments, playing to the capacities of certain instruments and the limitations of others.

Certain regions have their own repertoires which can sometimes be betrayed by the tune titles (although tune titles can change quicker than the tunes themselves) so it’s easy to work out that ‘the Ballydesmond Polka’ is a Sliabh Luachra tune, ‘The Glen Road to Carrick’ is a Donegal tune etc. Very often these repertoires are tied to an instrument or the aesthetic of a particular regional style. The Donegal repertoire is undoubtedly a fiddle repertoire with a preponderance of tunes with ‘A’ as tonal centre, the repertoire associated with iconic players of the east Galway tradition (musicians such as flute player Paddy Carty and fiddle players Paddy Kelly and Paddy Fahy will tend to work around a G with a minor modality (paradoxically musicians such as Carty acquired a lot of newly composed material from Cavan born, Philadelphia based fiddler Ed Reavey).

Some tune types are associated certain regional styles. For example Scottish and highlands are associated with Donegal music; polkas and slides with Sliabh Luachra music. Certain different types of the same tune type also will have predominance in different regions. The dominant Kerry polka and the Sligo polka (which seems to be the historically more dominant) have different structures. The Kerry polka will be in 2/4 and will move in a quaver motion

Keegan, Niall. The Parametres of Style in Irish Traditional Music.
while the Sligo version will be similar but will occasionally move in semi-
quaver motion.

**Duration & Emphasis**

Perhaps one of the most fundamental parameters of style in traditional dance music this is perhaps a combination of techniques most closely tied to the central rhythm aesthetic of style in this form.

Performers can produce emphasis by increasing the volume of certain notes in the patterns intrinsic to the various tune types. Here are some examples based on the first two bars of the reel ‘The Green Mountain’.

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig.20**

These are three fairly stereotypical accounts emphasis and often musicians will vary their approach to emphasis according to varied contexts, including the repertoire being performed. Also this is a parameter which is based in the relative volume given to notes rather than absolute values, for example, the first version presented above could involve equal but heavy staccato bowing or fairly light legato bowing but both with an little differentiation of emphasis between notes. So here I am describing an approach that could be manifest in a variety of very different sounds. Above I account for a couple of different approaches that could equally be manifest in very different sounds. The second staff in the system has an emphasis on the main beat of the reel. The third is an emphasis on the sub-ordinate beat producing what a lot of traditional musicians would call back-beat and would be regarded by many as a stylistic marker for North Connacht style.

Duration also effects rhythm by elongating the rhythmical values of certain notes at the expense of others in the stereotypical quaver based movement of the danced tunes, what Ó Súilleabáin calls the ‘motor rhythm’ (1990, p.121). We can illustrate this using the first two bars of the jig ‘Willie Coleman’s’;

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The second version on the system here puts a greater emphasis on the first quaver of each group at the expense of the second quaver. Again, this example of what would be regarded as a swung rhythm (and again seen as an important part of North Connacht fiddling) is oversimplified and stereotypical but it does show how the shifting of duration in the typical quaver movements of the dance tunes can be an important aspect of an individuals and a group of individual’s style. The development of duration and emphasis, building and changing patterns, versions of ‘motor rhythm, is one of the more subtle part of a musicians stylistic palette.

**Speed**

Another important aspect of style is the speed at which the dance tunes are played. There are several common regional paradigms around this which, though specifically often inaccurate, do illustrate the importance of speed. These include the oft-quoted ‘Donegal music is fast’ and ‘East Galway and East Clare musics are slow’ paradigms.

Speed is also a highly politicised parameter of style. The age old paradigm of many musics, that young people play too fast, occurs here. Breandán Breathnach writes in his preface to the second reprint of the influential collection, *Ceol Rince na hÉireann;*

> It was pointed out to the editor that readers not familiar with Irish dance music had been left in the dark about the tempo at which this music was usually played. The following shows the tempo for each class of this music:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music Type</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Double Jigs</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Jigs</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slip Jigs</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reels</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hornpipes</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To play the music at a quicker tempo detracts from the melody; to play it somewhat slower can do it 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. (Breathnach 1974, p.ix)
Anyone familiar with traditional Irish music would know that the time values are not observed strictly as above. However we can see here the common paradigms of the older musicians playing slower and dancers needing the music too fast emerging

