Teaching the Tunes: Understanding the Role of Irish Traditional Music in Higher Education in North America

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Abstract
Irish traditional music has had a tenuous existence in higher education in North America. Its inclusion in university course offerings and performance ensembles by ethnomusicologists and music educators has provided unique opportunities to examine the manner in which Irish traditional music is taught. As a traditional music, it has a well-established process of transmission that favours certain aesthetics and performative practices. However, when attempting to teach Irish traditional music to university students unfamiliar with its cultural milieu, a host of ethnomusicological issues arise. This research discusses the role of Irish traditional music in higher education and examines in detail the pedagogical strategies, repertoire, musical practices and educational outcomes of several, select university Irish traditional music courses and ensembles in the United States of America.

Keywords: Training; Irish Traditional Music; Irish Studies; United States; Higher Education

Introduction
Irish Traditional Music has a time-honored process of transmission that employs demonstration, aural perception, imitation and memorisation. Using communal cultural resources, tunes have traditionally been passed down from one musician to another via local, performative opportunities. Familiar with shared aesthetics and practices, musicians retain locally favoured tunes while adding new ones to the local repertoire (Waldron 2006, p. 3-4).

Presently, tunes are disseminated through various means such as aural transmission, published collections of tunes, commercial recordings, and via the internet which offers musicians access to a plethora of videos, audio recordings, transcriptions, and other educational resources (Hillhouse 2013, p. 38). However, when attempting to teach Irish traditional music to North American university students and local community members unfamiliar with its cultural milieu, a host of educational issues arise regarding university departmental politics, the historical development of Irish studies programs in North America, ethnomusicological and educational scholarship, pedagogy, aesthetics and tradition. Several North American, university Irish traditional music ensembles and courses navigate these challenges and serve as the central case studies for this article. This research draws from interviews with North American ethnomusicologists and music educators from the University of Florida, Evergreen State College, University of Windsor, Western University, and Texas Tech University, amongst others, who discussed at length the manner in which Irish Traditional Music was taught in their respective universities and the role that it played there. It should be noted that this research is based exclusively on the teaching experiences of the aforementioned professors and solely within a North American higher education context.

This research examines the relationship between Irish Traditional Music and higher education exclusively in North America from different pedagogical perspectives and addresses the tenuous existence of Irish traditional music both within and outside of Irish studies programmes at university level. The intersections between music education and ethnomusicological research (Nettl 2010; Campbell 2003; Krüger 2009; Huib Schippers
2009) greatly inform this work. The desire to explore the applied work that teachers do in the academy has become increasingly relevant as ethnomusicologists seek to better understand music phenomena occurring “at home”iv. By focusing on the nature of music transmission in the academy, ethnomusicologists are able to gain a critical understanding of the roles that these musics play in their own work and the values that the academy assigns to them (Krüger 2009, pp. 7-9). In a keynote address at the at the 29th meeting of the International Society for Music Education, Bruno Nettl emphasised that understanding the manner in which music is transmitted is essential to understanding the music itself. “What is transmitted—tunes, rhythms, the need to be consistent, or the need to always vary, and the way such pieces are broken up for teaching, special exercises—it seems to me that these are all part of the essence of music,” (Nettl 2010, p. 4). Patricia S. Campbell expands upon this concept and argues that the examination of music pedagogy from an ethnomusicological perspective can offer music educators (and ethnomusicologists) new insights into musical thought, musical behavior, cultural practices and function of music in any given culture and/or society (Campbell 2010, pp. 16-17).

In Facing The Music: Shaping Music Education From A Global Perspective, Huib Schippers examines the technical, cognitive, social and institutional aspects of teaching and learning music in different formal and informal contexts around the world. His analysis of “the rationale, content, relevance and methods of organising, learning and teaching music” provide both music educators and ethnomusicologists with different pedagogical strategies with which to represent, rehearse and perform music (Schippers 2010, p.90). Schippers’ insights are useful in understanding the different pedagogical approaches employed by the professors interviewed for this article. The impetus for this research stemmed from my own experiences with the creation and instruction of an ethnomusicological course entitled MUH 2501- Intro to Musics of the World through Celtic, Cultural Connections and MUN 2800- University of Florida World Music Ensemble- (University of Florida Irish Traditional Music Ensemble). Drawing upon my own musical and scholarly interests in Irish traditional musicv, I created these two ethnomusicological, undergraduate courses in order to instruct music majors and non-music majors about the history, transmission and performance of Irish traditional music.

