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SHEAUKANG HEW

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A DOCUMENT APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

BY

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Abstract

Musical activities in the United States traditionally associated with ethnic minorities are becoming increasingly popular among native-born Americans. Irish music, traditionally served as the cultural reminder for the Irish immigrant community, has in recent years been greatly enjoyed by the wider non-Irish-born American population. This dissertation is an ethnographic study of Irish music in Oklahoma, a locale that is relatively distant from cities that are recognized as having high concentrations of Irish immigrant population, such as New York, Boston, or Chicago.

Based mainly on fieldwork conducted in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas over a three-and-a-half year span (2002-2006), the research material for this dissertation has been gathered primarily through the author's observations as a participant in the Irish jam session held monthly at various places in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas, informal conversations, and planned and structured interviews with other participating session musicians. Information gathered from each interviewee included how musical skills were learned, circumstances under which he/she first encountered Irish music, experiences with other music genres, differences between Irish music and old-time or bluegrass music, appealing factors for his/her involvement in jam sessions, and family ethnic heritage.

The survey of the various contexts of Irish music practices in Central Oklahoma in Chapter 5, the close examination of the blooming Irish jam sessions in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas in Chapter 6, and the case studies of

individual musicians in Chapter 7 inform us of the cultural conditions in the American mid-West; ethnic musical activities, such as the Irish session serves not only as a reminder of the cultural identity of the particular ethnic group, but also offer a broader meaning in the social context of post-modern America. Irish music in Oklahoma, far removed from its original homeland, becomes a means by which native-born Americans find communities, roots and traditions, ethnic identities, or simple pleasures of learning and playing a musical instrument.

Chapter 1: Introduction

An Overview

Musical activities in the United States traditionally associated with ethnic minorities are becoming increasingly popular among native-born Americans. Irish music, traditionally served as the cultural reminder for the Irish immigrant community, has in recent years been greatly enjoyed by the wider non-Irish-born American population. This dissertation is an ethnographic study of Irish music in Oklahoma, a locale that is relatively distant from cities that are recognized as having high concentrations of Irish immigrant population, such as New York, Boston, or Chicago. In the past, extensive ethnographic research on Irish music has been conducted mainly with Irish immigrant communities in those cities. A study of Irish music in the non-Irish community provides us with a window to look into diverse issues of twentieth-first century American culture such as interaction between cultures, impact of the folk revival in the 1960s, Celticism and New Age spiritualism, and the expression of ethnic identity.

At the heart of this dissertation is a group of participants in the Irish jam session held monthly at various places in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas. Sessions are informal performing contexts for both experienced and novice musicians. Such a performance context exists not only in the Irish music scene, but also in old-time, bluegrass, and jazz traditions. “Jam” session implies spontaneity, defined in the Webster dictionary as “an impromptu performance by a group especially of jazz musicians that is characterized by improvisation.” To label an

Irish music session as a jam session is not appropriate according to Barry Foy in his whimsical little book Field Guide to the Irish Music Session. According to Foy, “there’s no jamming in Irish traditional music. Irish music is very specific: specific tunes in specific rhythms, played in specific ways in specific keys on specific instruments” (13). Nevertheless, I will continue to use the term in this study, not only because it is a term used habitually by the local musicians, but also because it indicates the unrestrictive and inviting nature of the sessions under study.

I attended my first jam session in Oklahoma City in the summer of 2002. This was also the first public jam session in this area, though many of the participants had played Irish music in various capacities and venues prior to this first organized gathering. Through these musicians, I came to learn about other music activities that featured Irish music. Therefore, although the jam session is the focal and initiating point for this study, other peripheral activities will be examined briefly to display a more comprehensive picture of the Irish music soundscape in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas. These activities include contra dance, band performances, festivals with Medieval and Renaissance related themes, a traditional music association, and an organization promoting Irish arts. Although I will describe each of these activities in later chapters, I will now briefly discuss their places in this study.

Irish music in each of these contexts serves a different function and meaning. In contra dance for example, Irish tunes, along with old-time tunes, are valued for their appropriate rhythmic components, which form the basis of the

selection of the tunes. In contexts relating to Medieval and Renaissance themes, Irish music is valued for its association with ancient Celtic civilization, which I will discuss in the next chapter. The Oklahoma City Traditional Music Association (OCTMA) is a venue where many people come into contact with Irish music for the first time. In the monthly meeting of OCTMA, old-time, bluegrass, and folk music from various Celtic traditions are featured. Irish music is treated as part of the overall folk music tradition in this context. Finally, Irish Arts Oklahoma, a non-profit organization and a branch of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann (C.C.E.) that promotes Irish music, dance, and language, holds annual Irish festivals to educate the locals about proper Irish performance style. Issues like authenticity in performance style, as well as ethnic and cultural identities expressed through musical participation will be explored in this context.

The popularity of Irish music in Oklahoma points to the globalization of music cultures through accessibility of Internet technologies and music recordings. In fact, many of my consultants heard their first Irish tune through recordings. By examining the musical style of these local musicians, however, I find that individual musicians do not abandon their own musical upbringing, which results in a blending of various traditions. The Irish music scene that brought people from diverse backgrounds together becomes an appropriate venue to investigate how cultures interact.

Exploring the various paths these musicians came through, I found that the folk revival in the 1950s and 1960s played a significant part in the increasing

popularity of Irish music in this country. This finding led me to delve further into the history of America's folk revival and its implications. The Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s that followed the folk revival led to the advent of cultural pluralism in this country. The New Age Movement, marked by an anti-establishment sentiment and a fascination with Eastern spiritualism, also began during this eventful era. I will examine how past social and political events have shaped the currently thriving Irish music culture and given it new meanings in the twenty-first century.

Scope of the study

As suggested by the title, "Irish Music in Central Oklahoma: An Ethnographic Study," this dissertation deals primarily with the Irish music scene in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas. My original intention was to only cover the Irish music culture in Norman, Oklahoma. However, I soon realized that many of the people that attend the session in Norman come from Oklahoma City and Midwest City (a small city between Oklahoma City and Norman), and many people who live in Norman commute to Oklahoma City or Midwest City to play music. The close proximity between these cities makes it possible to consider the Irish music culture in these various locations as identical. The same cannot be said about the city of Tulsa in Oklahoma, a three-hour drive from Norman. Therefore, even though Tulsa has a vibrant Irish music culture according to some of my consultants, it will not be considered in this study.

Although I have tried to cover as much Irish music-related activities as possible in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas, this dissertation is by no means a comprehensive and objective examination of all Irish music events in the region. The events that I can attend are limited by time and opportunities. Accordingly, I have only selected the activities that are accessible to me.

The jam session held on the first Friday of every month in Borders Bookstore, Norman, Oklahoma is the musical activity that I have attended on a regular basis since its advent in 2002. I visit the third Friday jam session held in Oklahoma City (Midwest City, Oklahoma more recently) once every few months.¹ Therefore, my field work concentrates mainly on the jam session in Norman. Other activities peripheral to this study that I have been involved with, in a lesser capacity, include the Contra Dance, Ceili dances and annual Irish Festival hosted by Jean Hill, and various band performances at St Patrick's Day and Medieval Fair celebrations. My discussions of these particular events are therefore based mainly on my role as an occasional observer.

The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to provide readers with an ethnographic description of the Irish music scene in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas. Through a detailed analysis and narrative of local Irish jam sessions, readers are introduced to a form of performance practice that is fascinating in its own right. But more importantly, by asking questions like: Why do these people gather every month at Borders Bookstore to play music? What motivates them? What keeps

¹ This jam session has been recently moved to the second Friday of each month.

them coming back to the jam session? Why do they prefer Irish music to other kinds of music? I explore the various meanings and implications of musical practices in this community. The usefulness of such knowledge is not limited to the deeper appreciation of the local Irish music community; it applies as well to our understanding of contemporary American culture, since this local community represents one of many subcultures in America.

The need for the study

Irish music first came to America through emigration and has served an important function in the immigrant community. Today however, Irish music is no longer limited to immigrant communities, but has spread to non-Irish communities in locales that are far away from the East Coast of the United States, where Irish immigrants tend to concentrate. Oklahoma is often associated with music cultures and genres such as bluegrass and country, but few would make a connection between Oklahoma and Irish music. It seems an unlikely place to study Irish music; many people have suggested that I go to places such as Ireland, Boston, and even Dallas, Texas, after they learned of my interest in Irish music. However, it is this very distance from locales with rich Irish cultural tradition, such as Boston and Ireland, or cosmopolitan centers where various music cultures flourish, such as Dallas, Texas, that makes this study valuable. What is Irish music doing in Oklahoma? Investigation of Irish music in Oklahoma not only contributes to our understanding of a particular ethnic music culture; it also informs us about the changing roles and functions of ethnic music in America.

On another level, this ethnography adds to our appreciation of the music culture in Oklahoma, even though it represents only one of many angles through which one can view the variety of music cultures in Oklahoma. The consultants involved in this study are not only participants of Irish music culture; they are also participants of Oklahoman music culture. Though the focus of this study is Irish music practices, readers can nevertheless catch a sight of the larger picture of music culture in Oklahoma through the eyes of the consultants who are also Oklahoman. We can further extend the data and insights gained in this study to increase our understanding of contemporary American culture, since this Oklahoman community, participating also in American culture, shares many experiences with similar communities in America.

In the existing scholarship, ethnographic studies done on Irish music in the United States or Ireland are scarce. Lawrence McCullough's "Irish Music in Chicago" of 1978 is one of the earliest studies examining Irish music culture in a U.S. city. However, McCullough's study focuses primarily on the process of transplanting Irish music tradition from Ireland to a new environment in the United States as a result of emigration. Mick Moloney's dissertation "Irish Music in America: Change and Continuity" of 1992 describes the Irish music culture in the United States, along with its roles and functions in Irish immigrant communities. Moloney focuses on contemporary performance of Irish music in major metropolitan areas in America by Irish or Irish Americans, with only a portion of a chapter dedicated to a discussion of the non-Irish performing Irish music in various

cities. Another study with a related interest, Hazel Fairbairn's "Group Playing in Traditional Irish Music: Interaction and Heterophony in the Session" of 1993 is an in-depth analysis of the musical structure and texture in public sessions that took place in several Irish towns. All of the above-mentioned studies, as well as some informal documentation of Irish sessions or music scenes, concentrate on music-making activities in Irish or Irish immigrant communities. This dissertation offers a new perspective to the existing scholarship by examining Irish music in Oklahoma, a place that differs historically, geographically, and socially from those mentioned in existing scholarship.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter two, "Research Method and Procedure," describes the methodology I employed when conducting fieldwork for this dissertation. I will also discuss theoretical concepts and analytical models that I have consulted for this study.

Chapter three, "Review of Related Literature," examines the existing scholarship on various issues such as change and continuity of Irish dance music, Celticism, and folk music revivals. The discussion of these issues will situate my fieldwork in a historical and social context.

Chapter four, "Early Irish Immigrants in Oklahoma: Music in the Frontier Experience," provides a brief survey of folk life and music in Oklahoma history, taking into consideration the emigration pattern of the Irish in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Chapter five, “Irish Music in Oklahoma?” is a survey of various music scenes and activities in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas that offer local residents and visitors opportunities to hear live Irish music.

Chapter six, “Irish Jam Session: My Observations and Experiences,” is a detailed description and analysis of the Friday night jam session held in Borders Bookstore in Norman.

Chapter seven, “Why Irish Music?” consists of case studies based on interviews with participants of the Irish jam session, exploring the use and function of Irish music in their lives.

Chapter eight, “Irish Music and American Culture: Conclusions,” is a discussion of the various issues raised in the preceding chapters.

Chapter 2

Research Method and Procedure

This study is based mainly on fieldwork conducted in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas over a three-and-a-half year span (2002-2006). Although I have lived in Norman, Oklahoma since 1993, I had not been aware of music communities outside of the school of music at the university, which consisted predominantly of other music students trained in the European classical music tradition, and professional classical musicians working in the Philharmonic Orchestra or a similar capacity. The local Irish music community has its own culture that is distinctly different from the classical music community at the university, allowing me to approach it initially from an outsider's perspective.

The research material for this dissertation has been gathered primarily through my observations as a participant, informal conversations, and planned and structured interviews (see Appendix I for sample interview questions, Appendix II for informed consent forms, and Appendix III for transcription of selected taped interviews). Participant observation is defined as a "long-term personal involvement with those being studied, including participation in their lives to the extent that the researcher comes to understand the culture as an insider" (Davies 71). My active participation first as a student of Irish fiddling established my initial contact with the community under study. Through a local musician, Phil Reid, who played fiddle with the local Irish band, Banish Misfortune, I learned some basic ornamentation. He then introduced me to my first Irish jam session, held in

Oklahoma City. My network of consultants grew larger as I continued to participate in the jam session. My learning experience, as I switched from playing classical violin to Irish music, contributed to my understanding of the learning process in the folk music tradition and generated further interest to ask questions about the learning experiences of my consultants. As I became more confident in my playing and learned more tunes, I was invited to play in other venues, such as contra dances and band performances, thus expanding my awareness of the use and meaning of Irish music in the local community.

At the various activities I attended, I gained access that enabled me to talk to musicians and audience members. The rapport created through playing music together in sessions or at dances often made conversation come easily. I usually informed them of my role as a researcher and the research interest of my dissertation during the early stages of our conversation. This self-introduction often elicited their curiosity in my study, leading to their willingness to share with me their experiences in the music and dance activities. As I began to be more actively involved in the music community under study, my role as an insider facilitated the opportunities to observe behaviors and hear comments that were usually inaccessible to an outside observer. On most occasions, my role as a researcher was invisible to the participating musicians in the activities; I feel that they acted and talked naturally in my presence and I was not viewed as any different to them from any other participants. It is thus left to my discernment what information to include in my writing. Negative behavior or comments towards others are relatively rare in

my observations and interviews. However, as in any other human communities, musicians in the community under study are not exempt from occasional criticism or unpleasant feelings towards each other. While understanding that it is not my job to paint a perfectly harmonious picture of this local music community, I used my judgment to avoid revealing information that is irrelevant to the purpose of my study and is potentially hurtful to the relationships in the group.

Informal conversations occurred spontaneously on many occasions during my interaction with other participants. These conversations are an important supplement to formal interviews. Many of the conversations occurred during car trips to dances and sessions in Oklahoma City. My lack of confidence driving on the interstate highway from Norman to Oklahoma City provided me with many unexpected opportunities to discuss music with other musicians as I rode with them to these events. Most formal interviews were audio taped. As the sessions continued to grow and change through the years, my list of interviewees also expanded. Most of the interviewees were selected based on their frequent and regular attendance at the session or their active participation at various Irish music and dance activities in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas. Depending on how well I knew the interviewee, an interview generally lasted about 30 minutes to an hour. Information I gathered from each interviewee included how musical skills were learned, circumstances under which he/she first encountered Irish music, experiences with other music genres, differences between Irish music and old-time or bluegrass music, appealing factors for his/her involvement in jam sessions, and

family ethnic heritage. Because of the casual setting of the sessions, some of my earlier interviewees had stopped coming to the session for a period of time. In such situations, their reappearance generated new interest and questions about the nature of the session and its place in their lives. My involvement in the music sessions and other activities at times became a common ground in the interviews for discussion and comparison of our own experiences and understanding of the nature and meanings of the various music activities in our lives.

On rare occasions, I asked questions through email correspondence. Data acquired through emails however, were seldom comprehensive without further conversations or formal interviews. Nevertheless, emails were useful when I had one or two specific questions in mind; it gave the consultants ample time to consider an issue more deeply. I also kept a journal of the sessions and local festivals I attended. These notes enabled me to observe and record the consistency and changes in local sessions and festivals over the last three years.

Through the years, I had the opportunity to travel outside of Oklahoma and attend jam sessions elsewhere in the country. These trips provided me with a glimpse of Irish music culture in other areas. More importantly, the conversations with session participants from other parts of the country gave me the opportunity to place the local jam session in a wider cultural environment. Ethnographic studies conducted by other researchers also offered me valuable views of sessions occurring in communities which are predominantly Irish.

Literary research and readings have broadened my awareness of the issues I encountered in my fieldworks. Mark Slobin's Subcultural Sounds of 1993 was especially helpful to my understanding of the inner structure of a particular music subculture and the interplay between various music cultures. Using examples from the works of Georg Simmel and Ruth Finnegan, Slobin recognizes the important role individuals play in a given subculture and the complexities of cultural analysis involving individuals, as individuals have "multiple identities and exist in a 'web of affiliations'" (39). This emphasis on the individual musician or participant is echoed in Timothy Rice's proposal for a "subject –centered musical ethnography" (156). In Rice's model, he puts each individual in a three-dimensional space of musical experiences: time, location, and metaphor. Rice further explains that time can be considered both historically and experientially. Historically, one can periodize changes in a music culture, linking them to crucial social changes. However, of more interest to my own research is Rice's idea of placing one's current musical experience in previous experiences:

Phenomenologically, musical experience in the present is partly conditioned by inveterate previous experience ... When we think about longer spans of time, periodized by important social and cultural changes that affect nearly everyone in a particular society and even many of us around the world, then the importance of time for musical experience takes on even greater significance. (163)

Rice's concept of location involves multiple social settings, and includes not only a physical, face-to-face interactional space, but also "imagined communities" in regional, national, diasporic, global, or virtual spaces (160). Finally, Rice defines "metaphor" as "beliefs about the fundamental nature of music" (163). In other words, what is music to each individual? For the purpose of my research, this question is further modified to: what is the nature and significance of Irish music to the individual participants in the jam session?

I also follow Slobin's model for analyzing expressive cultures in a given community, involving three overlapping acts: "choice, affinity, and belonging" (Subcultural Sounds 55-56). Slobin indicates that people in the modern world have wider choices of music, and though "we all grow up with something," meaning that we all start our life in a certain cultural environment, most of us can choose from the variety of music experiences available to us. On the other hand, Slobin recognizes that strong attractions (affinity) exist for people beyond personal and idiosyncratic choices, though an explanation for such an attraction is not always easy to find. Taking affinity one step further, a sense of belonging develops. However, Slobin warns against the complex act of belonging:

How deep does it go—casual participant, part-time organizer, professional musicians? Patterns of commitment can be intensive or desultory for leisure-time affinity groups and even within ethnic collectives. (Subcultural Sounds 56)

In my research, I also apply the idea of musical code (or style) switching, a term that Slobin borrows from sociolinguistics. Slobin notes that the study of musical codes and code switching is helpful in studying subcultures, since “small groups both generate their own distinctive style and interact with the styles of the superculture” (Subcultural Sounds 85). Examples of such interactions between cultures are abundant in the Irish music community under study. Chapter 6 of this dissertation is a performance analysis of an Irish jam session I attended, and discusses how the styles that participants bring to the session reveal the various musical pathways they have traveled. Musical analysis, as Slobin puts it, “becomes a process of untying a musical knot and seeing where all the strings come from before proceeding to the next node in the fabric” (Subcultural Sounds 87).

Chapter 3: Review of Related Literature

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines literature pertinent to the historical background of Irish music, especially changes, both socially and sonically, brought on by the process of emigration and modernization. Given that many of the active participants in the local Irish music scene grew up in the 1960s and 1970s, the second section of this chapter explores the era of the folk revival in the 1960s and 1970s, its social context, and the impact it had on contemporary American culture. The third section discusses the controversial issue of Celticism and its implication for the modern role of Irish music in American society.

Irish Dance Music: Change and Continuity

The repertoire that one encounters in a typical Irish music session today consists mainly of instrumental dance tunes. During the course of the session that often runs through an entire evening, songs are only heard occasionally. Interestingly however, even though dance tunes are played in the session, it is unusual to see people dancing to the music.² In this section, I will trace the development of Irish dance music as a separate entity from dancing, and look at how, while the function and performance practice of Irish dance music has changed significantly since the early twentieth century, continuity has been maintained through session playing.

² This is not to say that musicians no longer play for dances, but such occasions are different from a session. A session is usually only intended for instrumentalists, with no or a very small space left for any dancing activities. In the local sessions that I have attended, dancing only happens when one of the musicians brings his teenage daughter, an accomplished Irish step dancer, along.

House Dancing in Ireland: The ideology of communalism

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, instrumental music in Ireland was mainly associated with dancing that took place as a form of communal celebration in the countryside; writings of travelers often indicated the presence of wandering blind pipers and fiddlers at these dances (Fairbairn 55). According to Fairbairn, this communal dance tradition, “an intrinsic part of the social life of close knit rural communities,” continued into the first half of the twentieth century as outdoor summertime cross-roads dancing and house dancing (55).

At a time before radio and television were popular, house dancing was the only entertainment available to rural communities in Ireland. Remembering his experiences growing up in his Donegal home in the early twentieth century, Byrne describes his youth:

The music was a very important part of people’s lives in my younger days back home. It was part of growing up for the children, and it was part of passing on for the very old people, and for the in-betweens it was part of their pastime. In fact it was the principal pastime whenever there was no work to be done, especially in the winter evenings, and on Sundays: music, singing and dancing. There was nothing else: we didn’t have televisions or radios or anything.

(62)

House dances took place in the evenings, usually on Sundays, and often continued into the early hours of the next day. Byrne recalled that “Sunday night

would be the principal night for the dance, not Saturday night ... everyone had to get up on Sunday morning to go to church, so you couldn't be too late on Saturday night" (71). In the winter time, when there was little work to do at the farm, dances like these could go on for days. Michael Kennedy reminisced about dances in the winter during his youth in Flaskagh, in North-East County Galway in Ireland, before he emigrated to the United States in 1923:

In Ireland, they are mostly farmers, they don't have any work to do after the harvest ... they have October, November, December, January, and youngsters have four months to themselves. They don't hit the lake, but go to the dances, and come home at 3 o'clock in the morning and go to bed, and get up at 12, have breakfast, wash up and get ready for the dance again ... I had such a good time that I hated to leave. (Larsen, "Michael. J. Kennedy")

House dances were usually characterized as spontaneous and informal events. Music and dancing often happened naturally when neighbors visited one another with little prior planning, and there was always an abundant supply of musicians to accompany dances: "A few men would come in, and if there wasn't a fiddle in that house there was one next door, and somebody ran out and took in the fiddle, and there was nearly always a fiddle player in the company, and there would be some dancing" (Byrne 71).

Music that accompanied the dances was usually provided by one or two musicians (Fairbairn 55). In the house dances that Byrne remembers, musicians were seated in a corner or up on a table:

There were usually two chairs put up on the kitchen table, and they [musicians] sat away out up there. For two reasons: one was, they were right above the dancers ... and if there was a hectic dance going on and four or five people collapsed on a fiddle, that was the end of it! So the fiddle player was away safe, away in the corner or up on a table somewhere. So, let the dancers kill each other, who cared, the fiddles were safe anyway. (73)

Story telling, news sharing, dancing, and singing are important components of these house dances. In Byrne's vivid portrayal of a big dance night, people from the neighborhood gathered around the fire to talk about crops and price of cattle, smoke pipes, and circulate new stories from the neighborhood. As the night went on, the dancing became more excited and people "worked themselves into a frenzy—the sweat was pouring off them" (74). When the dancers needed a break after a few dances, songs and story telling took place. Good storytellers are important characters at such parties. In his memoir, Byrne retells a story about a fairy and a magical fiddle tune that his grand uncle used to tell at the fireplace. Like a thread that weaves through the fabric, music accompanies Byrne's memory of the village's life: "Now if you want to believe that story I won't try to stop you. That's

how my gran' uncle Big Pat Byrne used to tell it. He played the air too, a very nice air, and he called it 'The Firestone Lullaby'" (78).

Music and dancing, as reminisced by the older generation that grew up in Ireland, were important connections shared by people in the farming communities, serving the function of bringing the community together. Although Irish music is firmly rooted in the solo tradition, as the personal freedom of expressing a tune through intricate ornamentations is highly valued in such solo playing (Breathnach 122), it was nevertheless an indispensable part of a social life characterized by communalism.

In response to the perceived moral decay in Ireland and in an effort to build a national identity after the establishment of the Irish Republic in 1932, the government formed an alliance with the Catholic Church and passed laws to impose stricter moral codes (Gedutis 34). As a result, dances were only allowed in licensed halls under the supervision of church officials. House dances suffered a serious decline after the enactment of this law, the 1935 Dance Hall Act, which made informal house and cross-road dancing illegal. Seamus Mulligan recounts the time when the dances were outlawed in Ireland:

House dances were frowned upon because they were considered to be occasions of sin. Well, there'd be a little shenanigans after it. What happened was: one of the duties of the junior priest was to patrol the towns and watch out. And from time to time they would use devious methods, such as going in the back door. When the

lookout had said the priest was coming, all of the women and all of the guys would go for the back door, intending to sneak out, but would knock over the priest, who was attempting to sneak in the same door. (Gedutis 34-35)

The increasing presence of media technologies and an urban lifestyle also contributed to the disintegration of the communal dance tradition (Fairbairn 56). Fairbairn notes that radios and gramophones provided young people in rural Ireland with a new form of entertainment, and suggested to them an alternative town culture with its own lifestyle and value system. Many musicians stopped playing after the loss of their primary social function, as house dances were no longer viable in the community. Fewer young people took an interest in learning the musical skills of the older generation; many left for the cities as the independence of Ireland created job opportunities in the urban areas (Fairbairn 56-57). Facing the possibility of losing the musical tradition once vital to the Irish communities, individual players undertook the task of ensuring the continuity of traditional music. Fairbairn argues that the solo playing tradition in Ireland—the emphasis on one’s ability to incorporate intricate ornamentations and delicate variations into the music, has always coexisted with the communitarian functions of the music (57). This desire for individual players to “engrave” their own distinct identity on the repertoire through superior technique and inventiveness offered individual musicians an impetus to continue playing in spite of social indifference. The creativity and

efforts of these individual players eventually led to the introduction of a distinctive group sound.

Ceili Band and O’Riada: The emergence of group playing

‘Ceili’ is an Irish word originally referring to the gathering in a neighbor’s house for chatting, story telling, and dancing. The first Ceili was organized by the Conradh na Gaeilge (The Gaelic League) in London as a formal dance event.³ With the Ceili came the Ceili band, which was the “first identifiable group arrangement of musicians playing traditional Irish dance tunes” (Fairbairn 65). The form of these bands first took shape in the dance halls of emigrant communities in England and America.⁴ In Ireland, all dances were moved to the licensed clergy-controlled dance halls after the Dance Hall Act of 1935. Following is an account of the ending of the house dance and the beginning of ceili bands as remembered by Seamus Mulligan:

With the formation of the Irish government, Eamon de Valera, in conjunction with McQuaid, who was the archbishop of Dublin, decided that they were going to ban all house dances. That was the end of it. They were going to have dances in the town that would be chaperoned either by police or the clergy. Then what happened was they got there and they found out that the fiddler, or the box accordion couldn’t be heard in these halls. And of course there was no public address system. Consequently, with no public address

³ The Gaelic League was established in 1893 with the nationalistic aim of restoring the dying Irish language.

⁴ A more detailed record and description of the dance halls and Ceili bands in Boston can be found in Susan Gedutis, See You at the Hall: Boston’s Golden Era of Irish Music and Dance. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004.

system to fill the hall, they'd have a little dance here, and a little dance there, everyplace in the hall. From this we see the formation of the larger and louder ceili bands. (qtd. in Gedutis 35)

These ensembles, intended to be loud enough to accompany dances in bigger halls, typically included fiddles, flutes, button accordions, uilleann pipes, piano, bass and snare drums (Hast, Music in Ireland 83). The Ceili band sound is characterized by the military-style snare drum accenting the second and fourth beats, and a melodic line played in unison by four or more instruments accompanied by piano vamping (Fairbairn 65). In the 1960s, this kind of instrumental line-up was severely criticized by Sean O'Riada, a classically-trained Irish composer who was deeply concerned with the state of traditional music in Ireland. O'Riada felt such performance practice was abominable because it contradicted the aesthetics in traditional Irish music that emphasized personal, individual variation in solo playing:

The most important principles of traditional music, the whole idea of variation, the whole idea of the personal utterance, are abandoned. Instead everybody takes hold of a tune and belts away at it without stopping. The result is a rhythmic and meaningless noise with as much relationship to music as the buzzing of a bluebottle in an upturned jam jar. (qtd. in Fairbairn 65)

On the other hand, opponents of O'Riada's view defended the Ceili bands:

[O' Riada] had failed to understand the fundamental role of music, and, therefore, of its practitioners. Any questions of 'personal utterance' and 'variation' are entirely secondary to the musician's main role: that is to provide a solid rhythmic base of the dancers. (qtd. in O'Connor 75)

O' Riada proposed an arrangement of tunes that alternated between solos and different instrumental combinations, and encouraged the use of ornamentation and variations by solo instruments or a small group of solo instruments, instead of what appeared to be unison playing of Ceili bands (Hast, Music in Ireland 122; Fairbairn 74). Carson, however, argues that individual players in the Ceili bands had almost as much freedom as the soloists in Riada's arrangements:

Because there were no formal arrangements of the kind later introduced by O'Riada, there were no inhibitions and the individual musician could treat the tune as he liked, so long as he kept within implicit limits of decoration and timing. The informed listener could identify individual nuances, ignoring if he wished the sometimes unnecessary piano and drum accompaniment [in Ceili bands]. (Irish Traditional Music 53)

The bodhran, a handheld frame drum, was also introduced to ensemble playing by O'Riada at this time, replacing the snare drum used in Ceilli bands, as he discovered that the bodhran was capable of producing a variety of timbre and pitches in the hands of competent players. O'Riada's experiment had a significant

impact on the direction subsequent bands took to create their sound. Fairbairn suggests that O’Riada’s innovative ideas “are now taken for granted as part of a recognizable group style” in Irish music performances; one of the most popular and commercially successful Irish bands today, The Chieftains, followed O’Riada’s footsteps in the development of their ensemble style (83). Recordings of The Chieftains and other similar groups have reached a widespread audience, and for many, it is their first encounter with Irish music.

O’Riada’s efforts to create a group playing style that highlighted individual inventiveness, coupled with the popularization of the gramophone, altered the relationship between dancers and musicians, and changed the function of music from accompanying social dancing to being predominantly geared for listening pleasure. Nuala O’Connor points out that before the advent of the recording industry, dance music in Ireland was played for community dancing, except on rare occasions when there was a renowned player who would attract a listening audience for his virtuosic playing (76). Recordings of traditional Irish musicians released by record companies in the United States in the 1920s not only became popular in immigrant communities in America, but also made their way back to Ireland, leading eventually to the separation of the music from the dances.

Performing for a listening audience continues to be an important aspect of today’s Irish music session, though the definition of ‘audience’ does not necessarily exclude the musicians themselves. Likewise, the group-playing element of the Ceili

bands, as well as O’Riada’s emphasis on individual expression, find their way into today’s session practice.

Session playing: Continuation of an old tradition in a new practice

The Irish music session is an informal gathering of two or more musicians to play tunes in public venues or private homes. The word ‘session’ seems to have come into common usage by the middle of the twentieth century (Moloney “Irish Music” 172). According to Fairbairn, commercial dance halls in Ireland and abroad became pop-oriented in the 1940s, causing the pursuit of traditional music-making to find a new environment (120). In London, traditional Irish music was reported to have found its place in pubs:

For many an Irish country man, London proved an inhospitable place except for the joyous occasions of Irish music sessions and the camaraderie of an Irish pub ... In the fifties it was not uncommon to find fifty musicians at the Eagle in Camden Town on a Monday lunch time ... the music was a trigger in a mechanism which allowed people who had to work and live in a strained environment to regain their composure in a neutral way. (Mulkere 91)

In Ireland, Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, a government-sponsored organization that promotes the traditional performing arts, was established in 1951. This organization was responsible for the rejuvenation of Irish music after its formation, and one of its efforts to revive public interest in traditional music was to organize Fleadh Cheoil (music festivals) (Fairbairn 121). One of the most important

features of Fleadh Cheoil was the competitions held for categories such as solo instrumentalists, Ceili bands, dancers, and singers. These festivals also instigated the tradition of session playing, as most musicians who attend the festivals are not there to compete, but instead to meet with other musicians in the pub or on the street to exchange a few tunes.

The setting of the sessions in Fleadh Cheoil encourages the dissolution of boundaries, as musicians attending these festivals normally represent a wide variety of musical backgrounds, experiences, and playing styles. Fairbairn suggests that the music in such public sessions shares a similar function of bringing the community together as the house dance once did, though such musical practice reflects the new social context, in which musicians no longer share a similar lifestyle with those who participated in the house dances, but instead come from all walks of life while expressing their communality through the activity of playing music together (123).

Moloney describes several types of sessions in his dissertation. The home session is a gathering of old friends and musicians at an individual's house to play music. Such sessions are also known as closed sessions where only invited acquaintances are allowed in the session. On the other hand, open sessions are public sessions that accept the participation of almost anybody. These sessions sometimes find their home in bars, whose owners allow and often encourage traditional musicians to get together to play on a particular evening by providing free beer to the participants (Moloney, "Irish Music" 233). Exclusive sessions are sessions that only welcome participation of certain musicians regardless of whether

they are held in private or public venues. The “owner(s)” of the session determines what kinds of tunes are being played, and newcomers may be excluded by unfamiliar or obscure tunes (Moloney, “Irish Music” 212). Moloney also identifies sessions that are led by designated leaders, which is a relatively recent model believed to have been developed by some Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann branches, in which a particular musician assumes a clear leadership over the session by calling upon certain players to play solos, or accepts requests for audience members to sing or play (“Irish Music” 233).

Although there are many forms of session, there are certain commonalities present in all the sessions that Moloney observed. One of these commonalities is that a session involves musicians playing music together to please themselves (Moloney, “Irish Music” 189). While an audience may be present at some of the public sessions, pleasing the audience is not the purpose of the session. In order for the session to be successful, it is important that a certain number of the participating musicians possess a compatible level of technical competence and shared repertoire. Other factors recognized as essential to the success of the session include the absence of deviant behavior, the balance between playing well-known and lesser-known tunes, and other norms of social behaviors that are important to all group social activities.

A whimsical little writing, Field Guide to the Irish Music Session by Barry Foy, about the do’s and don’ts of an Irish music session points out a variety of ‘hidden’ rules that musicians should observe. One of the rules is the

appropriateness of certain instruments in sessions. Fiddle, tin whistle, uilleann pipes, flute, concertina, and accordion are on the top of the list of instruments most appropriate for the session. Rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment instruments like guitar and bodhran are to be limited to one per session; other percussion instruments such as dumbek and djembe should be avoided at all costs. Foy argues against the behavior of someone improvising or harmonizing on a tune if they are not familiar with the tune:

Irish music is a unisonal, not polyphonic, art form. Apart from occasionally dropping down an octave ... the idea is for all the melodic instruments to play the same notes at the same time. If you're clueless about a tune, refrain from improvising lovely little harmonizing lines to go along with it. They don't belong ... The anti-noodling rule doesn't mean that someone who has memorized a tune, or who is quick at picking tunes up, can't quietly, discreetly work her way through it. That is a legitimate part of the learning process. But as an end in itself, idle plucking, strumming, or tootling is a very unwelcome intrusion. (54)

Foy also describes the structure of the session as one that is characterized by endless repetitions of a tune, the lack of punctuality in terms of when the session begins, as well as the informality reflected in good-humored praise or criticism.

Conclusion

The Irish music session today has been shaped by the group-playing practice of Ceili bands and the emphasis on individual expression advocated by O’Riada. On the other hand, the recording industry has greatly transformed the function of the music, and as a result, the music played in a session today is more often intended to be listened to, whether by an audience in a public setting or by musicians playing for each other’s enjoyment, than for dancing. The relationship between the recording industry and session playing is symbiotic; whereas the music in many recordings in the latter half of the twentieth century came out of the practice of session playing, the sound and function of music in session playing were also shaped by the popular Irish music recordings from the early twentieth century.⁵ Comparing session playing to recordings and concert playing, Foy notes that session playing has given birth to recordings and stage performances:

The session is the wellspring of Irish music, its beating heart. Its importance to the tradition must never be forgotten. The sometimes tricky, overrehearsed material that finds its way onto recordings and the stage may maintain a higher profile, but it owes its vitality to the decades of sessions that preceded it and gave shape to the music.

What is all that fancy stuff, anyway, but the self conscious stepchild of the classic session in a pub or friendly kitchen? (65)

Despite the transformation Irish dance music has undergone during the last two centuries, the essence of communalism, an indispensable component of the musical

⁵ Such examples include recordings of the groups The Chieftains and The Bothy Band.

practice of early house dancing, has nevertheless found its continuation in the present-day Irish music session and becomes a significant link between past and present. This sense of community will be a recurring theme in later chapters of this dissertation, and it is one of the main factors that draw people to the session.