Instrument Specific Techniques

Many, if not all, instruments, possess capacities for techniques and effects on their own instruments that are not quantifiable by the above and are individual to that specific instrument or perceived family of instruments. Many of the categories above group techniques individual to certain instruments but quantified by their audible effect. For example, articulation is achieved on the fiddle by changing the direction of the bow, the pipes by stopping all the holes on the chanter, the whistle and flute by stopping the flow of air into the instrument using the tongue or throat. However, here we are talking about techniques also individual to certain instruments that don’t fall into the categorical structures above and have distinct audible effects. When examined it is true to say that many of these instrument techniques are associated with the capacity of the instrument in question playing more than one tone at any one time, and doing so very often to primarily produce rhythmical emphasis or provide a harmonic accompaniment. They include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiddle</td>
<td>Double-stopping</td>
<td>Playing more than one string at one time to produce a chord or drone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banjo</td>
<td>Chording</td>
<td>Playing chords at strategic points in the tune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pipes</td>
<td>Regulator playing</td>
<td>The employment of the regulator pipes, laying across the lap of the piper, to provide a basic harmonic and rhythmical accompaniment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accordion</td>
<td>Use of Bass</td>
<td>Providing basic rhythmical and harmonic accompaniment with the left hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concertina</td>
<td>Octaving</td>
<td>Playing the melody in two octaves simultaneously</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 21. Instrument specific techniques

Rhythm

When presenting this as a way of analysing performance to performance and ethnomusicology students at the University of Limerick, one of the first criticisms is why isn’t rhythm presented as a separate parameter? I would
argue that appropriate rhythms and their variation are developed out of the
careful combination of the parameters listed above. Ó Súilleabháin writes:

“Here is yet again another aspect of the creative process at work
whereby the musician interacts with a given rhythmic flow in such
a way as to allow for his own musical thought free reign within the
traditional norms of rhythmical possibility” (Ó Súilleabháin 1990,
p.122)

I am in complete agreement with his view but not his organisation where he
lists his four dimensions of creative practice; “phrasing, rhythm, pitch and
structure” (Ó Súilleabháin 1990, 120). Rhythm is I would argue more
accurately accounted for as the underlying aesthetic to this music, naturally so
as it is a dance music. It can be argued that all the parameters above are
utilized to the service of various rhythm based effects and aesthetics.
Although the music has been separated from the dance practice over the past
century or so it is still distinctly a dance music and we still very much listen
with out feet. This aesthetic is there in even the most undancable of
traditional music performances.

To illustrate this I will critique Micheál Ó Súilleabháin’s famous analysis of
Tommie Potts’ performance of the reel, My Love is in America’ on his
commercial recording, The Liffey Banks. The A part of this tune shows some
radical ‘deviations’ (Ó Súilleabháin 1987, p.209) from a more traditional tune
model. Ó Súilleabháin does illustrate some techniques particularly associated
with rhythm such a Pott’s exclusion of the set accented tone at the beginning
of bar three of the performance. Ó Súilleabháin gives a complete account of
the tonal and phrasing structure of the performance but I think he is missing
an important rhythmical subtext. Below is Ó Súilleabháin’s transcription of
bars 9-24, with his model of the tune in the second stave of the system.
Fig. 23. “Ill.44 Potts’ ‘My Love is in America ’ I (bars 9-24) compared with the model” (Ó Súilleabháin 1987, p.214)

Ó Súilleabháin concentrates on the variations in bars 1-4 and 7-10. I would argue that underlying the many processes described by Ó Súilleabháin is an aesthetic of rhythmic variation. In bars 1, 2, 7, 8, and 9 we can see what Ó Súilleabháin calls sequential variation (ibid., p. 213). These sequences have a different rhythmical structure, which is leaning into a strong 4/4 feel (where the shape of the melody is accentuation first, third, fifth and seventh quaver value of the bar) to the model which is more firmly centred around split-common time (where the major emphasis are more emphatically on the first and fifth quaver value of the bar).