The University of Florida is based in Gainesville, Florida, a city, which, as of 2011, contained a small community of Irish traditional musicians and dance enthusiasts with little connection to the university. Gainesville has never served as a major site of Irish immigration nor of significant Irish-American communities and therefore has never developed the infrastructure necessary to support a thriving Irish traditional music scene. Due to a desire to perform and teach Irish traditional music, the University of Florida’s Irish Traditional Music Ensemble was formed from a few, skilled Irish traditional musicians and dancers who are based in the community and from a pool of interested, accomplished undergraduate and graduate musicians who were quite inexperienced with Irish traditional music or dance. The ethnomusicological, lecture-based course provided undergraduate students with an introduction to Irish Traditional Music, dance and culture as well as other related Celtic musics and cultures. The course offered in-class musical and dance demonstrations with a few opportunities for student performative participation (i.e. in-class workshops focusing upon Irish traditional music and Irish step-dancev). However, the University of Florida’s Irish Traditional Music Ensemble was structured as a malleable, collegiate ceili bandvi in order to include a wide range of traditional and non-traditional instruments as well to satisfy my own pianistic leanings. The ensemble waxed and waned between eight to eleven students and
community musicians featuring several fiddles, flutes, concertina, guitar, piano and percussion (drum kit and, infrequently, bodhrán). As instructive rehearsals began, a host of pedagogical and ethnomusicological questions and challenges emerged. From a pedagogical standpoint, the ensemble contained mature, local musicians acculturated to Irish Traditional Music practices performing alongside proficient, classically trained, undergraduate musicians who knew little about Irish Traditional Music. Aural learning vs. music notation, processes of transmission, authenticity, interpretation, phrasing, ornamentation, lift, and accompaniment became immediate concerns to be addressed. In order to effectively address and discuss these educational and ethnomusicological issues, I began to interview established professors of ethnomusicology and music education who taught collegiate courses or ensembles centered upon Irish traditional music. Interviewees were asked a similar set of questions regarding the nature of their courses; enrollment; performative opportunities (both teacher and students); pedagogy; course goals; and relationships with their music department, Irish studies programmes, and with local Irish Traditional Music communities. I employed an open-ended, informal, conversational interviewing method, while recording these interviews through Skype. These interviews yielded a wealth of information that provided multiple insights into the development and nature of teaching Irish traditional music in higher education as well as pedagogical strategies and instructional difficulties inherent in this form of education.

Irish Traditional Music & Irish Studies in Academia
Upon analysing the interview data, several unifying similarities persistently re-appeared amongst the interviewed ethnomusicologists and music educators. The interviewees who taught Irish traditional music-based courses included Dr. Sean Williams of Evergreen State College, Dr. Janice Waldron of the University of Windsor, Dr. Kari Veblen of Western University (Ontario), Dr. Christopher J. Smith of Texas Tech University, Dr. David McDonald of Indiana University, and Dr. Gavin Douglas of the University of North Carolina (Greensboro). Each of these professors had been playing Irish traditional music for at least ten years and had learned to perform the music through the process of aural transmission. Irish Traditional Music often functioned as a personal musical passion and/or musical escape from their daily lives. Dr. David McDonald and Dr. Gavin Douglas both communicated that performing Irish Traditional Music in a local session was viewed and valued as personal musical, separate from their academic teaching assignments (Douglas 2014; McDonald 2014). Each professor expressed a genuine love of Irish traditional music and had cultivated a knowledgeable performative understanding of the tradition prior to pursuing it as either a secondary research interest or subject for a course. Despite variability in course format and pedagogy, the Irish traditional music courses of the interviewed professors grew out of a labour of love. Separate from any existing Irish studies programs, Irish traditional music instruction was provided due to the professor’s personal interest in the subject. Often, these courses were taught in isolation from other related subjects such as Irish history, literature or language (the exception being the Irish Studies programme at Evergreen State College). These Irish Traditional Music courses were all entirely housed in their respective music departments and were met by varying responses from their departments, ranging from apathy to full academic support. Dr. Christopher J. Smith discussed having to outline to his music department the different, beneficial skills that students could develop through studying traditional music and thus justify the teaching of traditional music at his institution (Smith 2013). These courses continued to exist in academia due to the persistence of the professors and the popularity of these sessions with undergraduate student bodies.
The fortunes of Irish Traditional Music courses in higher education are usefully examined in relation to the historical development of Irish Studies in North America. Recurring, parallel themes can be observed in both disciplines in differing time periods. In separate interviews, ethnomusicologists, Dr. Sean Williams, Dr. Gavin Douglas, and Dr. David McDonald, mentioned that they were advised to treat Irish Traditional Music as a secondary research interest due to its perceived lack of marketability in academia, a view which echoed my own experiences as an ethnomusicologist (Williams 2014; Douglas 2014; McDonald 2014). Further elaborating upon Irish studies and perceived academic marketability was former American Conference for Irish Studies (ACIS) president and ACIS historian, Dr. James MacKillop, who discussed that as Irish Studies programme emerged at the beginning of the 20th century, scholarly work concerned with Irish literature and history was largely ignored or shunned due to its perceived lack of academic marketability (MacKillop 2014). This was further elaborated upon in Dr. MacKillop’s The Unauthorized History of The American Conference For Irish Studies (2012), which discussed that only as Irish studies programmes began to emerge in greater numbers beginning in the early 1960s that this perception began to change. Similar to the current, isolated, professorial desires to create Irish Traditional Music coursework in higher education, (regardless of an existing Irish Studies programme,) Irish Studies pioneers such as John V. Kelly of Harvard University were similarly required to persuade their universities of the merit of Irish Studies scholarship and coursework, often teaching such classes voluntarily in addition to their regular teaching assignments (MacKillop 2012, p.25). Historically, Irish Studies programmes in North America have emerged only where Irish scholars could convince universities to invest in them. Early Irish Studies programmes in the United States were not necessarily established at institutions where there were large numbers of Irish-American student populations, but instead relied upon the Irish scholarly interests of certain professors (MacKillop 2012, pp.14-15). Of course, this parallels the current state of Irish Traditional Music coursework and its genesis in North America.