The Folk Revival: Its Historical Roots and Impact on Modern American Culture

The “great boom” of the folk revival is generally recognized as beginning in 1958 when the Kingston Trio’s “Tom Dooley”⁶ hit the pop charts, and ending in the summer of 1965 when Bob Dylan picked up the electric guitar and the Beatles began to dominate the American popular scene (Rosenberg 28; Cantwell 35-36). It was during this period that folk singers such as Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Peter, Paul and Mary, enjoyed tremendous commercial success singing either folksongs or original songs “conceived and performed” as folk songs, and motivated many young people to follow their path:

They inspired thousands of young middle-class men and women to learn folk songs, to accompany themselves on folk instruments, particularly the guitar and banjo, to search out and lionize authentic folk musicians, and finally to dress, groom, speak, comport themselves, and even attempt to think in ways suggestive of the rural,

⁶ The song “Tom Dooley” is about the murder of Laura Foster, of Wilkes County, North Carolina, by a Civil War veteran, Tom Dula, and his lover Annie Melton in 1866. Dula was hanged for the murder in 1868.

ethnic, proletarian, and other marginal cultures to whom folksong was supposed to belong. (Cantwell 36)

Although the official recognition of the folk revival—marked by its commercial success, did not begin until the late 1950s, its ground was being prepared long before that. Its success can be traced back to a string of events that took place in the 1930s, or even as far back as nineteenth-century minstrelsy. In the following paragraphs, social events and conditions that many considered essential to the blooming of the folk revival will be delineated.

Folk revival and blackface minstrelsy

Robert Cantwell considers the folk revival to be an extension of the American blackface-minstrelsy tradition of the nineteenth century. He argues that the romanticized images of folk life that played a crucial role in the folk revival would be impossible without the minstrel stage and its many motifs and images, such as cabins, wagons, fiddles, banjos, guitars, and the very “South” itself, that perpetuated American culture through songs, books, advertisements, folk festivals and almost every form of popular media (25). In fact, many of the old-time tunes rediscovered in the folk revival were fiddle and banjo tunes, along with nonsense songs made popular by the minstrel stage.⁷

⁷One example of such minstrel songs revived by old-time string bands is “Buffalo Gals,” first published in 1844 with the title “Lubly Fan” and written by one of the first black-faced minstrels, Cool White (or John Hodges). The title of the song changed accordingly to “New York Gals,” “Charleston Gals,” etc. Therefore, Buffalo refers to the city rather than the animal (Davis, “Turkey in the Straw”).

The fiddle tune “Turkey in the straw,” published in The Fiddler’s Fakebook as an old-time/bluegrass tune, was also one of the earliest minstrel tunes known as “Old Zip Coon,” published in 1834 with these words:

Similar ideologies and social functions can be found in both nineteenth-century minstrelsy and twentieth-century folk revival. Like blackface minstrelsy, where tensions between racial groups and classes were worked out in romanticized and stereotypical imitations of the “Other”—be it the blacks or other new immigrants, the folk revival was a “complex response” to the “ongoing adjustment of newcomer groups, whether racial, ethnic, or generational,” and to the “conditions of life under an industrial and post-industrial social and economic system” (Cantwell, When We Were Good 52-53). By “inventing the ‘folk,’” Cantwell explains, we discover ourselves through “experiencing ourselves reflexively as we emulate them [the folk]” (55).

Cantwell sees many connections between social movements in the revival and the blackface minstrelsy. He believes that the Civil Rights Movement connected to the folk revival of the 1960s reemerged from the abolition debates of the minstrelsy era, and that T.D. Rice, a white man who had popularized the black character “Jim Crow” on the minstrel stage, reminds us of twentieth-century white singers, from Woody Guthrie to Elvis Presley, who studied from and sang with black musicians (When We Were Good 56).

There once was a man with a double chin
Who performed with skill on the violin,
And he played in time and he played in tune,
But he wouldn't play anything but Old Zip Coon.
According to John R. Davis, this tune can be traced back to the Irish ballad “Old Rose Tree.”

Folk revival in the pre-and post-World War II era

The folk revival is considered to have begun as a leftist movement in the 1930s and 1940s among urbanites who discovered and worked with rural black musicians and “popularized the genre of ‘protest song’ as ‘folk song’” (Hast, “Music, Dance, and Community” 16). Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Leadbelly were identified as the major figures in the center of the folk revival in the 1930s. Used as a powerful left-wing tool in the mid and late 1930s, their songs were characterized by moral, social, and political themes (Neff 23). Many of these artists had traveled around the country and witnessed the lives and sufferings of the underprivileged class of society, and aligned themselves with the poor and suffering through their songs (DeTurk 21).

Rosenberg identifies three main grounds for the emergence of interest in folksong in the 1930s: 1) the collection and publication of folk music by collectors/lecturers/authors such as John and Alan Lomax, Marius Barbeau, John Jacob Niles, and Carl Sandburg, whose efforts to educate and entertain the public with presentations of folksongs in lecture halls and concert stages led to the advent of the folk festival, with its organizational structure and shape continuing to this day; 2) the political left, brought on by the new social consciousness as a result of the Great Depression, employing folk music as a means of expression for the American masses hit hard by the economic depression; and 3) the surging interest in the study of American culture that inspired students and scholars in American

universities to learn about their own past and sing the newly-discovered old songs at parties (4-8).

Leading up to the Kingston Trio's appearance in 1958 was the popular New York-based band "Almanac" that included Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie. The Almanac broke up at the start of World War II, when Seeger joined the army and Guthrie joined the merchant marines. After World War II, Seeger and Oscar Brand started the folk magazine and organization People's Songs⁸ that was initially heavily involved in the labor movement until it was no longer welcomed by the labor movement due to its radical viewpoint (Neff 34). Folk singers in the late 1940s were also hired to sing at parties and meetings organized by socialist and communist parties and unions. The "Weavers," started by Seeger after the war, was a pop-oriented group that had a series of hits in the early 1950s and a recording contract with Decca (Rosenberg 9; Neff 34). By 1958, the middle-class appetite for popular folk music was well established, especially on college campuses, and a variety of folk music recordings were easily available commercially (Rosenberg 9).

Cantwell claims that part of the reason for the great boom was the disappearance of rock singers who emulated and reproduced the southern-black, poor working-class singing style in the popular culture scene ("When We Were Good" 43). Elvis Presley was drafted to the army, Carl Perkins was seriously injured in a car accident, Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis were involved in sex scandals, and Buddy Holly, Eddie Cochran, and Gene Vincent were killed. The sudden vacuum left by these rock performers led to the alienation of middle-class

⁸ People's Songs is the forerunner of the modern magazine Sing Out.

youth from what they saw as commercialism—represented by singers such as Fabian and Frankie Avalon whose performance styles were more European white than Southern-poor white. The appearance of the Kingston Trio and similar bands who presented themselves as amateur singers with natural, untrained vocal qualities and simplistic open-chord acoustic guitar accompaniment attracted a young audience whose social awareness was already shaped by the sound of the poor southern-style rockabilly. This longing for a deeper social consciousness is also present in Pete Seeger’s writing in 1968, in which he acknowledges the appealing qualities of the five-string banjo music he heard in a square-dance festival when he was sixteen:

... I liked the rhythm, I liked the melodies, time-tested by generations of singers. Above all I liked the words. Compared to the trivialities of most popular songs, the words of these songs had all the meat of human life in them ... They weren’t afraid of being tragic instead of just sentimental. They weren’t afraid of being scandalous instead of being giggly or cute. Above all, they seemed frank, straightforward, honest. (48)

The resistance against the “civilized affluence” of contemporary life after World War II, which led to the alienation experienced in an urban or suburban society, is another component of the folk revival boom (DeTurk 22). Those born in the 1940s and early 1950s belonged to a new middle class, who were enjoying the blooming postwar economics while experiencing a changing society, in which

automobiles, television, research laboratories, and a transcontinental market were beginning to replace railroad, radio, factory, and regional markets (Cantwell “When We Were Good” 45). Cantwell notes that the social landscape at this time was marked by a uniformity resulting from a mass-produced vision of life:

Your house in the suburbs, with its new television set, your two-car garage, the gleaming, garish cars parked therein, perhaps the college degree that your parents persistently evoked as the key to happiness: these were trophies of the enthusiastic consumerism of the postwar period, the uninhibited reaching after a dream long deferred by wartime deprivations ... You tended, for example, to identify yourself with children your own age, who socially and culturally were more or less like yourself, and to think of the more or less uniform world of children in which your parent had made shift to place you, as the ultimate aim of their escape from the small town or the urban ghetto, as a norm. (“When We Were Good” 46)

The cultural monotony created a hunger for the romanticized vision of rural life represented in the folk songs. The desire for an alternative lifestyle was not only exemplified by the popularity enjoyed by songs like “Tom Dooley,” for its exotic but dark story is only one of many examples that captured the imagination of its listeners and carried them away “from high school corridors and sock hops” (Cantwell “When We Were Good” 44). It was also represented by a “sense of family” shared among the community that embraced the folk movement, and

characterized by a “genuine friendliness and camaraderie not only among the performers, but also among most members of the audience, and between performers and listeners” (DeTurk 20). This sense of family and yearning for a larger communal life is inevitable when one considers the highly atomized society that Cantwell described, in which the generational spectrum was reduced to that of parent and child in an average nuclear family (“When We Were Good” 47). The discontentment many young people felt in the 1940s and 1950s was also reflected in the spirit of defiance and boldness that they demonstrated, for example, through selecting academic majors in art, philosophy, or literature instead of programs in the social or natural sciences that offered more promising careers (Cantwell, “When We Were Good” 49), or through new styles of appearance as described by Deturk:

... the folk, whose music is authentic and earthy, wear boots or sandals, denim (preferably not brushed) or chino (unpolished) pants, work or prison shirts, and a hair style that doesn't look too recently or professionally trimmed. Admittedly, the archetypical folk look, consciously designed and rehearsed, is more characteristic of the younger devotees, those college-student couples who, at the 1965 Newport Festival, looked like reincarnations of their immigrant grandparents or walking replicas of a Grant Wood painting. (16)

Folk revival and Civil Rights Movement

The folk revival was closely entwined with the Civil Rights Movement, where folk songs had played an indispensable role. Eleanor Walden recalled that:

During the years of the Civil Rights Movement I was at the right place at the right time to sing with the Movement. Bernice Johnson Reagan and I organized the Atlanta Folk Music Society and then a “folk festival” that including authentic folk cultural artists as, Bessie Jones and the Georgia Sea Island Singers, and new songwriters such as Peter LaFarge, Len Chandler, and Buddy Moss. (Eleanor Walden Homepage)

Slobin recognizes that the ideology of the folk revival, emphasizing “humane internationalism and political activism,” was absorbed into the Civil Rights Movement, which in turn inspired a new ethnicity (“Rethinking ‘revival’” 41). This new ethnicity promotes racial and ethnic pride through the appealing image of “Black is Beautiful” (Curtis 322). As a result, interest in ethnic music was picked up alongside the folk revival. Ethnic groups began to preserve and celebrate their own ethnicities, leading to the revival of numerous old-world traditions. Many of the key sponsors for ethnic music activities and organizations, such as Ralph Rinzler of the Smithsonian Institution, Bess Lomax Hawes at the Folk Arts Division of the National Endowment for the Arts, and Ethel Raim and Martin Koenig of the Ethnic Arts Center, were all in one way or another involved in the folk revival and helped revive many ethnic dance and music traditions (Slobin, “Rethinking ‘revival’” 41).

Irish music and the folk revival

The impact of the American folk revival on Irish folk music is evident in the Clancy Brothers' comment:

It was America showed us Ireland, and not just America, but New York. We were singing along with Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Jeanie Ritchie. They were folk singers who were reaching into the American past to discover what was real, what was genuine as compared to the Tin Pan Alley junk. And they got us to look at our own past. (qtd. in Slobin "Rethinking 'revival'" 41)

Two of the Clancy Brothers, Pat and Tom Clancy, left Ireland in 1947 and eventually settled in the Greenwich Village area of New York City in 1950. After the first few years of struggles with staging plays in the Cherry Lane Theatre, they became successful when they organized a concert and engaged folk singers like Oscar Brand, Pete Seeger, and Jean Ritchie, as well as blues singers like Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and Reverend Gary Davis to sing with them (O'Connor 108). After Tommy Makem and the Clancys' younger brother, Liam came to the United States, the four of them became the folk group, The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem.

The popularity the Clancy Brothers enjoyed in America took them by surprise, as they had never considered themselves as folk singers or even heard of the term before they came to the United States. In an interview with Mick Moloney,

Liam Clancy indicated that their folk group was formed quite unexpectedly and was pushed along by the folk revival craze in Greenwich Village at that time:

Since we were the only fellows around who were of Irish extraction, most of the folk singers, and folk music was becoming an immense force in the United States, we had become very popular ... None of us played an instrument—Tommy played, but his hand had been broken in an accident. The four of us would stand up and we'd sing, I think, "Kelly the Boy from Killane" was one of our big ones, and another was one of my mother's songs, "Whiskey You're The Devil; You're Leading Me Astray"; these were a few songs we knew together. (Moloney, "Irish Music" 95)

Ironically, it took a while before they became popular in the Irish American communities, followed by immense success in their homeland, Ireland. Tommy Makem remembered that:

The Irish in America never came to see our shows ... They were used to 'Danny Boy,' 'When Irish Eyes are Smiling,' the clichéd Irish American songs, what they considered the Irish songs. When we started singing things like 'Brennan on the Moor' and 'Will Ye Go Lassie Go' and 'The Jug of Punch' they didn't think they were Irish songs at all, in fact a few people who came to the Blue Angel shouted up at the end of the show, 'When are you going to sing an

Irish song?’ They didn’t recognize these as being Irish. (O’Connor 111)

In 1961, the Clancy Brothers became widely accepted by the Irish American community as the “legitimate Irishmen” after their appearance on the Ed Sullivan show (O’Connor 112). They adopted the singing styles of American folk groups, especially the Weavers, and incorporated choral singing with the accompaniment of guitar and banjo, features that were foreign to Irish traditional singing.

Nevertheless, their singing styles became a well-recognized Irish folk-singing style both in Ireland and America.

Old-time music and folk revival

“Old-time music,” according to Humphrey, was a marketing label that traced back to 1923 when the record label O’Keh recorded fiddler John Carson playing “The Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane,” “The Old Hen Cackled,” and “Rooster’s Going to Crow.” Some of the common elements one can find in the commercial recordings of old-time music of the 1920s are: white rural Southern singers, an untrained singing voice and style, and string accompaniment. Raymond R. Allen describes old-time music as:

traditional singing, fiddling, and other instrumental styles of folk music which were popular throughout the South and rural areas across the United States from the post-Civil War era through the early decades of the twentieth century, before mass media and improved transportation began to wipe out regional styles. (66)

Some of the origins of old-time music came from the ballads that accompanied early immigrants from the British Isles to the Southern Appalachians. When English folklorist Cecil Sharp was collecting folk songs from the Southern Appalachians in the early twentieth century, he discovered many American variants of these British ballads, some of which were no longer remembered in their land of origin.

Humphrey indicates that African-American phrasing and syncopation was an important stylistic influence in old-time music, especially if one compares American string-band music to that of Canada, where the presence of an African-American influence was less prevalent. The banjo, used extensively in old-time music, is also an instrument generally recognized for its African-American origin, introduced to white Southerners through the blackface minstrel shows. As noted by Humphrey, the guitar was introduced later to this Southern rural tradition, mainly through mail-order catalogues such as Sears & Roebuck, which made inexpensive mass-produced guitars widely available in the late nineteenth century.

The folk revival boom in the late 1950s revived the interest in old-time music and old-time recordings made in the 1920s. Raymond Allen defines an old-time music revivalist as “a musician of urban, suburban, or small town (non-agrarian) background who attempts to recreate traditional, rural, vocal and instrumental styles of folk music which were not present in the home or community in which he or she grew up” (66). One of the most influential old-time revivalist bands in the 1950s and 1960s was the New Lost City Ramblers who carefully imitated the fiddle, mandolin, guitar, and banjo playing styles of the early

recordings, crediting the origin of each song (Lund 400). Richard Blaustein's recollection of his own involvement in the old-time music revival was experienced by many college students at the time:

My active interest in folk music bloomed in the summer of 1959 after attending a Pete Seeger concert in western Massachusetts. I returned to Abraham Lincoln High School in Brooklyn, New York, that fall to find that many of my classmates were similarly smitten ... After studying the rudiments of old-time and bluegrass banjo with Roger Sprung, one of New York City's first Scruggs-style pickers, I took up the fiddle, largely because of infatuation with the sound and style of the New Lost City Ramblers ... Suddenly I found myself part of a small but fervent group of diehard citybillies who kept playing old-time music and bluegrass regardless of the shifting currents of musical fashion. (258)

However, Blaustein argues that although the urban folk-music revival played a significant role in "redefining the value and worth" of old-time music, many old-time fiddlers associations devoted to preserving and promoting the old-time music that sprang up in the 1960s and 1970s were the result of a genuine grass-roots preservationist movement (260). Blaustein states that folk romanticism, resulting from the alienation and "unsatisfactory cultural identity" one experiences in changing social environments, as well as grass-root preservationism, the product of

“a subjective sense of deteriorating tradition,” are often equally prevalent and inseparable in the folk revival movement (264).

Conclusion

The folk music boom, with roots in the nostalgic motifs of the nineteenth century minstrel stage, fertilized by the abundant folk music research and social consciousness of the leftist movement in the 1920s, and further fanned by the sentiment of discontentment in post-war American society, had run its course by 1965 when the Beatles took over the popular music scene in America. However, its impact continued to be felt by many individuals. Although folk music had largely disappeared from commercial radio by the late 1960s, Therese Matthews, one of the participants in the Irish jam session in Norman, Oklahoma, recalled that she was still listening to Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, and Peter, Paul, and Mary when she attended college in the early 1970s (Personal Interview). According to Matthews, folk music was still easily accessible for college students at the time, even though the Beatles had already arrived on the scene. In the early 1970s Matthews was active in student movements, and she believes that folk music played a significant part in the “anti-establishment” movement active at that time. In her dissertation, Mary Neff indicates that the lack of media attention on the folk movement allowed the tradition to be developed at a grass-roots level (43). According to long-time folk performer, Phee Sherline, “What happened, really, is that the 60s came and went but people picked up the music and ran with it” (qtd. in Neff 42). The vibrant singer-songwriter movement today, as one can observe in many weekend cafés or “open

mic” nights, along with traditional music societies and dance societies, is the continuation of a cultural tradition established in the 1950s and 1960s. As will be further discussed in the following chapters, many of my consultants either personally lived through this era, or experienced the impact of this era through parents, friends, or organizations.

Celtic Music?

Since the beginning of my research, I have wavered between applying the label “Celtic music” or “Irish music” to the music I investigated. I finally decided to call it Irish music because of the complex and often ambiguous connotations attached to “Celtic” music. Nonetheless, I am aware that most musicians in Oklahoma identify themselves as Celtic musicians, and in fact, the Borders Jam session is labeled “Celtic Jam Fest” in the bookstore’s bulletin. The usefulness of the “Celtic” label lies in its all-inclusiveness: musicians are not limited to playing only Irish music. One can play Scottish and Irish tunes, as well as a few old-time American tunes, and still be called a Celtic musician. Moving beyond the local music scene, “Celtic” music in the global market is even harder to define. The slipperiness of this term is highlighted by Lois Kuter in Garland Encyclopedia’s article “Celtic Music:”

... no scholar has established a set of sonic traits that can qualify or disqualify music as Celtic. *Celtic* is just a convenient way to bundle the musical traditions of different Celtic countries whose differences often seem more striking than the commonalities. (8: 320)

Celtic music in the recording industry ranges from Enya, credited as the first recording artist to “celticize” popular culture, to the more recent Riverdance, as well as groups like The Chieftains who play mainly traditional tunes (Sawyers 3). Kenny Mathieson describes Celtic music in the present century as “an ever-expanding rainbow-hued canvas” (7), while the authors of The Rough Guide to Irish Music state that the Celtic label is:

largely a marketing ploy utilized by record companies to make their products more commercially attractive or to describe a form “ethereal” or “haunting” New Age, ambient music beloved by Bord Failte (the Republic’s Tourist Board) and muzak installer. (Wallis 6)

Such sentiments are repeated in June Skinner Sawyer’s The Complete Guide to Celtic Music, in which she admits that “Celtic music” is a marketing term that she used as a matter of convenience, with an awareness of the cultural baggage that comes with it (3-4).

The most common understanding of Celtic music that I have gathered from the local community refers to tunes or musical styles that originated, or in one way or another, are related to the so-called Celtic regions: Brittany, Cornwall, Ireland, Isle of Man, Scotland, and Wales. Old-time American tunes are often accepted as Celtic music because of their connection to the Celtic past, as it is generally agreed that old-time American music evolved from songs and tunes that early immigrants brought with them from Ireland and Scotland. However, for many people involved in the Irish music community under study, the Celtic label also conjures up images

of the ancient Celts, as well as the mystical spiritualism often associated with Celtic culture. In the following pages, I will present the popular view of Celtic history—one expressed in colorful books available in major bookstores, as well as the perspectives of recent scholars who argue that the popular history of the Celtic past is based mainly on myth, having arisen from various social needs and circumstances.⁹

The popular belief

The first evidence of the existence of Celtic civilization was found in the village of Hallstatt in Austria where a large prehistoric cemetery of 1,045 graves was uncovered in 1846 and excavated during the second half of the nineteenth century. This civilization became known as the “Hallstatt culture.” Scholars believe that the Hallstatt culture spanned from 800 BC and 700 BC, to around 600 BC and 500 BC. The material findings suggest a settled farming community characterized by frequent warfare. The uncovered iron works--decorated vessels and ornamented weaponry, match the description of a group of barbarian people whom the Greeks called “Keltoi,” as noted in the writings of Greek and Roman Classical writers (Delaney 29). Another site, La Tene, located at the northeastern end of Lake Neuchatel in Switzerland, was discovered in 1858; “La Tene culture” soon came to represent a period of Celtic civilization extending from around 600

⁹ Delaney’s *The Celt*, a book based on a series of BBC television programs about the Celts, has been criticized for providing readers a clear but misleading picture of ancient European Celtic culture. Chapman argues that illustrated books on Celts such as Delaney’s give readers a false impression; it appears that the authors had witnessed the pre-Roman barbarian Europe with “camera and tape-recorder” while there are still many holes to be filled in about what scholars actually know about Celtic culture (6).

BC until the Roman conquest. These La Tene Celts were also known as the Gauls, who spread east into Asia Minor, occupying the land known as Galatia and fighting with Caesar in the Gallic war campaign (Jenkins 23). La Tene culture is considered to be the culmination of ancient Celtic culture, characterized by lavish burials and advanced decoration on weaponry. The decorations found on objects uncovered in this time period are recognized today as “Celtic” style, and are widely imitated by modern “Celtic” artists and craftsmen (Chapman 94). The influence of the La Tene Celts was believed to have spread across the European continent, and westward into France, England, and Ireland; their reputation in Europe was feared by many.

The confrontation between Julius Caesar and the Celts is vividly described by Frank Delaney in The Celt. Delaney attributes the defeat of the Celts to the lack of unity among the Celtic tribes:

But however brilliant their presence, however admirable their farming skill, however exotic their artistic expression, they never managed to present themselves as one, organized nation. They remained a series of tribes, powerful and large families, rich and secure and experienced in warfare from defending their territories and possessions against their own Celtic neighbors or wandering marauders, always a wide and loose collective, composed of individual chieftains who would bow the knee to no single over-all leader. (34)

Many believe that the Celts had, at some point, migrated to the British Isles. A random search on the Internet resulted in the widely-known “Celtic invasion:”

They migrated as far west as Spain, and their boundary stretched towards the east, settling in the region called Galata, in the Anatolia (Turkey), the south-west coast of the Black Sea. Sometime during sixth century BC, they crossed the English Channel, to the British Isles. (Joe)

Britain was later invaded by the Romans, and after the Romans left, was taken over by the migration of the Germanic Saxons. However, in Northern England, Wales, and Ireland, the Celts were said to be mostly untouched by Roman power, and remained the last stronghold of Celtic culture:

By the end of the fifth century AD, only Wales, Scotland, and Ireland remained of the great Celtic tribal kingdoms that had dominated the face of Europe ... It was in Ireland that Celtic culture and institutions lasted the longest ... In the fourth and fifth centuries, the Irish crossed over into Scotland and systematically invaded that territory until they politically dominated the Picts who lived there. The settling of Scotland in the fifth century was the very last wave of Celtic migration. (Hooker)

Determined from the archeological findings of burial sites identified as typical of Hallstatt culture in Britain, Delaney claims that by 700 BC a large emigration to Britain had begun. Before Britain was conquered by the Romans, the British Celts

operated kinship and tribal ruling systems similar to those found in pre-Roman Gaul, distinguished by their love of warfare and accomplishment in beautiful metalwork and art (Delaney 45). Delaney suggests that, by the time Caesar began his invasion of Britain in 55 BC, probably as much as two-thirds of the population on the islands of Britain were Celtic tribes (40).

The history of the ancient Celts subsided before the end of the European Middle Ages. It is generally believed that Ireland is the last Celtic nation, with pockets of Celtic-speaking communities surviving in Wales, Scotland, and Brittany (Jenkins 37). Celtic scholars no longer acknowledge any group of people as Celts after this time period, although the people in modern Celtic fringes, including Ireland and Scotland, are generally considered to be descendents of the ancient Celts. However, an alternative view offered by Chapman and others argues that the continuity between the ancient Celts and the modern Celtic nations or people is uncertain. These scholars base their arguments on several grounds: the questionable mass migration of ancient Celts from the European continent to the British Isles, the problematic concept of ancient Celts as a self-recognized, unified group of people, the improbability of maintaining a “Celtic” cultural and biological stability through continual movements of people, and the weak assumption that the “Celtic” language serves as an indication of Celtic ethnicity.

When did the Celts migrate to Britain?

Although it is generally believed that the Celts occupied Britain by the fifth or sixth century BC, most scholars have difficulties tracing the arrival of the Celts in

Britain before that. There were no existing writings by the Celts documenting their arrival, only archeological evidence and writings of the Greeks and Romans, especially those of Caesar upon his invasion of Britain in 55 BC. Chapman and James propose that the Celts as a people may not have migrated in large numbers to the British Isles; instead it was their names and fashions that spread across the sea. The artifacts resembling, with significant local variations, those of the Hallstatt and La Tene culture uncovered in Britain and Ireland suggest that it was mainly “ideas and ideologies—religious, social-political, martial—that were moving, rather than people” (James 92). James claims that although it is plausible that there were individuals or small communities that crossed over to Ireland and Britain from the continent, the popular mass migration theory is not supported by archeological findings (40). Arguing against the popular explanation that the Celts must have migrated in large numbers across the continent due to the archeological discoveries, Chapman offers this modern analogy:

Something moved in time and space, certainly, but it was not people as such—it was, rather, a self-definition, a self-identification.

Archaeologists, looking back upon the twentieth century, may notice that the Coca-Cola bottle had spread throughout the known world by 1950, and had been completely replaced by the Coca-Cola can in many locations by 1990. We know, however, that they would be wrong to conclude, as well they might, that the Coca-Cola bottle people had emerged from North America, and spread throughout the

world, massacring all others as they went; or that they in their turn had been displaced and massacred by the Coca-Cola can people. (43)

Who were the Celts?

Since the Celts left no literary record of themselves, the majority of the descriptions and knowledge that we have of Celts today were drawn largely from Greek and Roman writings, including those of Julius Caesar himself. The term “Keltoi” was first used by the Greeks to refer to the barbarian people living northwest of them. The interchangeable usage of the terms “Keltoi/Celtae” and “Galli/Galatae” found in Greek and Roman writings has created confusion for modern scholars. It is uncertain if “Celt” was a term that the people called themselves. Even if there was a specific group of people calling themselves Celts, it is unlikely that all people referred to as Galli or Keltoi viewed themselves as Celts. Despite the confusion about the different names, scholars agree about the barbarous culture implicated by the various names. Thus, it is more likely that “Celts,” instead of signifying a cohesive group of people sharing similar physical features, language or other cultural traits, existed only in the perception of Greeks and Romans as the barbarous Other. Chapman concludes that classical writers were interested in the Celts as a people of the fringe:

The fringe in question was geographical, certainly, but it was also conceptual—a fringe territory of the social imagination of those that have left us our records. With the collapse of the classical world, the ‘Celts,’ constituted in opposition to this world, disappeared; the

structure of definition which gave them substance was destroyed.

(68)

Chapman argues that the disappearance of the “Celts” along with the ancient world does not indicate that they were massacred or displaced by another group of people; rather, it was the “structure of definition which had brought the Celts into existence as a category—the clear distinction between civilized Greece and Rome, and the barbarian north,” that had disappeared with the Germanic invasions of Europe, and the term ‘Celt’ did not re-emerge for many centuries (53). Chapman’s arguments challenge the popular belief that the Celts were a group of people that achieved one of the greatest civilizations in the ancient European world, vividly illustrated in Delaney and Chadwick’s descriptions:

... the Celts occupied a proud and vivid place in mainland Europe—lushness in their civilization, gold and flowers, and enough war and song and brutal savagery and imagination to fuel ten thousand legends (Delaney 34).

At that time a territory stretching from Ireland to Galatia was in Celtic hands. ‘For two centuries,’ says Grenier, ‘they (the Celts) were the greatest people in Europe.’ ... This rapid expansion over an enormous area implies great fecundity and a great spirit of adventure.

(Chadwick 6)

The modern Celtic language and the ancient Celts

Recent scholars reject the continuity between the modern Celtic language and the ancient Celts. In fact, the labeling of the language spoken in today's "Celtic" nations as "Celtic" only began in the eighteenth century, brought to the public's attention mainly through the works of Paul-Yves Pezron and Edward Lhuyd (James 44-47; Cunliff 112-115; Chapman 205-207). In his L'Antiquité de la langue et de la nation des Celtes, published in 1703, Pezron provided the Bretons with impressive genealogy, claiming that descendents of Celts survived in Brittany and Wales, and spoke the ancient language of the Celts. Inspired by Pezron's work, Lhuyd encouraged the translation of Pezron's work while he continued to work on his own ambitious 1707 publication of Archaeologia Britannica, in which he demonstrated the underlying similarities between the extinct language of the ancient Gauls of France and the modern languages of Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and Brittany, grouping them together as "Celtic." Lhuyd also suggested that these languages came to Britain and Ireland through the migration of people from Gaul. After the idea of a Celtic-speaking people was launched in Lhuyd's work, the Celtic label was quickly applied by the people in the British Isles to national and cultural identities. However, this connection between contemporary language and ancient Celts was established upon Classical sources and philological observations. Chapman reminds us that various forms of 'Celtic' labels in ancient sources were neither primarily linguistic in their content and application, nor self-evidently correct terms for the

linguistic or ethnological grouping, and “a different choice of term might have had radically different historiographical consequences” (70).

In summary, the continuity between the ancient people known as the Celts and the modern Celtic nations is vague and uncertain, if not completely dismissible. James states that “no one in Britain or Ireland called themselves a ‘Celt’ or ‘Celtic’ before 1700” (17). James and others argue that modern Celtic people have no “ancient pedigree,” but are instead a “modern interpretation” (James 10). This leaves us with an interesting question: Why are the Celtic identity and heritage so important to so many people, today, as well as in the eighteenth century, that author Simon James was accused of “ethnic cleansing” when he presented the idea of an invented Atlantic Celtic people (James 16)? Examining the various periods in which “Celticism” rose and fell in history, it becomes obvious that Celtic identity is closely tied to the social needs of a particular time. In the rest of this chapter, I will trace the various social situations that have arisen since the eighteenth century under which Celticism blossomed.

The threat of an English assimilation

Around the time that Edward Lhuyd published the concept of a Celtic-speaking people in 1707, and throughout the course of the eighteenth century, a joint British identity, dominated by the most powerful nation, England, was established through political unions between England, Scotland, and Wales. The dominance of the English identity in this British union threatened to assimilate and submerge the non-English identities into a “common Britishness which was

overwhelmingly English in character” (James 48). Lhuyd’s writing not only provided the dispossessed non-English group, including the Irish people whose identity was also threatened by the English, with a new name and identity: Celtic, it also instilled in them a new sense of pride by giving them a long and honorable pedigree that was far more ancient than the English, and thus allowed them to recreate a distinctive identity (Cunliff 116). The desire to create a separate identity from the English continues to motivate many people in the Celtic nations, as expressed by a Cornish woman in Merle Severy’s 1977 National Geographic article “The Celt:”

I have learned to speak Cornish because I am Celtic. I taught my daughter to speak it, so she will feel Celtic too. We are Celt—not English, not Anglo-Saxons. We must make our heritage live, as must the Irish, the Welsh, the Bretons, the Scots, and the Manx. (Severy 584)

The Romantic Movement

Celticism also attracted the attention of the urbanized English. As the threat of the “barbarians” finally subsided following the defeat of the Scottish Highlanders at Culloden in 1746, the rising industrial classes began to romanticize and glamorize the “vanishing” old Highlander’s culture and the “wildly beautiful” countryside (Chapman 125; James 48). Chapman notes that the romantic notion of the Other is only possible when the dominant society is no longer threatened by it:

While wolves range round the human winter homestead, carrying off babies and dragging down the weary, it is unlikely that the human society involved will rejoice in the wild splendor of the wolf pack. When the human society has moved into cities inhabited by millions, and the last wolves are living a threatened existence on the margins of geography, subject to the bullet, the situation is altogether changed. Then one might expect a movement for the conservation of wolves. The analogy with wild animals is apt, because the Highlanders were often viewed in this light by the self-consciously civilized lowlands. (126)

The romanticisation of the Celtic “Other” was also fueled by literary publications, such as James Macpherson’s Ossian collection, Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland, published in 1760, and a series of Sir Walter Scott’s novels published in the nineteenth century. Macpherson claimed to have collected the Ossian poems from two manuscripts that were between 1200 or 1300 years old. Although the poems were later proved to be forgeries, revealed to be Macpherson’s own writing, they nevertheless inspired the public’s interest in Celts, and brought unprecedented prestige to the language and culture of the Celts. Scott’s novels further planted the idea of a noble Highland clansman into the popular imagination, resulting eventually in the visit of King George IV to Scotland in 1822, wearing a kilt that had been banned by the English authority in 1746. This romanticized popular image of Celtic Highland culture led to the establishment of

many Highland Societies and such invented traditions as kilt, tartan, and bagpipe (Jenkins 61).

Irish nationalism

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, following the potato famine during which millions died or emigrated, nationalism and a campaign for independence began to emerge in Ireland, leading to the establishment of the Gaelic Athletic Association in 1884 to promote distinctively Irish sport, and the Gaelic League in 1893 to “de-Anglicize” Ireland by promoting the Irish language and other Irish art forms, including traditional music. Sparked by the revival of the Gaelic language and political nationalism, a literary movement in Ireland known as the “Celtic Twilight” was well on its way by the end of the nineteenth century. Key players of this movement were William Butler Yeats and his colleagues, who found inspiration in their Celtic cultural roots. According to Chapman, these writers were dissatisfied with society at the turn of the twentieth century:

Yeats, like his colleagues, found the present sadly wanting; all beauty, mirth, truth, valour and poetry had left the world, their absence to be lamented in tender grief. It was only a step from this, however, to looking around for somebody to blame for this condition. All the metaphors of Celthood, all the romantic indictments of modernity and reality, were there to serve this end.

(218)

The memorable “fragile beauties of the ‘Celtic Twilight’” that characterized their writing propagated ideas of the Celts in the modern world, as Chapman reminds his readers: “How many children have gone, with Yeats, to the Lake Isle of Innisfree” (219)? This literary revival romanticized early Irish history and legends, such as the Celtic heroic-legendary figure Cu Chulainn, culminating in a renaissance of Celtic culture that swept through the Celtic nations (Jenkins 69). By the end of the nineteenth century, intellectuals in Celtic nations took pride in their Celtic heritage and fought back against the repression of Celtic language, heritage, and nationhood. During the first half of the twentieth century, the Irish Republic won her independence in 1918, Scotland and Wales established their own national parties, and the new Irish state was successful in the “Gaelicization” of Irish historical identity, emphasizing its Celtic roots while marginalizing most post-Norman elements (James 131). The popularity of Celticism, which had gradually declined during the first half of the twentieth century following the World Wars, economic depression, and the strength and unity of the British Empire, resurfaced only in the 1960s (Jenkins 70).