It is interesting that when Potts in interview with Ó Súilleabháin about the programmatic nature of the music that Potts more often than not explicitly contextualises this in a rhythmical than a tonal realm, the movement of the shuttle in ‘The Weaver’, the movement of the caravan in ‘The Yellow Tinker’ (ibid., p. 271). I would not like to undermine the analysis of Ó Súilleabháin which is quite obviously the singe most significant and extensive piece of academic analysis of a performance of traditional Irish music but he perhaps understates the motivating role of an underlying traditional aesthetic based on rhythm in the music of Potts.
Conclusion

I am certain that the account above of technical parameters of performance practice in Irish traditional music is not exhaustive. However it does provide a useful tool for performers in examining their own performance practice and also for the musicologist for examining others. In the Irish tradition we are in the interesting position of these two personalities manifesting in the single performing musicologist although we must be aware of the problems, many manifest here, that this Janus figure generates for both academic and performance communities.

It is important that the use of such systematic tools for musicological analysis should remain reflexive and open-ended. If music is encultured and imaginative and is essentially indefinable (through language at least) then the way that individuals constitute and categories aspects of what they do and hear will never be precisely the same. Even within the often romanticised community of Irish traditional music (although for a more acerbic view see O’Shea 2007) there are diverse ways and seemingly endless variations of accounting for what we hear and play. Much as the presentation here is as complete as the author can aspire to, it is a categorical structure that will exclude some sounds out of ignorance or a sense of traditionality as I am sure some aspects included will seem to others to be untraditional.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the list presented above is that it comes out of the community that sustains its performance. Below (fig.24) is an adjudication sheet from a Comhaltas county fleadh from 1993. Competition is a contentious issue in traditional Irish music circles as it is in many practices although it would be fair to say that most developing traditional musicians would have taken part at some level.
Monaghan born flute and fiddle player Majella Bartley supplied the form which comes from a county flute competition for ages 15 to 18 that she won in Monaghan. If you look first at the template of the sheet it asks the adjudicator (whose anonymity is preserved here) to provide marks for style and ornamentation, variation and control of tone, rhythm and phrasing, time and command of instrument according to various weightings. Anyone familiar with these adjudication sheets will also be familiar with the way adjudicators maintain the independence of their aesthetic judgement by completely ignoring this marking scheme on the form and provide their own justification for the place and mark of the performance in the remarks section (which has perhaps motivated a more recent restructuring of these forms to replace the prescriptive structure here with a list of suggested parameters). However, many of the same criteria can be seen in the comments, which would naturally reflect the performance and what was appreciated (or not) by the adjudicator. Here she likes the strength of tone, the variations, speed, a particular ornament that would be regarded as advanced in a child performance (the D cran) and the choice of repertoire. Thus, in one adjudication sheet we can see evidence of nearly all our stylistic parameters. These are a particular organisation and presentation of the tools we use to evaluate performance or perhaps more accurately to justify our evaluation of a performance. They are also used in the construction of performance which can perhaps be best seen in the contemporary teaching practice of traditional

Irish music. The way these tools are used and the combinations of them are always different but they are always there.

We must always remember in this sort of analysis that the effect can be artificial and can easily loose a sense of the whole performance. An effective but gruesome metaphor is to imagine the performance being analysed as being a favourite pet dog that is dissected, chopped up into small pieces and turned inside out, to try and find out why it is so lovely! In the analysis we can loose the thing we love and interact with, this music is obviously more than a sum of its parts and this sort of process can loose its true musical, social and cultural impact. However, as a tool to develop our individual performance practice it can be invaluable. It is also invaluable for musicologists attempting to engage with native structures for assessing and accounting for performance. Many contemporary performers need to become musicologists in order to develop their performance practice and examine how these technical parameters of style are manifest in their own music and make decisions about the effect of such technique on their style and how their use can add, or subtract, from what they want to achieve in performance. True enough, we all meet musicians who seem to never practice, never examine themselves in such a cold and clinical manner, seem to be handed their talent from either God or the devil. The role of ‘deliberate practice’ outside of classical music scenes needs much more examination and also the importance of deliberate ‘listening’ is something that is being examined by the academic community of music psychologists (see Hargreaves and Coleman’s account of ‘listening styles’ (1981). I suspect that there are fewer of these unreflective, non-practicing people than we think and the vast majority of us have to engage in this sort of reflective, analytical practice to become the musicians we have the potential to be. These processes are the root and means of creative practice in traditional Irish music and as such processes, I would argue, we are duty-bound to follow. A duty not particularly to God or Ireland but the people who have to listen to us!