Thus, the question that begs to be answered is why Irish Studies programmes from their inception did not employ an interdisciplinary model that included Irish Traditional Music and Dance. The oldest Celtic studies programmes in North America, at Harvard University (established in 1896) and Catholic University of America (1898), focused upon Celtic languages, literature and history (Blenner-Hassett 1954, p. 13). These courses provided the groundwork for the dogged proponents of Irish studies during the 1950s-1960s that would eventually lead to the establishment of similar programmes in various formats at Fordham University, Columbia University, New York University, the University of Kansas, amongst others (Blenner-Hassett 1954, p. 6). Inspired by the pioneering academic work of such Irish Studies luminaries as Dr. Emmett Larkin and Dr. Lawrence McCaffrey, the number of Irish Studies programmes in the United States increased in the early 1960s, and these often featured the simultaneous examination of literature, linguistics, history and archaeology, with occasional interactions between these disciplines. The concept of integrating related academic disciplines within a single originated in Scandinavia during the first part of the twentieth century, where folklore was considered an integral component in the creation of national identity, and much later this approach was incorporated in certain sectors of North American higher education (MacKillop 2012, p.16).

There are many factors that contributed to the exclusion of Irish Traditional Music from the burgeoning Irish studies departments of North American higher education. Firstly, Irish traditional music has always been viewed as the domain of the common people or
“folk” of Ireland whether it was the “peasant” class in Ireland or the working class Irish and Irish-Americans in North America (Hirsch 1991, p. 1119). This strong association between the Catholic, oppressed, Irish working-class people and Irish traditional music led certain Irish immigrants and Irish Americans seeking upward socioeconomic mobility to distance themselves from Old World cultural traditions. Thus, Irish Traditional Music simultaneously represented both a connection to a rich, cultural and linguistic tradition as well as an unpleasant reminder of the cultural traditions many ambitious, modern Irish attempted to shed (Meagher 2005, p.129). In John V. Kelleher’s article, ‘Irishness in America’, he describes the outlandish lengths that some Irish immigrants would go to in order to distance themselves from the backwards, hard-drinking, unintelligent, bellicose “thick mick” stereotypes during the early part of the twentieth century (Fanning 2002, p. 153). Unfortunately, Irish traditional music along with the Irish language, Irish dance and other cultural forms became associated with this stereotype and, therefore some ambitious social climbing, Irish immigrants and Irish-Americans avoided association with them. Thus, it is unlikely that those Irish and Irish-Americans who ascended to the middle class and/or attended university would have considered studying Irish Traditional Music in academia, but equally, the opportunity to do so would not have existed.