1960s and the New Age movement

The 1960s saw the folk revival boom: leftist political ideologies associated with the Civil Rights Movement and a general dissatisfaction with modern life led to a renewed awareness of ethnic identity and a desire for an alternative lifestyle. Scholars compare the counter-culture of the 1960s to Romanticism in the late nineteenth century; Chapman notes that both periods were characterized by secure

prosperity (219). Although Chapman was referring mainly to the British experience, economic prosperity and social stability were also characteristic of American society in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Writing in the 1970s, Frank Musgrove observed that “today’s [1970s] counter-culture Romanticism flourished not among the poor and oppressed, but among the well-to-do and highly educated” (66). Ideologies rebelling against “technology, work, pollution, boundaries, authority, the unauthentic, rationality and the family” were prominent in both the counter-culture of the 1960s and nineteenth-century Romanticism (Musgrove 65).

The New Age movement emphasizes inner life or self-spirituality. Paul Heelas summarizes the essentials of New Age as “detraditionalized” and “internalized:”

That is to say, autonomy and freedom are highly valued; and authority lies with the experience of the Self or, more broadly, the natural realm. This means that New Agers attach great importance to the Self-ethic, which includes emphasis on the exercise of Self-responsibility and which, more generally, serves as a ‘meta-“narrative”’ operating at the experiential level. Detraditionalization is also associated with the Movement’s perennialized outlook, namely that the same wisdom can be found at the heart of all religious traditions. (29)

The interest in Self-spirituality grew in the counter-culture of the 1960s, an era rendered by Heelas as oriented towards changing the mainstream (manifested in

Civil Rights or anti-war demonstrations), rejecting mainstream disciplines to live the hedonistic life, and finding ways of life which serve to nurture the authentic self (51). Jenkins states that New Agers looked outside of contemporary mainstream Western culture for guidance in their personal spiritual actualization; many found inspiration in the distant past, such as pre-historic pagan Europe, or to non-Western culture, such as Zen Buddhism (74).

The Celts, as argued by Chapman, have since the time of Greek and Roman Classical writers, been constructed as “the opposite of their self-consciously civilized observers” (210). Contrary to the “predictable, artificial, reserved, formal, conventional, reasoned” lifestyle of urban culture, New Agers were drawn to the “free, unpredictable, natural, impulsive, creative, unreasonable” nature of the Celts—popular images gathered from Classical writings and nineteenth-century descriptions of Celtic people (Chapman 212). Religiously, the pagan Celts offer superstition, magic, and irrationality, qualities that are refreshing to New Agers who seek escape from conventional Christianity. The appealing qualities of the Celtic people are illustrated in an editorial introduction for Severy’s article:

The Celts, a proud, inventive, battle-loving people ... Yet there was something about the Celts—some poetry of mind. Fey, superstitious, melancholy, ribald—that enabled the culture to endure. (Grosvenor 581)

Severy's description of a Cornish midsummer festival, evoking the imagery of a Celtic-pagan fire festival, represents the fascination of many towards an ancient ritual filled with mysticism:

Children link hands and circle right, in the ritual direction of the sun, making dancing shadows against the wall of flame. Voices sing in the ancient tongue of Cornwall ... On that fiery Midsummer Eve in Cornwall, as pinpoints of yellow light flickered into flame from hilltop to hilltop, one could feel the magic of that timeless land steeped in legends of King Arthur, where the wizard Merlin seems to cloak in myth each stone circle, each Celtic cross, each ancient field and hamlet and headland. From one end of Cornwall to the other, and in Brittany across the narrow sea, a chain of beacons set the night on fire, as in those dark distant days when the Celts spanned the Continent. (584-5)

Interestingly, however, this seemingly ancient festival is entirely a modern creation, and the type of people who participate in festivals like these are usually Celtic enthusiasts and New Agers (Chapman 221; Jenkins 86).

A large number of publications regarding Celtic history, culture, mythology, mysticism, religion, language, art, and music have become available since the 1960s (Jenkins 73).¹⁰ The public's growing interest in Celticism in the 1960s is often

¹⁰ Examples of such fascination with Celtic myth and mysticism can be found in books published in the 1970s, such as Celtic Mysteries. Passages accompanied by numerous illustrations of ancient stones, artifacts, human figure, and burial sites capture the imagination of many, for example:

compared to the Celtic Twilight in the nineteenth century. However, the nineteenth-century Celtic Twilight involved mostly middle-class and upper-class intellectuals, while Celticism in the 1960s attracted a broader segment of the British population (Chapman 219-220). A fascination with Arthurian myths and literature was strongly expressed in both eras. Chapman notes that the most convincing testimony to this “is not, perhaps, the great bulk of overtly Arthurian literature, but the extraordinary vogue for J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings,” which achieved the height of its international sales in the 1960s and 1970s (220).¹¹

Conclusion

The various social and cultural factors leading to the rise of Celticism in the past are essential to our understanding of the popularity of Celticism in twenty-first-century America. References to ancient Celts had not appeared in literature for more than a thousand years since the downfall of the Roman Empire. It was not a coincidence that when Celticism first emerged in the eighteenth century, people living on the fringes of Europe were trying to establish a identity that was distinct from the dominating English or French culture.

This easy movement between the human warrior hero and his otherworldly archetype, the sun god, is a common practice in every kind of Celtic story. This is the key to the Celtic Mysteries—the merging of the spiritual, physical and imaginative planes . . . The Celtic Mysteries took shape in the flux of in-between states, such as the twilight between light and dark or night and day, or in the dew that was neither rain nor seawater, nor river nor well-water; and used the sacred mistletoe that was neither a plant nor tree. The ghost warrior from the Sidh, ‘a man born not of woman,’ tells Cu Chulainn to sleep, ‘for they have no power over your life at this time.’ In the bardo state the hero is neither dead nor awake; like Arthur asleep below a hillside, he is a ‘once and future king’—ritually bound as a cosmic embodiment of the Ancient dream state. (Sharkey 10-11)

¹¹ My own observation of the music community under study testifies to this fascination with medievalism.

The search for an identity continues to be a central issue in contemporary American society. As Timothy Taylor suggests, “contemporary Americans are so famously mobile—rootless—that I think a lot of ‘identity’ politics is a way of ‘placing’ ourselves: in Wales, Ireland, Scotland, Brittany. Or India, or China, or Puerto Rico, or wherever” (281). Ethnic cultural forms, including the “ancient” Celtic traditions, serve to provide Americans with a distinctive pedigree and identity, as well as a sense of rootedness. The romanticisation of the “Other” and the fascination with counter cultures, such as New Age spiritualism, are recurring issues in modern industrialized societies. Over the course of history, whether the ancient Celts who existed in Classical writing, or the reconstruction of a modern Celtic identity since the eighteenth century, “Celtic-ness” has always represented the “Other”—the irrational, the unconventional, the sentimental, the disorder, the magical, or the emotional. This representation conveniently offers modern Americans alternatives to a “Western rationality that is too narrow, a Western economy that is too individualistic and selfish, a Western science that is inhumane and tyrannical, and so on” (Chapman 218). In this dissertation, the images, imaginations, and meanings evoked by “Celticism” are considered in the context of the uses and functions of Irish music in the local communities of the Oklahoma City and Norman areas.

Chapter 4

Early Irish Immigrants in Oklahoma: Music in the Frontier Experience

The movement out of Ireland

Irish have been coming to the New World since the earliest days of settlement in America. Historians generally divide the Irish immigrants into two groups: the Presbyterian Scots-Irish from Northern Ireland and the Catholic Irish.

“Scots-Irish” refers to the group of Scots who settled in the Ulster Plantation in Northern Ireland, as part of King James I’s plan in the early seventeenth century to control Northern Ireland through encouraging settlement by English, and subsequently Scottish, on lands previously owned by native Irish. The difficult economic conditions and the high land tenure in Scotland were the major forces behind the migration of Scots, especially lowland Scots, to Northern Ireland (Chepesiuk 41). The Ulster Plantation promised the poor Scottish farmers a chance of owning fertile lands and a greater religious freedom from English authority. However, the Presbyterian Scots continued to face religious persecution from the English, especially during the change of power at the ascension of each ruler. Life in Ulster also presented its own challenges, as two distinctive and mutually hostile cultures—the Protestant Scots and the Catholic Irish—co-existed alongside each other (Chepesiuk 50). Since the more fertile farmlands along the rivers in Ulster were occupied by the Protestants, the Catholics were forced “to scratch out a meager existence in the poorer, mountainous areas” (Chepesiuk 50). Such conflict culminated eventually in the great Irish rebellion of 1641, which continues to impact

the distrustful relationship between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland today. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Scots-Irish were once again forced to emigrate due to economic and religious hardship, but this time to North America.

On the other hand, the Catholic Irish were the earliest group of Irish immigrants who arrived in North America during the seventeenth century, when the English and Scottish immigrants began to move into Ireland (Blessing, "Irish" 525). Many of these early Catholic Irish immigrants were voluntary or involuntary indentured laborers or prisoners. According to Blessing, many political and military prisoners and their dependants under the rule of Cromwell in the mid 1640s were sold as indentured servants ("Irish" 525). The major wave of Catholic Irish to North America occurred in the mid-nineteenth century during the Great Famine of 1845, although living conditions in Ireland were intolerable for years before the famine. By the mid 1830s, Catholics from the midlands and southern part of Ireland were already dominating the emigrating movement to the United States, and most of them were unskilled rural peasants. In the 1820s, many Irish took the route to the United States through Canada, as the British Passenger Act encouraged emigration to Canada, causing the travel fare to Canada to be much lower than to the United States. During the famine years, however, more Irish traveled directly to the United States (Blessing, "Irish" 529).

Most of the emigrating Irish in the famine years were aided by families and relatives, especially in the provision of travel fares. Usually relatives pooled

resources to send out younger and more energetic family members, who later earned sufficient funds to pay the fares of those who remained behind (Blessing, “Irish”

530). In Bringing It All Back Home, Nuala O’Connor writes:

They all, men and women, sent millions of dollars home. This money helped support the family, pay rent and ultimately bring brothers and sisters out. The fact that someone had relatives in America was in itself almost a reason for going. (47)

Settlement in the United States

Irish immigrants typically arrived first in the Eastern port cities. The early Scots-Irish immigrants who settled in New England often faced hostility that came from the Puritan New Englanders. Pennsylvania, however, with its receptive and tolerant policy towards immigrants and its cheap lands, soon attracted a large influx of Irish immigrants. By 1735, when Pennsylvania became crowded, prices of land and rents rose. These Irish immigrants then began to cross the Blue Ridge Mountains into the Susquehanna and Shenandoah Valleys, the North Carolina Piedmont, and moved further west into the Appalachians of Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Georgia (Emmick 6-7). As early as the 1790s, large numbers of these Scots-Irish immigrants crossed the Appalachian Mountains and moved via three routes into Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri (Blessing, The British and Irish 3, see map below). Chepesiuk indicates that:

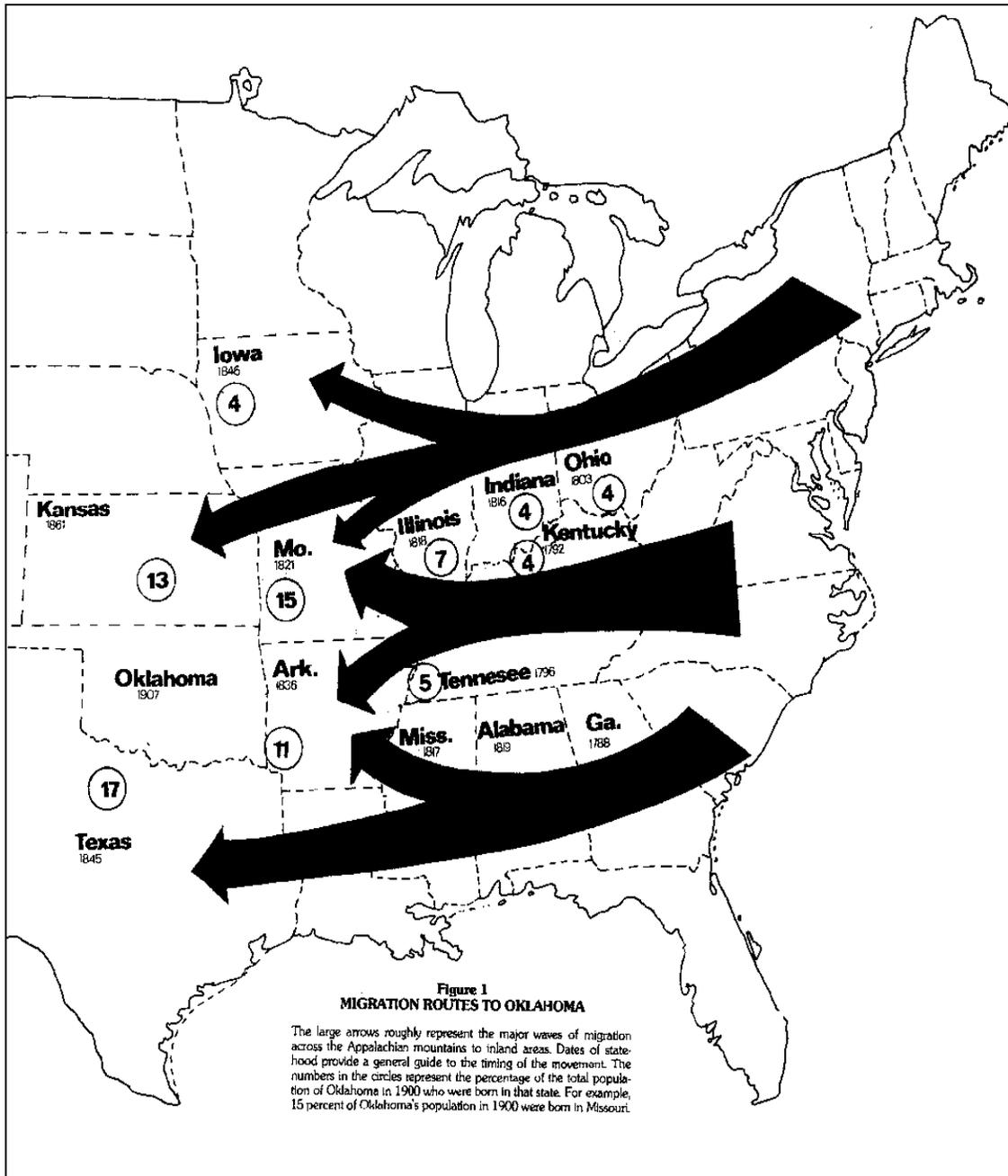


Figure 4.1 Migration Routes to Oklahoma (Blessing, *The British and Irish in Oklahoma* 3)

... a constantly shifting frontier became the norm in this southward migration. Those who had bought land and developed it could make a large profit by selling to latecomers and, with their profits, could then move onto the fringes of the frontier and buy large tracts of cheap land. (123)

Dennis Clark suggests that the early foundations of Scots-Irish in America enabled them to access the mountain frontiers; they served as the “prototypes” of the settlers in the mountains, upholding the image of “restless exploration, rustic character, bitter struggles with the Indians, and distrust of authority [which] all came to typify in the American mind the frontier experience”(Clark 74). Although the major and earliest influence of Irish culture in the Appalachian Mountains came from the Presbyterian Scots-Irish of Northern Ireland, Irish Catholic fugitives, who came to this country as indentured servants or prisoners, also made their way into the mountains and gained security in the mountain fortresses. Clark notes that their “hardy individualistic lifestyle, their racy Irish music, and their suspicious secretiveness were already a tradition in the Southern mountains from the Smokies of Virginia to the Ozarks before the Civil War” (96). Many early Irish Catholics adopted Protestantism after their arrival in the United States and often worked side-by-side with the Scots-Irish (Emmick 9).

Many of the first-generation Irish immigrants worked in dangerous and less desirable jobs, resulting in a high mortality rate. Irish immigrants had followed the coal mining jobs to the Appalachians and Far West, where the death rate was high in

the mining areas. According to Patrick Blessing, “Americans rarely see gray-haired Irishman during the mid-19th century” (“Irish” 532). In the nineteenth century, as the United States government planned to connect the country more effectively through canal and railroad systems, which created a huge demand for workers, many Irish, especially the large number of newly arrived Irish immigrants, became canal and railroad workers. Contributing their lives and energy to the developing transportation system in early America, Irish immigrants were taken to all corners of the country. Clark claims that Irish were “distributed deep into the interior of the nation” even before the influx of immigrants during the Great Famine (19). In an article documenting the establishment and development of the Catholic school, Sacred Heart Academy, in Vinita, Oklahoma,¹² Velma Nieberding reports that Catholic Jesuit priests were coming to the then Indian Territory to serve the spiritual needs of the railroad builders, known as the “Irish Brigade,” who were mostly Catholics. The visits of these priests eventually led to the establishment of a Catholic church and school in Vinita in the late nineteenth century (380).

The Oklahoma Land Run that opened the Indian Territories to white settlers occurred on April 22, 1889, following the demands of hungry homestead seekers and a series of negotiations between Congress and tribal governments in the Indian Territories. Blessing documented 756 British and Irish among the thousands of settlers (British and Irish in Oklahoma 13). However, the presence of Irish in Oklahoma began long before the land run. Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century,

¹² Vinita, located at the Northeastern corner of Oklahoma, was established in 1871. It is the second oldest town in Oklahoma “born under the struggles of the Cherokee Nation and the expansion of the railroad” (Visitor Information).

Irish came to Oklahoma as traders and ministers, and they served in the military posts of the United States Army across Oklahoma. In the nineteenth century, many came as railroad workers or coal miners.¹³ Many of these Irish married the local Indians not only because of the shortage of white women on the frontier, but also because it was easier to conduct business or convert a tribe after one acquired tribal membership through marriage. Blessing reports that Irish Catholic cleric Benedictine Brother John Larcy encountered an old white farmer and was advised: “Find a good-looking Indian woman and your fortune is made” (The British and Irish 2). Through these marriages, many British and Irish acquired access to Indian lands and resources, such as coal and oil. By 1900, Blessing indicates that the British and Irish newcomers in Oklahoma had increased to 4,290, with English in the lead and Irish second, while the population with British or Irish parentage had expanded to over 10,000, becoming the largest group with foreign ethnic background in the Territories. Few of these newcomers came directly from their original homelands; most had resided in at least three states (The British and Irish 13).

¹³ According to Rodger Harris, there were four major waves of Irish moving into Oklahoma. The first group came to the greater McAlester area as coal miners in the 1880s, and many in this group came directly from Ireland. The second group came during the land run period, and some in this group came from Ireland by way of New York or Chicago. The third group came from Texas to Greer County in the Southwestern corner of Oklahoma during the period spanning from the early 1880s to statehood in 1907; only a few came directly from Ireland, if any, but most had lived in Texas before moving to this area. The fourth group came and settled in the Drumright area during the oil boom of the 1910s and 1920s. While some in this group may have had come directly from Ireland, most had worked in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, or perhaps Texas, oil fields, before coming to Oklahoma (Personal Communication).

Community life in frontier Oklahoma

Life in the community of settlement in Indian Territories (soon to become Oklahoma) centered around gatherings in neighbors' homes on Sundays. Music was a significant aspect of community life, as described by this vivid illustration in Angie Debo's Prairie City: The Story of an American Community:

They spent long evenings together, talking, popping kaffir corn, pulling taffy. Everywhere they met they sang, and when they returned late at night with two or three families packed in a lumber wagon they sang the whole way home. They liked religious songs, not deeply spiritual, but gay and tuneful; popular ballads they had brought from the old home; and light-hearted ditties of their own that were already springing up from the fresh Oklahoma soil. (23)

Marion Thede recalls a typical Sunday gathering in early-twentieth-century Oklahoma:

A bountiful meal of chicken and all the trimmin's marked the noonday, after which the men retired to the shade at the side of the house, making sallies to the field, the garden, and the barn, while the women devoted themselves to clearing away the table, getting the babies to sleep, talking over quilts, the new or the impending arrival in the neighborhood, and generally exchanging news. There was often a fiddler, a banjo or a guitar "picker" in the group in the shade

of the house, and many a tune and ballad has found a new master.

(23)

Much like the house parties in the farming communities in Ireland and the British Isles, the fiddle was an indispensable element in accompanying the all-night dancing. Dances like the polka, schottische, waltz, and two-step were popular, and so were play-party games, in which the couples “dipped and whirled in intricate figures to singing and clapping of hands,” while more modest ones “touched hands only” (Debo 24). Collecting play-party games throughout Oklahoma in the 1920s and 1930s, B.A. Botkin explains play-party games as “singing-games, including both dramatic choosing or marching games and dancing games, in which the dancers swung each other by the hands or, if permitted, by the waist, with no music save their own singing” (16). Although there was generally no musical accompaniment at play parties, Botkin indicates the use of dance instruments such as the fiddle, banjo, guitar, and harmonica with chords provided by the piano or organ on some occasions, especially if square dancing was included in the parties (26).

Communalism was a vital aspect of frontier life, and music making in the form of house dancing or play-party games served to bring the community together. “They had to sing,” as Ethel and Chauncey O. Moore put it. “Although the story of their accomplishments seems to us a colorful one, to them life must often have appeared unbearably drab and uneventful. They could choose between entertaining themselves with song and story or listening to coyotes howl outside their doors”

(viii). Commenting upon the play-parties, a tradition that declined with the disappearance of cultural isolation typical in rural settlement areas, Botkin notes that:

in the days before railroads, highways, automobiles, mail-order houses, and rural delivery had brought the town and the city to the crossroads and the farm, and the moving-pictures, the phonograph, and the radio had brought the nation and the world to the provinces, the play-party would naturally arise as one solution of the amusement problem on a “make-it-yourself-or-do-without” and “hand-me-down” level of culture. (19)

Tune repertory

A unique music culture was born out of Irish immigrants and their descendants' adaptation to a new environment and new life experiences. While these immigrants continued to play tunes from their homelands, they were more likely to integrate new elements they had encountered in the new land into their musical expression, as attested by the development of old-time music in the Appalachian regions. It is generally agreed that many old-time tunes of the Appalachian regions were variants of British/Irish versions and had incorporated African-American rhythmic features and musical phrasings. As many of these immigrants or their descendants scattered further west following job opportunities or chances for a better life, concentrating first in the state of Missouri, their music repertoire followed. In Marion Thede's The Fiddle Book, an invaluable collection

of fiddle tunes in Oklahoma during the early 20th century, many of the fiddle tunes were collected from fiddlers who had come to Oklahoma from Missouri. But more importantly, these tunes testify to the transformation a tune may go through when traveling through a new region.

The titles of the tunes or the words accompanying the tune often indicated the places or people that the fiddler encountered. In Thede's collection, for example, several tunes were taken originally from African-American songs or banjo tunes. For instance, part of the fiddle tune "I'd Druther Be A Nigger Than A Poor White Man" came from an African-American song "Poor White Man" that Thede heard in Davis, Indian Territory (later Oklahoma). Thede also demonstrates how "Possum Pie" was an African-American tune that was transformed into "Bile Them Cabbage Down," which she collected in Cotton County, Oklahoma (69). Thede collected a few tunes that indicated the encounter that early settlers in Oklahoma had with Native Americans, bearing titles such as "Good Indian" and "The Lost Indian." The fiddle tune "Creek Nation," according to fiddler Claude Keenan, from whom Thede collected the tune, was based on a Creek song sung on the Trail of Tears (30). Two of the tunes Thede collected were originally Irish tunes. Thede indicates that "one characteristic of some American folk tunes 'of Irish descent' is the occurrence of the natural minor...Usually the mode passes from major to minor, and back to major," as exemplified in the tune "Paddy on the Turnpike" (Figure 4.2):



Figure 4.2: "Paddy on the Turnpike" (Theude, The Fiddle Book 77)

This version of "Paddy on the Turnpike" is similar (both are in the key of G) to the version identified as an "old-time" tune (Figure 4.3) in The Fiddler's Fake Book, a collection of fiddle tunes compiled by David Brody. (The A and B strains in Theude's collection seem to be reversed if compared to Brody's collection.) Brody labeled another version of the tune (Figure 4.4) as Irish, but it is not hard to see the similarities between the three versions:



Figure 4.3: “Paddy on the Turnpike,” old-time version (Brody, The Fiddler’s Fakebook 214)

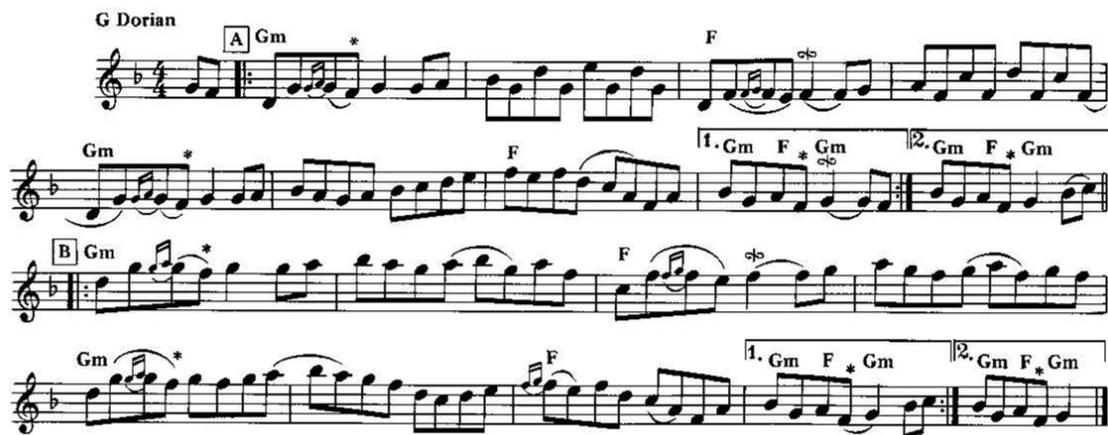


Figure 4.4: “Paddy on the Turnpike,” Irish version (Brody, The Fiddler’s Fakebook 213)

A careful examination of the tunes collected in Oklahoma reveals a glimpse of the music culture in this community of early settlers. Irish immigrants who came to settle in Oklahoma had already lived in several other states and absorbed much of the local culture, and many of those who came before the land run intermingled significantly with the Native Americans. Though sharing many characteristics with

other mid- or south-western states in its frontier culture, Oklahoma was opened to white settlement only in the late nineteenth century, later than most other states in the Midwest and Southern regions. While an Irish presence is undeniable in Oklahoma's past, one has to remember that:

... the impressive level of interaction between British and Irish newcomers, their descendents, and others in the society, both white and Indian, underscores the hazards of any rigid identification of Oklahomans as members of a single ethnic group. (Blessing, The British and Irish 13)

On the other hand, in his study of the regional cultures in the United States, Clark reminds us of a persistent Irish memory in the South:

It is the record of conscious regional identification and discrete familial and ethnic memory that has sustained Dixie's Irish-Americans. The South's inheritance of a quasi-mystical planter class and the saga of Blacks who have dreamed of freedom must also include the inheritance of the Irish who coursed its rivers, laid its rails, and served its broken Confederacy. (110)

The music culture of early Oklahoma is a reflection of the traditions that settlers carried with them. Many Irish descendants in Oklahoma, most of whom have a mixture of traditions in their family history, have kept a part of their Irish heritage alive through music. Whether it is old-time tunes, bluegrass tunes, or Irish tunes, they are all an integral part of Oklahoma culture.

Chapter 5

Irish Music in Oklahoma?

This chapter is a survey of the various cultural events or organized activities in Central Oklahoma featuring Irish music. This survey is by no means comprehensive, but rather, it is a sampling of local music activities in which I have participated in various capacities. For the events that I have attended more frequently and participated in more actively, such as the Medieval Fair and the Scissortail Contra Dance, my description is based on my observations over a period of time. For those events that I have only attended a couple of times, such as the meetings of the Oklahoma City Traditional Music Association, I focus on my experience and observation on a particular day or evening.

Oklahoma City Traditional Music Association (OCTMA)

OCTMA was established in 1984 through the efforts of Anita Roesler and Neil Gaston (OCTMA homepage). On the website of OCTMA, Roesler narrates the story of the early meetings of the organization that began innocently as a group of folk musicians eagerly searching each other out to play music together. The annual Walnut Valley Festival held in Winfield, Kansas, was conducive to Roesler's desire to make connections with other musicians, as she was inspired by the excitement of learning new tunes and making new friends at the festival. Roesler and Gaston eventually gathered more people with similar interests; the first meeting of OCTMA occurred on Saturday, April 6, 1984, with more than 50 people attending. Though

the format of the meeting has not changed significantly over the years, the venue for the meeting has moved many times:

The format of the evening was much the same as it is now with workshops, the play-around, a meet and greet, and a jam. We ended up with workshops for autoharp, mountain dulcimer, and hammered dulcimer. Other instruments present were mandolin, banjo, guitar, bones, fiddle, concertina, and an Irish harp. We first met at the Midwest Boulevard Christian Church in Midwest City in April and May. The June and July meetings were held at Will Rogers Park where the Gazette did a story about us. It was getting hot in August so we moved to Crown Heights United Methodist Church at 37th and Western where we stayed for several years. We grew by leaps and bounds and needed a larger meeting place so we moved to the City Arts Center. From there we have moved to the Tom Steed Center at Rose State College, then to Central Presbyterian Church and finally back to City Arts Center (Roesler)!!¹⁴

I attended the OCTMA meeting held at the Village Christian Church in Oklahoma City on Feb 4, 2006, and the following narrative is based on my observation and participation in that meeting.

OCTMA meets every first Saturday of the month, beginning at 6 p.m. with workshops featuring various instruments including hammered dulcimer, mountain

¹⁴ The venue moved again in 2004 to the Village Christian Church in Oklahoma City because of the rising rental cost at City Arts Center.

dulcimer, mandolin, fiddle, and guitar. The instructors or leaders for these workshops are volunteers who attend the meetings regularly, and if there is no instructor available to lead a particular workshop, people are encouraged to come and meet other musicians, bring copies of their favorite song to share, or even become a workshop leader themselves.¹⁵ My friend and consultant, Therese Matthews, told me that the attendance at each workshop fluctuates every time. On the evening that I visited, the largest class was the workshop for mountain dulcimer. More than ten people sat in a circle in the mountain dulcimer class. When I was observing the class, the instructor of the class, Ray Haines, president of OCTMA at the time of writing, passed out copies of sheet music, one of which was the folk song “Simple Gifts.”



Figure 5.1: Workshop for mountain dulcimer at OCTMA

¹⁵ Although this was only the second time I attended the meeting since the beginning of this study four years ago, I was invited to teach the fiddle workshop because the regular fiddle instructor could not make it to the meeting.

The other popular class was the guitar class. About ten people scattered around in a big Sunday school classroom. A woman in her fifties, who appeared to be the leader of that class, sang simple folk songs such as “Amazing Grace,” accompanied herself on her guitar, and instructed other guitarists to follow her on the simple chord progressions. The level of skill seemed to vary significantly among the guitarists; while some guitarists were playing more complicated melodic and harmonic patterns, some were slowly trying to follow the chord progression.

In the classroom designated for the hammered dulcimer class, a man who appeared to be a beginner was demonstrating a tune slowly on his hammered dulcimer to another man. Apparently there were no other hammered dulcimer players attending the meeting that evening. But according to other musicians whom I talked to, hammered dulcimer is sometimes a popular instrument in the meeting. Jacque Rapp, a session player in Norman, Oklahoma, used to teach the hammered dulcimer class.

In addition to the various workshops, there was a fast jam session that played mainly bluegrass and country songs or tunes. In this jam session, five or six singers/guitarists gathered around to play the chord progression while a couple of seemingly more accomplished musicians took turns singing or playing the lead, as it is customary in the bluegrass genre for each musician to take turns playing the melody while other musicians provide the rhythmic backing.

Wayne Cantwell and Malia Bennett, both active in the Irish jam sessions in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas, were rehearsing in the fellowship hall of the

church building for their performance the next day. Malia brought her twin daughters, Rachel and Lauren, and their friend to the meeting and sent them to learn some tunes at the fiddle workshop. Malia and Wayne's rehearsal soon turned into a jam session when more people stopped by to listen and joined them in some of the tunes. Well versed in both Irish and old-time music, Wayne played several old-time tunes with some of the old-time musicians there.

The instrument workshops ended at around 8 p.m. Most people went into the sanctuary of the church, as it was the "play-around" time, when anyone could sign up to perform on stage. Many of the performers were singers who accompanied themselves on guitar or banjo; some sang original songs that they had written. There were about 50 people present in the play-around, and most of them were in their late 40's or 50's. (The membership of OCTMA, according to the membership directory, was over a hundred at the time of writing.) One of the performers told a banjo joke, making reference to the "heavy pots" of the 1960s; Therese told me that references to the 1960s are a norm in the play-around time. Malia, her two daughters, Wayne, and Melissa Ang, who is also an active whistle player in the Irish jam sessions in Norman, performed two fast Irish reels. A female singer sang a song telling the story of an important governor in Oklahoma history. Another singer, covered with a big beard and white hair, sang a song that he wrote about plumbers and the inventor of the flush toilet, eliciting hearty laughter from the audience with his amusing lyrics.

When I left around 9 p.m., the play-around was still going on. The play-around usually ends around 10 p.m. According to Therese, some people linger around after the play-around for jam sessions, and do not leave until midnight.

As stated on OCTMA's homepage, "even for a person who doesn't play, OCTMA meetings offer good clean family entertainment." Having fun in a family environment is apparently one of the most appealing qualities of the meeting. Furthermore, for a person who wants to learn how to play an instrument, such as my consultant, Therese, who is learning to play the fiddle, OCTMA's meetings are friendly and inexpensive. It only cost the whole family \$15 a year to become members and \$3 to attend each monthly meeting.

Though American folk songs, popular country Western songs from the earlier part of the twentieth century, old-time music, and bluegrass music constitute the major repertoire played in OCTMA meetings, Irish music and music from other Celtic regions play a small but indispensable part in the evenings. Many attendees of OCTMA, who were otherwise unfamiliar with Irish or Celtic music, were introduced to Irish and Celtic tunes in these meetings. In fact, many of the participants in the Irish/Celtic jam sessions in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas were, at one time or another, active members of OCTMA, and some even heard their first Irish tunes at one of the OCTMA meetings.

St. Patrick's Day Celebration

A series of music performances takes place in the Bricktown area of downtown Oklahoma City each year on St. Patrick's Day in March. It is the busiest

time for local Irish or Celtic bands. The day usually begins in the late morning with music performances taking place on a portable stage in one of the parking lots on Sheridan Street. With the stage on one side and the food and beer vendors on the other side, tables and chairs are set up in the center of the arena. The bands are amplified through a sound system, and the loud music livens up the entire area with a festive spirit. The following account is a snapshot of the downtown Oklahoma City St. Patrick's Day celebration on March 17, 2005.

I arrived at Bricktown around noon, after playing with several musician friends for the St. Patrick's Day luncheon at the nearby State Capitol. It was a sunny day. Not many people were in the arena when I arrived. A band called O' Kelly's was playing on stage; the band members were a couple in their 50's or 60's. They sang mostly Irish and Scottish folk songs and displayed the lyrics of the chorus section on a piece of cardboard to encourage sing-along from the audience. Most of the audience members at this hour ranged from 50 to 70 years old; many of them appeared to know the songs and sang along during the choruses. The musicians played a wide variety of instruments, including banjo, mandolin, harp, spoons, bodhran, fiddle, and even a set of practice-bagpipes. Young children were encouraged to come up to the empty space in front of the stage to dance. While some children seemed to have taken Irish step-dancing lessons, many were simply moving along and imitating the dance steps.

O' Kelly's played for about two hours, then another group known as the Scottish Mayhem came onstage. There were four musicians dressed in kilts and

boots, ranging from about 30 to 50 years old. The instrumentation of the band was two Scottish bagpipes, a bodhran, a Middle Eastern dumbek, and a Western drum set. The audience, which had grown into a bigger crowd at this time, was excited by the sound of the pipes and drums, and many were cheering and swaying to the music. In the last tune that the band played, a drum solo passage was featured on the snare drum, creating a strong marching rhythm. A professional Irish step dancer, who was also the wife of the bodhran player, came out to dance when they began to play this last tune. Her dancing, however, was interrupted when the band sped up the tempo to a march.