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VERNACULAR SOCIALITY AND REGIONAL ICONICITY IN
STEP DANCE

Colin Quigley

Both in Ireland and regions of North America vernacular traditional dance includes the percussive use of feet on the floor by individual dancers that is generally called step dancing.¹ Performance of this widely diffused way of dancing is socially organized in many different ways. Individuals may perform step dancing singly or in groups. It may be thought of as a dance in and of itself or be found in the context of a group figure dance. Step dancing is sometimes improvised, sometimes choreographed before a performance, sometimes codified as a system and formally structured in its performance and sometimes not. Step dancing throughout its range often shares many kinetic elements, that is, the little bits of movement that make up the action of dancing: a tap of the toe, a drop of the heel, a change of weight from one foot to the other. It even shares many kinemic units, that is, natively recognizable coherent groupings of elements.² These are usually called, not surprisingly, steps.

One of the most common ways of characterizing variation in this idiom is in terms of regional style. Popular literature and media publications generally treat step dancing in this way: as Cape Breton step dancing; Appalachian clogging; Ottawa Valley step dancing; and of course, Irish step dancing. In the Irish context the high profile achieved by the “nationalized” schooled step dance idiom has led to a reaction that acknowledges a wider variety of less codified regional vernacular idioms. While seldom nationalized in North America, step dancing is usually seen and presented as regional in style.

In Close the Floor (1985) I examined traditional dance and dance events in rural Newfoundland. That study focused on the so-called figure dances that are performed by groups in various formations rather than on the percussive stepping also found there, partly because at the time I conducted this field research (1978-80) visual documentation adequate to examination of stepping was not available nor easily made on a student budget. Later, I made recordings on a return research summer project to Newfoundland in 1989. ³ Although that video-8 system has now also become obsolete, it was much better suited to my needs than the SONY PortaPac reel-to-reel machine of earlier years and significantly augmented my step dance data. For the following discussion I have pulled together a variety of other recorded step dancing that I could locate in other film projects, such as concert performances, profiles of the musicians and their communities, as well as instructional videos. In recent years, as video recording technology continued to advance, much more of such documentation became available.⁴
It is apparent from even such a desultory database that step dancing is a widely shared dance idiom. From a repertoire of movement resources and possibilities, some constellations crystallize and become seen as emblematic of regional identities. Some of these "styles," are widely familiar, while others such as that found among the Metis of central Canada perhaps less so (CITE Medicine Fiddle). Looking back over the 30 years during which I have been observing step dance in North America, I see evidence that the variety that is characteristic of living vernacular tradition has persisted in social dance practice, and that regional styles seem to coalesce around influential dancers who achieve prominence beyond their immediate locale, usually in concert with a surge in popular interest. Such mass popularizations are a complex phenomenon in their own right in which media attention, exposure, and commercial exploitation, interact with cultural politics and ideologies to create this effect.

A search of the web, for example (nowadays always a good place to look for a measure of popular awareness of a cultural phenomenon) reveals the example of a recent, almost sudden, burgeoning of interest in step dancing as practiced in Cape Breton (MacEachen 2003). In discussions regarding the appropriateness of the schooled Irish step-dancing to adult recreation, one finds it frequently mentioned as a possible alternative that might be better suited to provide the sociality that adult enthusiasts are looking for from their dancing. The music industry has played an important role in this most recent exposure and concomitant surge of interest (Feintuch 2004). A "maritime" regional sound has had commercial success in Canada and one iconic sound element in its mix has been the fiddle. A few younger fiddlers have been building careers in the popular world-music market and dance has been to some extent "brought along" by them to a wider popular awareness (Gurstein 1999; Mead 1999). Also as usual with such revivals of traditional musics, a few individuals emerge as both iconic and authoritative. In Cape Breton, fiddler Buddy MacMaster and dancer Harvey Beaton are perceived in this way. Buddy has made several commercial recordings, including a recent one from Rounder that is particularly well documented (McMaster 2003). He is also the subject of the film that includes step dance sequences (Murphy nd.). The identity discourse to which the dance is appropriated here is a powerful one of Scottish identity and the film shows Harvey teaching dance in Scotland.