Irish Traditional Music functioned in Ireland as a source of entertainment, as an expression of a shared history and a means of communal socialisation. While there is a multiplicity of learning approaches, Irish Traditional Music is often transmitted from one musician to another through performances at house parties, sessions or dance halls (hAllmhuráin 2012, pp. 7-8). These informal networks of musical transmission ensured the continuance of the tradition. These networks would eventually stretch across the Atlantic Ocean to Irish diasporic communities that became rooted sites of music activity. These education networks were further strengthened in the 1920s-1930s by the emergence of radio broadcasting and the 78rpm recording industry primarily located in New York and to a lesser degree in Chicago and Boston (Dillane 2000, p. 113). Many of these recordings were popular among the large numbers of Irish expatriates living in North America. With newfound jobs and disposable income they were able to purchase these recordings and help support this nascent industry. Many of these recordings found their way back to Ireland via 78-RPM recordings and radio broadcasts (Vallely 1999, p. 296). These technological advances allowed for new means of disseminating and learning a variety of Irish Traditional Music. Further solidifying the educational, communicative pathways throughout Ireland’s musical communities and later throughout Irish diasporic communities, was the establishment of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann in 1951 by members of the Dublin Piper’s club. This organisation was founded in response to the prevailing negative societal perceptions of Irish traditional music and its gradual decline in popularity and performative frequency. Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann created an institutional social network for Irish traditional musicians that would eventually become international in nature that encouraged the performance and transmission of Irish Traditional Music. The establishment of the Fleadh Cheoil (Irish music festivals/competitions) also proved extremely successful in their revival agenda (Fleming 2004, pp. 233-234). Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann provided the groundwork to produce successful music revival movement beginning in the 1950s. Criticisms regarding the institutionalisation and standardisation of Irish traditional music would later be leveled against Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. However, it is clear that Irish Traditional Music was taught and studied through informal, communal networks of transmission, recording technology and non-profit, state-sponsored cultural institutions, all of which existed outside of academia.
Beginning in the late 1940s and 1950s, North American universities witnessed the emergence and spread of the hybrid discipline, ethnomusicology, which was slowly being accepted into anthropological and musical departments in the United States. Prior to this, university music departments in North America were largely concerned with the musicological study and performance of Western art music (Frank 2014, p. 30). During the 1960s and 1970s, American academia began incorporating a greater number of ethnomusicology programs that sought to address an increasing scholarly interest in the musics of India, Japan, China, and Indonesia. Ethnomusicology programmes began producing graduates who disseminated the importance of studying musics of the world (Campbell 2010, p. 19). African musics became areas of renewed interest beginning in the Civil Rights era (1954-1970) as music departments responded to African Studies department’s desire for new material (Eagles 2000, p. 816, 821). By the 1980s music departments deemed it necessary to offer a more balanced offering of coursework focusing on different musics of the world including Native American musics, Latin American musics, urban musics, popular musics and European folk musics (including Irish Traditional Music) (Campbell 2010, p. 19). Thus, the inclusion of Irish Traditional Music and European folk musics in general is a relatively recent development in North American academia, where historically ethnomusicology programmes predominantly focused upon non-Western musics. In an interview, Dr. Sean Williams mentioned that despite the early scholarly efforts of University of College of Cork music professor, Seán Ó Riada and his influential music ensemble, Ceoltóirí Chualannxxxviii, North American ethnomusicologists largely ignored Irish traditional music, which was often viewed as being not exotic enough for scholarship concerned with musics of the worldxxx She also described the negative, obstructive impact that institutional racismxxx had upon the development of Irish traditional music scholarship in North American academia (Williams 2014).

It is my view that, with a few notable exceptions, Irish Traditional Music was generally neglected and excluded from North American higher education institutions until the last decades of the twentieth century. This I ascribe to the confluence of alternative educational networks and institutions of Irish traditional music that existed outside universities, the emergence of Irish Studies and Ethnomusicology programmes in academia, negative perceptions regarding Irishness and related Irish cultural forms, the lack of implemented interdisciplinary educational models in universities; and institutional racism.

Pedagogy: Tradition and Innovation
While the significant informal and formal networks and institutions concerned with Irish Traditional Music have been discussed, the formal, institutionalised pedagogies used to teach Irish traditional music in higher education in North America warrant further investigation. The institutionalisation of traditional music raises an ethnomusicological and educational issues that are now receiving increasing academic attention due to the increasing number of world music ensembles in North American universities. The institutionalisation of traditional musics often carries a negative stigma that references Western imperialism, musical inauthenticity, cultural mining and the alteration of a particular musical tradition. Irish Traditional Music is a unique example, in that the majority of Irish traditional music ensembles and course offered in North American academia have not been developed by either Irish Studies nor music departments. Instead they are almost entirely constructed and taught by eager professors in isolated instances. There is no unifying, governing body concerned with the instruction of Irish traditional music in higher education nor is there a documented pedagogical or
conceptual framework that has been developed and implemented by music professors. Irish Traditional Music coursework is marked by its pluralistic pedagogical strategies, eclectic repertoire and passionate faculty. Due to the smattering of Irish Traditional Music coursework offered in the United States, there has been no concerted effort to standardise the curriculum. Despite the heterogeneous nature of Irish Traditional Music instruction in higher education, the process of institutionalisation, albeit on a small scale, involves the alteration of the tradition itself. Frequently, university Irish Traditional Music ensembles rehearse once or twice a week in a music department rehearsal space with students, community members and occasional faculty (Smith 2013). Irish Traditional Music has effectively been injected into a formalised, collegiate instructional model. For the purposes of higher education instruction, the site of Irish traditional music activity has been re-located from local community settings to within the walls of academia. The instructor becomes a mediator between the tradition’s perceived values and practices and the educational requirements of the institution. This balancing act can be quite challenging to the professor’s educational ideology where it conflicts with his cultural understanding and past musical experiences associated with the tradition. Each interviewed professor described a similar experience of attending informal sessions where tunes were listened to, imitated and eventually perfected. Over a period of years, a repertoire of Irish traditional tunes would be built and refined through countless performances in a communal context. The professor must then condense this wealth of experience into a form of instruction that novice students can mentally cope with. Given the limitations of instructional time and opportunities for traditional, community-based learning and performance, certain pedagogical decisions concerning course expectations, purpose and musical proficiency must be addressed as one attempts to teach a traditional music in a non-traditional setting and format.