The performance of Scottish Mayhem lasted for about thirty minutes, followed immediately by another local band, the Counterfeit Bards. The instrumentation of this group was drastically different from the previous band, featuring softer instruments such as the hammered dulcimer, tin whistle, guitar, bodhran, and vocals. The audience continued to respond enthusiastically to the Counterfeit Bards. Several passers-by stopped in front of the stage and started to dance freely to the music; mothers danced with their little girls or boys, making up movements as they danced. Some members of the audience had been long-time fans of Celtic music and had regularly supported the performances of local bands. A middle-aged couple sitting at my table, whom I recognized from other Celtic music events, told me about their Irish heritage, as reflected in their last name “Yates.” They said they had been supporting Celtic bands for many years since their early encounters with Celtic music at science-fiction conventions. Lynn, the

wife, explained to me the difference between the “hard” and “fantasy” science fiction, and indicated that she is a “fantasy” science fiction fan, who enjoys fictions such as The Lord of the Rings and others that were set in an imaginary ancient world. Celtic music, according to her, was featured prominently at those medieval science-fiction conventions.

Two other local Irish bands, Banish Misfortune and Calliope House played in the afternoon. Banish Misfortune consists of Phil Reid, the fiddler, Miranda Arana, the flutist, Steve Vanlandigham, the mandolin and banjoist, and their newest addition, Susan Pierce, the vocalist, who was also learning to play the bodhran. Several dancers from Irish Arts Oklahoma’s step-dancing program came up to dance to Banish Misfortune’s performance.¹⁶ The sight of these beautiful young girls, dressed in their intricately embroidered dance outfits, brought on enthusiastic cheering from the audience. A man sitting at the neighboring table with his family was intrigued by my videotaping of the event and struck up a conversation with me. After learning of my interest in Irish music, he told me that he had been listening to Banish Misfortune for three years. He said he enjoyed the band more when Kevin Burke, an Irish-born bodhran player, was playing with the group.¹⁷ The man also talked about his Irish heritage. He was third-generation Irish and had visited Ireland twice in the last three years, although he had no relatives left in Ireland. When asked about his involvement in Irish music, he said that he liked the opportunity to

¹⁶ The step dancers from Irish Arts, led by Jean Hill, had been working with Banish Misfortune for several years.

¹⁷ Kevin left the group more than two years ago for Florida, however, he came back to play with the band for the St. Patrick’s Day celebration in 2004. Kevin, coupled with his Irish-accented English and witty jokes, was very capable of capturing the attention of the audience.

take his family to outdoor music festivals, but was not interested in participating more actively in Irish music or cultural events. After Banish Misfortune's performance, the organizer of the event came onstage to say a few words on behalf of the commercial sponsors, including Sprint and Budweiser, and urged the audience to "have a good time and drink more beer."

Calliope House started playing at about 5 p.m. Even though it was getting darker and colder at this hour, the crowd was getting bigger as more people were coming out to the celebration after work. Calliope House is a four-piece band that includes banjo, guitar, vocals, fiddle, Irish flute and whistle, African drum, and hammered dulcimer. Chairs were set up under the tent in the empty space in front of the stage. Calliope House performed with ample energy, demonstrated especially in the rhythmic movement of the fiddler, Shanda McDonald. Several audience members standing at the side started to move with the music, some imitating the movements of an Irish step dancer.

I left the arena after watching Calliope House play a few tunes. I was told that bands hired for later in the evening were rock bands. Some of the Irish bands that played earlier in the day were hired to play in various restaurants in Oklahoma City for the rest of the evening.

For some people, St. Patrick's Day is an occasion to celebrate their Irish ancestry and heritage. Listening to Irish music performance may be an expression and reminder of their Irishness, even if it is only temporary. However, for many

other people who attend the St. Patrick's Day celebration, Irish music merely adds merriment to the beer drinking and the outdoor activities.

Irish Music and Dance Festival

The Irish Music and Dance Festival organized by Jean Hill of Irish Arts Oklahoma has taken place annually on the last Saturday of January since 2002. The one-day festival offers music and language workshops taught by Irish musicians or dancers who have been recognized by local musicians as authorities in their fields, bearing credentials such as a commercially successful recording career, or winning highly acclaimed competitions in Ireland. The festival has expanded, both in the number of its attendees and the variety of classes it offers, since the first year of my participation in 2003. In 2003, Mary McLaughlin was the only artist who offered workshops in Irish Sean-Nos singing, Irish language, and story telling, and accompanied her own singing in the evening concert.

When I attended the festival again in 2004, in addition to Mary McLaughlin, Seamus Connolly, a fiddler who emigrated from Ireland in the 1970s and is currently the director of Boston Irish Music Studies, and Niall O'Leary, a championship winner of Irish step dancing from Dublin, now residing and teaching in New York, offered workshops in Irish fiddling, step-dancing, piano accordion, and spoons. I attended Seamus Connolly's fiddle workshops taught at beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. There were about ten to twelve people attending the beginning and intermediate classes, but only about half of these people stayed for the advanced class. In the beginning-level class, Seamus taught several simple

jigs, focusing on the proper jig rhythm,¹⁸ principles of producing a strong tone, use of a good bow control,¹⁹ and a couple of simple ornamentations. In the intermediate and advanced levels, students learned several fast reels and applied a variety of ornaments to a tune. The principles of applying ornamentation properly were emphasized in all of his classes. Despite his own early experience with learning a tune aurally, Seamus mastered music-reading skills after he came to United States in the 1970s and readily accepts the use of sheet music as an efficient way to aid in the learning process in traditional music culture. In his fiddle classes, Seamus distributed sheet music but emphasized the importance of listening when learning a fiddle tune. Seamus also played the tunes many times and encouraged the students to record his playing, so that they could listen to the tune at home when they practiced.

The day ended with an evening concert featuring the three artists. In addition to being a dancer, Niall is also an accomplished accordion and spoon player, dazzling the audience not only with his good looks, but also with the flair of his skillful performance. At one instance, he threw his spoons in the air after he finished playing a fast passage with Seamus, eliciting laughter and cheers from the audience. The step dancers from Jean Hill's dance school, who had spent the earlier part of the day in Niall's workshops also made their appearance in the evening's performance. Seamus played a few solo fiddle tunes, in addition to accompanying

¹⁸ A jig is in 6/8 meter. When playing a jig, the first note of each group of three should be longer and heavier, creating a dotted rhythm feel.

¹⁹ Although Seamus received no formal classical training when he was learning the fiddle in Ireland, he demonstrates playing techniques that are emphasized in classical violin training.

Niall's dancing and Mary's singing. His fiddling style is characterized by a strong and solid tone that comes from his right hand's firm bow strokes. Aided by a microphone, the sound that he produced is loud enough to be heard over the thunderous dance steps created by the hard-sole dance shoes.

The class sizes and the number of guest artists expanded again in the 2005 Irish Music and Dance festival (see description in figure 5.2). There were more students in the workshop compared to 2004. In the intermediate fiddle class that I attended in the morning, there were about 20 students, the majority of them being children. Almost half of these students came with their teacher, Karen Khanagov, who emigrated to the United States from Russia. I knew Karen from a few years ago when he was studying violin at the University of Oklahoma. In 2004, he came to the workshop because one of his students invited him. We had a conversation in 2004 and he told me that he was trying to compose music using the various musical styles of the world, including Irish. I did not have a chance to talk to him in 2005, but was amazed to see that he had brought about ten students with him this time.

In 2005, the step dancing classes had a great turn-out rate. The social set-dancing class however, was not as popular, mainly because people in Oklahoma were less familiar with this kind of dance.²⁰ The spoons class was the most popular

²⁰ According to the teacher, Niall O'Leary, and my friend, Lauren Sonder, who used to live in Boston, set dancing is very popular in areas with large populations of Irish immigrants. Niall explained the differences between step, ceili, and set dancing. He said that set dancing originated from French quadrilles but was adopted by the Irish and was revived in the 1980s. One of the dance figures that he taught, known as "dancing around the house," was associated with an old Irish saying "dance around the house and mind the dresser." In the past when people held house parties, dances usually took place in the kitchen since it was the biggest room in the house. Therefore, it was easy to knock down the dinner plates on the dresser. He told us that there was a pub in Boston that had a dresser in the back room where the set dancing took place. Though the dinner plates on the dresser

workshop in 2005. Spoons seem to be the easiest and most inexpensive “instrument” and therefore attracted many people who wanted to participate in a session but could not play an instrument. Niall however, explained the etiquette of playing in session to the students, cautioning that there should not be more than one or two people playing spoons (same rule applicable to bodhran) in a session at one time.

In the advanced fiddle class, while taking a break from the technical aspect of Irish fiddling, Seamus Connolly talked about his views on the changes in Irish music over the years.²¹ Recognizing that as a living tradition, changes in Irish music are inevitable, Seamus encouraged us to master the proper styles of ornamentation and then develop our own interpretation of the tunes.

This annual Irish festival is the only event in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas that offers instrumental, dance, and vocal workshops taught by internationally recognized Irish or Irish-American artists. Proper playing style is emphasized in these workshops. The various workshops also provide an opportunity for the local musicians and Irish music enthusiasts to witness and hear about the significance of traditional music in the lived experience of an Irish person in Ireland or an Irish immigrant in America.

were fixed to the shelves, someone apparently had tried to pull down the plates deliberately, as evidenced by the broken corner on one of the plates.

²¹ Seamus acknowledged that it was impossible for him to look at what the younger people are doing with the music and not adopt some of those elements in his own playing. However, when he visited the older players in Ireland, he chose to play in a conservative and traditional manner, as people there did not expect him to change his playing style to that of the younger generation. He commented on the changes that technologies had brought to Ireland since the time he grew up; there was no television, very few means of transportation, and he did not even own a bicycle. Traveling to another town ten miles away was difficult. He recalled that there was only one telephone in the town where he grew up, and the townspeople had to stand in line to receive or make a call.

Mary McLaughlin Class Descriptions

Beginning Irish Language, 10am-11am. For anyone who wishes to learn a little about Irish pronunciation and structure. Learn a few simple greetings, a little about the background of Irish, explore some of the mysteries of Irish pronunciation! Please bring those names of tunes and songs like "Eoghan Rua" which have baffled you for years and learn how to pronounce them properly! No previous experience needed.

Intermediate Irish Language, 11am-12pm. If you speak a few phrases or sentences in Irish, come to this class where Mary will extend your abilities to having a basic introductory conversation. If you have more Irish, she will push you a little harder. The emphasis will be on spoken Irish and correct pronunciation, not grammar. If you've attended a class with Mary or someone else in the past, this is the class for you!

Beginning Sean Nos Singing, 1pm-2pm. In order to sing in the "old style" (sean nos) you need, first of all, to sing a few songs in Irish. In this class Mary will teach you a few songs which are sung in the Donegal gaeltacht (Irish speaking area) and introduce you to the style. You do not need to be able to read Irish as she will use a phonetic approach.

Intermediate Sean Nos Singing, 2:30-4:30pm. In this class Mary will teach one or two of the more complex songs in Irish and spend more time exploring the style. The focus will be on quality rather than quantity and the emphasis will be on getting into the heart of the song and spending time with the nuances of both style and pronunciation. You will also listen to some exponents of the style and begin to appreciate what elements mark a song as being in the "sean nos." If you have already worked a little with basic Irish singing (for example attended a previous workshop) then come to this class.

Seamus Connolly Class Descriptions

Intermediate Fiddle, 10am-12pm

Students will focus on the essential elements of the Irish style of fiddle playing. Emphasis will be placed on tone, bowing, style, ornamentation and getting the proper "feel" for a tune.

Beginning Fiddle, 1pm-2pm

This class will provide beginning fiddlers with inspiration and understanding of what to listen for on a recording or live performance and how to learn tunes from recorded media. Students will gain insight into the principles of left-hand technique, bowing, practicing and tone production. Students should already know the basics of playing the instrument.

Advanced Fiddle, 2:30pm-4:30pm

This class will cover in depth the role of bowing in ornamentation as well as phrasing, style, and repertoire. Technique topics such as tone, practice methods, and playing with speed and precision will be included as appropriate.

Niall O'Leary Class Descriptions

Intermediate Step Dancing, 10am-12pm

Niall will teach interesting and challenging steps to students dancing at Advanced Beginner or Novice level. Soft & hard shoe.

Set Dancing, 1pm-3pm

Learn the basics of Irish "country" dancing done in a full set formation (8 dancers in a square) or half set (four dancers in a square). Niall will also explore footwork used in some of the Irish sets. No partner is necessary, wear soft-soled shoes.

Spoons, 3:30pm-4:30pm

This class was hugely popular last year with all ages. Learn to produce lively rhythms with an ordinary pair of metal teaspoons or soup spoons (bring your own).

Colleen Farrell Class Descriptions

Ceili Dancing, 10am-12pm

After an overview of basic footwork fundamentals, including threes, sevens, and the rising step, students will learn a progressive dance such as "Antrim Reel" as well as a four, six or eight hand figure dance such as "Trip to the Cottage". Many of these dances were made with the social aspect in mind, so get ready for some fun. No partner is necessary.

Advanced Step Dancing, 1pm-3pm

For experienced students dancing at advanced novice to open level who are comfortable with a fast teaching pace. Colleen will give each dancer some individual attention & offer positive critique and tips for improving style and stamina. Soft & hard shoe.

Beginning Step Dancing, 3:30-4:40pm

This class is open to anyone interested in Irish Step Dancing and would be appropriate for Irish dance students currently in Beginner 1 or Beginner 2 classes. Some previous dance experience or familiarity with basic Irish steps such as threes and sevens is suggested but not absolutely necessary. Students will focus on soft-shoe movements.

WORKSHOP & CONCERT LOCATIONS. Workshops: Oklahoma City Community College, 7777 S. May, Oklahoma City, Entry 6. Evening Concert: Oklahoma Children's Theatre, state fairgrounds, NW 10th & May, Oklahoma City, 7:30pm.

COST. 1-hour workshops are \$15, 2-hour workshops are \$30. Concert tickets are \$15 in advance, \$20 at the door.

PAYMENT. Full payment should be received by January 20 to ensure a place in class or a seat at the concert.

Mail payments to: Irish Arts Oklahoma, P.O. Box 54463, Oklahoma City, OK 73154.

QUESTIONS? More information at www.irishartsok.org, telephone 405/528-0239 or email irishartsok@msn.com.

Figure 5.2: Flyer describing the various workshops in the 2005 Irish Music and Dance Festival

Medieval Fair

In early April, many local Celtic bands are hired to perform at the Medieval Fair in Norman, a three-day event starting on Friday morning and ending on Sunday afternoon. Originally a project of the English department of the University of Oklahoma, the Medieval Fair has been held annually since 1976 and has become the largest event in Norman and the third largest event in the state of Oklahoma (Medieval Fair Homepage). In 2003, the fair was moved to Reaves Park, one of Norman's largest parks, to accommodate the rapidly growing crowd. In addition to the concession stands offering typical "fair" food such as Indian tacos, funnel cakes, bratwurst, and smoked turkey legs, craft vendors dressed in costume come from all over the country and set up booths that sell anything from inexpensive hair garlands to ornately-decorated handmade African masks or Middle Eastern drums. Ongoing entertainment, in the form of band performances or various Middle Age reenactment shows are offered at the five or six stages scattered in the park.

The local bands that have played regularly over the past few years at Medieval Fair include the Counterfeit Bards, Calliope House, Banish Misfortune, and Boru's Ghost, a rock-style Celtic band. There are several bands that come to the Norman Medieval Fair annually from out of town: Tullamore from Kansas, Queen's Gambit from Tulsa, and Scottish Mayhem from Texas. Most of these bands, except Scottish Mayhem which features bagpipe and drum, share similar repertoire and instrumentation; most play predominantly Irish and Scottish tunes or folk songs on guitar, hammered dulcimers, flute or tin whistle, and vocals. Since

2005, Steve Vanlandigham and Miranda Arana have played together as Arabesque at the fair; their repertoire includes a wide variety of tunes originating from the Middle-Eastern and Celtic regions.

Dressed in period clothing or costumes, members from the various bands become part of the overall scenery of the fair. Each band is scheduled to perform two to four rounds a day, each set lasting for thirty to forty-five minutes. Even though bands are paid a lump sum of money for their performances in the three-day event, most bands try to make some extra money by passing the hat to collect tips near the end of their set and by selling CDs of their music.²² Some of the bands also take the opportunity to promote themselves for hire for other occasions. Some band members make use of the free time in between their sets to play for tips on the “street” of the fair. According to the members of the Counterfeit Bards, they collected a good amount of tips playing on the street.

Bands that perform regularly at the fair came to know each other over the years. According to my consultant, John McGaha, he became acquainted with Tullamore and Queen’s Gambit through playing at the Medieval Fair and the Renaissance Fair in Muskogee, Oklahoma.²³ Bands appear to be supportive and

²² In year 2003, I was invited to play with Banish Misfortune at the Medieval Fair, with Steve Vanlandigham, Kristen Davies, and Yvonne Crist. We were stationed at one stage and programmed to play three thirty-minute sets of music throughout the day, with long breaks between the sets, during which time other groups performed. The band was paid about five hundred dollars for the weekend, and the money was divided evenly among the four of us. The tips that we collected at each set were usually enough for us to buy food and drinks from the concession stands in the fair, where prices are marked twice the regular cost.

²³ The Renaissance Fair in Muskogee is held annually for three weekends in May. Many of the bands that play at the Medieval Fair also play at the Renaissance Fair. According to John, one of the most unique features of the Renaissance Fair is its setting in the Castle. Unlike the Medieval Fair which is a free event, there is an admission fee to enter the Renaissance Fair. In my interview with

friendly towards each other, similar to what one may encounter at the St. Patrick's Day celebration; near the end of a set, the members from a band would introduce the band playing after them and urge the audience to stay and listen to the next band. Furthermore, band members often attend performances by other bands. Lessa Keller-Kenton from the Counterfeit Bards, for example, told me that she enjoyed listening to other bands to find inspiration for new musical ideas.

In addition to Celtic music, a local African drumming group is also part of the regular program of the Medieval Fair. The African drumming group welcomes the participation of anyone who would like to sit down at a drum to play. In 2006, performances by step-dancers from Jean Hill's Irish dance school were added to the program. They danced to pre-recorded music which could be heard clearly through a sound system. The upbeat dance tunes and the energetic steps of the dancers attracted a large crowd, many of them children. When the young dancers from Jean Hill's school were performing, some of the members in the audience clapped along with the dance beat, and some, possibly parents of the dancers, were videotaping the performance.

Though I have visited the Medieval Fair for many years, the experience of participating actively as a performer at the fair in 2003 with Banish Misfortune brought a new perspective to my understanding of the social significance of fairs with Medieval or Renaissance related themes. My days at the fair began in the morning when I changed into my "costume"—a sheer white shirt with a fluffy black

the Counterfeit Bards, I was told that both Tullamore and Queen's Gambit travel to the various Medieval or Renaissance-themed fairs around the country and make a partial living out of playing at these fairs.

long skirt, completed with a knitted hair-bandana—the closest thing I can find in my closet that fit my imagination of a villager from the Middle Ages. From the moment I put on my “costume” and drove off to the fair, I felt as if I was entering into a fantasy world that is appealing and enjoyable yet full of contradictions. The interest in myths (found, for examples, in some of the Irish and Scottish ballads sung at the Medieval Fair) and the fascination with Eastern culture and spirituality²⁴ can be interpreted as elements found typically in the New Age movement since the 1960s, as discussed in Chapter 2. On the other hand, the juxtaposition of the modern—sound systems, concession stands—and what appears to be the ancient—period clothing, various reenactment shows—displays a playful and irrational spirit that is characteristic of a post-modern ideology. The widely diverse forms of music and dance ranging from African drumming to traditional Irish music and the numerous hybrid forms in between, along with the countless ethnic traditions or historical periods signified by the crafts and goods sold in the Medieval Fair, reflect a:

new culture of ‘paralogy’—of imagination, inventiveness, dissensus, the search for paradox, and toleration of the incommensurable. Post-modernism is therefore characterized by ‘a pluralisation of life-worlds.’ (“Postmodernism”)

²⁴ The fascination with a romanticized image of ancient Eastern culture is expressed, for example, in Arabesque’s performance of a variation on the Irish tune “Glen Road to Carrick.” The variation is named by the band as “Glen Road to Cordoba;” Cordoba, according to Steve’s commentary at their Medieval Fair performance, is “a city in Muslim Spain, a city with flowing fountains and countless books and libraries, where Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Celts coexisted in relative peace and harmony for almost 700 years.”



Figure 5.3: Author (fiddle) playing at the Medieval Fair with Banish Misfortune in 2003

While some of the reenactment groups have done extensive research on Medieval culture to recreate authentic acts, many of the participants put on a performance that is based mainly on their imagination of an ancient culture, reminding us of the post-modern phenomenon:

According to Jameson, a survey of recent aesthetic, philosophical, and social criticism ... projects an image of a culture that is assertively concerned with surfaces, and hence exhibit a certain 'depthlessness'; is voraciously hungry for variations in surface decoration and hence very adept at pastiche and careless of historical

time ... and, finally, is strikingly utopian on the grounds that what you dream is what you might get. (“Postmodernism”)

When I discussed with Miranda Arana from Arabesque and Anna Holloway from the Counterfeit Bards about their experiences at the Medieval Fair, they both mentioned the outdoor elements—the wind, the sun—as some of the unpleasant factors of playing in Medieval Fair. Miranda also noted that the outdoor sound system and the sometimes inattentive audience took away some of the pleasure of performing. Both Miranda and Anna, however, think it is fun to dress up and play at the Medieval Fair once in a while. For Lee Agnew from Counterfeit Bards, playing at the fair puts him in an environment that is different from everyday life. He said although he still had to deal with personal affairs when he was at the Medieval Fair—making calls and returning calls on his cell phone—performing and being at the fair seems to give him a better tolerance of those stresses. Miranda joked about the “post-fair” depression that she and Steve, the other member of Arabesque, suffered after all the excitement of the Medieval Fair weekend was over.

As music is often capable of transporting someone to another place and time, Irish music, with its exotic modal tunes, its intriguing murder ballads, and its intricate ornamentations, enlivens a post-modern imagination of an ancient time. In the context of the Medieval Fair, Irish music is no longer meaningful as an expression of Irish ethnicity or heritage, but is the equivalent of “Celtic” music—music of the ancient Celtic culture; its kings, bards, and gods continue to live in the fantasy world of the twentieth-first century.

Scissortail Contra Dance

Every second and fourth Saturday of the month, the Scissortail Dance Society holds its regular contra dance at the Unitarian Church in Oklahoma City from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. Since 2005, the society has held the fourth Saturday dance in Norman. However, at the time of writing in 2006, the society was still looking for a suitable dance hall and was experimenting with holding the dance at various locations.

The majority of the dancers are members of the Scissortail Dance Society. Members pay eight dollars annually and five dollars at the door, while non-members pay six dollars for the evening. At most of the dances, there are a small number of newcomers and dancers who only attend occasionally. People who have never attended contra dance are encouraged to come to the dance at 7:30 p.m. to learn some basic dance figures.²⁵ Dancers can either come alone or with a partner and are encouraged to dance with a different partner each time. The dance figures are easy to learn; newcomers are not required to have any prior experience in contra dancing. As experienced dancers guide the sometimes disoriented new dancers through the dance progression, the intermingling of experienced and new dancers ensures the smoothness of the dance.

Musicians that play Celtic or old-time music are hired to play at the contra dances. Some of these musicians are already playing regularly as a band while some get together to play specifically for that evening of dance. Typical instruments

²⁵ Dance figures are short steps or moves, such as do-si-do, balance, and allamende, that make up a dance.

used in the dance band are similar to those seen in the Irish jam session, such as the fiddle, piano, guitar, mandolin, banjo, bodhran, accordion, and tin whistle. The tune repertory for contra dances consists mainly of Irish and old-time dance tunes.

Musicians usually link three tunes in the same style (such as reel, jig, and polka) as a set. Each tune is repeated at least three or four times before the musicians change to another tune. The exact number of repetitions is hard to predict, as the caller may let a particular dance go on longer if he or she thinks that the dancers are enjoying themselves. Customarily, near the end of a dance, the caller turns to the musicians and indicates to them how many more times they have to play the tune.²⁶ The lead musician in the band then communicates the upcoming change of tune or ending to the rest of the musicians by lifting up a leg or yelling a “hup.”

The caller also teaches the figures of each dance before the musicians start playing. Musicians usually play for three or four dances before dancers take a break at about 8:30 p.m. Depending on the complexity of the particular dance, the caller could spend anywhere from ten to thirty minutes teaching the dance. Some callers tend to allocate a longer time in teaching the dances, while some prefer to let the dancers figure out the movements as the dance progresses with the accompaniment of live music. The musicians converse casually among themselves when the caller

²⁶ One repetition equals thirty-two measures, in the form of AABB. The caller is someone who “teaches each dance before it is actually done to the music. This gives everyone an idea of what to expect so the movements can be easily executed. The caller leads the dances while they are being done to music, so dancers are able to perform each movement to the music. Once the dancers appear to have mastered a particular dance, the caller may stop calling, leaving the dancers to enjoy the movement with music alone” (Shapiro).

is teaching a dance or use the time to discuss the tune selection for the next dance. The decision to play certain tunes for a particular dance is mainly based on the style of the dance, especially the smoothness of the dance steps; this knowledge apparently comes from the experience of accompanying dances regularly. After dancers and musicians take a fifteen minute break, during which time snacks and drinks are served, the second half of the dance is resumed with a waltz. A waltz is also the last dance of the evening before the contra dance ends at around 11 p.m.

Depending on the amount of the entrance fee collected on a particular evening, musicians divide among themselves a lump sum of eighty to one hundred dollars. The number of musicians playing for a typical evening ranges from two to five. In recent months, however, Wayne Cantwell formed a volunteer string-band that welcomes any Celtic or old-time musicians who would like to participate. Wayne wanted to provide an opportunity for the local musicians to learn and practice tunes with one another through accompanying dances and to reduce the financial burden on the Scissortail Dance Society. Wayne said that he was inspired by a CD recording of a seventy-piece contra dance string-band, and hopes to see a growing participation of musicians in this local string-band. The rehearsal for the string-band takes place every first Monday of the month at a musician's home. Wayne prepares a list of tunes and sheet music for the musicians who read music but cannot make it to the rehearsal.

My participation in the contra dance began with my involvement in the local Irish sessions. As musicians whom I met in the session learned of my interest in

playing for dances, they invited me to sit in at some of the dances where they were playing. Soon after, I started to play fiddle, and sometimes piano, for the contra dances. I also danced at the contra dances every evening in the Rocky Mountain Fiddle Camp I attended in the summer of 2004. After coming back to Norman that summer, I began to participate in the dances more frequently. Some of the participants in the contra dance have had a similar experience of crossing the boundary between playing music and dancing, although according to Mark Cashion, such incidents happen less often in Oklahoma than in other areas of the United States.

For both the dancers and the musicians, contra dance is an enjoyable social event. Dancers enjoy the physical activity of the dance, the opportunity to meet new people, and the friendships established through years of dancing together. Similarly, many participating musicians told me that they have fun playing for the dance and appreciate the opportunity to learn new tunes through the numerous repetitions of a tune. As a musician, I not only derive a sense of satisfaction from witnessing the physical and rhythmic expression of a tune in the form of dance, I also delight in the company of fellow musicians. This communalistic nature of the contra dance is also an important quality experienced by the participants in Irish jam sessions, a topic that I will further discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Irish Jam Session: My Observations and Experiences

The first public jam session in Oklahoma City occurred in the summer of 2002 at the Celtic Cup café, located between Hudson Street and NW 23rd Street. This Celtic Cup session that met every third Friday of the month was the beginning of a series of organized sessions at a public venue in Central Oklahoma. According to my consultants, sessions were held irregularly at private homes before the first meeting at the Celtic Cup took place. Shortly after the third-Friday sessions were underway, Steve Vanlandigham started to host a session on the first Friday of every month at Borders Bookstore in Norman, Oklahoma. In 2004, Jean Hill, the director of Irish Arts Oklahoma, began to lead a slow jam session that caters to beginning players on the second Friday of every month at Borders Bookstore in Oklahoma City.

The first-Friday session has been meeting consistently at Borders Bookstore in Norman since the summer of 2002. It was cancelled only once in December 2005 because the manager of Borders Bookstore accidentally booked another band for the evening. Other sessions had more difficulties finding venues that could host the session regularly for a substantial period of time. The third-Friday session had to move to The Deli, a restaurant located on Classen Street in Oklahoma City, when the owner of the Celtic Cup decided to close the business in 2004. After a few months, the third-Friday session was moved to Mid-Del Studio in Midwest City, a private studio used for music and art classes in the daytime. Although non-musician

spectators were welcomed at the Mid-Del Studio session, only friends of musicians and those who were active in the Celtic music community were aware of the gathering. The session was not widely publicized; one could either find the information on the “Celtic Oklahoma” website or learn of the information by subscribing to the group emails. Wayne Cantwell, the session leader, decided to move the third-Friday session from Mid-Del Studio to Java Dave’s Café in Midwest City in June 2005, and changed the meeting day from third Friday to second Friday.²⁷

Jean Hill, the leader of the second-Friday session, was searching for a new site for the meeting in September 2004 when Borders Bookstore in Oklahoma City was no longer willing to host the session. Apparently, the musicians of the slow jam session were taking up too much space in the café and affected the seating availability of the café. In October 2004, the slow jam session found a new meeting place at the living room area of a retirement center called The Mansions, located in Oklahoma City on N. Penn Street.

Most session participants consider the first-Friday session at Borders Bookstore in Norman and the third-Friday session in Oklahoma City/Midwest City as an advanced-level session, or the “fast” jam. These two sessions share many characteristics, such as the structure of the performance, the tune repertory, and the technical level of the players; many players in the Norman session also participate

²⁷ Java Dave’s closed its business in December 2005. There are two second-Friday sessions going on at the time of writing: one is meeting at Brannigan’s at the Best Western in Stillwater, Oklahoma, a ninety minute drive from Oklahoma City, while the other is meeting at the Full Circle Bookstore in Oklahoma City.

in the Oklahoma City/Midwest City session. On the other hand, the second-Friday session, also known as the slow jam, or the C.C.E. session, is one of the regular activities held by Irish Arts Oklahoma, a branch of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann (C.C.E.). C.C.E. is an Ireland-based organization promoting traditional Irish music, dance, and language. One of the requirements of becoming a branch is to hold regular sessions. The objective of teaching Irish tunes to beginners sets the C.C.E. session apart from other sessions in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas. This emphasis on teaching and preserving Irish traditional music is shared by C.C.E. sessions in other parts of the world. Edward O. Henry reports that beginners are likely to receive encouragement at C.C.E. sessions that other non-C.C.E. sessions are less likely to offer (71).

The next section is a description of a typical Irish jam session. Although it is based mainly on my observations and participation in the sessions at Borders Bookstore in Norman, I also discuss some of my experiences participating in the third-Friday (now second-Friday) sessions and the C.C.E. sessions in Oklahoma City.



Figure 6.1-2: Friday night sessions at Borders Bookstore, Norman, Oklahoma

An Irish jam session

The process

At around 7:30 p.m., musicians start to arrive at the café of Borders Bookstore. There are only a very few musicians at this time. Those who arrive early look for a seat at a table around the corner and wait for the others to arrive.

Some musicians pick up a magazine to read, and some sit down to talk to friends until more musicians arrive, or until they hear the sound of the music. When three or more musicians show up, they gather at the corner of the café and pull a few chairs around to form a circle or semi-circle. Conversation begins even before musicians enter the circle. After the musicians sit down, they slowly unpack their instruments while conversing casually. They continue to chat among themselves until someone begins to play a tune. When the rest of the musicians hear a tune that they know, they quickly drop the conversation and start playing. Sometimes the host, Wayne Cantwell, an experienced fiddler, or Steve Vanlandigham, an accomplished banjo/mandolin player, invites someone to start a tune, especially if there is a visitor among them. If neither Steve nor Wayne is there, the job of the 'leader' usually falls on those who have regularly attended the session and know quite a few tunes. There is no well-defined role of leader in a jam session. Those who can confidently start and lead a tune share the leadership.

Musicians continue to arrive until around 9 p.m. Most of these musicians are regulars and are warmly greeted by the others. Newcomers are usually brought by regulars, although those who come by themselves are usually well accepted. After a few rounds of tunes, the regulars are likely to have already exchanged some information with the newcomer. For instance, there was a mandolin player, known as John, who became friendly with the session players and was encouraged to bring his instrument to the session after hanging out at the bookstore a few times. He

eventually brought his instrument one day and tried to pick out some simple chords with the session players.

Throughout the session, musicians take breaks between tunes or during tunes that they do not know. They get up to go to the restroom, buy a drink, chat with acquaintances in the audience, or simply sit back and listen to the music. Usually there are pauses between tunes, when the musicians decide what to play next, or chat with each other. Sometimes they continue the conversation while other musicians start to play a new tune. The sound of a familiar tune, however, often acts like a magnet that draws the musicians back to the music from wherever they may be.

Just before 10 p.m., the pace of the session begins to wind down. The servers in the Borders café had requested that the sessions end at 10 p.m., an hour before Borders Bookstore closes for the evening, so that the session would not attract more listening audience and create more demand for the café servers who are starting the closing procedure at this time. Before such a time constraint was placed on the session, the session usually ended at around 10:30 p.m., as the musicians had exhausted most of their tune repertoire after almost three hours of playing. A couple of tunes were still lingering when most musicians were packing up their instruments. A few musicians wandered off to some obscure tunes or even occasionally to other genres, such as jazz. Now, musicians stop playing at 10 p.m. and start to pack up their instruments, although they often stand around and talk before leaving the café.

The musicians

Most players that attend the jam sessions are non-professional musicians; they all hold other jobs that contribute to the major part of their wages. Most of them, however, play in local bands to generate extra cash. Several band members from Banish Misfortune, Calliope House, and Counterfeit Bards participate regularly in the sessions. Most of the players have had experience in playing old-time music, or were at one time members of an old-time string band. Steve Vanlandigham, Lee Agnew, and Wayne Cantwell, for example, used to play in old-time string bands. Other session players who do not belong to a permanent band play together sometimes as temporary bands for contra dances.

Though the majority of the session players are in their 40's and 50's, the session is a friendly place for children as well. Malia Bennett, a guitarist, frequently brings her twin daughters to the session. Her daughters, Laura and Rachel are learning classical violin through the Strings Program at the University of Oklahoma, while taking Celtic fiddling lessons from another session player, Marilee Tussing. In addition to offering a satisfying performing experience for Malia, the session provides an opportunity for the two girls to play newly learned tunes with other musicians. Another set of siblings, Daniel, Rachel, and Mike Stribling, whose ages range from twelve to seventeen years, known affectionately as the "Stribling kids" by the session players, play bodhran, fiddle, and ulliean pipe respectively. However, the two-hour drive from Enid, Oklahoma, where they reside at the time of

writing in 2006, and their frequent trips to other states to Irish festivals and workshops, make it harder for them to travel to session on a regular basis.

Some of the musicians know how to read music at a basic level, having had several years of musical training in grade school or high school. Most musicians, however, consider themselves self-taught as their ability to read musical notation is limited. Wayne Cantwell, a self-taught fiddler, having learned most of his tunes by ear, is beginning to learn how to read music. Ian Brittle, on the other hand, only reads tablature. Occasionally, Kathy Dagg, a guitar and mandolin player, hands out sheet music that she has transcribed from recordings. She uses software that is capable of slowing down the music without lowering the pitches, and a computer program that helps her to write down the music. Kathy's music-reading and writing ability comes from her choir experience during her high school years. She said that her speed of writing down the music has improved gradually over the years.

The music

The tunes played in the sessions in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas consist mostly of reels and jigs, with occasional hornpipes, polkas, and waltzes (or airs). The more experienced musicians usually play from memory without using sheet music. On the other hand, those who are relatively new to the tradition of Irish music are more likely to play with sheet music if they can read music. The most popular sheet music collections that many session players own are the Portland Collection and the Fiddler's Fake Book. When someone plays an unfamiliar tune that cannot be found in either of these tune books, other players might pull the tune

out from their personal collections of sheet music, which they downloaded from the Internet or obtained through other published collections, and share it with those who need the music. Transcriptions of tunes, whether in the form of Western notation, or in the form of abc notation,²⁸ are easily accessible online, enabling those technologically-inclined session musicians to quickly expand their collection.