It is my thesis that in this and other documented regional "styles" of step dance one sees examples of a shared dance idiom that BECOMES identified as a regional style only when particular conditions are ripe for it. This stylization is often accomplished by a selection of certain movement features based on the dancing of a very few key performers. The selectivity of regional stylization may be so unrepresentative in fact that its regional character might be said to have been "invented."

Broad characterization of any large cultural geographic regions would seem to dissolve into complexity as the focus sharpens to reveal more detail. At smaller scales of collective identification dance style is associated more with social networks such as family or immediate community. On the port-au-port peninsula of Newfoundland the Corent brothers from Mainland were well known as a musical family, and so on to the Formangers and Benoits at the other end of the coastal region. A tendency to identify style in terms of region obscures the often quite large range of variation within that region as well as the high degree of similarity that exists across these boundaries.

My most extensive fieldwork has been in Newfoundland and I turn there now for further confirmation of this argument. A “Newfoundland step dance style” never really emerged and coalesced, although several distinctive features of individual practice vied, in a sense, for pride of place as markers of a Newfoundland dancing.

Many of the kinetic elements and larger step units documented in the preceding sources are also to be seen in Newfoundland. Such juxtaposition draws attention to the need to investigate in what dimensions of dance movement stylization is manifest. More systematic comparative analysis would help to clarify the traditional vernacular movement resources which have been molded in response to different conditions throughout North America, such as the interaction with African-American culture in the South, the development of contests and other performance settings in many regions, as well as more pervasive and underlying differences in social and economic organizations such as those I believe are represented by the Newfoundland case. A goal is I see it, however, is not stylistic identification for its own sake, not merely classification of the complexity we know is there, but rather an enrichment of our understanding of processes by which stylization occurs, shedding light on how dancers manipulate their traditional resources to make dance meaningful in terms of their experience.

Within Newfoundland there are number of vernacular regions characterized by particular historical, social, geographical and other conditions which had an impact on the practice of dance. Of particular importance have been factors influencing the available elements of dance and music repertory directly, the history of settlement, and subsequent contact and interaction with the changing world of music in dance beyond Newfoundland. Thus French Newfoundland, on the Port-au-Port Peninsula is a distinct vernacular region in itself.

Its best known fiddler, Emile Benoit, and members of his family can be seen playing and dancing at home on the Canada and the United States volume of the JVC/Smithsonian Music and Dance of the Americas video series (Benoit 1995). I also recorded him and members of his family making music and dancing together on man occasions.

The Codroy Valley area of southwest Newfoundland is also somewhat distinct, being settled largely as an extension of the more Scottish population in the neighboring maritime province of Nova Scotia. The rest of Newfoundland land is dominated by a mix of English and Irish settlers and distinguishing between their dancing is much more difficult, as the two groups have mixed and influenced one another. Characteristics of music/dance culture are more aligned to the vernacular regions formed by the different bays around which settlements are scattered than along this ethnic-religious division. It is to this English and Irish Newfoundland culture that I now direct my attention.

The complexity of factors that influence dance culture make it difficult to generalize about the whole of Newfoundland. Communities around St. John’s, the provincial capital, for example, have always been more engaged by on-going developments in North American and British popular culture, than the more remote outpost settlements. From some bays so-called foreign-going sailors went on schooners to Europe and the Caribbean, while others maintained highly localized in-shore fisheries. Communities located near the Second World War American military bases were strongly influenced by these contacts. Elsewhere radio introduced American music post-war styles and new roads often brought traveling performers. Beginning in the late 60s, television programs served to promulgate mainstream popular music and dance repertoire. In the years of my fieldwork there were some outpost areas, however, which remained relatively removed from this mainstreaming trend. At that time in some of those communities, older musical traditions persisted. In yet other areas, such as Placentia Bay, social upheavals such as forced relocation, lead to the self-conscious revitalization of older forms. Such processes have clearly continued. Today one can find a self-consciously revived dance heritage practiced, in part, for tourists; a phenomenon barely beginning during my time there (Pigeon Inlet 2005).