In separate interviews with Dr. Chris Smith, Dr. Gavin Douglas and Dr. David McDonald, each professor stated that the primary motivation for teaching a course about Irish Traditional Music was to introduce students to this music culture and allow them to experience it in a formal, educational setting. The course objective was to equip interested students with a basic understanding of the culture through a combination of lectures, readings, musical rehearsals and performances, which would allow them to further pursue Irish traditional music in the community and abroad in less formal settings. These courses and ensembles served as an introduction to Irish Traditional Music for a diverse student population who were often unfamiliar with Irish culture in general. The educational intent of these North American courses and ensembles differs greatly from the Irish traditional music programs found at the University of Limerick’s Irish World Academy of Music and Dance and University College Cork, which seek to produce professional, Irish traditional musicians that draw from a substantial and already competent student population (Smith 2013). The majority of music-major undergraduates in North America are accustomed to learning music from the notated page and often find the process of aural learning to be intimidating and unfamiliar (Nettl 2010, pp.5-6). In addressing this educational obstacle, professors must choose whether to solely employ the aural transmission model used in Irish Traditional Music or embrace a more inclusive, educational model that incorporates elements from the aural transmission model and from non-traditional methods (e.g. music notation). Dr. Christopher J. Smith of Texas Tech University advocates for an inclusive pedagogy that benefits from using aural teaching techniques and notation. By introducing students to new aural, learning methods, while stimulating previous knowledge and notated learning experiences, students are able to process new musical information without being overwhelmed or frustrated (Smith 2013). This pedagogical perspective is further supported by Dr. Kari
Veblen of Western University, who emphasised the educational importance of supporting student interest in learning and performing Irish Traditional Music, whilst the pedagogical means was a secondary consideration, particularly at the introductory level (Veblen 2014). This was not a dismissal of traditional pedagogy, but rather encouraged students to continue learning by any means necessary in order to overcome certain educational hurdles. Once a basic understanding and musical proficiency was developed, students would eventually be able to musically participate in a traditional manner. A certain degree of musical skill was thought to be necessary in order to progress towards learning exclusively through aural means. Both Dr. Kari Veblen and Dr. Christopher J. Smith understood that learning Irish traditional music takes years of study and that novice students needed to employ a comprehensive learning strategy that incorporated familiar and unfamiliar learning methods in order to sustain a continued, vested interest.

In contrast to the inclusionary, educational model, Dr. David McDonald of Indiana University, Dr. Janice Waldron of the University of Windsor and Dr. Gavin Douglas of the University of North Carolina (Greensboro) preferred an immersive, student experience that required participants to use traditional learning methods (listening/observing, imitating, memorising, performing). Although instruction occurred in the classroom, students were encouraged to attend local sessions and to participate where appropriate. The professors were interested in teaching students about Irish traditional music with an emphasis on aural transmission, because this was the manner in which they learned the music themselves. By requiring students to learn in this manner, students would eventually develop the necessary skills to actively participate in the tradition without relying upon non-traditional methods to do so. (McDonald 2014; Waldron 2014; Douglas 2014).