A tune is often started by a musician playing the beginning of a phrase. Other players soon recognize the tune and join in. In this case, there is no prior discussion about what tune to play. After most players begin playing, those who do not know the tune are eager to find out the name of the tune so that they can look for it in their sheet music collection. Those who are already playing usually yell out the name of the tune, though in some occasions, nobody seems to be able to recall the name of the tune. This aspect of the session—the “unknown” title of a tune—has become one of the popular subjects in jokes about Irish session.²⁹

The common knowledge of a tune among the majority of the players is important in building up momentum through repetition. If only a few players know the tune, the tune is not likely to be repeated many times. Occasionally, a player asks if anybody else knows a particular tune, and if nobody else does, that player

²⁸In abc notation, pitches are notated by their letter names. Lower case denotes higher octave and a number after the letter denotes the duration of the note. Here is an example of an Irish traditional tune notated in abc notation:

T:Paddy O'Rafferty

C:Trad.

M:6/8

K:D

dff cee|def gfe|dff cee|dfe dBA|dff cee|def gfe|faf gfe|1 dfe dBA:|2 dfe dcB||
~A3 B3|gfe fdB|AFA B2c|dfe dcB|~A3 ~B3|efe efg|faf gfe|1 dfe dcB:|2 dfe dBA||
fAA eAA|def gfe|fAA eAA|dfe dBA|fAA eAA|def gfe|faf gfe|dfe dBA:| (Walshaw)

²⁹ See for example Ciaran Carson's Last Night's Fun, pp. 12-13, and Barry Foy's Field Guide to the Irish Music Session, pp. 27-28.

may be invited to play a round of that tune as a solo. There are only a few tunes that every player knows well and can play from memory; the jig “Road to Lisdoonvarna” and the set of polkas which consists of “Dennis Murphy,” “Sean Ryan,” and “Bill Sullivan,” are some of the most popular tunes among the session players in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas. Many tunes are unfamiliar to some players; they have to rely on the sheet music, if available, or “pick up” the tune by listening, if the tune sounds familiar enough. The process of “picking up” involves playing only the skeleton of the tune, leaving out the running passages and ornaments between the main beats. Depending on the complexity of the tune, the experience one has with Irish dance tunes, the number of times a tune is played in sessions, and the musical skill of the individual player, the time it takes to “pick up”—or learn—a tune can vary significantly. It is often amazing to see an experienced player like Wayne Cantwell, who has spent many years playing Irish and old-time music, learn a tune after only listening to and following the tune a few times. To these experienced players, having accumulated a rich repertoire of tunes in their memory, the structural familiarity shared within the genre of Irish dance tunes helps them learn a tune faster.

My personal learning process in the session attests to this learning process. In the beginning of my involvement in the session, I could hardly “pick up” any tunes without the help of sheet music. I have improved slowly over the years; those tunes that were more popular among the group were played more often in session, hence enabling me to learn the tune gradually through the many repetitions.

Nevertheless, the process of “picking up” a tune required a significant amount of attentiveness and energy from me. Sometimes, when an unfamiliar tune was in progress, for me, and for those players whom the basic shape of the melody seemed too difficult to figure out, it was simply a time to sit back and listen.

Repetition is the main feature of the music heard in the session. Each section of the tune is usually repeated (AABB), and the completion of a whole tune is sometimes known as a round. Each round of tune is usually repeated several times, commonly followed by a different tune. The exact number of repetitions is not pre-determined. The tune may repeat as many times as the players feel necessary. In the sessions I attended, sometimes all players stopped at the same time, as if there was a pre-agreement. Occasionally some players stopped while others kept going. When this happened, the players who had already stopped resumed playing until the music finally came to a stop after one more round. If several players stop playing, it is usually a good indication that the musicians are finally getting tired of the tune and are ready for a change.

During the course of the numerous repetitions, some players try to break the monotony of repetition by spontaneously creating variations, mainly through varying the speed and texture. Sometimes the musicians start a tune, typically a reel, at a slower tempo, but speed up to an extremely fast tempo, generating excitement along the way. At the December session of 2005 in Java Dave’s café, one of the musicians, Mark Cashion, unexpectedly stood up and called out commands for different combinations of players to play: “Those with black shoes

play!” “Fiddlers only!” “Women only!” Initially, the rest of the players, not able to hear Mark’s voice clearly, simply stopped and stared at him, and then burst into a round of laughter. But soon after everyone understood the plan for the game, the group responded enthusiastically to Mark’s commands.

Switching to another tune may be spontaneous without prior discussion; sometimes a player goes straight into the next tune without any verbal communication. It is therefore possible to hear two tunes in the same key going on simultaneously as some players who are unaware of the change keep playing the old tune after the new tune is already underway. Most of the time, however, the players quickly realize the change and join in the new tune if they know it. At times, a more experienced player indicates the upcoming change by yelling “hup,” lifting up a foot, or calling out the next tune’s name, though it is usually hard to hear the tune’s name over the ongoing music. Some tunes are automatically expected to follow certain tunes because it has often been done this way in the session or in recordings. For example, “Calliope House” (a jig), was often played after “Sheebeg Sheemore” (a slow air), a practice introduced by some of the band members of the local band Banish Misfortune, who had been playing the two tunes together frequently in their band performances. On the other hand, if the players decide in advance what tune, or set of tunes is to be played, the change of tune is often smoother, requiring only a simple gesture from a player to indicate the change, such as nodding, lifting of the foot, or a single “hup.” The role of leadership becomes apparent and important on such occasions of starting and changing a tune. As mentioned earlier in this chapter,

however, this role is not fixed on one person, but is interchangeable among those who know quite a number of tunes from the common repertory of the group and are confident to start or lead the change.

After perhaps a few rounds of reels, the session players often ask for a slower jig, hornpipe, waltz, or slow air, so that everyone can take a break from the sometimes extremely fast-tempo reels. While the fast dances provide excitement for the evening, the slower airs and waltzes are often appreciated for their “pretty” melodies. The rowdy spirit of the session quickly turns to one that is serene and mellow. Singing, which occurs occasionally in this mainly instrumental session, also brings a change of mood to the session. At times, however, bashfulness accompanies the act of solo singing in the session. Sometimes, a player learns of another player’s desire to sing a song and invites him or her to share a song. For example, on several occasions, Thea Rapp, a tin-whistle player and the daughter of the pianist, Jacque Rapp, was invited to sing because her mother knew of her desire to share a song. When somebody is singing, other musicians often remain quiet and attentive, or accompany softly if they know the song. At the April session of 2006 in Norman, Lee Agnew sang a Scottish song, “Green Grow the Rashes O,” and accompanied himself on the guitar; as this song is familiar to the session players, many players joined in or harmonized during the chorus verses.

Tunes from other traditions or genres often find their way into the session, although the repertoire of the sessions in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas consists mainly of Irish tunes. Old-time tunes are the ones most often played

besides Irish tunes. Musicians recognize the Celtic root of the old-time tunes and accept them into the common repertoire of the sessions. However, when I talked to musicians participating in sessions in other parts of the country, this is not usually the case. According to my non-Oklahoman consultants, old-time and Irish sessions are often separate events in their areas. When players in Norman stray away from Irish tunes to play old-time tunes, Michael Stribling, a thirteen-year old and a much adored member of the group who travels frequently to attend sessions in other cities, would protest, “You can’t play that, that’s old-time!” (Cashion)

Session players sometimes wander into more “remote” musical styles, such as bluegrass, jazz, or fusion of different styles. In the March 2005 session, Malia Bennett, a bluegrass and Paul McCartney fan, played a Paul McCartney tune on the piano, and jokingly insisted that Paul McCartney had some Celtic connections, thus qualifying this tune to be included in the Celtic jam session. During the same session, Malia and Wayne Cantwell asked for “Freebird” when Lee Agnew, a witty singer/guitarist who enjoys making up words for tunes, appeared late at the session. Malia picked up the guitar and played a few opening chords from “Freebird;” Wayne and other players responded with laughter. Apparently, “Freebird,” a popular song of the 1970s, was a shared joke among some of the session players who had journeyed through the same cultural experiences.³⁰ As another example, Miranda Arana, a flute player, and Steve Vanlandigham, play together as a band at the time of writing and enjoy incorporating a Celtic-Arabic-fusion-style

³⁰ According to one of the session participants, audiences attending rock concerts in the 1970s often asked for “Freebird,” a slow song, when they became tired of the rock songs that the singers were performing.

improvisation into the Irish tunes. Miranda and Steve played some of their arrangements in the session. While band arrangements like these appear at the session from time to time, they tend to exclude the participation of the non-band members in the session, especially if the arrangement strays away from the usual structure of an Irish tune. However, most session players in Norman do not seem to mind the occasional display of talent in the session; for many, it is simply a time to sit back and relax.

The instrumentation

Most musicians carry more than one instrument to the session. Mandolin players, for example, usually play other plucked string instruments, such as the guitar, banjo, octave mandolin, cittern, or bouzouki. Since mandolin, tenor banjo, and fiddle share similar fingering, some fiddlers play mandolin and banjo as well. The regular accordion player of the session, Mark Cashion, also plays harmonica and always bring his collection of harmonicas in different keys to the session. Ian Brittle plays mandolin, accordion, tin whistle, banjo, and guitar. Tin whistle seems to be one of the most popular instruments in the session, along with the bodhran. Tin whistles are inexpensive and easy to learn; most whistle players carry more than one whistle, each constructed in a different key and tone color.

Since the most prominent element of Irish music lies in its melody, it is essential to have enough melodic instruments in the session. The fiddle plays a significant role in the session because of its loud volume and its ability to project a melodic line clearly. Plucked-string instruments have a harder time leading a tune:

their sound can be easily covered by other instruments. Most plucked-string instrumentalists strum chords to provide rhythmic and harmonic support. However, a skillful musician such as Steve Vanlandigham, a banjo/mandolin/bouzouki/guitar player, not only picks the entire melody on his instrument, but also accents important notes in the tune to bring out the melodic line.

The instrumentation also affects how fast the tempo of a dance tune can go. A skillful flute or tin whistle player is likely to take a reel to the faster extreme. Fiddlers are often blamed for fast tempi as well. Wayne Cantwell calls himself the “flying fiddler,” a nickname that he said came from his reputation of playing tunes too fast. The plucked-string musicians, on the other hand, usually play slower when playing the melodic part, due to the speed limitation of the picking motion. When the tempo speeds up, the plucked-string players often have to switch from plucking melody to strumming chords to accommodate the faster tempo.

One of the interesting features of the session is to see the players frequently switching to different instruments. The players not only switch to different instruments at the beginning of a new tune, they also do so during the repetitions of the same tune. The lead fiddler, Wayne Cantwell, for example, sometimes starts a tune with the fiddle, then changes to banjo after the tune is securely underway. At the beginning of my involvement in the session, I would stop playing when I saw that Wayne put down his fiddle, not knowing that he was just switching to another instrument.

The bodhran, the Irish frame drum, is popular among session participants in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas. At the February 2005 session at Borders Bookstore, Norman, there were five or six bodhrans and one African drum playing simultaneously at one point during the evening. Although too many drums can obscure the audibility of the melodic line, such performance practice is usually tolerated at the sessions in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas. On the other hand, the etiquette of session playing,³¹ which discourages the simultaneous playing of more than one or two drums, seems to be observed more strictly in sessions held in other parts of the United States or in Ireland, as was explained by Niall O'Leary in his spoon workshop in the Oklahoma Irish Music and Dance Festival (see Chapter 5).

The audience

Although some people come to the café for the sole purpose of listening to the music of the session, most come to the café to have a drink, meet a friend, study, or read a book while listening to the music. Session playing is a form of musical performance that is very different from other musical events on Borders' live music program. Most musical performances at Borders are more audience oriented, meaning that the performers are more concerned with entertaining the audience and demand more attention from the audience. One indication of this is the use of a sound system. A sound system not only ensures the audibility of the music, but also imposes upon the audience the presence of the music. In a performance like this,

³¹ See for example Barry Foy's Field Guide to the Irish Music Session, p. 18.

the line between performer(s) and audience is clearly defined. The performers often put up tip jars for the audience to show their appreciation, while the audience usually responds to the performance with applause and/or money.

A jam session, however, has a less defined line between performers and audiences. Session players do not consider themselves performers. Entertaining an audience is not their primary concern, although the session often attracts a good crowd. The audience is not expected to show their appreciation in monetary tips or applause, though a few rounds of tunes usually bring out some generous applause from the crowd. In fact, someone once asked Wayne if the group wanted to put up a tip jar, and Wayne refused, commenting that the session was not a performance. The players come to the session with the purpose of enjoying themselves and learning new tunes. Within the circle of the players, players take up the roles of both performer and audience. They are not only playing together but also playing for each other. Players often seek appreciation and acceptance from fellow musicians more than from outside listeners. Hazel Fairbairn states that “the session hinges on the exploration and expansion of common knowledge between the participating musicians and there is almost no concern about the impact that this may have on anyone else in the bar” (27). Due to the informal nature of the session, players do not worry about making mistakes, such as failing to start a tune correctly or stopping in the middle of a tune and starting again. A session is more an enjoyable musical and social activity for those who participate than a musical

performance that involves an attentive audience. Fairbairn comments on the lack of performer-audience division in the session:

... the music is not a focus for attention but merely forms part of a social gathering in a communal place. Although there may be keen traditional-music followers who listen very attentively in sessions, most people in a session-pub experience the music as something which contributes to the general atmosphere and pay it little attention. (27)

However, while there is a general lack of concern for the attention and behavior of the audience from the musician's standpoint, the friendly reception of the audience makes the Borders Bookstore in Norman a welcoming venue for the session players. When a member of the audience asks for a certain tune, the musicians are usually willing to comply if they know and like the tune. At the same time, session players also recognize that they are not obliged to honor the requests if they so choose.

Over the years, the session has become part of Borders' Friday night live music programs and has attracted a group of fans who come regularly to listen to the music. While some of these fans are Celtic music enthusiasts who also attend other Celtic musical events in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas, such as those mentioned in the previous chapter, most of the fans simply enjoy the ambience of the café and the pleasing sound of the music. Many audience members appear to have little prior knowledge of the Irish music session; sometimes, audience

members come up to the musicians and inquire about the group and the music, asking questions such as: “Do you guys play somewhere else? What kind of music was that you played?” or express their desire to hear the group play again.

The dynamics of the session

The players that show up at each session are unpredictable. This unpredictability directly affects the dynamics of each session. The intensity and enjoyability of a session are often determined by the attendance on a particular evening. When the session consists mainly of experienced players, it is most likely a fun and satisfying event. At such sessions, each player has opportunities to play familiar tunes, learn new tunes, or to revisit some less-played old tunes. The most experienced musicians seem to have an inexhaustible repertory of tunes; through playing with other musicians, a session then becomes a venue for them to refresh their memories of some almost forgotten tunes. On the other hand, for a player who has a limited repertory of tunes, a session can be a place for him or her to hear and learn a new tune. Although sheet music for tunes is widely available, most musicians prefer to hone a tune through playing with other people. The opportunity to play with other people sometimes becomes a motivation for a musician to learn a particular new tune. Some of the musicians who read music often write down the names of the tunes played in each session, so that they can practice and learn the tunes on their own, and come back next time to play with other musicians in the next session. The list of tunes played regularly in the sessions in the Oklahoma City

and Norman areas was also posted on the “Celtic Oklahoma” website.³² Session participants could look up tunes from the list, and find the sheet music or abc notation for the tunes through the attached internet links.

Maintaining a balance between the frequently-played familiar tunes and the less well-known tunes is important. The state of groove, which happens when all or most players are immersed in the process of music making, can only be achieved through a shared knowledge of a familiar tune. Experienced musicians, such as Wayne Cantwell and Steve Vanlandigham, help achieve a good balance of tunes because they can easily pull out familiar or little-known tunes from their memories. The session sometimes turns into a sight-reading session when new, inexperienced players with very limited repertoire of tunes rely heavily on sheet music. Sessions like these are usually less enjoyable to me as a participating player; the reliance on sheet music seems to lessen my sensitivity to the surrounding musical sound. Furthermore, reading from sheet music also limits the speed of a fast tune, hence reducing the energy level of the session.

The presence of regular participants contributes to the high-level energy in the session because there is a shared repertoire of tunes among these players. This common knowledge of tunes is built through knowing each other and playing together for a substantial period of time. Due to the vast number of existing old-time and Irish tunes, a visitor to the session may have a different repertoire of tunes, sharing only a few common tunes with the rest of the group. Besides sharing a

³² Unfortunately, the website was shut down at the time of writing. Wayne Cantwell, the web host, no longer has the time to maintain the website.

common repertoire, the rapport that regular participants have established over the years, either through playing music together in sessions or through participating together in other Irish or Celtic events, creates a warm camaraderie among the players, which is reflected in the friendly conversation and high-spirited laughter. Though the session is structured around tunes, interaction between musicians is an essential part of the session. In fact, many people are attracted to playing Irish music because of the friendly social environment they find in sessions. At the Norman Medieval Fair of 2003, in a conversation with Kristin Davies, a former participant of the Norman session who was trained classically as a flutist but later turned to playing Irish music, she identified the sociable environment she experienced when attending her first session as the main reason she became interested in playing Irish music. Hazel Fairbairn recognizes that the “enjoyment of the process of playing is as, if not more important than the quality of the musical result” (30). In my own experience of attending local Irish music sessions, I have to admit that more often than not, I enjoyed the interaction with friends more than playing music.

Sometimes, the success of a session can be determined by the size of the group. It is difficult to generate energy when there are simply not enough musicians at the session. In the April session of 2003, for instance, only four musicians attended; the session ended early that evening because of the obvious lack of momentum to keep the music going. However, over the years, as participants know each other better, a small group can be more intimate than a larger group, even

though the energy level is not as intense. I remember fondly of such a session that occurred near the end of 2005: only four or five of us were present at that particular session, and none of us had a rich repertoire of tunes. Mark Cashion pulled out a list of tunes, on which the beginning phrase of each tune was notated using his self-devised, numbered notational system. We did not play many tunes that evening, nor did we enjoy the dense musical texture typical of a large group. Nevertheless, we talked, laughed, and enjoyed deciphering the tunes on Mark's list. I went home that evening feeling rejuvenated by the company.

Video transcription of an evening of Irish jam session

For the rest of this chapter, I will discuss the transcription of a short clip of a videotaped session that took place on March 4, 2005, at Borders Bookstore in Norman, Oklahoma. The transcription gives the reader a close-up view of the interaction between musicians during a brief period of time within the session. I place less emphasis on the notation of the tunes played; this transcription is not intended to be a musical analysis of how various tunes were being executed and interpreted by each musician, as such musical analysis has already been undertaken by Hazel Fairbairn in "Group Playing in Traditional Irish Music: Interaction and Heterophony in the Session." I feel that a detailed transcription documenting the performance process—the minute-to-minute activities of the musicians, reveals the importance of communal experience in the session as reflected through the musical and verbal interactions between the musicians. Unlike traditional Western notational system, in which one can only notate the basic skeleton of the tunes

consisting of varying pitches and note values, while leaving out valuable information regarding the performance process—such as the spontaneous musical and verbal expressions of session participants—the purpose of my transcription is to notate the sight and sound of an Irish jam session, introducing the social experience into the notational system.

My transcription of the session is based mainly on the videograph Regula Qureshi developed for her analysis of a Qawwali performance (142-174). I find that the Irish music session and the Qawwali session share a common emphasis on interaction. While the Irish music session focuses on interaction between musicians, the Qawwali focuses on the interaction between musicians and audience. The purpose of Qureshi's videograph is to demonstrate visually the “behavioral information relevant to the Qawwali performance interaction” (145). Qureshi's investigation focuses on an analysis of the music, and the effects that context—the interactional process—has on the music (136). My video transcription, however, focuses on the interaction, both musical and verbal, between session players in the circle. As I will explain later, verbal interactions in an Irish jam session are typically structured around musical interactions, and are often the byproduct of musical interactions, especially among players who have not known each other well. However, since personal relationships had already been established among the participants of the session at Borders Bookstore of Norman, verbal interaction is an inseparable element in the performance process. My transcription, notating the various verbal, musical, and physical responses of each participant, informs us of

the nature of the communal experience in session playing—one that is light-hearted, supportive, and informal.

Analysis of the transcription

In the particular videotaped session I analyzed, which was relatively well-attended, most participants were regulars. Wayne Cantwell (A in seating chart) brought his teenage daughter Hannah (identified as “dancer” in the transcription), who has been taking lessons in Irish step dancing for many years. This evening, as most other evenings, Wayne brought his family to Borders Bookstore. Hannah sat in the café reading and listening, or sometime browsed around in the bookstore. A few times during the evening, she requested tunes from her father so that she could dance. Occasionally, her father or other musicians invited her to dance. Her dancing has always been a welcome moment for both the musicians and the audience.

Malia Bennett, a guitarist (E in seating chart), came with her twin daughters, Rachel and Laura (F and G in the seating chart). Malia often asks Rachel and Laura to start tunes that they know, so that they can play some tunes with other musicians before wandering off into the bookstore. Mark Cashion (B in seating chart) is another regular at Norman and Oklahoma City sessions. A retired engineer and self-taught (like most other players) button accordionist and harmonica player, he seldom starts a tune but is able to join most of the tunes. Mark and Wayne have known each other for years; the three of them, Malia, Mark, and Wayne, are also involving actively in the Scissortail Contra Dance group in Oklahoma City and

Norman. While Malia and Wayne often play together in the band for the dances, Mark is an experienced dancer, serving as the president of the Scissortail Contra Dance society at the time of writing in 2006.

Melissa Ang (H in seating chart), an undergraduate Electrical Engineering student studying at the University of Oklahoma, plays Chinese flute and came from Singapore in 2003. She began to play tin whistle when I brought her to the Norman session not long after her arrival in this country. Although shy and quiet by nature, she is a fast learner of new tunes, a quality that is warmly appreciated in the session. Sitting next to Melissa in this videotaped session was Mary Kennedy (I in the seating chart), a self-taught bodhran player, who comes to the session regularly but only plays intermittently. Most of the time, she sits in the circle and simply enjoys the music.

The participant represented by 'K' in the seating chart seldom comes to the session. His presence seems to trigger a sense of uneasiness among the regulars, demonstrated in most players' unwillingness to initiate conversation with him. Some players are annoyed by his behavior of touching and playing others' instruments without permission. Contributing further to his seemingly unusual behavior and appearance is his very limited knowledge of Irish and old-time tunes. During the several times that he attended the session, he rarely started a tune that other players knew, or joined an ongoing tune. In this videotaped session, most of the time he was holding his guitar without actually playing; sometimes he followed the chord progression of the music by watching and mimicking the left-hand finger

positions of Malia, another guitarist. Sometimes he tapped on his guitar, following the rhythm of the music.

The top line of the transcription is a musical notation of the tunes played by the musicians. The notation, however, is by no means an exact transcription of what each musician was playing at that particular moment but a representation of the overall musical structure *around* which everyone was playing. The musical notation also provides a temporal axis against which interactions and responses take place. I use contour lines, hand-traced from the musical notation of the tune, to represent what each musician is playing. The lines express the entrance of each musician and the basic skeleton of the tune each musician is playing. I feel the natural unevenness and imprecision resulting from the hand-drawing further illustrate the musicians' carefree attitude towards playing a tune in one "accurate" way. Although everyone followed the skeleton of the tune, each individual was intentionally, or most likely unintentionally, playing a phrase differently from his or her neighbor in the circle. Such minor variations could be the result of different perceptions of rhythm, occasional out-of-tune playing, imprecise tuning between instruments, different versions of the same tune, or individual efforts to add ornamentation to the tunes. In some instances (for example at 03:03), the contour line shows how musician "A" deviated away from the main melody that musician "F" was playing, thus creating a counter-melody to the overall texture.

When notating the part of the guitar, I use symbol (x) to illustrate the changing chords and note values. Although the symbols are placed on the musical

staff, they indicate only the chords, instead of exact pitches being played. The symbol x also indicates the percussive nature of the guitar accompaniment which, in addition to providing harmonic support, is the dominant rhythm instrument. The guitar's part, although performing mainly the role of rhythmic punctuation, adds to the overall density of the texture. A black line (beneath the top line of musical notation), with varying degrees of thickness and darkness, indicates the density of the composite sonic texture. I further express the bright tone color of the tin whistle that pierces through the texture with a thin dotted line.

My role as a participant in the session created some amounts of inconvenience in the process of videotaping the session. I constantly struggled between my attempt to capture the session from many different angles, therefore covering a wider view of the session, and my contributing role in the music-making process. I also took into consideration the possibility of creating too much of a distraction for the musicians if I were constantly carrying and aiming the video camera at them, especially during the casual conversations that occurred between tunes. Therefore, I decided instead to set the camera on top of the piano to avoid attracting too much attention to its presence. The placement of the video camera, however, resulted in a limited visibility of the audience and musicians. At times I used my personal observation and field notes to supplement such limitations. For example, even though musician "K" is hidden from the camera view (refer to seating chart), I was sitting directly across from him (C in the seating chart) and was able to observe his movements.

The sequence of performance in this video transcription adheres to the format of most sessions that I have attended at Borders Bookstore in Norman. The video transcription begins with Malia Bennett telling Wayne that her two girls were going to play the tune “Road to Lisdoonvarna,” a popular jig among the players. Wayne responded by nodding his head and holding up his fiddle, while Laura and Rachel held up their instruments. At this point, I finished adjusting the video camera on the piano and walked to my seat. Malia plucked a few notes on the guitar and signaled the girls to start playing. One of the girls (F) started playing by herself, then was quickly joined by her mother and other players. The thickening of the sonic texture is represented by the composite line near the top of the transcription. Melissa (H), the tin whistle player, came in when the A part of the tune was repeated, hence adding a distinctive tone color to the overall texture. Mary Kennedy (I), the bodran player, turned and talked periodically to her friend sitting at Table 3. She rubbed her drum, looked around, took a sip of her drink, and only began to beat on her drum at 01:50 from the beginning of the videotape.

The beginning of the tune “Road to Lisdoonvarna” did not seem to draw attention from the audience; the group of people sitting at Table 1 continued to talk among themselves. Occasionally, a member from the group turned around and watched the band (00:20). A couple sitting at Table 2 were reading most of the time, and only looked up to the musicians sporadically. After the tune had been repeated three times, the musicians were ready to change to the next tune. Malia communicated the change to the next tune “Swallow Tail” verbally when “Road to

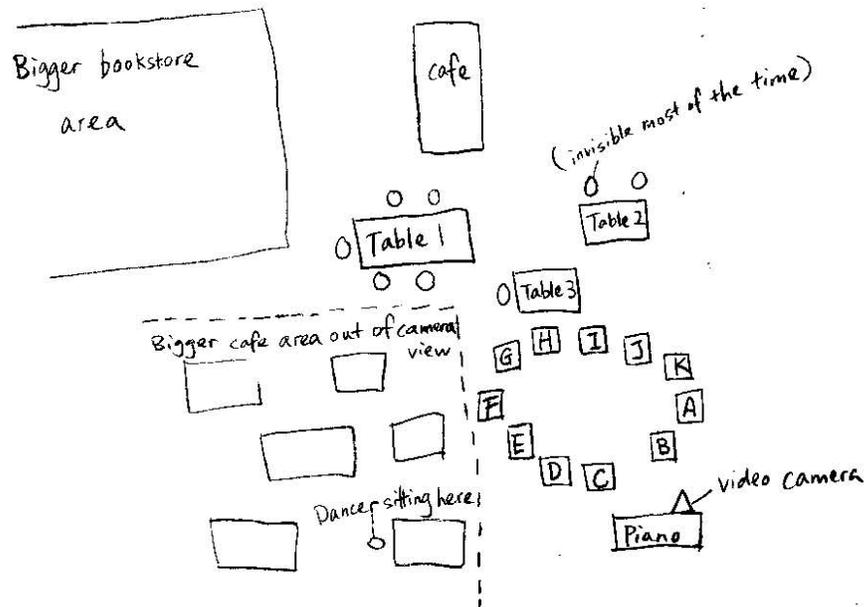
Lisdoonvarna” was about to be repeated for the fourth round (01:41). To make sure that her daughters were ready to play the next tune, Malia reminded them again (around 01:46). “Road to Lisdoonvarna” changed smoothly into the next tune “Swallow Tail.” “Swallow Tail” is often selected to pair up with “Road to Lisdoonvarna;” sharing a key (e minor) and a similar opening phrase (both emphasizing the fifth relationship, E-B), the two tunes transition into each other smoothly. After “Swallow Tail” was repeated a couple of times, some musicians, uncertain if the tune would be repeated one more time, stopped playing briefly to listen (03:02). Melissa (H) played a couple more measures, but stopped when she became aware that some musicians had stopped playing. At this point only two fiddlers and a guitarist kept going. Wayne played a counter-melody in a higher register while Rachel (F) continued to play the main melody. Although occasionally Wayne likes to improvise a counter-melody or accompany the main melody with short back-beat strokes,³³ this is one of the very few times that the counter-melody became clearly audible in the video recording because of the relatively thin texture. Everybody came in again at 03:11 and continued playing the tune for one more round. It seemed that the group came to an unspoken consensus to end the tune after this round. Malia stressed the chords at the last two measures to emphasize the ending (03:30), and exchanged a smile with Wayne and Mark before giving a sigh, “All right!”

³³ Accenting the back beats with short, bouncy bow strokes is one of the rhythmic features in old-time music.

The audience responded to the ending of the set of tunes with applause (03:31). The musicians, however, did not acknowledge the audience but began to talk among themselves. Smaller groups within the group formed as the conversation resumed: Melissa and Mary (H and I) were talking to each other, the two sisters (F and G) were reading a book together, and the dancer, Wayne's daughter, came up to the circle at this point and said something to Malia (E), Mark (B) and Wayne (A). Learning of Hannah's desire to dance, the musicians invited her to come into the middle of the circle to dance (04:00).

Wayne set the tempo by playing a few measures of vamp on the note D before starting to play the jig "Haste to the Wedding." The dancer waited for eight measures before she started dancing, as it is customary for dancers to start dancing only after the first eight measures (part A) are played through once. When Hannah started dancing, most of the audience turned their attention to her. "Haste to the Wedding" was repeated three times before changing to the tune "I Buried Me Wife and Danced On Top of Her," following Wayne's verbal cue—a "hup" at 06:31. These two tunes, "Haste to the Wedding" and "I Buried Me Wife," are often played together as a set; the musicians not only find the names of the tunes humorous and ironic, they also find the two tunes rhythmically and melodically compatible (both are jigs in the key of D). When the dancer bowed to the audience at the end of "Haste to the Wedding" and exited the circle, the audience responded with a round of applause (06:33). The musicians, however, did not stop but continued on with "I Buried Me Wife."

Figure 6.3: Seating Chart of Video Transcription, March 4, 2005, Borders Bookstore, Norman, Oklahoma

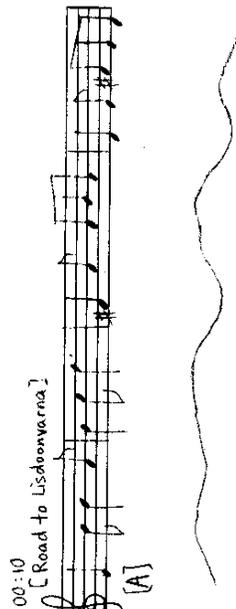


Instrumentation

- A: Fiddle
- B: Accordion, Harmonica
- C: Fiddle
- D: Bodhran (arrived later in the evening, not present in the video clip)
- E: Guitar
- F: Fiddle
- G: Fiddle
- H: Tin whistle
- I: Bodhran
- J: Guitar (arrived later in the evening, not present in the video clip)
- K: Guitar

Figure 6.4: Video Transcription, March 4, 2005, Borders Bookstore, Norman, Oklahoma

00:00
00:10
[Road to Lisdoonvarna]
[A]



Composite texture

A (A) nods, get up fiddle

B (B) places hands on accordion, waiting to play

C (C) walks from piano to seat

(D) [arrives later in the evening]
"Wayne, they are going to do Lisdoonvarna"

E holding fiddle up *

F -holding fiddle up --- waiting to play

G listening, watching

H turning to table 3 --- rubbing her drum --- looking at table 3

I (J) [arrives later in the evening]

K [invisible from camera]

Dancer

Audience laughter from Table 1

cafe sound of cappuccino machine --- loud knocking from emptying espresso ground

* --- indicates continuous motion

00:13 00:17"

[A repeated]

A B C (D) E F G H

(H) getting up tin whistle

put down drink, watches around

I takes a sip of drink from table 3

(J)

K

Dancer

Audience table 2 turn to watch musicians, table 1 talking among themselves

Cafe

knocking

00:00 00:25 01:41

[B] etc
Tune repeated for 2 more times

[third round ends]

(M) nods, smiles |

A B C (D) E F G H I (J) K

(I) turn around to face the circle etc

Table 3 watches musicians

Table 2 reading, table 3 reading

Table 1 turn around to watch musicians

Dancer
Cafe

01:44
 01:50 etc

[Repeated A, fourth round]

* (F#) (E) (D) (B)

- A.
- B
- C
- (D)
- E continue strumming similar pattern ----- (to F#G) "play swallow Tail next", keep strumming
- F
- G
- H
- I watches audience watching around, lightly drumming, inaudible -----

- (J)
- K
- Dancer
- Audience Table 3 reading ----- Table 1 talking ----- Table 2 takes a sip of drink. watch musicians
- Cafe

* The letters indicate the approximate pitches at the main beats

02:44
 (End of A, second round)

02:01
 [Swallow Tail] 02:06 etc
 [Fourth round ends] [A, first round]

(A) *trump*

(B)

(C)

(D)

(E) continue strumming similar pattern

(F)

(G)

(H)

(I) soft drumming: | X - - - - - | X - - - - - | X - - - - - | stop and listen - - - - -

(J)

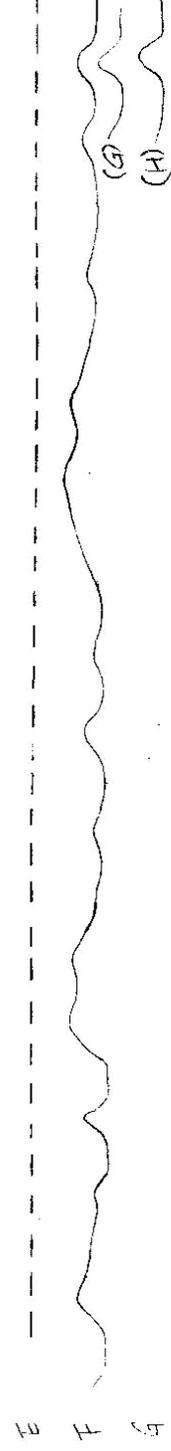
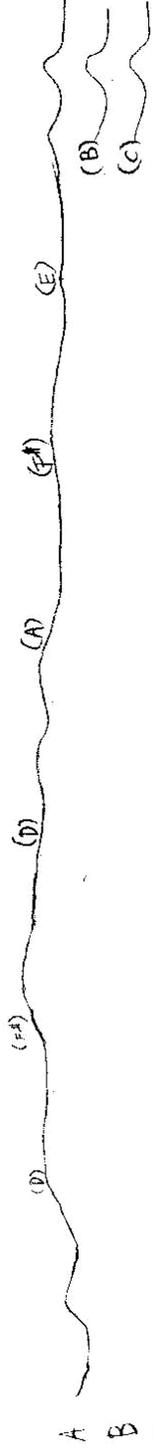
K

laughter from table 1

chairs
 audience table 2 looks at musicians, table 1 talking
 cafe

03:03 03:11

[A repeated, third round] etc



stopped
[drumming inaudible]

(J)

K

Dancer

Audience Table 2 watches musicians

Table 1 talking

cofe

03:28

03:31

03:40

03:45

[end of third round]



A

B

C

(D)

E

F

G

H

I

(J)

K

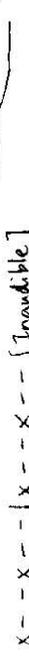
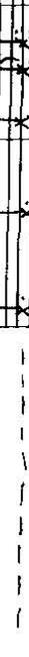
Dancer

Audience

Cafe

smiling, look at E

look at B



(A) lean forward to listen to dancer
 (B) listening to the conversation between E & dancer

"All right!"

F&G talking inaudibly...

H&I talking inaudibly...

say something to A & E

Table 1 resume talking, Table 3 reading

clapping unidentified whoop!

04:00

"Ah..." (B to dancer) "You need some space, don't you?" (gesture to invite dancer) laughing

A look at B & E, (to E) "What did she say?"

B

C

(D)

E (to A) "She said..." "

F

F & G looking at a book together

G

H

H & I continue talking

I

(J)

K

Dancer talking to A & E

Audience

loud laughter from Table 1

Cafe

04:05

04:15

04:20

(A) holds up fiddle, deciding on a set of tunes

A

B

C

(D)

E

F

G

H

I

(J)

K

Dancer

Audience

Cafe

(to dancer) "come down here, chingy doodle...", clear up space in the middle (to A) "what shall we do?"