Despite local differences and on-going historical changes there is however an overarching shared experience throughout much of Newfoundland that strongly shaped all of its dance traditions. This is the pattern of outpost social life that developed in the context of the merchant fishing economy as practiced in this particularly harsh natural environment (Sider 1986). It is this framework that largely set the parameters for the types of dance events I have previously examined and which has fostered the patterns of meaning with which Newfoundlanders have infused their dance movement.

Step dancing in Newfoundland is performed in the context of group dances, but is also found as distinct genre. At its most formal the step dance is a solo performance for an audience within the largely social context of the dance occasion. It may also take the form of the competition between two dancers, a
freely organized group of dancers all stepping together, or a kind of couple dance depending upon the social context.

There is a pervasive contrast between male and female dance practice. In general, men take a more active role and perform energetic stepping throughout the group dances while the women may simply stand in their places.

Women seldom performed solo step dances. It was more likely to find the occasional woman who would step dance in a less formal manner, coupled with a man or in a group context, but even then it seems that women usually danced at halftime tempo and in an accompanying role. Informants expressed the attitude that while it was expected that men could dance, "it was sort of a bonus of the woman was an especially good dancer" (MUNFLA Ms. 73-89/p.109). Even those women so identified to me, however, performed more rudimentary steps compared to those of the men.

A characteristic use of the body and some aesthetic norms underlie a range of individual variation. Dancers generally perform in an upright posture with little torso movement. Movement articulation focuses almost entirely on the feet with which the dancers perform complex stepping patterns, tapping out the musical rhythms. The feet are kept directly under the body. The arms and hands hang naturally at the dancer’s sides or may be slightly raised with a flexed elbow. Such arm and hand gestures are not considered a significant part of the dance.

Broadly speaking step dance structure consists of a variety of kinetic elements, primarily weight changes between the heels and balls of the feet. Gestural tap and brush movements, again with the heel or ball of the foot and a more forceful stamping of the whole foot. These may be placed around the body in various ways. The significant positions are defined in relation to the body axes: generally slightly in front, diagonally front, to the side, diagonally back behind. Some movements incorporate leg and foot rotations.

These elements are combined into step units of different lengths to incorporate one or more kinetic elements into repeatable patterns. While some dancers express an ideal of formal structuring in which "each foot is used the same," that is, each step sequence is repeated in a symmetrical mirror image, few adhere to this ideal in practice, and most dancers the seem to think principally of coordinating the structure their steps to the musical phrases. The solo Step Dance, performed in a more presentational manner for an audience, is likely to tend toward the more formally structured end of the spectrum while men's stepping in set dances seems much less formalized. Particular dancers favor a smaller selection from the whole range of available elements and employ a characteristic step, often identified as their step by
name, and to which they consistently return after using a few others in a punctuating manner.

Since much of this general description is widely applicable throughout North America, Ireland and the British Isles, a closer examination of several dancers is needed to provide a finer grained image of step dancing in Newfoundland. I have documented dance traditions in several vernacular regions. Within each region particular settlements form quite distinct social groupings, which may be made up in turn of quite separate family networks. I spent nearly a month in Plate Cove West, Bonavista Bay, for example, among the Keoughs and their relations before I met families from the "other side of the harbor " in the natural course of social life, and had similar experiences elsewhere.

The communities of Plate Cove, Open Hall, Red Cliff and Tickle Cove on Bonavista Bay South constitute one such area, in which much my fieldwork was conducted. Their dancing was recorded by CBC television in 1976 for the program Land and Sea (MUNFLA, Videotape, 78-50/v.32). Gerald Quentin was both one of the area's dance musicians and a performer of the solo step dance. In the brief performance shown one can see that he characteristically supports his weight on the ball of his foot, keeping the heel slightly lifted. His preferred steps consist of rapid alterations of weight between the ball and/or heel of the foot, stepping directly under the body on the accented (down) beat and gesturing slightly to the front or side.

When performing, he would begin with simple steps and progress to the more complicated, which were often those which sounded more subdivisions of the beat or increased the parts of the foot used in each step, creating more movement density. In a culminating step the weight is transferred from one ball to the other while quickly striking the heel of that foot before taking the weight in rapid repetition. This requires more "lift" off the ball of the foot to sustain the weight off the ground for that short moment longer than in easier steps; something one feels as an increased energy in the dancing. None of these steps, however, are unique to Newfoundland. This dancer's distinctiveness is to be found more in a sense of control, and a "held "quality which is conveyed by his body attitude, which is slightly flexed throughout, the restriction of movement to a very small "near reach" space around the body, and a lack of release in the lower weight and foot gestures.