As part of the coursework for the University of Florida’s Irish Traditional Music Ensemble, students were required to attend the local Irish Traditional Music session in Gainesville, Florida, in order to observe the nature of communal music-making, socialisation, the hierarchy of Irish traditional musicians, tune selection and general session etiquette. After attending and observing several sessions, students were then encouraged to gradually participate in the sessions where appropriate. Since a few members of the local Irish traditional music community performed with the University of Florida’s Irish Traditional Music Ensemble, students were welcomed and encouraged to question and discuss musical practices at the session. Bridging classroom instruction with community sessions can provide students with increased motivation, greater opportunities for student sharing and the possibility of extended learning outside of the classroom. Local community sessions can serve as a medium in which to connect educational objectives with students’ prior musical knowledge and with the surrounding communities at large. Dr. David McDonald stressed the educational value that he places upon student involvement in sessions near Indiana University both for their experiential importance and potential for continued musical learning (McDonald 2014). The participatory, informal nature of sessions can provide a valuable contrast to formal classroom instruction. By pairing these two types of educational environments in a university course curriculum, professors and students can benefit from a dynamic model that allows for the ‘real world’ application of taught concepts learned in class. However, due to geographical constraints, social politics amongst Irish traditional musicians and/or the lack of a community of local musicians, the ability to connect the musical worlds of academia and local sessions may not always be possible.
Conclusion
Despite the growing popularity of Irish Traditional Music and Dance, university instruction continues to have a tenuous existence in North America. Courses are often made available by dedicated professors rather than solicitous music departments. Often excluded from Irish Studies programmes, ethnomusicologists and music educators create personalised Irish Traditional Music courses that stem from individual, professorial research and musical experiences that do not rely upon a standardised curriculum. Future research examining the evolving role of Irish Traditional Music and Dance in Irish Studies programmes in North America would be beneficial to scholars and educators alike. In addition, an analysis of the relationships between non-profit cultural organisations (e.g. Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, Na Píobairí Uilleann) and North American universities would be particularly informative regarding the future of Irish Traditional Music curricula, processes of pedagogical standardisation, the institutionalisation of the music, and the nature of dialogue between community musicians and academic music ensembles. There exists great academic potential to learn from the intersections of music education and ethnomusicology research in order to build deeper understandings of Irish traditional music, education, and culture (Campbell 2003, p.17).

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McDonald, David (Apr 2014) Interview, Albany, New York.


Smith, Christopher (Dec 2013) Interview, Albany, New York.


Williams, Sean (Apr 2014) Interview, Albany, New York.


**Appendix: Short Biographies**

**Dr. Gavin Douglas**

Dr. Gavin Douglas is an associate professor of ethnomusicology at the University of North Carolina (Greensboro) School of Music, Theatre and Dance and teaches courses in World Music, Asian Music, American vernacular musics and guides seminars on music and society. His research interests include nationalism, politics, globalisation and cross-cultural aesthetics. He teaches an undergraduate course centered upon Irish traditional music and performs this music in his local community.

**Dr. James MacKillop**

Dr. James MacKillop is a scholar, critic and journalist. In a search of Internet sites, one finds his name most often as the author of the Oxford Dictionary of Celtic
Mythology and the Penguin Myths & Legends of the Celts, the most prominent of his seven books. He is co-editor, with Maureen Murphy, of An Irish Literature Reader, the world’s most widely used college-level textbook in that field. James MacKillop is the past-president of the American Conference for Irish Studies and is currently under commission to write a history of that organisation. For twelve years he led a theater and archaeology tour to Ireland. At present he is editor of the Irish Series at Syracuse University Press.

Dr. David McDonald

Dr. David McDonald is an assistant professor, department of folklore and ethnomusicology at Indiana University. His research interests include Israel/Palestine; performance ethnography; social theory; and the ethnomusicological study of violence and sociocultural trauma. He teaches a course on Irish traditional music and performs this music in his local community.

Dr. Christopher J. Smith

Dr. Christopher Smith is an associate professor and chair of musicology/ethnomusicology and director of the Vernacular Music Center at the Texas Tech University School of Music. He serves as faculty advisor for the Tech Irish Set-Dancers, Caprock English Country Dancers, and Caprock Morris Border dance team. He serves as External Examiner for the BA program in Traditional Music and Dance at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick as well as External Examiner for PhD dissertations at institutions in the USA, UK, and Ireland and for the Irish government’s music program accreditation bureau. He teaches courses in American, 20th century, and African Diasporic musics, as well as vernacular, world music, and ethnomusicology topics. His research interests are in American and African-American Music, 20th Century Music, Irish traditional music and other folk musics and cultures, improvisation, music and politics, performance practice, and historical performance.

Dr. Kari Veblen

Dr. Kari Veblen is an associate professor of music education in Western University. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses such as cultural and Canadian perspectives, music for children, research, and community music. She served as a research associate (Irish World Music Centre, University of Limerick). As a musician and educator, Veblen studies international trends in community music and writes on the intersections of music, education, the transmission of traditional Irish/Celtic/diasporic musics, and the arts and society.