F & G continue to look at a book

H & I stop talking, look at dancer

intermittent loud laughter from table 1 --- Table 2 & 3 reading ---

04:25

04:30

04:45

(A) laughs

A

B

C

(D)

E

F

G

H

I

(J)

K

Dancer

Audience

Cafe

A&B talking -----

(to dancer) "Come on here. baby doll..... bring it on, bring it on" laughs "You are not going to hit us, we'll hit you"

----- F & G continue reading -----

(H) laughs
(I) laughs

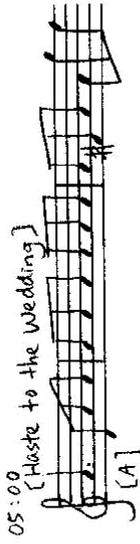
"I am not going to..."

"ok." walks into the circle

walks out of the circle

----- loud laughter from table 1 -----

04:50

05:00 [Haste to the Wedding]


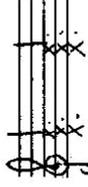


(A) getting ready to play
 (B) getting ready to play



(E) laughs. "Yes, we'll wait..."

"ok," plays D chord



F# G watch dancer

I "Don't tell her that, let it be surprise!" laughs

(J)

Dancer Comes back to the circle

Audience

Cafe

----- Table | turn around,
 stop conversation, watch dancer

05:04

05:11

(A repeated)

etc



(A)

(B)

(D)

E watch dancer

F watch dancer

G watch dancer

H waiting to play

I (H) start beating drum, inedible

J tapping foot to the rhythm

K Table 1 watch dancer, table 2 watch dancer, table 3 reading, table 2 watch dancer

Diner start dancing

Audience

Cafe

05:18 [B, first round]

05:25 [B repeated, first round]

A etc

B etc

C etc

(c)

walk back to seat

watch dancer

watch dancer

(H)

holding drum, drum beats inaudible --- Swaying

(J)

K

Dancer continue dancing

Audience

Cafe

06:30
 06:31
 06:33
 [I buried me wife]
 [End of third round] [A]
 etc

(A) etc

"bump" etc

A & B look at dancer leaving, smile etc

(D) etc

E ----- etc

F -----

G -----

(H) ----- etc

I ----- etc

(J) ----- etc

K -----

Dancer continue dancing ----- bow ----- walks out

Audience ----- clapping, someone whistles, Table 2P3 reading, Table 1 watch musicians

Cafe -----

Findings

This performance analysis reflects the core values and functions, both socially and musically, of an Irish jam session in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas. The communalistic quality of the session is illustrated by the verbal interactions notated in the transcription. The verbal communication was usually structured around little jokes about the tunes, interesting personal encounters, or shared knowledge and news about a common acquaintance. As shown in the transcription, laughter was one of the main ingredients in the session. For example, at one point, at about 4 minutes into the tape, for example, the musicians, led by Malia, were teasing Hannah, the dancer and teenage daughter of Wayne (A), and challenging her to dance in the small space inside the circle. Such enjoyable verbal exchanges are sometimes referred to as “crack” in British Isles. According to Fairbairn, “crack is a term used to describe the experience of enjoyable activity in good company. Its use is not restricted to describing musical events but is a general term for any form of enjoyable social discourse.” Anthony Seeger describes a similar experience, existing among the Suyá of the Amazon, as *kin*:

Everyone listens, laughs, and jokes. The village is in that desirable state of collective euphoria, or *kin*, that should be part of any ceremony. When people feel euphoric, they are happy and want to sing. Singing makes them happy. *Kin* is a desirable state. New songs are being learnt. People are acting correctly, they are being

delightfully improper with their joking relatives and behaving properly towards the other. (17)

“Being delightfully improper” is an accurate description of Malia’s behavior towards the teenage dancer; calling Hannah “baby doll” and challenging her with words like “come on here, bring it on” (04:25), demonstrate the friendly and comfortable relationship between the two.

The interaction through musical means brought satisfaction to the individuals in the group, which was especially apparent at the end of a set of tunes. The verbal and non-verbal expressions, such as a smile or a satisfied sigh, “all right!” (03:31), were a manifestation of the joyous feeling each participant experienced after completing a shared musical journey through the tunes. The sense of satisfaction is even greater after finishing a set of tunes in an extremely fast tempo. For example, at the April session of 2006 at Borders Bookstore, the bodhran players in the group sped up the tempo intentionally so that it became almost impossible for the melodic players to keep up; when the fiddle and tin whistle players kept up and finished playing the exceedingly fast tempo, everybody in the circle broke out into a hearty laughter. I believe that collective experiences like these are important to strengthen or create bonds between participating individuals.

Offering support to each other in a communal setting is an important social behavior reinforced through the performance of the tunes. The support is often offered through joining in the tunes started by one of the musicians; sometimes the support is exhibited by picking up one’s instrument again and playing a repeating

tune after one has already stopped, simply because someone else is still playing the tune. Such an instance is indicated in the video transcription (03:02) when the music seemed to come to a natural stop at the end of the second repetition of the tune “Swallow Tail;” some of the musicians, who were uncertain if the tune was going to be repeated, stopped playing and only rejoined the tune after eight measures. Musical support is especially valuable in fostering the confidence of the less experienced players, as is evident at the beginning of the first tune in the transcription, “The Road to Lisdoonvarna” (00:10), where the small and bashful sound of a single fiddle played by Laura (F), Malia’s daughter, was soon carried and covered by the sound of the group’s playing. This kind of supportive environment makes the session a welcome locus for family activities, especially in a place like Borders Bookstore. Not only does her two daughters’ music education benefit from the experience of playing with others, Malia is also able to enjoy herself in the music-making process while her husband and sons entertain themselves in the bookstore.

The informality of the session is displayed by the different participation levels shown in the transcription. Session players in this community are usually very receptive toward players of any level. Musicians are welcome to leave or sit through tunes that they do not know. Mary Kennedy (I), for example, enjoyed sitting with the musicians in the circle even though she only played her drum occasionally. Most of the time, however, when hearing an unfamiliar tune, musicians either attempt to follow the skeleton of the tune with their instruments or

participate at the minimal level of tapping their feet and swaying to the tune. It is only during the singing of a slow song or playing of a slow waltz that many musicians sit still and listen passively.

As demonstrated in the video transcription, audience involvement in the session is often insignificant. The general audience paid little attention to the musical and verbal activities happening in the circle of the session, except when the dancer participated. The participation of a trained Irish step-dancer like Hannah captured the audience's attention. The audience responded with generous applause (06:33), which the dancer acknowledged with a graceful bow. Such reciprocating exchange between the audience and performer relocated the "audible" but "invisible" session temporarily to the foreground.

Conclusion

Comparing my observations on the Irish sessions that I had attended during the course of this study, I noticed that the process and dynamics varied to a certain degree in each session. Factors that contributed to the variations are the size of the group, the familiarity between players, the musical skill and experience of the players, the presence or absence of an audience, and the organizational structure of the session. These factors are discussed below.

- 1) Group size: A smaller group consisting of mostly long-time acquaintances offers more intimate verbal and musical interaction. On the other hand, in a bigger group, musical interaction seems to take precedence; the presence of more musicians introduces a wider selection of tunes.

- 2) Relationship between players: If a comfortable and personal relationship has not been established among the participants, musical interest becomes the predominant commonality between players. (This is a trait that I also observed in sessions held at the Rocky Mountain Music Festival I attended in 2004.)
- 3) Musical skill and experience: Skilled and experienced musicians bring with them a rich reservoir of tunes that keep the musical momentum in the session going. Without the musical contributions of accomplished musicians, the session leans more heavily towards verbal interaction, especially if the players know each other well, instead of musical interaction.
- 4) Audience: Although session players generally pay very little attention to the audience, a warm and responsive audience provides a pleasant atmosphere for the music-making process. Steve Vanlandigham used to respond to the audience's applause by acknowledging the audience and then saying to the group, "Hey, they like us!" Though other musicians usually do not openly acknowledge audience's applause, the warm responses of the audience are nevertheless very much appreciated by the players. When the third-Friday session was moved from Mid-Del Studio, a privately owned facility, to Java Dave's café, a public restaurant, it was partially because of the space and the easy access Java Dave's café could offer to the listening audience.
- 5) The organizational structure: In most of the sessions that I attended, leadership and structure were usually spontaneous and implicit. However, in

the few C.C.E. sessions, or “slow jam” sessions, that I attended, leadership played a more noticeable role. Jean Hill, the session leader, usually went around the circle and invited players to take turns starting a tune. This way, beginners were given opportunities to start a tune at their own comfortable pace, while the slow tempo encouraged players to learn an unfamiliar tune. On the other hand, the more organized structure limited the personal conversations and focused the attention of the players on learning and playing tunes.

Despite the differences one may encounter in each session, a supportive environment offered through musical interaction is an appealing quality shared by the various sessions that I attended. Strangers often become friends after playing several rounds of tunes together. The shared knowledge of a particular tune is like a common language between two players that enables them to interact musically before any verbal communication takes place. I often witnessed and personally experienced the instant bond created by the music; many times, an unspoken rapport was established when I joined in a tune started by another player.

The sessions in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas reflect the interplay between various music cultures: old-time, bluegrass, Beatles, jazz, and Arabic-Celtic fusion were a few musical styles that were interjected into the predominantly Irish music-making activity. This occasional style switching, or “code” switching, using Slobin’s term (Subcultural Sounds 85), reveals the multiple identities and affiliations that each individual brings to the session: Malia’s piano rendition of a

Paul McCartney song informs us of her participation in the mainstream American pop culture alongside her identification with Irish culture, while Miranda's Arabic improvisational style implies her fascination with multiple non-Western musical traditions. In the next chapter, through case studies of individual participants in the sessions, I will further investigate the social and cultural changes that affect the musical experiences of these participants, the choices these participants make to participate in the sessions or other Irish music activities, their affinity with Irish music, and the nature and significance of Irish music in their lives.

Chapter 7

Why Irish Music?

This chapter is a compilation of case studies based on interviews, informal conversations, and email communications with selected participants whom I met in Irish jam sessions and other Celtic-themed music activities in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas. I have played music with these participants on various occasions for about three years. While the majority of these case studies focus on individuals, some of them examine the experiences of individuals along with their association with local bands. The purpose of these case studies is to inquire about the choices each of these consultants has made to participate in Irish /Celtic music activities. Why do they choose Irish music among the rich variety of musical experiences available in post 1960s American society? What is the nature and significance of Irish music in their lives? This investigation reveals the multiple identities and affiliations that each musician carries—a complex issue raised by Slobin in Subcultural Sounds—and further informs us of the social and cultural conditions in America.

Mary Kennedy

Mary Kennedy has been attending the Friday night Irish session in Norman for about two years. She often has a bodhran with her but only plays occasionally, since she is just beginning to learn the instrument. She likes to sing if there is someone in the session who will sing with her. Most of the time, she sits with the musicians in the circle and listens to the music or talks to her friends at the café.

Although she does not participate in the music-making process very actively, she enjoys the music very much. She is very passionate about Irish music because she considers Ireland her home.

Mary grew up in Oklahoma, but she can trace her Irish ancestry back a few generations, mainly on her mother's side. Her father's side came mainly from English Britain. As a child, she had always been close to the relatives from her mother's side and she remembers hearing many Irish and American folk songs in her household. When she was fifteen years old, she befriended a girl from the Pawnee tribe and became close to her family. This friendship opened the door for her involvement with Native American culture. In the 1980s, she met a Kiowa man, John Aunko, who later became involved in the American Indian Cultural Society (AICS). At that time, the society was not open to non-Indians, but John wanted to open it up to non-Indians. Mary joined the society and became acquainted with Effie Tee, who was one of the earlier presidents of AICS. Effie Tee, a Navajo, wanted to adopt the Gourd Dance into the society even though the Gourd Dance was originally only celebrated by the Kiowa tribe. The Gourd Dance was eventually introduced to the AICS and has since then become intertribal.

AICS was founded by Doc Tate Nevaquaya in 1989.³⁴ In the beginning years, Mary, who is also an artist in her spare time, drew portraits of Doc Tate and was also responsible for the drawings on the bulletins of AICS. According to Mary, the membership of the society bordered around one hundred people, with about 30% of them being non-Indians. The goal of the society was to educate American Indian

³⁴ AICS was dissolved in 2005.

tribes about the culture, music, and dance of each other, and also to educate non-Indians about Indian culture. The regular programs of AICS meetings included beadwork, shawl making, basket weaving, lectures given by guest speakers, and sometimes flute playing or a flute making workshop. The society usually got together once a month. Mary used to be very active in the Society until about five or six years ago when her busy schedule with school and family got in the way. She said she remained a member but became less active in her involvement.

Responding to my question about her ancestral history, she claimed that it is unclear if there was any Indian in her family lineage. She said that her great-great grandfather from Ireland might have married an Indian woman, but there is no proof. Nevertheless, the lack of Indian lineage does not prevent her from adopting the Indian culture. Her long-time friend John Aunko was planning to adopt her into his tribe by having a formal tribal adoption ceremony. Unfortunately, John became very sick and eventually died before the ceremony could be performed. According to Mary, there were many white Americans since the 1960s and 1970s who were known as “wanna-be Indians.” These “wanna-bes” are eager to adopt the Indian culture. However, her friend John told her that she was a “should-have-been Indian.” She explained to me that the “wanna-be Indians” are those who are not fully accepted into the community, while “should-have-beens” are those who are accepted into the tribes by certain members. Even though the adoption ceremony never happened, she believes that she has a strong emotional tie to Indian people.

The quality that Mary appreciates most in Indian people is their sense of humor and optimism in spite of what has happened to them in the past. She admires the spirituality of the Indian people and their generosity to give to their community, which is very different from mainstream American culture. She especially likes the music of the gourd dance; the sound of the drum takes her back to a pre-birth time. She describes the drumbeats as the heartbeat in the mother's womb. It creates for her an experience of healing and spirituality. She often loses herself in the music, feeling connected to the people in the circle right then, and also to the past and future. She describes such sensations as transcendental. She has felt connected to the music since she was fifteen, although sometimes people teased her for "dancing like a white woman" at powwows. She respects the Indian culture very much and wants to see it maintained and grow. She believes that it is important for the Indian people to have a sense of self.

I also had a chance to talk to Mary about her involvement with the monthly Irish session. She told me that she was first attracted to the opportunity to hear live music. She appreciates the openness and sharing of the people in the session, as well as having the opportunity to sing and play music. She claims that Irish music has always been in her soul; she recalls that as a child, she had already pointed to pictures of Ireland and called it home. She felt strongly connected to the Irish side of her family and enjoyed the music of her mother's side. She mentioned that there was never music from her father's side of the family. When describing her family genealogy, she teased that she "is not purely anything." "But one cool thing about

being an American,” she half jokingly said, “is that you can pick and choose from all those different things and stay with one that you like.” Mary recently visited Ireland for the first time and said she felt at home there. Since then, she has visited Ireland several times.

Therese Matthews

Therese Matthews is another regular attendee of the monthly Irish session. She not only participates in the session in Norman; she is also very active in the slow Irish session in Oklahoma City, hosted by Jean Hill of the Irish Arts Oklahoma. Like Mary, Therese is beginning to learn the bodhran. She plays her drum occasionally, but most of the time she sits in the circle and listens to the music. More recently, she also added mandolin, flute, tin whistle, fiddle, guitar, and concertina to her instrument collection.

Therese spent many years in Tulsa, prior to moving to Norman to work. She had heard Irish music in Tulsa but had not been actively involved with any musical activities in Norman until one day she came across the session in Borders accidentally. She soon became active in many music activities, as people in the session introduced her to the local music organizations, such as Irish Arts Oklahoma, Oklahoma City Traditional Music Association and Scissor Tail Contra Dance Society.

Tracing her ancestral lineage, Therese said that she has Osage blood on her father’s side and Irish blood on her mother’s side. Her father’s genealogy has a mixture of Osage, Welsh and English and she is considered one-sixteenth Osage,

although she suspects that she might have more Osage lineage in her family. She studied the Osage language while in college. She recalls going to intertribal powwow dances when she was little but did not become actively involved in the Osage tribal annual dances Inlonshka until she was invited by her Osage college professor to attend the dances. Since then she started to go to Gray Horse, one of the three districts that hold the annual Inlonshka in June. She also began to help in the preparation process of the dances every year.

According to Therese, the Inlonshka was traditionally only danced by grown men and the eldest sons of the family. Spiritual renewal is an important aspect of the Inlonshka. The dance is held in a huge arbor. Each district selects a drum keeper who is responsible for the annual event. The event lasts for four days, from Thursday to Sunday. Women have been allowed to participate in the dance only since the Second World War. Therese used to go to the event and stay at the camp to help with the preparation process when she was still living in Wichita. She made her own dance outfit for the dance. It is considered significant to own a dance outfit because it is difficult and expensive to make one. After moving to Tulsa, she would drive back and forth from the dances. She said she missed the days when she stayed overnight at the camp because she enjoyed the rhythm of each day when people were getting ready for the dances. Since she moved down to Norman several years ago, she has been unable to attend the dances because of her work schedule.

Even though she is active and eager to learn about the Osage tribe and participate in the dances, Therese regrets that her parents and family are not as

interested. She wants to learn as much as she can about the language and culture so that she can pass them down to the next generation. Her active involvement in Irish music activity also has little to do with her family. She became interested in American folk music and bluegrass music during her college years. She said that she is very eclectic in her taste of music and enjoys a wide variety of musical activities. But among all the activities in which she is active, she likes Irish music the most. She especially enjoys the mass energy created by a group of people playing fast tunes together in the sessions, and the friendships that grow out of playing music together in the session. She believes that her interest in Irish music is an outgrowth of her desire to acknowledge the different ethnicities in her ancestral lineage. She found out recently that all the European blood in her ancestry came from the ancient Celtic areas. "I am a hundred percent tribal in that sense," she joked. Participating in Irish music activities enhances her Irish ethnic identity and helps her maintain a balanced view of her ethnic identities as a descendent of Osage and Irish ancestors.

John McGaha

I became acquainted with John McGaha mainly through playing in Celtic jam sessions held monthly in the Celtic Cup of Oklahoma City and Borders Bookstore of Norman. A young man in his twenties, John plays fiddle, hammered dulcimer, and has even started to learn Celtic harp. He also plays in a band called Boru's Ghost, a band that mixes Irish tunes with instruments from other traditions, such as African djembe and jazz bass. He grew up in a musical family in Oklahoma.

His father is a long-time bluegrass banjo player and played in one of the first bluegrass bands in Oklahoma during the 1970s. His father encouraged him and tried to teach him fiddle when he was little. His maternal grandfather used to live in the rural areas and play fiddle for barnyard dances. “Between my dad and my granddad, I learned how to play fiddle,” he said.

When he was a teenager, John felt pressured to quit playing bluegrass for a while because he was laughed at by his friends in school. He learned how to read music when playing in a school band as a marimba player, but he is still more comfortable with playing by ear and memory. Somewhere along the line, he heard Irish fiddle music and it was “like a breath of fresh air” for him. He got a Chieftains recording and said that it was refreshing to hear it for the first time. In 1994, when he graduated from high school, he came across a Celtic music performance at the Medieval Fair, played by a group known as Nonesuch. At that time, he was interested in the hammered dulcimer. He fell in love with the sound of the hammered dulcimer after hearing this instrument in a hammered dulcimer shop during a family trip to Eureka Springs. When he saw the playing of Jacque Rapp, the hammered dulcimer player of Nonesuch, he became acquainted with her. She introduced him to OCTMA (Oklahoma City Traditional Music Association), an organization that is dedicated to the promotion of traditional music (see chapter 5 for more discussion on OCTMA). He started to attend OCTMA meetings regularly and learned hammered dulcimer in one of the many workshops held at the meetings. There he found support and encouragement for his playing. “Going to OCTMA was

like going to church to me, I learned a lot of traditional old-time tunes there,” he said. He also dragged his current band member and best friend to attend OCTMA workshops with him.

Gradually, John and his friends started to play together and formed the band Boru’s Ghost. When they first started, they played strictly traditional and Celtic music; they began to introduce rock and jazz styles into the band more recently. He told me that he doesn’t play bluegrass music as much anymore, and considers himself more of a Celtic musician now. Because of the regular band practice, he can no longer afford the time to attend OCTMA meetings. He attended the Celtic jam session in Oklahoma City that began to meet regularly at the Celtic Cup of Oklahoma City in the summer of 2002. According to him, Celtic musicians in this area simply did not have a venue to get together before the Celtic Cup opened its business. He said he enjoys sessions more than band practices because he gets to know new people and learn many new tunes in the session.

John likes an eclectic style of music. When I inquired about the use of djembe in his band, he told me that a few years ago, he went to the North Texas Irish Festival and heard a performing group using African djembe. At that time, the drummer of Boru’s Ghost was having some trouble learning how to play the bodhran. Since djembe is an easier instrument to learn, he bought a djembe for the drummer. John is not very interested in African music per se, but sees the importance of bringing different instruments from other traditions. As an example, he notes that the hammered dulcimer came from China and the Middle East, but

blends well with Celtic music. “It produces an ethereal, almost magical sound,” he said. Adding a drum makes a big difference for the band, and audiences respond well to the rhythm. They also added a bass guitar player who was converting from playing jazz.

When asked about his ancestral background, John said he had done some research in genealogy and found out how his last name “McGaha” came about. He said that “McGaha” can be traced back to a Northern Ireland county, one of the Protestant areas. He thinks his family came over from Ireland a few generations ago. “One day I want to go back there and see if I can find some relatives there. That will be cool,” he told me. He said he also has some Viking heritage, and has recently taken up interest in Norwegian music and culture. He started to find out about and become interested in his Irish heritage after playing Irish music. “Before that, I knew I was a mixed breed, I didn’t care,” he said, “but something ancient woke up in me when playing Irish music.” He told me that Celtic music is the original version of old-time traditional/Appalachian music brought over by immigrants from Ireland, Scotland, and England. When asked what it means to be an American, he said, “In America, anyone can belong. Being an American is a vague thing, it doesn’t have to do with race. America is the blending of all the world’s cultures, kind of like a bus station. It used to be different, my father never saw any person other than a white person until he was seventeen. People now are more open-minded.”

Kathy Dagg

Kathy Dagg, an oncologist at Norman Regional Hospital, heard her first folk revival recording, Peter, Paul and Mary's "Blowin' In The Wind," when she was nine years old. Her early musical influences included American big band jazz, her father's favorite, and Stephen Foster songs that her mother used to sing. Growing up in a small Oklahoma town, she learned a few chords from a book on her first guitar, as there was no string teacher in the town. She claimed that her only formal lessons occurred during her graduate school years when she took a few guitar lessons. In high school, Kathy learned music reading and vocal technique from her choral music teacher, and sang and played guitar in an all-girl folk group. In her college years, she sang at coffeehouses, sometimes by herself, and sometimes in a folk duet.

Kathy had to put her musical interests aside for about ten years after the beginning of medical school in 1978 and the arrival of her first child in 1981. As she started working and her children grew older, she became interested in the hammered dulcimer and started attending a hammered dulcimer workshop at OCTMA in 1990, where she met her current band member, Jacque Rapp, who was the instructor for the workshop for several years. Through OCTMA activities, Kathy was exposed to many styles of acoustic music and encouraged by the friendly and helpful people she met at the meetings. Though she never became an accomplished hammered dulcimer player, she picked up her guitar again and learned other string instruments such as banjo and mandolin. Before joining her

current band Calliope House, she played with Cathexis, a folk group with blues and country influences, and another folk band called Some Assembly Required.

Calliope House was formed in 2002 with Wayne Cantwell on fiddle and tenor banjo, Jacque Rapp on hammered dulcimer and piano, Thea Rapp (Jacque's daughter) on tin whistle, wooden Irish flute, mandolin, hammered dulcimer, and banjo, and Kathy on guitar, cittern, octave mandolin, and mandolin (with occasional button accordion). At the time of writing in 2006, Wayne Cantwell had left the group and the vacancy was filled by another fiddler, Shanda McDonald. This group plays mostly Irish tunes and songs, although all band members have experiences in playing old-time and other genres such as blues and jazz. In a review, the band's CD Splendid Isolation is described as having "a sort of New Age type of sound, yet with strong hints of a traditional nature on most of the tunes" (Sanders).

Kathy was first introduced to Irish music through a recording of O'Carolan harp tunes played on the hammered dulcimer in 1990. Soon after that she discovered Irish bands such as Altan, Silly Wizard, De Dannan, and The Bothy Band through a music store in Oklahoma City. Kathy said that when she was first drawn to Irish folk songs, they were "a little reminiscent of the Child ballads sung by Joan Baez during the folk revival." She remembers learning her first Child ballad "House Carpenter" at a camp in 1968 and singing it for years. She appreciates the rhythms and the modal structure of many Irish songs and dance tunes. "They're not just I-IV-V chord structures like a lot of 'folk' and popular songs. The more I listened, the more details I heard," she said.

Kathy stated that she has little or no Irish heritage in her predominantly American-German family genealogy, and certainly did not grow up listening to Celtic music. But nonetheless, the lack of Irish heritage does not lessen her strong affinity for Irish music. She said that music is a very important hobby for her and has brought friends into her life. She not only taught herself how to transcribe tunes and chord charts from recordings using computer software, but also learned some digital recording and sound reinforcement techniques. Now that her children are all grown, she plans to devote more time and energy to studying music, and perhaps learn how to play piano and violin as well.

Jean Hill

Jean Hill and her husband Matthew Hill are both active participants in the local Irish music scene. Besides playing Irish music on accordion and tin whistle, Jean Hill is known to the local Irish musicians for her dedication to teaching Irish step dancing in the Oklahoma City area. She is the director of Irish Arts Oklahoma, a non-profit organization and a branch of C.C.E, and is responsible for bringing in well-known Irish musicians and dancers from some major cities of the United States to teach various instrumental and dance workshops at the annual Irish Music and Dance Festival in Oklahoma City (see chapter 5). She also organizes one or two ceili every year, a social event rooted in the tradition of the house party in Ireland. Her husband, Matthew, plays fiddle in jam sessions and contra dances, and provides, together with several other local musicians, live musical accompaniment for the social dancing at the ceili.

Jean started playing clarinet in junior high school and became interested in folk dances from different regions of the world when she accompanied folk dancing in the international festival organized by the public schools in the city. Later, when she attended the University of Oklahoma as an education major in the early 1970s, she joined the international folk dance club at the university. As an adult, she learned to play the piano accordion, one of the most popular instruments used to accompany various types of dances. In the 1980s, she began to focus on Irish/Scottish music and dance; she reasoned that Irish and other British Isles music, which she believes to be the root of American folk music, is more versatile at the dances found locally, since it is also used to accompany contra dancing and square dancing. In addition to this, she also recognizes the Irish and Scottish culture as part of her family's heritage on her mother's side. She told me that her family came over to the United States during the famine years in the mid-nineteenth century.

Jean's interest in Irish dancing motivated her to attend dance workshops around the country and learn continuously from other dancers. In the late 1990s, she was approached by parents who saw her dance performances and wanted their children to learn Irish dancing. Since she was still holding down a full-time job at that time, she declined the invitation to teach dancing. However, when more and more parents expressed their desire to have her teach their children, she finally agreed, even though her lack of experience in teaching dancing at that time presented her with many challenges. Recognizing her own need, as well as her students' need, to learn from other teachers, she organized dance workshops and

invited Irish-born dance teachers to come to Oklahoma City shortly after she began teaching Irish dance. The dance workshop was soon expanded to include other areas. She invited Mary McLaughlin to teach Irish singing and language in 2002 and added to the list of guest artists Seamus Connolly, Irish fiddler, and Naill O'Leary, Irish step dancer and accordion player, in 2004. In 2000, two years after she started to teach, she formed Irish Arts Oklahoma, a non-profit organization, so that she could further extend her passion for Irish arts to the local community. She noted that the interest from the local community in Irish music enabled her to bring in guest artists; financial support provided by a substantial number of people in the local community is essential in covering the expenses.

Discussing the use of music in her students' step-dance performances, Jean acknowledged the challenges of finding appropriate live music accompaniment; she had resorted to using recorded music most of the time. Students from her studio collaborate with the local band Banish Misfortune a few times a year. Not every band, however, can, or is willing to, play for dance. Jean explained that it is sometimes hard to work with live bands to get the right tempo for the dances, as some bands like to play a tune too fast, or simply prefer to play in their own tempo. According to Jean, the separation between music and dance, as many Irish musicians in Oklahoma do not dance, makes it challenging to communicate with musicians about the proper tempo and style of the dances.

Irish Arts Oklahoma became a branch of C.C.E. (Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann) in 2003. Jean's idea of joining C.C.E came partly from her reading about

the St Louis Irish Arts, which was already a branch of C.C.E at that time. Her meeting with Niall O'Leary, one of the guest artists she invited to the Irish Festival in Oklahoma City and head of C.C.E.'s Manhattan branch, further encouraged her to become a branch of C.C.E. Maintaining a connection with C.C.E., an Ireland-based organization, is important to Jean, as she has always been trying to invite Irish-born guest artists. The quarterly publication Treoir that C.C.E. sends out to each member contains information on Irish music and dance events around the world, tunes, and news about important Irish musicians and dancers recognized by the organization. Jean appreciates the education-oriented mission of the organization to promote and preserve Irish language, music, and culture, and the many competitions, conventions, and sessions it holds regularly. Since one of the requirements for becoming a branch is to hold sessions on a regular basis, Jean began to hold a monthly slow jam session in Oklahoma City in 2004. Besides leading the slow jam session, Jean said she could hardly find time to attend other jam sessions in the area because of her busy teaching schedule. Most of the time when she wants to learn a new tune, she would rather learn it by herself, listening to recordings, or learn it from one other person; she commented that the tunes in most sessions are played too fast and are not repeated enough for her to learn them.³⁵

Responding to my question on her views about the popular show Riverdance, Jean acknowledged the influence that Riverdance has on the growing interest in Irish step-dancing by the American public. The blending of various

³⁵ Such sentiment is also expressed by Irwin Shenker, a fiddler from Washington State who attended the Norman session whenever he was in town.

dance traditions in Riverdance does not bother her, however, because she has always been interested in many different folk dances. She also understands that such blending of cultural traditions is inevitable in the present century:

... and I think because of the TV and technology, no ethnic group can be immune from influences from other cultures. It is not possible to be that pure. It was not that pure three hundred years ago anyway. Countries invaded each other all the time; there was a lot of mixing going on anyway. In the modern days, CD and recorded music have a huge influence [on how people mix things up] ... I like to see in the future what will happen with this mixing of different cultural styles; it will be interesting. (Hill)

Jean readily accepts these cultural fusions and draws a connection between her attitude towards multiple cultural influences and her identity as an American:

... I look at myself, I don't consider myself an Irish. I am an American, maybe Canadian American, though I have Irish heritage. If I go too far back, I don't know what it's like to live in Ireland, or Germany. So I draw that distinction; I am an American. (Hill)

Speaking from her experience with encounters with the parents of her students, Jean claims that many parents who send their children to step-dancing classes are also interested in learning more about the Celtic heritage in their family. They are not only interested in the dance and music, they are also interested in the language and culture. One family, for example, is active in Scottish highland

athletic games as well. Another appealing quality of Irish step-dancing, for many parents, is the healthy physical activity that involves no sexually suggestive gestures, as many parents are concerned about the sexual pressure and easy gratification that American society offers to their children, especially to their daughters. The children, on the other hand, enjoy the friendship that they find with each other through practising and performing together over the years.

Jean sees a healthy and growing participation in Celtic music of different age groups from the local community. However, she recognizes the issue of the “watered-down” style that many local Irish or Celtic musicians tend to play. Bringing in guest artists for the annual workshops in Oklahoma City is part of her effort to educate and remind the local musicians of a more authentic Irish sound, which requires one to spend more energy and time to master the intricacy of traditional Irish music. Despite the “Americanization” of the Irish tunes, Jean claims that the nature of folk music, which encourages personal contacts through fellowshipping in the music-making process, is not lost in the local Celtic music community.³⁶

Lee Agnew and the Counterfeit Bards

Lee Agnew was an English major studying at Oklahoma State University during the early 1970s. His first encounter with American folk music was a Pete Seeger album that his father brought home one day when he was in his teens. He

³⁶ Early in 2006, Jean Hill separated her dance school from C.C.E. She became a certified Irish dance teacher in March 2006, after passing a series of examinations administered by An Coimisin na Rince Gaelacha (The Irish Dance Commission). Her dance school is now accredited by the Irish Dance Commission, and her students can now compete in Feiseanna (festivals) organized by The Irish Dance Commission.

then became interested in folk music and began to learn guitar by listening to recordings. During his college years, Oklahoma State University held a series of bluegrass and folk music concerts, featuring first-class performers such as Bill Monroe and Jean Ritchie. Lee said he was very fortunate to have had the opportunity to witness such legendary performances.

Lee first heard traditional Irish music from Chieftains' recordings in the 1970s. Before that, he only knew a few popular Irish American songs such as "Danny Boy" and "Believe Me, If All Those Endearing Young Charms." Later, he heard Celtic music from an old-time string band called Friends of Tradition, which he joined in the 1980s. His first impression of Celtic music was that "it sounded like bluegrass" (Agnew). Besides playing with bands, a trip to an old-time music camp, the Walnut Valley Festival, held annually in Winfield, Kansas, is one of Lee's favorite musical activities. He has also played in the annual Irish Festival in North Texas several times. The Walnut Valley Festival has been one of the most esteemed traditional music festivals in the country since the 1970s, and attracts thousands of people every year. The Irish Festival in North Texas, on the other hand, has a shorter history, having been established in the 1980s.

Lee belongs to a local band known as the Counterfeit Bards that plays mainly Irish, Scottish, and some English tunes. The band consists of Lee Agnew (vocals, guitar, tin whistle, and recorder); Anna Holloway (vocals, recorders, and bodhran); Lessa Keller-Kenton (fiddle, vocals, recorder, and percussion); Leah Kenton (vocals, recorders, tin whistle, and hammered dulcimer), and the newest

addition to the group, John McGaha (fiddle, hammered dulcimer), who also plays with Boru's Ghost. According to Lee, Counterfeit Bards got its name from a magnetic Shakespearean kit. The name reflects the spirit of the great bardic traditions in ancient Celtic culture but also acknowledges the modern, different context in which the music is created today. "It refers to the Celtic bardic tradition, but implies that, obviously, we can't recreate it exactly as it was, and what would be the point anyway?" Lee said. The instrumentation of the band, especially with its extensive use of recorders, creates a sound that resembles the early music of the Medieval or Renaissance period. When asked if early music was an influence on the band's musical and stylistic choices, Lee points to a CD called Istanpitta, produced by an early music ensemble, which he still listens to occasionally. Besides playing Celtic music with the band, he also regularly gets together with friends to play American folk songs and songs from the 1960s, such as Woody Guthrie and Grateful Dead songs. Lee claims that he has been playing music for such a long time that he feels incomplete when he is not playing music, and it frustrates him when music making and life affairs get in the way of each other.

The two younger members of the group, Leah and Lessa Keller-Kenton, are both interested in Renaissance and Medieval arts and love to go to the Medieval Fair. Leah and Lessa and have both taken part in performances such as "Shakespeare in the Park" in Norman. Leah and Lee also used to perform extensively with the Arthurian Order of Avalon, which is a group that reenacts Medieval and Renaissance societies. The two sisters' interest in Celtic music comes

mainly through their fascination with ancient culture. As a child, Leah was enchanted by the make-believe world and the beautiful costumes that she saw at the Medieval Fair. For her, playing Celtic music is the realization of her childhood dream and brings her closer to the Celtic bards that she read about in stories and fairy tales. Lessa, an accomplished dancer, liked to dance to Scottish and Irish music that her parents played from recordings when she was little. Hanging out with her sister, Leah, at the rehearsals of the Counterfeit Bards, she soon learned how to play bodhran, African drum, recorder, and her most recent addition, the fiddle.

Anna Holloway bought a bodhran at the Medieval Fair in 1992 and began to learn the instrument on her own after getting some basic instructions from the vendor. She joined the Counterfeit Bards in 2000. Playing and singing in the band, and the musical improvement that she has made over the years offer her a sense of accomplishment that is very satisfying to her. Like the other members in the band, she is passionate about folk music in general, not simply Irish music, although she remembers growing up with her parents' Clancy Brothers records. She is excited about future opportunities to explore many different styles of music from various traditions.