Lloyd Oldford, another dancer from the same community is shown in this film dancing in the Square Dance. While performing within the same broad parameters outlined above, he dances quite differently than Gerald. He tends to maintain his weight more towards the back and to gesture diagonally to the side with slightly outwardly rotated legs. He favors an energetic step, again transferring weight from one foot to the other while interpolating a gestural heel-strike of the floor, as in Gerald's duple time Step Dance above. Lloyd dances to the compound time meter generally used to accompany figure
dances using a triplet rhythm. After taking his weight quickly on the ball of his foot at the final third beat, he drops back onto the whole first foot rather than springing back as in Gerald's step. The effect is a persistent pounding of the first beat of the triplet marking the pulse of the music with an insistent impulsive drive. Other dancers in this excerpt use even simpler steps and even more forceful stamping.

The differences between these two examples reflect the shifting context, from solo Step Dance performance with its heightened focus on aesthetic valuation, to the more social figure dance in which the juxtaposition of male and female movement statements is emphasized. Some informants noted a shift from light dancing to heavier more forceful stamping between these two generations that may also be at work in this example. Surely there are individual idiosyncratic contrasts here as well.

The women dancing in this example provide a striking contrast that illustrates the general gender distinctions and made earlier. Some women simply stand in their place, at most their may shift their weight from side to side at half the tempo of the man's stepping. This is even clearer in the performance of an older couple demonstrating the Square Dance as it was performed in the Placentia Bay community of Red Island (MUNFLA, Videotape, 82-092/v. 77).

At certain points these women take a very passive role, merely providing a framework within which the men can dance "to" each other; during traveling sequences, of course, the women do participate more actively. The two men exemplify the very contained the use of space and the lack of free-swinging gestures noted earlier, although their body attitude is not as flexed as that of the Plate Cove dancers.

Another vernacular region in which traditional step dancing continued is the Northern Peninsula. Its West Coast was home to Rufus Guinchard, a fiddler with whom I worked extensively, and who was the primary dance musician of his community for much of his life. At the family observance of his 90th birthday on 6 September 1989 step dancing in the couple format occurred in which the woman, while more active than in the Square Dance, "stepped" by changing supports at half the male tempo, lifted her feet higher, and supported weight on the whole foot, in a manner markedly less intense than the male stepping.

The vernacular regions of Newfoundland represented in these illustrations were settled by both Irish and West-country English people, of both Catholic and Anglican faiths, who had interacted in mixed together while maintaining some with separate identities. It is difficult to distinguish distinct dance tradition between these two groups, although some of the stricter Protestant dominated communities, often of primarily English origin, tended to discourage dancing might employ singing games instead, while strongly Irish
settlements were often perceived as more liberal in their enjoyment of music, dance and drink. It is sometimes possible to distinguish the musical repertory, but any particular musician is likely have a mixed repertoire.

Together with step dancing traditions throughout North America, Anglo and Irish Newfoundland shares a largely common repertoire of kinetic elements, among which a few may be characteristically emphasized within particular dance communities or by particular dancers. These units are combined with a range of structural formality depending upon the dancer and the context. What seems to distinguish most of Newfoundland in contrast to other North American regions, is a combination of features including certain tendencies to be seen the use of space, weight overall body attitude, and concomitant preferences among the wider range of kinetic components. This constellation of aesthetic values and expressive meaning is embedded in a shared cultural experience of informants. In the step dancing component of dance tradition extreme emphasis on contrast between male and female is perhaps the most striking feature of Newfoundland dance compared to other regions. Stepping seems to have become an emblem of maleness to be used for personal display as a solo dance, asserted within the context of group figure dances, or to express comradely competition.

English and Irish Newfoundland stepping is marked by its very contained quality. The limbs are kept close to the body and there is often some flexion throughout which contributes to a sense of spatial containment as well. The footwork is rarely far off the floor, movements are small and kept directly under the body. The use of weight is very controlled, seldom passive or released. The lower leg is rarely swung, as in some Appalachian clogging. Expressive intensification is communicated by increased frequency of kinetic variety within an ever smaller spatial envelope, requiring ever more control.