Dr. Janice Waldron

Dr. Janice Waldron is an associate professor of music education at the University of Windsor, where she teaches music education and ethnomusicology courses. Dr. Waldron is an accomplished Irish traditional musician and recording artist on Irish flute, tin whistle, and uilleann pipes. She has taught at the Goderich Celtic College Summer School and performs regularly in the communities of Southern Ontario as both a soloist and as a member of the traditional Celtic band, “Traddicted.” Dr. Waldron’s research interests include informal music learning practices, online music communities, cyber ethnographic research methods, Irish, Old Time, and Bluegrass traditional musics, lifelong learning, and adult music education.
Dr. Sean Williams

Dr. Sean Williams is a professor of music, Asian studies, and Celtic studies at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. Her research interests include cultural studies, ethnomusicology, Celtic language, Indonesian language, literature (Indonesian, Irish), music, and world music. She teaches several courses exploring different facets of Irish studies.

Author Biography

Colin Harte is a Doctoral Fellow and Ph.D. candidate in Ethnomusicology at the University of Florida. He received his Master’s in Ethnomusicology from the University of Limerick. As a NYC Teaching Fellows, he received a Master’s in Education from CUNY-Lehman College while teaching band, general music and percussion ensemble at a Bronx, public middle school. As a pianist and bodhran percussionist, Colin Harte founded, manages and performs with the UF Irish Traditional Music Ensemble. He is also active as pianist in the Gainesville jazz and Brazilian musical communities.

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i An abbreviated form of this article was presented at the joint 2014 American Conference for Irish Studies and American Conference of Irish Studies and the Canadian Conference for Irish Studies/L’Association Canadienne d’Études Irlandaises Annual Meeting at University College Dublin, Ireland.

ii Irish traditional music will be defined as ‘the older dance music and song in Ireland, that is distinct from nineteenth century ‘national’, ‘popular’ and ‘parlour’ music’ (Vallely 1999, p. 401).

iii “In 1982, the American Conference for Irish Studies Guide identified 365 colleges and universities offering Irish studies courses or programs. By 1994, the number had grown to 454. Most colleges were sponsoring only small programs or single courses offered by an interested faculty member, but the numbers also included several comprehensive programs, such as those at Boston College, Catholic University, Notre Dame, and New York University, established in the 1970s, 1980s, or 1990s” (Meagher 2005, p. 270).


v My Irish traditional music experiences involved playing tunes in the house with family members while growing up and attending Irish traditional music concerts throughout my lifetime. I participated in weekly sessions with friends and fellow musicians in Albany, NY and performed with the professional, New York-based Irish traditional music ensemble, Nephin. I also attended the University of Limerick’s Irish World Academy of Music and Dance where I received my master’s in ethnomusicology.

vi Irish step dance can be defined as “a technical, solo performance genre, and although there exists a canon of ceili dances (group dances) performed by Irish step dancers, it predominantly has solo associations. Generally, Irish step dance is performed to Irish traditional dance music by either male or female dancers. The step dance performance ranges from informal to formal contexts, from informal to formal dress, from age groups of five to eighty, from improvisatory performances to set repertoires, and from spatially confined to theatrically lavish stage performances” (Foley 2001, 35).
A *ceili* band is defined as “a group of musicians organised together on a permanent, professional or ad hoc basis, in order to provide music for Irish social dancing and/or set dancing” (Vallely 1999, p. 60).

The *bodhran* is a large frame drum that is beaten with a wood sticks/beater/tipper to provide percussive accompaniment to Irish traditional tunes.

Lift is defined as a driving, infectious rhythmic quality that makes music highly danceable for its audience. Lift is created through a propulsive combination of phrasing, rhythm, ornamentation, note accent and interpretation (Kaul 2009, pg. 143).

Interviews were conducted from 2013-2014. It should be noted that one of the interviewees, Dr. James MacKillop, is neither a professor of music nor an Irish traditional musician.

Please see the Appendix: Short Biographies for more information regarding the interviewees.

The process of aural transmission for the aforementioned professors involved a combination of learning music by ear from fellow musicians, recordings, and live performances.

A session can be defined as an informal, communal gathering of musicians for the purpose of playing Irish traditional instrumental music (Williams 2010, p. 239).

It should be noted that the courses and ensembles offered by the interviewed professors in this study stemmed from a desire to provide novice university students with an introduction to Irish traditional music. These course offerings differ greatly from the Irish traditional music programs offered at the University of Limerick’s Irish World Academy of Music and Dance and at University College Cork, which seek to train, acculturated, accomplished Irish traditional musicians for a career in performance.