The group, like other local Celtic bands, is often hired to play at Medieval and Renaissance fairs, St. Patrick's Day celebrations, cultural events, private social events, and bookstores and cafés. As a band, Counterfeit Bards produced a CD, Bard From This Hall, which was a very satisfying experience for all the band

members. The band members have not only developed a close bond with each other through music over the past six years, they also knew each other personally before they started playing music together. Anna, for example, has been close to Leah and Lessa's parents for many years:

Watching these two girls, since I've known them since they were just little girls, watching them grow up as musicians has just been so cool ... When I met Leah, she was five, she doesn't even remember it because she was not interested in her dad's friend at that point, she was interested in whether or not she could buy candy out of the store. Both of them were home schooled and I watched their parents raise them. (Holloway)

Members of Counterfeit Bards all have daytime jobs or responsibilities. Like other semi-professional bands in this area, they struggle with finding time to play music together and the uncertainties of changes in the personal lives of the members, which may affect each member's commitment to the band. Although paid gigs provide welcome supplemental earnings for the band members, the joy found in each other's company and in the music-making process is equally important to them. However, as much as they enjoy playing together with each other as a band, they understand that life circumstances may one day bring them to a parting of the ways or force the band to take a break from playing music together.

Because of their busy schedules with band practice, school, family, and jobs, members of Counterfeit Bards only attend the jam session occasionally. The

session, however, provides an opportunity to play music if they cannot get together to play as a band. “If we have to take a break from playing as a band for a while, we know we have the session that we can go to and keep ourselves active,” said Anna.

Steve Vanlandigham and Banish Misfortune

I became interested in Irish music when I heard Banish Misfortune, a local Celtic band, play at Borders Bookstore and at one of the summer outdoor music festivals in Norman in 2002. Phil Reid, the fiddler of the band at that time, gave me a lesson on Irish fiddling and introduced me to the jam session. I became acquainted with Steve Vanlandigham, a skillful mandolin, banjo, guitar, and bouzouki player, through these jam sessions in Norman, and have since then performed with him on several occasions.

Banish Misfortune is the only band in this region that has included an Irish musician in the recent past. Their former bodhran player, Kevin Burke,³⁷ was from Ireland. When asked to comment upon the uniqueness of actually having an Irish member in their group, Steve Vanlandigham says, “From the audience’s perspective, having an Irish singer in the band adds a certain ‘authenticity.’ But I think that’s shallow.” However, Steve points out that Kevin was able to offer perspectives that were different from the rest of the band. It was also very helpful to have an Irish singer in the group because of their genuine Irish accent, which is hard to imitate by an “Okie.”³⁸

³⁷ Note that this name “Kevin Burke” is also the name of a well-known Irish fiddler mentioned in the case study of Wayne Cantwell.

³⁸ When I talked to a fan of Banish Misfortune at the 2005 St. Patrick Day’s celebration, the man told me that he enjoyed the band more when Kevin was around (see Chapter 5).

Steve grew up in a small town where music was not part of his environment. He started to learn guitar in 1970, when he was attending college in Chickasha, Oklahoma. Two years later, he transferred to the University of Oklahoma to study anthropology, continuing to play guitar and take informal lessons from his friends. He later learned banjo and formed the band Banish Misfortune with two other friends in 1980, playing a mixture of traditional old-time tunes, Irish tunes, and original songs. Over the years, the membership of the band has changed many times. Steve is the only original member left in the group. Its more recent configuration, with Phil Reid (fiddle, guitar, banjo and mandolin),³⁹ Dana Morrow (keyboard), and Kristen Davies (flute, whistle),⁴⁰ began in the late 1990s, and the band has been playing mostly Celtic repertoire since then.

Phil Reid was also attending college at Chickasha in 1970 as an English major. Both Steve and Phil were aware of and were affected by the folk revival that was going on in college campuses throughout the country at that time. According to Steve, the folk songs of Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan, as well as hillbilly music, were very popular at that time. Phil has also been playing with a local string band known as Falderal for more than 20 years. When asked what attracted them to Celtic music, they both point to the melodic aspect of Celtic music. Phil notes that:

I think the thing that appeals most to me about the Irish music is the strong melody. Because it is more or less heterophonic [everyone playing the same melody line with slight variations] the tune is not

³⁹Phil Reid left the group in 2006.

⁴⁰Kristin Davies left the group and moved to another state in 2003. Miranda Arana now plays with the group.

lost in harmonies and supportive parts. The speed and drive of the tunes gives them an excitement that is hard to match in other forms. Perhaps bluegrass is closest. The melody of the songs and airs has that characteristic "lilt" and "lift" that I also find in operatic arias. I'm not sure how to describe that exactly, but it is a soaring, lyrical quality that moves me. The old-time music is sometimes similar, but lacks that emphasis on melody line and rhythmic drive that I enjoy in the Irish tunes. (Reid)

Steve is very interested in other musical cultures, and has tried his hand at African drumming and Middle Eastern Ud. He thinks that his interest in different cultures, especially those rooted in ancient history, may have come from his background in anthropology; he has always been interested in digging into the past and its roots. His interest in world music and his desire to bring musical styles from other cultures into the band's repertoire were not well received by other members of Banish Misfortune. Nevertheless, he and Miranda Arana, who replaced Kristen Davis after she moved away in 2003, often play together and mix elements from different musical cultures, since Miranda also has a background and interest in world music. Their common interest in various non-Western music traditions led to the formation of their new band in 2005 called Arabesque, although both of them continue to play with Banish Misfortune. As Arabesque, Miranda and Steve incorporate Arabic-style improvisation into Irish or Celtic tunes, play and improvise on tunes originating in Middle Eastern regions, and at times perform original tunes

that they have written. In a performance at Borders Bookstore in Norman, Oklahoma, in March 2006, they played a wide variety of musical pieces from many world cultures, ranging from old-time American to Middle Eastern to Vietnamese traditions.

Wayne Cantwell

Wayne is one of the most active Irish/Celtic musicians in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas. A manager of Oklahoma Honda-Suzuki, Wayne is not only supportive and encouraging to young players, he was also instrumental in organizing the first public jam session in Oklahoma City. He was responsible for setting up the Celtic Oklahoma Website and a Yahoo email-group that serves as the main channel of communication within the community of Celtic musicians and Celtic music enthusiasts in Oklahoma.

Wayne started playing guitar in 1974 at the age of thirteen. At that point in time his interest was rock and roll. But when he got older, he started to play bluegrass. In 1984 he attended a meeting of the Oklahoma City Traditional Music Association and was introduced to traditional old-time music and some Irish tunes. From 1986 to 1987, he served as the president of the OCTMA. His enthusiasm for Celtic music came mainly through his daughter's participation in Irish step-dancing; her interest in Irish dancing was sparked by the show Riverdance. He taught himself how to play fiddle in 1987, after the fiddler of the band he was playing with at that time, The Prairie Land String Band, left for a job in another state. Wayne often shares his experience of learning the fiddle with others: "When I first started

playing violin, my wife made me practice in the garage. I was there about a year. Then I graduated to the bathroom. Great acoustics.”

Wayne’s rich repertoire of tunes consists of both old-time and Celtic tunes. He points out that Celtic tunes sound similar to old-time traditional tunes, and that there are many cross-overs in the repertoire, noting that he was already playing some Celtic tunes when he was playing old-time music. He thinks the main difference between Celtic music and traditional old-time music is the melodic clarity found in Celtic tunes.

Having learned most of his repertoire by ear through playing with other musicians in sessions and listening to recordings, Wayne began to learn how to read music in recent years, though his music-reading skill is still limited. He is often eager to learn and listen to new tunes; when the youngest and only ullieann piper in the session, Michael Stribling, plays a new tune that he has learned from one of his trips to Irish music workshops and sessions in New York or other big cities, Wayne often urges him to keep playing even if no one else in the session knows the tune.

Wayne also likes to learn new tunes by listening to recordings; his list of favorite recordings includes those produced by commercially-known Irish fiddler Kevin Burke or bands such as Altan and DeDannan, and recordings produced by local fiddler John McGaha and bands such as Boru’s Ghost (Cantwell Homepage). Wayne said that he likes to practice with recordings because he “can start and stop the music as necessary” when learning a tune. Listening to different fiddlers also

led to a mixture of various fiddling styles in his playing. On his homepage, Wayne responds to the question about his playing style this way:

“What style do you play?” Now that is a good question because I don't know myself. I would have to say that my fiddle style is a mixture of old-time and Celtic. I'm not a bluegrass or Texas swing fiddler. I have sat in with a few Blues players before which was a hoot! (Cantwell Homepage)

Wayne played with The Prairie Land String Band, an old-time string band in the late 1980s, and Calliope House, a Celtic band, from 2002 to 2004. He also performs frequently as a solo strolling fiddler at festivals and other social events. In 2005, he, Malia Bennett, and Ian Brittle formed a band to play for contra dance (see case study on Malia Bennett). Married with five children, Wayne finds that balancing between work, family responsibilities, and music activities is not an easy task. Occasionally, Wayne has to give up opportunities to play music or attend music workshops because of his many responsibilities. Time away from music is often frustrating for him. Music is like a “medicine” to him; “there is nothing I enjoy more than playing for a dance or going to a hot session after a crazy day at work” (Cantwell, Email Interview).

To Wayne, playing Irish and old-time music means “keeping in touch with the past:”

For the most part American Old Time is nothing more than Irish, Scottish, English, and other tunes brought over on the boat with those who immigrated over here. (Cantwell, Email Interview)

Part of Wayne's heritage comes from the Scots-Irish, like many Americans. He believes that playing Celtic music becomes a connection not only to his own past but also to the history of America. But most of all, playing Celtic and old-time music is simply fun and enjoyable for him. "Can't explain it other than it's happy, sad, fun ... it brings out emotions," he says.

Mark Cashion

I am always glad to see Mark at the jam sessions, especially since I came to know him better through playing music and sometimes dancing together. Although he seldom starts a tune on his harmonica or accordion, his occasional witty and comical gestures or comments adds laughter to the session. A retired engineer, Mark comes frequently to the sessions in Oklahoma City and Norman and serves as the current president of the Scissortail Dance Society in Oklahoma City.

Mark learned to play harmonica in college during the late 1960s through a friend who played rhythm and blues. He jammed with friends on rhythm and blues for a while but then stopped playing the harmonica for many years. He picked up the instrument again when he began to participate actively in the contra dance in the early 1990s. He was first attracted to the atmosphere and the music when he peeked into a contra dance one day, and began to go to the dances when the woman he was dating at that time invited him. He continued to go to the contra dance after the

relationship ended, and his involvement in the contra dance was conducive to the renewal of his interest in music. The live music accompaniment to contra dance, which mostly consists of old-time and Irish jigs and reels, introduced him to new possibilities on the harmonica, as he was not aware of the capacity of a chromatic harmonica for more complex melodies until he saw someone playing one. Mark recalled that he used to take breaks from dancing and go outside of the building to play his harmonica along with the music that came through the wall so that nobody could hear him. Eventually he became confident enough to play with other musicians. Later he joined Matthew Hill, Dana Morrow, and Phil Reid to form a band for contra dance.

Another woman in Mark's life, whom he dated for five years, introduced him to Irish music. Mark had heard Irish music before on the radio, and thought Irish music was very repetitive, with common phrases found in many tunes. But when he listened to Irish traditional solo fiddle music, a genre that this woman particularly liked, the intricate melodies of the music captured Mark immediately. He began to go to Irish workshops and festivals in Dallas and New York with her, and took Irish-style button accordion classes.

Mark usually learns a new tune by reading sheet music and listening to others' playing. Sometimes, with the help of sheet music, he picks out the melody of a tune on the piano, on which he had two years of lessons when he was in second grade; sometimes he simply plays along on his harmonica if he has heard the tune

several times. “If I can whistle a tune, I can play along, so if it’s in my head enough to be able to whistle it, I can play it,” he said.

Mark took early retirement at the age of 52 in 2001 and now lives on a ranch at the outskirts of Oklahoma City. He continues to participate actively in the contra dance. According to him, there are several dance groups in Oklahoma City; he is involved with the Scottish Clans of Central Oklahoma, a group that does mainly Scottish and English dances; the International Folk Dancers; and the Scissortail Dance Society, which does mainly contra dances. He is no longer playing in a band because he prefers to dance at contra dances. One evening, for example, he played with the band at the beginning of the dance but ended up dancing most of the evening. He explained that there are usually more women than men in the dances; he can help balance out the numbers if he dances.

For Mark, playing Irish music has little to do with his family tradition, although he believes that Irish is part of his ancestral heritage. He said he enjoys contra dancing and playing music in jam sessions. The community of people, the informal nature of these events, and the opportunity to learn new things are some of the aspects that Mark appreciates:

They both have in common ... a community of people. I enjoy the music and the people. And also you can participate as much or as little as you feel like at any moment. If you don’t feel like dancing, you can sit down, and if you don’t feel like playing in the jam, you can just listen. And there is always something new to learn in the

session. People are always bringing new tunes, or new to me I mean, and maybe new to the group, even though they are traditional tunes. Same thing in the contra dance: you don't learn a dance, they all have similarities but they put things together differently. (Cashion)

Malia Bennett

Malia Bennett grew up in a musical household, with a father who owned a large collection of recordings that ranged from Western Baroque and Renaissance music to a wide variety of ethnic music, such as Scottish bagpipe music and Mexican Mariachi music. As a child, she and her brother both took piano lessons, and she learned guitar on her own as she grew older. She left Oklahoma to attend the University of Wisconsin and minored in piano performance in the mid 1980s. Her college years in Wisconsin were filled with musical activities; she was taking piano lessons in college, playing bluegrass music on guitar with friends, and attending folk music concerts, where she came across many performers who were associated with the radio program Prairie Home Companion in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Like Kathy Dagg, Malia had to put aside her musical interests when it came time to graduate from college, develop a career, and build a family. She transferred back to the University of Oklahoma to finish her college degree:

Once I got back, I was concentrating on graduating, and working. I started working in radio, and just trying to get as many hours in at school and work as possible and get out and start working. And once that happened, I was working six to seven days a week, between

school and work. And I would barely pick up my guitar, barely touch the piano. (Bennett)

Eventually, after about twenty years, the desire of Malia's twin daughters to learn bluegrass fiddle music, after hearing a CD of the Dixie Chicks one day, revived Malia's own interest in playing music. Malia sent her daughters Laura and Rachel to the Sooner Strings Project at the University of Oklahoma to learn some rudimentary violin technique. After a year, she found a fiddle teacher, Marilee Tussing, for her daughters. Marilee taught Laura and Rachel some Irish fiddle tunes, and encouraged both Malia and her daughters to go to the local Celtic jam sessions. Malia brought her daughters to their first jam session at the Celtic Cup Café in Oklahoma City in 2003, and soon after, they began to attend sessions regularly in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas. Malia's experience in playing bluegrass music and the Celtic music that she listened to in her college years all came back to her at the jam sessions; she was able to catch up quickly with the chord progressions of the Irish tunes that were played at the jam sessions.

Getting back to music-making activities brings her relief from stresses and demands in life:

It really has been a blessing to me, I mean, it has been such a joy ... I have a job, that's fairly demanding, and you know, having three kids, that's very demanding. And this is something that is unrelated to those stresses and demands. It's just fun, just enjoyable, just

something that I can enjoy, that I can do, that doesn't have those other demands and stresses on it. (Bennett)

Through her participation in the jam sessions, Malia became friendly with other musicians and occasionally began to play with some of these musicians for contra dances. Together with Wayne Cantwell, Ian Brittle, and sometimes Mathew Hill, Malia formed a band in 2005; they call themselves The Suspicious Contraband. Although they originally got together to play for contra dances, they soon extended their performance engagements to many other festivals and settings, such as the Oklahoma City Arts Festival, the Tulsa Scottish Games, and Mcnellies Irish Pub in Tulsa. Malia's older brother who lives near Tulsa also plays in a Celtic band, which he referred to as his "middle-age garage band" when I met him at the State Capitol on St. Patrick's Day, 2005. The two bands—Malia's band and her brother's band—sometimes perform together.

Malia's ethnic heritage from both sides of her parents includes Native American, Irish, and Scottish. She is listed as an eighth in the Seminole tribe, and the genealogy research that her brother conducted indicates that her ancestors came to the United States from Edinburgh, Scotland, as well as from the Munster region in Ireland. Both her parents are actively involved in the affairs of Native Americans; her mother is a professor of Native American Art History at the University of Oklahoma, and her father is an Indian tribal judge in Eastern Oklahoma. As a child, Malia's parents took her to powwows and other Indian dances, and she learned how to do round dancing, war dancing, two-step, buffalo

dancing, and stomp dancing. As she grew older, however, she lost interest in the dances because she became self-conscious of her blue eyes and blonde hair which “stuck out like a sore thumb” at the dances. She has brought her children to powwow dances, and she said they enjoyed dancing at the powwows. However, cultural activities like these now have to take a backseat in the busy schedules of their lives.

When I raised the question about the connection between her Irish/Scottish heritage and her affinity for Irish music, Malia believes that she was first attracted to the music itself:

I think the main reason that I got involved with it really had nothing to do with the fact that I was part Irish or part Scottish. It was the fact that I enjoyed that music. I enjoyed the interesting, the modal form of the music. I just find it intriguing, it's fun, it's ethereal ... I think it's just the music itself, and the fact that we have ties to those countries where that music is from, I guess that strengthens my interest. But it was the music itself that got me at first. (Bennett)

Because of her busy family schedule and her daughters' involvement in sports and other extracurricular activities, Malia has not attended the jam sessions regularly since the fall semester of 2005. Her twin daughters, Laura and Rachel, turning fourteen in 2006, continue to receive classical violin training from the Sooner String Project, but have been unable to take fiddle lessons. However, the two sisters continue to play Irish fiddle music, and call themselves The Flowers of

Edinburgh, since part of their ancestry can be traced back to Edinburgh, Scotland. Sometimes they play as a band on their own, but more frequently they are invited to play with their mother's band for dances, festivals, and other social events.

Malia appreciates the friendly environment that the jam sessions provide for her daughters to play with other musicians. While the two girls enjoy playing with other people, playing in jam sessions also exposes them to a wide variety of tunes and instruments, and strengthens their listening skills:

I think that the fact that the girls get to go and hear the tunes and hear what they are supposed to sound like, and how it can sound when someone masterful is playing ... I think it helps them gain some confidence ... and everyone at the jam sessions ... is very kind and generous for the most part ... pull out the chairs and make the circle wider ... everybody is happy to show somebody something, or ... let people join in. (Bennett)

Although Malia has not been able to attend sessions regularly at the time of writing in 2006, playing in bands and sometimes playing with her daughters has continued to bring her joy and relief from stresses in life. Playing music with her daughters is a privilege that Malia wishes she had enjoyed with her own mother. Music has created a common bond between Malia and her two daughters. She hopes that playing music will be an enjoyment throughout her daughters' lives and bring them a fuller life.

Conclusion

Several themes have emerged through these case studies. I will first discuss each of these themes, and then further address the questions I raised earlier.

- 1) Music-making process as a form of enjoyment: One of the most frequently used words to describe music-playing in jam session is “fun.” Malia emphasizes that playing music relieves her from stresses in daily life, and for Wayne, “there is nothing [he] enjoy[s] more than playing for a dance or going to a hot session after a crazy day at work.” From the conversations with my consultants, I sense that learning a new instrument or mastering a new tune is itself an enjoyable and rewarding experience. Nevertheless, playing music is often secondary to building a career and raising a family. Both Kathy and Malia, for example, had to put away their instruments for a substantial period of time after they graduated from college and started a family.
- 2) The importance of community: An appreciation for the sense of community created through making music or dancing together comes up frequently in my conversations with my consultants: Mary feels the connection with the people around her in the Native American Gourd Dance; Therese enjoys working together with other tribal members to prepare for the Inlonshka dance; Mark acknowledges the presence of a communal setting in both the jam sessions and the contra dances. Many participants of the jam sessions enjoy friendships developed from playing music together over the years.

This desire for communal activities can be interpreted as middle-class Americans' counter-reaction to the mainstream culture as they envy the more "meaningful community" believed to exist among lower class racial and ethnic groups (Bellah et al. 52). Addressing the desire of middle-class Americans to reach out to others, the authors of the best selling book Habits of the Heart put it this way:

With the weakening of the traditional forms of life that gave aesthetic and moral meaning to everyday living, Americans have been improvising alternatives more or less successfully. They engage, sometimes with intense involvement, in a wide variety of arts, sports and nature appreciation, sometimes as spectators but often as active participants. (Bellah et al. 291)

- 3) The impact of the folk revival on post-1960s American society: The local Celtic musical life belongs to a tradition that began in the folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s. In my case studies, most musicians who are in their fifties came from a middle-class, college-educated background. As discussed in chapter 2, even though scholars generally agree that the folk music revival had ended by the late 1960s and commercial radio was largely taken over by rock and roll when The Beatles became popular in America at that time, folk songs and other forms of acoustic music, such as bluegrass and old-time music, that had become popular during the folk revival, continued to form an important subculture in American society, especially in the college

environment in the 1970s. Singers like Joan Baez, Jean Ritchie, and Pete Seeger are some of the prominent figures in the folk revival who still remain an important influence in my consultants' musical choices.

- 4) Search of roots, a tradition, or an ethnic identity: For some of my consultants, Irish music creates a memory of the past. Mary feels strongly about Irish music and Ireland; Irish music brings her closer to a home that she feels existed long before she was born in this country. To a lesser degree, Therese and John recognize the Irish and Scottish heritage in their ancestry and acknowledge that music strengthens the Celtic part of their identity. On the other hand, for Steve, Irish music represents one of the many ancient cultures in the world, and his involvement in Middle Eastern, African, and Celtic music expresses his desire to dig into the roots and past of the human civilization. All of my consultants readily recognize that the roots of American folk and old-time music lie in traditional Celtic music. In this way, Irish music is an important part of American tradition and culture. "It's a connection with my past. It's also a part of American history," Wayne said. John articulated a similar sentiment at the end of our interview, "My family lost touch with the past...I get in touch finally with my roots. I feel a sense of home when I play. It's hard to explain, but I feel completed."
- 5) The intrinsic attributes of Irish music: Many of my consultants mentioned the rich melodic interest as one of the appealing qualities that they find in Irish music. Most of these musicians had experiences in playing old-time or

bluegrass music; Irish music, while fitting into a familiar musical structure of old-time and bluegrass music, offers melodic intricacies that are generally not found in old-time music, and for John, listening to Irish fiddle music was “like a breath of fresh air” to him. Both Malia and Kathy find the modal form of Irish music intriguing, and Kathy often finds herself hearing more details each time she listen to the tunes.

- 6) The fusion of various musical styles: While all of the musicians that I encountered in this community admire the traditional form of Irish music, most musicians welcome the blending of a variety of musical elements from different traditions. In band arrangements, musicians sometimes incorporate elements from other musical traditions, such as African drums, Arabic improvisation, or bluegrass rhythms into their rendition of traditional Irish tunes.⁴¹ In jam sessions, the playing styles of a musician often reveal his or her experiences in old-time or bluegrass music. Wayne, for example, likes to play harmonization or provide rhythmic backing on the backbeat, which is a common performance practice in old-time or bluegrass tradition. Although musicians in this community want to learn more about traditional Irish performance style, as indicated by their eagerness to attend weekend workshops taught by well-known Irish or Irish-American musicians, most of these musicians are not primarily concerned about playing in an “authentic” Irish style.

⁴¹ John points out that at the North Texas Irish Festival that he attended, almost every band that he encountered there incorporated some form of fusion.

The multiple themes that surface from the case studies indicate that no simple answer can be offered to explain the nature of Irish or Celtic music activities in the community under study and the choices each musician makes to participate in such a music-making process. As Slobin reminds us in Subcultural Sounds, we are presented with a wide variety of music in Euro-American society today. Irish music is one of many musical experiences available to my consultants. Yet even though they have chosen to participate actively in Irish music activities—and I have focused extensively on their involvement in Irish music in my interviews—most of them are not exclusive in their musical choices. As discussed previously in Chapter 6, for instance, the “code-switching” that occurs in the jam sessions shows that these musicians are also part of the mainstream pop culture; such juxtaposition of choices and musical traditions is “at the heart of urban musical culture” (Russell 351).

Nevertheless, the case studies indicate that the choices that my consultants made are not necessarily random. The friendly setting of an Irish jam session and the versatile uses of Irish music in many settings—from the Medieval Fair to contra dances—make Irish music easily approachable. The folk revival in the 1960s paved the way for the old-time and bluegrass music culture to occupy a significant place in post-1960s American society; the compatibility between the musical structure of Irish music and old-time music further increased the accessibility of Irish tunes for many Americans. The desirable elements in Irish music draw people from many different cultural and social backgrounds, generations, and ethnicities. Addressing the question “Why Irish music?” offers us an insight into the meaning of Irish music

in America; it serves not only as a reminder of a historical homeland and a symbol of ethnic identity for many immigrants, but also as a cherished form of musical expression that can be conveniently adapted to many social contexts, and is aesthetically pleasing and emotionally satisfying in its own right.

Chapter 8

Irish Music and American Culture: Conclusions

This ethnographic research highlights the musical life of ordinary Americans in the heartland of the United States, similar in some aspects to Melinda A. Russell's ethnographic study of 1999, on the musical life of Decatur, Illinois. My study focused on a community of musicians for whom Celtic music is one of several musical genres that they enjoy. Like Russell, I selected ordinary people; I did not select the musicians for my study based on any outstanding quality of their Irish music performance or their contribution to the world of Irish traditional music, although many of them are very capable musicians and some of them play an important role in the transmission of Irish music and dance in their community. Without dismissing the idiosyncratic life and musical experiences of each individual, I believe it is their very experience as an ordinary American that helps us understand the meaning and role of music, particularly Irish music, in American culture.

The survey of the various contexts of Irish music practices in Central Oklahoma in Chapter 5, the close examination of the blooming Irish jam sessions in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas in Chapter 6, and the case studies of individual musicians in Chapter 7 inform us of the cultural conditions in the American mid-West. The musicians' readiness to reach out for communal music activities reveals many Americans' desire for community. But what kind of community is created out of the various music-making activities? Rasby M. Powell,

in her 1997 study of old-time dance groups, found that while some members in the dance group experience a fun time but do not feel committed and obligated to the dance community, many dance participants do find a sense of community in the dance group and “create bonds to one another and the group through sharing activities and working towards common goals” (283-284). In my study of Irish jam sessions, the communal nature of the activity and the energy created through playing music provide a fun experience for the participants. Though bonds are created and friendships are built through the common musical language, I did not find a sense of commitment or obligation as described by Powell among the Irish session participants. The session provides players with satisfying musical experiences and interpersonal interactions; however, without a lasting commitment, such experiences are recreational in nature. In fact, out of the ten case studies that I conducted, only three participants continue to attend the jam session in Norman regularly; most of the participants had, in the course of this three-year research, taken long breaks from attending jam sessions, and many only attended occasionally over this three-year period. Family responsibilities, job demands, or band rehearsals often take priority. For many participants, playing music seems to be the most important leisure activity that ensures their emotional and physical well-being; the jam session, however, is certainly not the only outlet for their musical expression, as many players also find pleasure in playing in a band or playing for dances.

In addition to creating a communal setting that is enjoyable, the consumption of Irish music in Oklahoma, whether through active participation or passive

listening, also reflects many Euro-Americans' nostalgic quest for a tradition, a root, or an ethnic identity. Although Irish music in Oklahoma is far removed from its original homeland, it "still has ties to place and has cultural power to invoke place" (Taylor 280). This "place" could be the homeland in Ireland for Mary Kennedy or the Irish immigrant communities in the American past for Wayne Cantwell. While the degree of the importance of an identifiable ethnic root varies for each person, this search for roots is one "shared by other white Americans in a particular cultural and historical moment in the United States" (Taylor 276). The emphasis on "white" Americans in Taylor's statement rings especially true in this local community, in which both the performers and audience consist mainly of Euro-Americans. According to Taylor, "the presence of racial and ethnic minorities proclaiming and celebrating their heritage makes the members of the dominant culture feel as if they have no ethnicity, no way of identifying themselves" (277). Graeme Smith came to a similar conclusion when reflecting on the incorporation of the didgeridoo in Irish music by Anglo-Australians: "As multiculturalism has elevated ethnicity to a primary category of social difference, then Irish or Irish-Australian ethnicity is provisionally tried on by groups of Anglo-Australians who are otherwise excluded from claiming an ethnic identity" ("Celtic Australia" 86).

Examining the condition of Irish music in Chicago in the 1970s, Lawrence E. McCullough was already aware of the emerging and growing popularity of Irish music in non-Irish communities, as noted in the conclusion of his dissertation of 1978. He predicted that:

it could be possible that, if the present trend continues, the emigrant tradition could eventually be transferred virtually intact to the trusteeship of musicians who play the music in the accepted, genuine manner but who are not ethnically related to the emigrant group. Thus, the emigrant tradition continues to flourish in its adopted environment as its ethnic base alters and expands. (356-357)

My research on the Irish music community in Central Oklahoma has shown that McCullough's prognosis of the future of Irish music rings true in twenty-first century American society. Irish music continues to flourish even in areas located in the interior of the United States, such as Oklahoma, where most residents, including those who claim an Irish heritage, have not grown up with a vibrant Irish immigrant culture but have for generations absorbed and intermingled with traditions found locally. However, what McCullough did not envision in his dissertation is the extent to which Irish music has been adapted and modified—evident not only in the various fusions of performing styles, but also in what Irish music has come to signify—in post-1960s American society. One of the most noteworthy transformations that Irish music has undergone is its correspondence to “Celtic” music and the impressive role it occupies in the “world music” genre today. Philip Bohlman claims that “there are few places in the world, within and without the world music scene, where Celtic music has not made its presence known” (World Music 77). According to Scott Reiss, the inclusion of Irish folk music in the world music genre by the recording industry “is a possible factor in some Irish musicians

going in the direction of cross-cultural fusions,” and the sounds produced by the fusion “delocalize and situate the music in an exotic imaginary” (161).

Many of the musicians I consulted with for this research, especially those who play in a band, have taken the route of fusion; as the sound of fusion became fashionable in recordings labeled “world music,” its impact on how local musicians constructed their band arrangements is unquestionable. The blending of elements from various musical traditions can also be viewed as the response of musicians to the availability of multiple musical styles in their living environment, a post-modern cultural condition which David Harvey defines as the abandoning of “all sense of historical continuity and memory,” the juxtaposition of “incommensurable spaces,” and the “total acceptance of the ephemerality, fragmentation, discontinuity” (39-65).

Yet despite its association with Celticism, world music, commodity, and a “virtual community” created through Internet technology, CDs, and videos (Reiss 158-166), Irish music continues to occupy a central place in the lived memories of many traditional musicians. I met Grey Larsen at the Rocky Mountain Fiddle Camp which I attended in the summer of 2003; he grew up in Ohio but chose to devote his life to playing Irish flute. Grey’s recollections and story of his encounter with an old Irish immigrant who passed on to him a tradition that he still holds onto after more than three decades is a powerful illustration of the local, personal histories and memories embedded in Irish music:

In January 2005, Cindy Kallet and I were traveling in Ireland and we decided to visit the Dunmore area in north County Galway. My first

mentor in Irish music, melodeon player Michael J. Kennedy (1900-1978), had been born and raised in the village of Flaskagh, five miles outside of Dunmore. He'd left there in 1923 to immigrate to Cincinnati, Ohio, my hometown. I met him in Cincinnati, when I was a teenager and he was in his 70s, and during these last years of his life he passed along to me, and several other young musicians, his unique musical repertoire, along with stories of his years in Ireland and America. Cindy and I wanted to see if we could find Michael's homeplace and pay it a visit. With the help of several local residents, particularly Gerry Hussey, headmaster of the tiny Gortaleame School near Flaskagh, we found what we were looking for. After our trek to the ruins of Michael Kennedy's family farm, we returned to Gerry's school to share stories about Michael and to play his music for the children and teachers. This turned out to be very meaningful for everyone in the room, because local knowledge of Michael and his music had all but vanished in the region. The news that they had an important and unique local musical heritage had come as a very welcome surprise.

In the days and weeks after we left, word of our half-day visit apparently spread among the local musical community. Soon I received an invitation to come back to Dunmore in April to perform and teach Michael Kennedy's music at a local festival and in the

area's schools. I was thrilled beyond belief! So in April, I returned and spent two weeks in Dunmore and the surrounding area, getting to know many local children and townsfolk—teachers, musicians, shopkeepers and mail carriers. I performed Michael's music at the festival and at other town gatherings, on Midwest Radio in nearby Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo, played with other musicians for set dancing in the community hall, and taught workshops for children and adults—bringing the music of Michael Kennedy back home again. What an honor that was.

With the help of another new friend, Alan Morrisroe, I explored Michael's homeplace much more extensively, meeting and talking with neighbors and with two remaining relatives of Michael's. We found some of the places where he had learned his music, from musicians like Maggie McGee, Winnie Dowd and Paddy Concannon, people Michael had told me about back in the 70s. I became much more aware of what life had been like for him during a youth of poverty, in a time when he could travel only on foot, when the only music to be heard were the tunes that he learned from other musicians in his small community. His was a time and way of life in Ireland that went through revolutionary and irreversible change soon after Michael emigrated, with the introduction of electricity, 78 rpm records, automobiles and long-distance travel. I came to appreciate

more deeply what a treasure Michael's storehouse of old, truly local traditional music is, what a privilege it was for me to receive it from him, and what a gift it had become to be able to pass it back into his own community.

I made deep connections with that place and the people there, and I look forward to more visits to Dunmore and Flaskagh in the future. (Larsen, electronic newsletter)

Irish music has not lost its meaning as a form of folk music rooted in past traditions. Recognizing the ever-changing definition and boundaries of folk music, Philip Bohlman argues that the scholarship of folk music in the modern world “ascribed importance to place on the basis of community [and] the aggregate of individuals that interacts with its physical and cultural environment” (The Study Of Folk Music xiv). Folk music “is a vital, living art, not an archeological antiquity. It continues to be a medium through which the people express their thoughts, feelings, and interest” (Rhodes 15). For the musicians in the Oklahoma City and Norman community, participating in Irish music and dance activities, along with folk music activities from other cultural traditions, is often a genuine expression of their own lived experiences. At a Ceili in Norman, in April 2006, Jean Hill, the caller for the dances, played the musicians a tune for the dance that she wanted to teach the dancers. However, before the musicians could figure out the tune, Jean had already put down her accordion and disappeared into the dance circle. The dancers, wrapping their arms around each other at the shoulder, formed a big circle. While

the musicians were still trying to figure out the tune, I looked over to the dancers and saw that they were accompanying their dancing with their own vocal diddling of the tune. At that moment, I witnessed the display of a folk tradition that reminded me of the play party in early Oklahoma frontier life and the house party in nineteenth-century Ireland. Even if it is only temporary, a community was created that evening.

Like many musicians I met through this research, I have often found good company and meaningful interactions through the music and dance. I first heard Irish music at the Borders Bookstore in Norman in 2001, a year before I embarked on this research. Without knowing what I was listening to, the sound conjured up images of a beautiful country life—images that I associated with America when I was growing up in Malaysia. I was attracted to the unrefined sound of the fiddle at Borders Bookstore that evening; it was free; it was vastly different from the classical violin that I had played for many years. I never dreamed that I would play fiddle music; I had never seen a Chinese playing fiddle music. I not only play fiddle music today, but more importantly, I have developed meaningful friendships with many white “Okies” through the music and dance activities. This music, be it Irish, Celtic, or old-time, has helped me cross the ethnic boundary and find my place in American society.

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Appendix I: Sample Interview Questions

- Name, address, phone number, email
- When did you start learning music?
- What was your first instrument?
- What kind of music did you play when you first learned music?
- Do you read music? Were you classically trained? Did you have a teacher?
- When did you start having an interest in Irish/Celtic music?
- How did you become interested in Irish/Celtic music?
- When was the first time you participated in an Irish jam session?
- Where was your first Irish jam session experience if not in Oklahoma? Was it different from the jam sessions here? How was it different?
- Do you play old-time traditional music too? How are the tunes different from or similar to the Irish/Celtic tunes?
- If you play old-time traditional music, do you participate in the jam sessions too?
- When was the first time you participated in an old-time jam session?
- What are the differences between the old-time jam session and the Irish jam session?
- What do you like about Irish/Celtic music (the melody, the rhythm, etc)?
- What attracts you to the jam session? What do you like or dislike about it?
- How many tunes do you think you know (approximately)?
- How do you learn a new tune?
- How often do you learn a new tune?
- How long does it take for you to learn a new tune?
- What do you think makes it a good or enjoyable session?
- When you play in the session, are you aware of the musical sound going on around you? Do you pay attention to the sound around you when you play?
- What is your relationship like with other jam session players?
- Do you think playing with different people will influence how you play?
- When playing an unfamiliar tune, do you depend on others to lead the tune?
- What makes a good tune leader when you are trying to follow the tune?
- What kind of work do you do?
- Does your work schedule ever conflict with your music making time? If it does, is it frustrating or all right for you?
- Is the jam session important to you?
- Do you play in a band?
- Do you play in the contra dance?
- Which of the musical activities do you like best? Why?
- Does playing in a band bring in any significant contribution to your livelihood?
- What do you think are the most important differences between playing in jam sessions, band performances and contra dances?
- Are you also associated with Oklahoma City Traditional Musician Association?
- Are you also associated with the Irish Arts Project?
- How involved are you in Irish cultural activities besides music making?
- Are you interested in Irish culture or other ethnic culture? If yes, what do you like about them?