The importance of these features is confirmed by examination of the shared aesthetic concepts reflected in folk speech concerning dance. The most admired step dancers were those described as the "tidiest," and those who did not move all over the floor. Even in a "sidestep "in which the dancer moved quickly, or "cut" across the floor it was considered that the footwork should still be "neat "and kept under the body. In addition to neatness, "lightness," was also much admired.

These two of characteristics were often illustrated by the observation that some dancers were so light on their feet they could dance on a tin, or enamel pan, turned bottom-up on the floor (MUNFLA, Ms. 781-271/pp. 177-181). Short anecdotes of dancing on plates have been reported throughout Newfoundland. The expression "so and is so could dance on a tea plate" indicates lightness on one's feet and the ability to dance without moving from one spot (personal communication from Herbert Halpert May 1981). Another man described this ability by claiming that he could dance on a "thole pin,"

the wooden peg used as an oarlock (Story and Widdowson 1982, 571), and another informant of mine commented that his father could dance on a two-by-four if need be (MUNFLA, Ms., 81-271/p. 198).

These stories are apparently based on traditional step dancing feats performed by good dancers. The phrase "close to the floor" often used as a shout of encouragement to dancers or in a request for a step dance tune, indicates that dancers, as well as being light and neat were expected to keep their movements relatively small and subtle. The upright postural norm is implied in descriptions of comic dancing which I heard. To get a laugh dancers, often "half shot" or slightly intoxicated, would get themselves "in all kinds of shapes" and "did everything in the world" with their body (MUNFLA, Ms., 79-339/p. 55). It is the upright norm that makes such movements incorrect and humorous. (See the video illustration provided earlier).

The element of display that pervades all step dance performance seems compatible with the emphasis on individuality in style. Each dancer is expected to have their own distinctive step. Indeed in the context of mumming,vi characteristic steps are used by the disguised mummers to hide their identity and by the audience to discover it (Chiaramonte 1969, 87). Music and dance performance generally in Newfoundland is one domain of social life in which an otherwise rigidly imposed egalitarianism that restricts self-assertion is suspended and within which rigid social distinctions might be challenged. The assertion of individuality through step dancing is one aspect of this social ethos that is grounded in the relationships of outport economic life. Different vernacular regions, and smaller networks based on community residential and kinship patterns, in Newfoundland displayed preferences for a particular musical repertoire, rhythms and steps. Within a dance community, however, step dance style is used primarily to express sexuality and individuality. These two domains of meaning are raised to a dominant level of significance in Newfoundland due to the conditions of social life and the expressive role of dance and music with in this system.

Step dancing has not in Newfoundland become associated with an assertion of all large cultural geographic regional identity, as it has in Cape Breton. The Newfoundland example stands, I think, as illustration of the dynamics of step dancing which existed throughout North America apart from the self-conscious regionalism engendered by changing social conditions that challenge traditional patterns of life.

This situation provides an opportunity for productive comparative research. The processes of stylization can be seen particularly clearly in relation to this dance genre, which is widely dispersed among regions distinguished by differing social conditions that sharing a basic repertoire of movement resources. The distinctive profile of Newfoundland step dancing might

profitably be compared to other regions to explore the kinds of manipulation undergone by this medium in response to different social conditions and expressive issues. A thoroughgoing comparative study based on the more complete ethnographic description that is currently available offers the possibility of more fundamental generalizations about these processes.

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End Notes:

i This essay is includes material modified from its original publication in *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* Volume 33, 1991 (a source which is not generally available) and draws extensively on previously unpublished material from my Folk Dance in Rural Newfoundland, MA Thesis, Folklore, Memorial University of Newfoundland 1981.

ii This use of "kinemic" is well established in ethnochoreology and taken from Adrienne Kaeppler's work analyzing dance structure.

iii Thanks to the Research Committee of the Academic Senate of the University of California Los Angeles for their support.


v Natalie McMaster has become probably the best known of these performers, and she frequently step dances as part of her show.

vi Mumming is one form of the widespread disguised Christmas house visiting custom.