‘Traditional’ music refers to music that is part of an aural transmission process. It has been passed down from generation to generation and is not commonly written down or notated. The aural transmission process often results in multiple versions or variations of a particular song or tune. This method of transmission allows for the music to change continually and prevents the music from becoming static. Traditional music is usually associated with a specific cultural or geographical group of people.” (Frank 2014, p. 8)

John V. Kelleher (1916-2004) was a professor of Irish studies emeritus in the Department of Celtic Languages and Literatures at Harvard University, who was renowned for his expansive knowledge of all things Irish. He influenced two generations of Irish studies scholars who, in turn, developed programs throughout the United States of America (MacKillop 2012, pp.25-27).

A similar, burdensome course load was assigned to Dr. Fred Robinson, the founder of Celtic Studies at Harvard University in 1896. He was only permitted to spend one-third of his instructional time upon various Celtic languages (Irish, Welsh, Scottish-Gaelic, Manx, and Breton) (Blenner-Hassett 1954, pp. 8-9).

Dr. Emmett Larkin (1927-2012) was a former University of Chicago history professor whose academic career focused upon Irish history and the role of the Roman Catholic Church after the nineteenth century great potato famine. He also helped found the American Committee for Irish Studies as well (MacKillop 2012, pp. 9-13).

Dr. Lawrence McCaffrey is a Professor of History (Emeritus) at Loyola University of Chicago whose work examines Irish nationalism and the Irish diaspora in America. He was instrumental in founding the American Committee for Irish Studies (MacKillop 2012, pp. 9-13).

These programs were located at the University of Kansas, Indiana University, the College of William and Mary, and Cortland State amongst others. It is important to note that these initial programmes were not formed at schools that historically had large Irish American populations such as Boston College or Notre Dame (MacKillop 2012, p. 14-15).

Please note that music is not included as one of the subjects that formed early Irish studies programmes.

For a more detailed discussion that problematises the definition of folklore, see Dan Ben-Amos, 'Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context', The Journal of American Folklore, (1971), 84, 331: 3-15.

Early 78-rpm record companies were interested in capitalising upon musics from different immigrant communities with the hopes of selling these recordings to previously untapped, immigrant markets. Therefore, record companies openly encouraged local, immigrant musicians to record. Irish music had been recorded on wax cylinders as early as 1899 by the Edison company, however, the "golden era" of Irish 78 RPM recordings was from 1920-1930s, with a decline of interest in Irish recordings by record companies from 1942-1953. While over 40 companies released Irish music from 1899 to 1942, three major companies controlled the recording, marketing and distribution of Irish records, namely Columbia, Decca and Victor. Smaller record companies such as Copley Records or Keltic Records would seek out talented local musicians; record them; and then distribute the records through one of the main three aforementioned record labels (Dillane 2000, pp. 113-114).

Prior to the formation of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, in 1897, the Dublin Piper's club, in conjunction with the Gaelic League, had created a music festival featuring musical competitions for the uilleann pipes (the Irish bagpipes) and the harp (Fleming 2004, p. 231).

As of 2007, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann claimed 36,000 members in 400 branches located in fifteen countries on four continents (Kearney 2013, p. 75).

"Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann “has been largely sponsored by the Irish government and, through a combination of nationalist politics, music competitions, centralised bureaucracy, and grassroots activism, has played an important role in preserving and revitalising traditional music in Ireland" (Fleming 2004, p. 228).

Seán Ó Riada founded and directed the ensemble, Ceoltóirí Chualann, which combined native Irish instruments and Irish repertoire (drawn from the texts of Edward Bunting’s 1796 publication, The Ancient Music of Ireland and subsequent publications in 1809 and 1840, George Petrie’s 1855 publication for the Society for the Preservation and Publication of the Melodies of Ireland, as well as from living Irish musicians) with a modern ensemble formation and modern arrangements in order to present a new musical creation that drew upon both native, Irish musical culture and modernist, music concepts (White 1998, p138).

Historically, the study of musics of the world music refers to non-Western music or music of the other.

Institutional racism will be defined as "the structures, policies, practices, and norms resulting in differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society by "race." Institutionalised racism is normative, sometimes legalised, and often manifests as inherited disadvantage. It is structural, having been codified in our institutions of custom, practice, and law, so there need not be an identifiable perpetrator.” (Phyllis Jones 2002, p. 10).
Dr. Sean Williams has written an Irish Traditional Music textbook for higher education, entitled *Focus: Irish Traditional Music*.

Founded in 1968 in Dublin, Ireland, *Na Píobairí Uilleann* (The Society of Uilleann Pipers) is a non-profit cultural organisation with thousands of members worldwide that seeks to preserve and promote the music and culture of the uilleann pipes (*Na Píobairí Uilleann 2007*).