Appendix II: Informed Consent Forms

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH BEING CONDUCTED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA-NORMAN CAMPUS

INTRODUCTION: This study is entitled *Irish Music Jam Session in Oklahoma City and Norman areas*. The person directing this project is Sheaukang Hew, graduate student in University of Oklahoma, School of Music, sponsored by Dr. Paula Conlon, Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology. This document defines the terms and conditions for consenting to participate in this study.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY: This study examines the Irish music jam session in Oklahoma City and Norman areas. The research is primarily based on interviews with people who have participated regularly in the jam session. With your permission, you will be interviewed through two (2) interview sessions, each approximately one (1) hour in duration. Both sessions will be at the location of your choice. The first interview session will consist of questions and discussions relating to your interest in Irish music, learning experiences and the value of jam session activities in your life. Such questions as: "When and how did you become interested in Irish music?," and "What attracts you to the jam session?" will be asked. At the second interview session I will review notes from the initial interview, and seek elaboration and commentary on the material from the initial session.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: No foreseeable risks, beyond those present in routine daily life, are anticipated in this study. By participating in this study, you will be helping to investigate the role and function of the Irish jam session in society and the understanding of the value of Irish music and musical activities in the community.

CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION: Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. Furthermore, the participant may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled.

- I consent to be contacted for a second interview.
- I do not consent to be contacted for a second interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Participants' names will be linked with their responses unless the participant specifically wishes to remain anonymous. Please select one of the following options.

- I prefer to leave my identity unacknowledged when documenting findings; please do not release my name when citing the findings.
- I consent to the use of my name when recording findings and that I may be quoted directly.

AUDIO TAPING OF STUDY ACTIVITIES: To assist with accurate recording of participant responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording. Participants have the right to refuse to allow such taping without penalty, and can request that the equipment be turned off at any time. Participants will have final approval for comments from the interview sessions that are to be incorporated in subsequent publications of this study. Participants will be provided with a copy of the transcription of their interview via email to review prior to publication. Any recordings that participants do not want included in publications about this study will be omitted without penalty or loss of benefits. Please select from the following options.

- I consent to the use of audio recording.
- I do not consent to the use of audio recording.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY: Participants may contact Sheaukang Hew, at 405/447-7616 or sheau00@hotmail.com and Dr. Paula Conlon at 405/325-1431 or pconlon@ou.edu with questions about the study, *Irish Music Jam Session in Oklahoma City and Norman areas*

For inquires about rights as a research participant, contact the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405/325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

PARTICIPANT ASSURANCE: I have read and understand the terms and conditions of this study and I hereby agree to participate in the above-described research study. I understand my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Researcher Signature

Informed Consent Form for Videotaping

I consent to be videotaped during the Irish jam session in Borders, Norman, Oklahoma. I understand that the tape is part of the research study entitled *Irish Music Jam Session in Oklahoma City and Norman areas* and will be presented in conferences.

Signature of Participant

Printed Name of Participant

Informed Consent Form for Videotaping

I consent to the videotaping of my child _____ during the Irish jam session in Borders Bookstore, Norman, Oklahoma. I understand that the tape is part of the research study entitled *Irish Music Jam Session in Oklahoma City and Norman areas* and will be presented in conferences.

Signature of the Parent

Printed Name of the Parent

Appendix III

Transcriptions of Selected Taped Interviews

Transcription of taped interview with Jean Hill, conducted at Borders Bookstore, Oklahoma City, on April 14, 2004.

SK: Tell me about how you got started. How did you get interested in Irish dancing and music?

JH: Well, in Junior High, I was playing the clarinet. Our school participated in the international festival organized by the schools in the city. Our school did the folk dance from Israel, and I played the clarinet for the dance. I became interested in the folk music of all those countries and especially enjoyed the different dances. At OU, I joined the International Folk Dance Club.

SK: You went to OU? What did you study?

JH: I studied education.

SK: No wonder you are such a good teacher.

JH: I really enjoyed the different dances and music, then I started to play piano accordion

SK: Did you know how to play accordion already?

JH: I picked up the piano accordion as an adult. I specifically wanted to learn it to accompany dances.

SK: because a lot of dances use piano accordion.

JH: Yes, yes,

SK: How long ago did you attend OU? Because I don't think we have International Folk Dance Club now.

JH: It was 1973. Well, a lot of organizations come and go, but it was very strong in the 70's. In the 80's I began to focus on Irish/Scottish music and dancing.

SK: What attracts you to the Irish dance and music?

JH: I think Irish music is more easily integrated into the musical activities in US, than let's say Balkan or Israel music. It is more usable in the dancing around here, for example, Irish music is also used in contra dancing and square dancing. I think American folk music has its root in the music of British Isle. Plus, Irish and Scottish is also part of my family's heritage.

SK: Were you born here in Oklahoma?

JH: Yes, but my father was Canadian.

SK: So his family came from Ireland?

JH: No, he has German and Polish heritage, but my mom has Irish heritage.

SK: Was your mom born here?

JH: Yes.

SK: How long ago can you trace your heritage back to Ireland?

JH: I can trace back to 1860's, my family came over during the famine.

SK: A lot of people came over during that time.

JH: Yes, it's either starve or leave.

SK: I have seen you teach dancing and music, you also play penny whistle?

JH: Yes, it's an easy transfer for me from clarinet to whistle, it's a cheap instrument, anybody can play it.

SK: When you learn Irish music, do you learn it by ear or you read music?

JH: I can read music but I try to learn it by ear, that way I remember it better.

SK: Do you learn the repertoire in session?

JH: I like to learn a tune by myself, or listening to recording, or I learn it from just one other person. It is hard for me to learn in the session, the tunes went by so quickly, they played so fast and they didn't play it long enough.

SK: I agree, by the time I almost got the tune, they were already done.

JH: That's right, and they just move on. So I don't think session is a great place to learn tunes, though it's a great place to learn *of* tunes.

SK: and I think we don't have enough sessions around here too.

JH: That's true.

SK: What are the classes you are teaching now?

JH: I teach dances 4 or 5 days a week, all Irish, different levels, in the evenings, and I go to three different cities to teach.

SK: I know Monday night you have dance classes and music class. Is the music class once a week only?

JH: Yes

SK: How did you start to teach dances?

JH: I learned to dance on my own. I came back to dance with other adults in performances around here, and people saw me dance and started to ask me if I could teach; I wasn't interested at that time because I was working full time at that time. Few years ago, I was approached by more and more people, most were parents who wanted their children to learn Irish dancing. Most of them were interested in learning more of their own Celtic heritage. A lot of them are not only interested in the dancing or music but also in the language and custom. One family involved in Scottish highland athletic competition, a highland game. So at that point, they talked me into doing it, and then I had to find a place, figure out how much to charge, what curriculum to use, and there're a lot of trials and errors, figuring out what works best for me and the kids. The biggest challenge is the different age levels of the dancers. I had occasionally an exceptional eight-year old who could do adult level dance, where should I put her? It's often hard to figure out where to put them and when to move them up.

SK: You learn to dance by yourself?

JH: Yes, but I also took workshops around the country and I also learn from other dancers here.

SK: Irish dancers in Oklahoma? I always thought you were the only one around here.

JH: I used to be the only one in town, but there have been more people involved in Irish dancing in recent years, I think Irish dancing is becoming more popular, as well as dances of other ethnic groups. I think nationwide, there are a huge amount of people interested in their heritage, and arts. There are a lot more out there available for different ethnic groups to learn about their cultures. I like to bring in guest artists to do workshops too, and the reason I can do that is that there are a large number of people that are interested and can support the financial expenses. I can't fly in somebody if there're only a couple of people interested.

SK: Do you have any help in running the art school?

JH: I pretty much just do it myself. In the year 2000, two years after I started teaching, I formed a non-profit organization because my interest has always been to offer education to the community rather than just having students of my own, so it's for educational purpose. I do have two board members, one of them being my former student. But basically it's still a one-man show.

SK: How many students do you have now?

JH: The number fluctuates; some students come and go. I started off with 90 this year and it's down to about 70 now.

SK: When did you start to organize workshops for the community?

JH: I started pretty early, I think six months after I started teaching, Jan. 1999 I think. The first year I brought in an Irish dance teacher, because I needed to learn too. And then the next year I invited another dance teacher who continued to come for a couple of years. This second teacher was focusing more on the competition, which is a world wide interest in Irish dancing. There're a huge number of Irish dancers who want to compete, and there's another group who wants their kids to participate for recreational purpose, and for the physical activity that the dance provides, and to learn about the Irish culture. In the competition group, like in any other competitive sport, the parents can get ugly. So I had a more uneasy relationship with the second teacher, because most of my kids' families were more geared toward recreational purpose. So that sort of didn't work out. I do want to add the competitive aspect as an option but it will never be the primary focus, and I am working on becoming a certified Irish dancer myself. I am taking the certification test in October.

SK: What do you have to do for the certification exam?

JH: There are five parts to it; one part of them is to have the extensive knowledge of 30 traditional Irish dances, part of it is to demonstrate steps of different levels, part of it is to show them you know how to teach, another part is to identify 30 specific Irish dance tunes.

SK: That's a very difficult exam! Who is giving the exam?

JH: There're several organizations, national and international groups that help set the rules and have meetings to govern the Irish dancing.

SK: Is it coming from Ireland?

JH: Yes, it's based in Ireland.

SK: Do you have to go to Ireland for the exam?

JH: I could, but they give the exam in different parts of the country too; I probably would go to Chicago.

SK: The dance teachers that you invited for the workshops, are they from Ireland?

JH: Yes, they are both Irish-born, I usually try to get Irish-born artists to do the workshop. I think it's best for the educational purposes to get someone who was from Ireland. I think they know the dancing and music better, since it's part of their culture in Ireland.

SK: Is Mary a regular artist you invited? How did you know her?

JH: This is the third year I got her. I got her in for language and singing and story telling, all about the culture. I met her in the camp in North Carolina, and I took a student with me to check out how her teaching was.

SK: How about Seamus Connolly?

JH: This is the first year; I met him in a Boston camp.

SK: How about the charming young dancer that came with him? Niall?

JH: Yes, he is charming; I heard about him and knew that he is good. He's born in Dublin.

SK: You also did a workshop on contra dancing, right?

JH: Yes, Mini Rodgers from Texas.

SK: I have done a little piano accompaniment for contra dancing; is there any difference between accompaniment for contra and Irish dancing?

JH: Not much, the basic repertoire is the same, the reel, the jig, polka. The emphasis is slightly different, the Irish dance is more up-on-the-toe dancing, while the contra dance has evolved into more walking steps; but the music will work for both, not much difference. Contra dancing came from Irish, Scottish, French, British, and they all have similar dance formation, like lines and squares.

SK: I notice that Irish step dancing is a very virtuosic dance, mostly used for stage presentation; does Irish have social dances as well?

JH: Yes, Irish social dancing would be like the contra dancing, in lines; the step dancing is more soloistic, and has evolved in the last couple hundred of years to be increasing complex.

SK: The Riverdance came from step dancing?

JH: Yes,

SK: and the Riverdance had a big influence on the popularity of Irish step dancing?

JH: Yes, that's a huge influence.

SK: What do you think about Riverdance? People said that it had too much mixture of everything.

JH: It suited my taste, I was interested in different kind of dances anyway, I like the Spanish dances, the Russian folk dances and the American tap dancing in it, I was not bothered by that at all, and I think because of the TV and technology, no ethnic group can be immune from influences from other cultures, it is not possible to be that pure, it's not that pure three hundred years ago anyway. Countries invaded each other all the time, there were a lot of mixing going on anyway. In the modern days, CD and recorded music has a huge influence.

SK: on how people mix things up.

JH: that's right, like the group Afro-Celt sound system, fusing African music and Celtic music. I like to see in the future what will happen with this mixing of different cultural styles, it will be interesting.

SK: So it doesn't bother you at all with these mixing?

JH: No, and I look at myself, I don't consider myself an Irish. I am an American, maybe Canadian American, though I have Irish heritage. If I go too far back, I don't know what's like to live in Ireland, or Germany. So I draw that distinction, I am an American. I know some people say they are Scottish, while they are basically American. I think some people who are interested in their heritage go a little bit too far...But I think it's still a healthy positive interest.

SK: I read in your website about your school becoming a member of C.C.E. [Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann], what's that?

JH: I was aware of that organization because I read about a group in St.Louis...

SK: Yes, I read about that too...

JH: St. Louis Irish Arts, I was always looking around how other people organize their school. I thought about joining before, and Niall, the dancer, is the head of the C.C.E.'s Manhattan branch. He encouraged me to become a branch of C.C.E about six months ago. I figured since we were already doing what other branches were doing, we might as well become one; I am still figuring how it works.

SK: What are you required to do to become a branch?

JH: We have officer, members and yearly membership fees. I like the fact that it's an Ireland-based organization, it is founded in Dublin, and I like to have that connection, since I am always trying to invite guest artists from Ireland.

SK: What's their purpose?

JH: To promote and preserve Irish language, music, and culture.

SK: What kind of advantage is there for becoming their member?

JH: They send out a quarterly publication, with a lot of information about events, especially musical events around the world. They have a website and music competition, intended more to help to preserve the music than compete, unlike the Irish step dancing competition. It's more educational oriented, and they also have yearly conventions, and a lot of session. They usually have more Irish social dancing, instead of step dancing.

SK: I haven't seen the Irish social dancing yet.

JH: I usually organize two ceili every year, and we do more social dancing in the ceili.

SK: Lauren told me she used to do social dancing.

JH: Yes, she did, Irish social dancing is sometimes called set dancing.

SK: What motivated you to devote your life to teaching and promoting Irish dancing?

JH: I got a lot of pleasure out of learning the dance and music, but right now I am a little burned out. I have a lot of frustration with students that don't practice...I think I am continuing doing this because of my students, I can't leave them, they won't let me go. I have frustration like all other teachers, and I enjoy teaching kids most of the time.

SK: I can understand that. And what is the motivation behind organizing the workshops for the community here?

JH: I think it comes back to education, I think it's important for people to learn from other teachers, not just learning from what I know. I have to bring people in for the benefit of education, because we don't have much resources here in Oklahoma.

SK: You are really an educator.

JH: Yes, yes I am.

SK: You have a lot of requests from people too?

JH: Yes, I have a lot of requests, but I don't have that much time to organize more concerts. I have my own teaching to take care of. But once a year I do that, and for the music class that I have, I would like them to play for the dancers.

SK: Do you use live music frequently? I know you dance with Banish Misfortune, do you dance with other groups as well?

JH: I do that a few times a year. The goal of the music class is to be able to eventually play for the dance, and sometimes I invite more advanced players to help out. You have to have a core group who know the dance tunes well enough and can keep up the tempo.

SK: Does your husband, Matthew, help you out too?

JH: Yes, he plays for the dance too and helps out the music class sometimes...

SK: What's the challenge of playing with live music?

JH: Not every band can or is willing to accompany dance, mainly because of the tempo. You have to play in a certain tempo for the dance. Some bands might play too fast or just want to play in their own tempo because it sounds better. A lot of Irish musicians don't dance in this area, and it's challenging to educate them about dancing.

SK: Do you have many opportunities to jam with people in sessions at all?

JH: No, I don't really have time, I am teaching most evenings, and if I get a free evening, I would rather be with my kids.

SK: You have an eight year old girl and thirteen year old boy? Do they like Irish music too?

JH: Yes, my little girl is learning Irish dancing, and my son is learning guitar and he picks out tunes.

SK: What do you think about the local Celtic music scene?

JH: I think it is healthy and growing; I like to see all ages participating.

SK: Are you concerned about the authenticity of the Irish style? For example, in Irish fiddling, the style is really important, do you see that in this community?

JH: Well, I think it's a little watered down around here; that's why I am always trying to bring guest artists here. Playing in an authentic style is harder, and you need to be constantly reminded of it, or else it will get further away. It's still enjoyable, but it just doesn't have an Irish sound, it's more Americanized.

SK: And a lot of people came from playing American old-time music.

JH: Yes, and they want to play it that way, they are used to that. It requires effort to learn the Irish style, it's like the classical style, it requires effort. That's the only problem I see, that it gets watered down. I think one important point about folk musicians is the personal contact one has with other musicians [in] the session. You will never see a bunch of classical musicians coming together like that. The fellowship—they go and they enjoy each other's company, support each other's musical growth and they can share even though they came from diverse background. I see that with my students too, they enjoy each other's friendship.

SK: Would that be one of the motivations for the parents to send their kids to Irish dancing too? A healthier environment to grow up?

JH: Yes, absolutely. Many of my parents are concerned, especially with their daughter, the sexual pressure, the easy gratification that our society offers; there is no sexually suggestive gestures in Irish dancing, they like the structured environment, and the physical activities.

Transcription of taped interview with Malia Bennett, conducted at Malia's office at the State Capitol, Oklahoma City, on Feb. 24, 2006.

SK: Okay, first question, what is your musical background, like you know, when did you learn your first instrument, what type of music did you learn?

MB: I grew up in a household, with lots of music in it. My father plays piano and guitar and a little bit of Hawaiian Ukulele. And he always made sure we listen to music all the time, and it was a broad spectrum of music. We listen to renaissance music, we listen to baroque music, we listen to classical music, we listen to albums, you know, record albums 33 records, a Scottish bagpipe music, a Mexican mariachi music, and music from Japan, and Hawaiian music. And we were exposed to all different kinds of music growing up. My brothers and myself were all, you know, they made sure we all had piano lessons. My father taught me how to play a piece in Ukulele. And then, when I was older, I tried to teach myself to play guitar.

SK: So you learned the piano as your first instrument?

MB: Ya when I was about in the 3rd grade, ya, that was my first instrument.

SK: And your father is a Native American, or your mother's side?

MB: Both my father and mother.

SK: Part Irish too?

MB: Yes, both of them are part Native American, both of them are also Irish and Scottish. I have that on both sides of my family. My brother does a lot of genealogy research. We knew that one of my great great grandfathers immigrated to the United States from Edinborough, Scotland. And we also have ancestry that we have traced to the Munster region of Ireland, and also to the ouster of the region. So, ties to both countries.

SK: So, let me see, but are you, I know your mom is an art professor in Native American arts, so is she very active in participating in Native American activities?

MB: Yeah, yes, and we were very fortunate growing up. My parents took us very often when we were little to, Powwow, Indian dances. And not the kinds that they have in the big arenas now, these are the ones that were out in the country, and could only be attended by Native Americans; you didn't have a lot of tourists there. And I grew up learning how to do round dancing and war dancing and buffalo dancing, and then two-step and stomp dancing which is more Seminole/Creek.

SK: So, in terms of Native American tribes, what kind of a tribe do you belong to?

MB: What tribe?

SK: Ya.

MB: What I'm listed as is Seminole. But I think we also have Chickasaw and a little Cherokee, but predominantly Seminole, but I think I'm listed as an eighth.

SK: Do you still go to powwow or stuff like that?

MB: No I don't, I don't. I think probably, you know, to be quite honest, as I grew older, I just felt like I just stuck out like a sore thumb. You didn't see a lot of blue-eyed, blonde-hair kids dancing. And I started to feel more self conscious about it, about standing out so much physically, and so I really didn't do it much later on. But now my mother still goes. She's still very involved, through the University as a professor of Native American art history, and I know that for many years she has been the faculty representative for the Native American Student Association. She still goes to the things. And my father is still very much involved ... He's the magistrate for the eastern Oklahoma Indian court of criminal offenses. So he's an Indian tribal judge.

SK: So you would say that your parents were both highly educated, both holding career, jobs.

MB: Well not that when I was growing up. My mother really didn't go back to college until I was a child. She was still in high school when they got married. And when we were children, she went back and earned her bachelor's degree, and went back and got her Master's, and then completed her doctorate.

SK: Wow, amazing.

MB: Yes, but she was very much a product of the fifties. And in fact her high school guidance counselor told her that she should probably just get married, she really wasn't college material, and now she's the Associate Dean of Fine Arts. So I think it's kind of funny.

SK: How many years has she been teaching at OU?

MB: Well she taught for years even as an adjunct faculty, but she has been teaching this since 1980s, long time, and she is an excellent teacher too. If you ever have a chance to take one of her classes, just do it. It's wonderful.

SK: So, do you let the girls, like do you expose them to Powwow, things like that?

MB: You know, they've been to just a couple of dances. We went to one Powwow where they got out and danced a little bit. It was one that was actually an event that was held at St. Paul's Cathedral in downtown Oklahoma City and I took the girls and my son there, and they loved it, they really did enjoy it. But you know, I think it's just our lives are just so busy right now, it's just not central, it's just not anything that we do, you know. Not any real reason, at this point I could care less about having blue eyes, there are so much intermarriages now, there are a lot of members who are blues eyes and blonde hair. But at this point it's just that our lives are so busy, it's just not really that much a part of my life at this point.

SK: How about your Irish music, does that in any way, mean more to you, because you have part Irish heritage when you play Irish music, or is it just one of the activities that you enjoy?

MB: I think the main reason that I got involved with it really had nothing to do with the fact that I was part Irish or part Scottish. It was the fact that I just enjoyed that music. I enjoy the interesting, the modal form of the music, I just find it intriguing, it's fun, it's ethereal. When I was in college at one point, I started playing bluegrass music a little bit, and I got more interested in acoustic music. And I went to see a concert by a woman who performed pretty regularly on the Prairie Home Companion, back in the 80s, and her name is Sally Rogers. And she did a lot of old-time music, and she plays dulcimer and banjo and other string instruments. But she also did some Celtic music. And, she performs some very traditional tunes, and she performs some contemporary Celtic tunes, by a group called Touchdown. And I think that's the first time I started really listening to some of the modal tunes. I listened to music by Jean Ritchie, the mountain dulcimer player and composer. And that type of music just intrigue me. The structure of it, the sound of it, the story of the lyrics, all intrigue me. And that's [when] I started really getting interested in the music in the 80s. I think it's just the music itself. And the fact that we have ties to those countries where that music is from. I guess that strengthens my interest. But it was music itself that got me at first. I mean, I don't think if I were one drop of Irish and Scottish I would like the music any less. You know, I'm sure you have that thing I'm feeling. I mean, something about that form of music that just gets to you. And so many people that have never really listened to it, they'll listen to it and it's moving, it touches them in some way, I think. So I think that's when I first really got kind of exposed to it, but then after I graduated from college and I started working, and then I got married and now I have children, and I just did not play much music, much less listen to music. And it wasn't until my children got older, and I was with my daughters, and we were driving the car, and I had on a Dixie Chicks, and they heard fiddle music and they said 'Ah! We want to play fiddle like that.'

SK: Were they playing violin at that time already?

MB: No, this was out of the blue random. And I'm like 'You want to play fiddle' so I started thinking, maybe I'll find a program, and it just happened in that same week we got a flyer at school, about the strings program at OU. So since our school doesn't have a strings program, I got the girls enrolled in the sooner strings program, I told them to learn the basics in the school year and they went to 4th grade that year, and when summer comes, we'll find a fiddle teacher. So when the end of the school year was approaching, I called Innercity Violin Studio and then asked if they could recommend somebody because my daughters want to learn bluegrass. And she gave me the name of a woman and said 'Oh she's a wonderful fiddle teacher and your daughters will love her. Her name is Marilee Tussing.' And I called Marilee and she said 'Well, yes I do but I teach Celtic, not bluegrass.' And I said 'Well, that's the grand daddy of bluegrass. That will be great, that will be fine.' Because I knew that bluegrass had its roots in Celtic music, and so a lot of the tunes are exactly the same, you know, that you hear in bluegrass and you hear in old-time; they are Celtic. Bluegrass is one generation away from that I guess, I don't know. But uh, so we went to take a lesson from Marilee, and Marilee said 'Well we have these jam sessions, why don't you come?' And so I brought the girls to a jam session over at the Celtic Cup before it closed. And I think you were there at that time.

SK: Right, what year was that now?

MB: That would have been 2004?

SK: Just before it closed right?

MB: Ya ya, well 2003 or 2004.

SK: Probably.

MB: Maybe it was 2003, I think that might have been it. And so we went to the jam session, and the music just sounded very intuitive to me. And I think because of the structure, the chord structure from bluegrass, a lot of it is very applicable. And, Marilee had brought a guitar to let me play, and I was able to figure out the chords pretty quickly, it's just very intuitive to me. Because I've been listening to it, you know, many years before, and I played music similar to that many years before. And so, that's when I started to get involved and actually playing it and not just listening to it.

SK: When you started with bluegrass, it was in your college years?

MB: I was in college and I was doing a minor in music and piano performance.

SK: So where is it? At OU?

MB: No, University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire. I transferred back to OU because I knew I wanted to work; um I'm from Oklahoma, I wanted to live and work back in this region. And I was going into broadcast journalism and I knew if I wanted to get back into, you know, get a job in the market, if I was going to college here and doing interns and got a job here then it would be easier to step into it. So I transferred back here, OU did not require a minor so I did not finish my minor and I regret that. But I did have the opportunity to have a great deal of exposure, lots of piano with a Ph.D., and one semester strings. I wished I'd taken more than that—well music and music history and theory and all those good things.

SK: But there was a culture of bluegrass music going on in college?

MB: It was when I was working at the summer camp, and the resident caretakers of the camp, the man had a bluegrass band and his son played in it. And, they played in the area a lot. He plays guitar and banjo and his son played mandolin, and he taught me how to flat pick a little bit.

SK: On the guitar?

MB: Uh-huh. He had a beautiful Martin D 28 that I just admire greatly. And so he taught me a little bit of flat pick.

SK: You already knew how to, sort of, play guitar?

MB: Ya, I did but I never done any bluegrass, never done any flat picking. He showed me some, tapped out some music for me, and I would just jam with him and played with people around the area, and played with other musicians. I kinda put together a little bluegrass band in college. I think I might have just played a few times in the coffeehouses around the campus. We had ... fun. You see, our fiddle player was the viola instructor in the college, and the mandolin player was the first chair bass player of the college orchestra, and our bass player, played bass and was an opera major in college. We would play, and every now and then, we came to together to jam.

SK: So when you were going there, there was a group of people that played?

MB: Well, I just sought these people out, said 'Do you want to get together and play these?' I don't know how much they had played before, I mean, we just got together and jammed. I didn't run across any organized jams like they have here in the city. But we would get together and play, and I have another partner, and we would, she also play guitar, and we would play, different places up there. And we did mostly original stuff when we played.

SK: So not only bluegrass?

MB: No, no, we're all doing mostly original stuff, mostly stuff that I had written, when we played together. It was a lot of fun. There was a lot of uh, all kinds of music out there, and we were fortunate, because we were right there, you know, near St. Paul, Minnesota, that was about 75 miles away. So a lot of them musicians were with Prairie Home Companion and were two or three there. And that was a lot of fun too. There was a chance to see a lot of music, and of course every time we are at the campus there are so many talented people there, that come through, whether the professors, or you know, someone that's coming through and play the concert at the campus.

SK: What year?

MB: Oh this would have been in the early in the mid 80s.

SK: But you never really have any contact with bluegrass before the college years?

MB: No, not really.

SK: No? Not even when you were in Oklahoma?

MB: No, I've never played that before. No, um none. I think, of all the country music that we listened to growing up, and again, my father has pretty eclectic taste, I don't know a lot of people that have 33 albums of Scottish bagpipe music or mariachi music. Bluegrass is one genre that I really wanted to be exposed to. So I don't think ...

SK: But your dad was not a professional musician or anything?

MB: My dad? No, no, he just loved music and liked to listen to it. I just said, he played a little bit, my mother sang; she has a beautiful voice and she sang in the church choir. No, no music background on that. I think my father's father might have made a little name in college playing piano in a jazz combo or something, but, long time ago, you know, 20s or 30s, but that's about it. I know that my great great grandfather was a classical violinist and he supposedly played in one of the first orchestras they had here in Oklahoma City. And he was from Austria, well his family was from Austria. But uh, no, no professional musicians that I'm aware of.

SK: But a lot of music.

MB: Yes a lot of music.

SK: So when you came back from Wisconsin, were you very active in the bluegrass?

MB: No, not at all. Once I got back, I was concentrating on graduating, and working, and I started working in radio, and just trying to get as many hours in at school and work as possible and get out and start working. And once that happened, I was working six to seven days a week, between school and work. And I just would barely pick up my guitar, barely touch the piano. It just seemed I didn't have time. And it just weren't a priority for me because of the time.

SK: Did you play a little bit of bluegrass or were involved like going to bluegrass concert before the girls got interested in Celtic music?

MB: I think one time, when I was working in radio, before I got married, I was working at a country radio station and they asked me to interview a bluegrass concert at UCO, and you know, I hung out with the musicians and I played one tune at the end of the show with them but that was about it. I just, literally, it wasn't a priority for me 'cause I just didn't have the time.

SK: So the girls' interest in the fiddling, it actually sort of got you back?

MB: Absolutely. I mean, really, it was like I had hardly played much at all for twenty years. Ya, my nice little guitar was sitting the case untouched, pretty much. So the girls were getting interested in that, and that got me back into it. And, it really has been a blessing to me, I mean, it has been such a joy and it's such a nice, really, you know, I have a job that's fairly demanding, and you know, having three kids, that's very demanding. And this is something that is unrelated to those stresses and demands; it's just fun, just enjoyable, just something that I can enjoy, that I can do, that doesn't have those other demands and stresses on it.

SK: Get to play with people.

MB: Yes, it's just fun, you know how it is. It's just a good time.

SK: So um, what do you think about the session, like is that something that, I know you don't have a lot of time to go to session, is it something frustrating to you that you are not able to go?

MB: Well err, I think what I have been doing is, well you know why it hasn't been frustrating to me because through the session I got to meet other musicians and we are in the band. So we are playing.

SK: Right, you are in the band.

MB: So we are playing, so you know, that I'm so busy with that, I don't mind. We play fairly often enough.

SK: So you still get the same amount of enjoyment out of playing in the band?

MB: Yes, exactly,

SK: Do you actually practice regularly with those guys?

MB: You know, we often laughed, you know, sometimes we get together and click so well that I can't imagine if we did practice. We were all really, really busy, and so we don't get together and practice that often. We really don't, you know. We would just get together and sit down and play. There are tunes that, when we played, it's usually for dances, and we would just come in and play. But you know we have a real good chemistry, the three of us you know.

SK: Ian, Wayne.

MB: Ian and Wayne, ya. And sometimes Matthew comes and plays too but sometimes he doesn't, so it's mostly you know, Ian Brittle and Wayne Cantwell and myself. And sometimes my daughters will come in, sit in with us occasionally; the three of us are the main ones and it's kind of funny. We got together specifically to play for contra dances, and we were trying to come up with a name, and I think Wayne said how about, you know, two guys and a girl or something like that, and I think I said 'how about this, how about since we are playing for contra dances, Suspicious Contraband' which was of course a play on words, but we thought it was funny. Yeah we play, you know, sometimes just a couple times a month, sometimes a lot more, you know. We've gotten to play at the Oklahoma City Art Festival, at the Purcell Arts Festival, at the Tulsa Scottish games. We've played in Tulsa several times, at the Mcnellies Pub up there, and that was always a good time. We've played for the Ancient Order of Hibernians which is an Irish Catholic organization, and a lot of different events. So we just have been having a blast, so even if I haven't been able to come to the jams, and those are always fun, you know, I'm still playing a lot, probably even more.

SK: Hmmm, what about the girls, are they still learning fiddling?

MB: The girls, this year, have not been doing fiddle lessons during the week because of their time schedule, but they are still playing fiddle and they still invited to play, so they're kinda working on that. Right now they are still focusing on their classical training, um with Sooner Strings, and this year is really good because they get private lessons and then the orchestra. And so, it's helping them with their techniques and theory, and things that you don't see emphasized a lot sometimes in folk music, but you know as musicians how much those things help you. It's the basic stuff that gives you, you know, an edge. I think, if you have the ability to read music and play by ear, you have you know, such an advantage, as opposed if you just do one and not the other.

SK: Right. So they are not currently taking lessons?

MB: Not right now, because of the swim team schedule, I think they'll probably get back into it in the summer time. But they've played together as The Flowers of Edinburgh, since part of our Scottish heritage is from Edinburgh, Scotland, so they go by the name of "The Flowers of Edinburgh."

SK: What do you think about, oh actually if we have time I want to show you a little video clip though [of] that session that the girls were in, and I'm going to put in my dissertation. But I remembered hearing the girls say one time that playing with other people is so much fun for them. What do you think about the importance of session to the girls' music education? Is it something that you think would improve, you know, help them to be more interested in music?

MB: I think it exposes them to a lot of music, it exposes them to a lot of musicians, and lets them hear, and I think, I think now as far as training, I think from what I can sense, and I have not been taking lessons for a very, very long time, there seems to be more openness about ear training than there used to be. When I was taking piano, of course I would play by ear and not learn to sight read, and when my music teacher caught on, she wouldn't play through the music for me, she would hold a book over my hands, I couldn't look down at the keyboard. And I was just in tears, 'cause I played mostly by ear and I had to go back and learn the reading. But the fact that they do, you know, now when you get a music book, they usually have a CD of the music that goes with it so you can hear how it's supposed to sound, and you know, I think that it is good. I think that the fact that the girls get to go and hear the tunes and hear what they are supposed to sound like, and how it can sound when someone masterful is playing, I think that's really good for them. I think it helps them gain some confidence, and everyone at the jam sessions, one thing I like about the jam sessions, everyone is very kind and generous for the most part, you know, pull out the chairs, and make the circle wider, and you know, everybody is happy to show somebody something or you know, let people join in, you know, as long as they kind of observe some unspoken etiquette within the group.

SK: One thing that I think I've appreciated seeing is that sometimes, you know, like how Wayne a lot of times encouraged the girls to start a tune, and then we all joined in. I think that may help them build up confidence.

MB: I think so, I think so. I think that's really good for them. I think it just gets them exposed to all the different music, even when they put down the instruments. The one thing is that when they have the jams in the bookstores, my daughters are so distracted by the books. That's one thing about the Celtic Cup; I think they would sit in the circle and play longer because there weren't all the books to distract them and all the other things going on ... I think they have learnt a lot, and it's a nice exposure, like they went through a lot of music, a lot of musical instruments, and

you have people playing things that I don't have at home, like a bohdran, or an octave mandolin, or bouzouki, or pipes, you know, things that they won't be exposed to at home.

SK: Are they playing orchestra in school?

MB: They are playing. There are school districts that were ended up in half strings, so they don't have an orchestra, so they are learning flute this year. So they are playing flute in band. And they said they hated it, they don't like flute. But they are actually pretty good, they are actually pretty good. But uh, so that's another thing, another reason time that are constrained. They have flute to practice everyday, they have their violin to practice ... they have a lot of homework due.

SK: But at the Sooner Strings they don't really have an orchestra there?

MB: Yes they do.

SK: They do?

MB: Ya.

SK: They play with all the other people?

MB: With cellos and basses, and then they might have a couple violas; they are always short on violas, but yes, and they have first, second and third violins parts that they learn, and they do teach them orchestra piece. And they have been in Sooner String; this is the fourth year. The students each have a thirty-minute private lesson with one of the teachers in the Sooner Strings and then they have one hour of orchestra every week.

SK: Do they enjoy it?

MB: They are loving it; they love it, ya, ya, they do, especially now that they are at the level where they are getting private lessons. I think they got really frustrated for a while because it seemed like they were moving very slowly. And the girls, once they started learning the better stuff—and they were used to doing some very fast intriguing tunes, and then they were working on 'Mary had a little lamb'—and I can say they were getting a little frustrated but now they are very challenged, they are doing tunes; one of pieces they played at the Christmas concert was one of the Brandenburg concertos, and then Ashoken Farewell, some good tunes, something that I can really see that they sink their teeth into it.

SK: Good. You go to OCTMA regularly?

MB: I didn't last Fall. Um, we've been to the last few.