

Editors' Preface

The contents of this edition of **Ethnomusicology Ireland** clearly show this to be a period of vibrant research into the social and cultural aspects of music-making. Encouragingly, the *amount* of research being carried out these days is matched by the thematic and methodological diversity to be encountered, both at conferences and in fora such as this journal. In part, this activity is inevitably due to the ongoing development of institutional programmes in the disciplines of Music, Folklore, Irish Studies, Ethnomusicology and Sociology, both in Ireland and internationally. Academic, and particularly postgraduate courses, are building upon foundations laid down at Universities from Belfast to Cork a generation ago. However, the 'cultural turn' within the humanities has made music increasingly relevant to wider range of disciplines, and the discussion has likewise broadened to include new and diverse approaches. Whilst most research is inevitably based in third level institutions, academic programmes only flourish if the subject matter sufficiently catches the imagination of the non-academic population; the practicing musician, the deejay, music technician or owner of an independent record label, for example. The resulting debates may take place with the benefit of an academic attention to evidence, but are not, and never could be, divorced from the first hand experience of music-making in real life. Most, if not all, of the articles you will find in this edition are produced by individuals who came into research through their enthusiasm for music as practitioners. Such insight is essential for any sensitivity towards the roles that musics play in social life.

That said, the sphere that this journal occupies, (which mirrors that of its parent organisation, ICTM Ireland), is inclusive of quite different perspectives. From one direction we have the area that we might be generalised as the study of 'Irish Traditional Music and Dance'. This is itself a diverse field of research, which, as articles here demonstrate, extends much further than the island of Ireland itself, so considering an 'Irish Musicality' in all its inherent complexity. The local and temporal manifestation of a 'traditional' culture, the mechanisms of its reproduction, the 'business of its mediation, debates about identity, place and authenticity are core to research in this area. Such research does not simply analyse and define the shifting expression of Irish culture but often challenges earlier approaches, bringing critical perspectives from other disciplines and contexts to the debate. A number of articles in this edition (e.g. Mac Aoidh, Harte, Williams) are focussed precisely on the issue of transmission, learning and communication, and between them create a dialogue about issues that are valuable way beyond the area of Irish music in itself.

Scholars from, or based in, the island of Ireland have also played an important role in the emergence of Ethnomusicology as a global discipline (as is clearly evidenced by ICTM Ireland's recent CD publication). Ethnomusicology's original perspective was that an 'outsider's view' was the best way to approach a musical culture, without the fog of pre-existing assumptions blurring a researcher's vision. Consequently much 'Irish'

ethnomusicological research has taken place outside of Ireland, and until fairly recently the discipline has had less impact upon the study of local music than might have been expected. In this century, however, the ethnomusicological focus has shifted more towards research 'at home' whilst the importance of comparative analysis has remained central to the discipline. Ethnomusicology today is defined more by an ethnographic approach to research than the exotic nature of its field of study, as we observe in the contributions of Smith and Milosavljevic to this volume. Ethnomusicology, by looking both outside and inside our 'home culture' raises issues that should be important to all researchers into music. The contributions of Melish and Jones included here are elegant and detailed studies of other cultures that offer insights into music's key role in religious devotion and the formation of social identity, themes that have resonance far beyond any one location.

Ireland is possibly unique amongst ICTM's regions in that as much research is carried out into musics within the 'home area' as beyond it. This means that local members of the organisation have diverse specialisms and experiences that are of considerable value to one another, and which offers enormous potential for dialogue and critique. And increasingly, the technological dissemination of contemporary musical media has blurred disciplinary boundaries in provocative and interesting ways. O'Donnell's article, for example, shows how software provides a level of analysis that explains the barely perceptible nuances of intonation, and discusses the role of media in both the decline and revival of a musical tradition.

Annual conferences of ICTM Ireland include papers from such diverse disciplines as Popular Music Studies, Sound Studies, Cultural Studies, and Human Geography as well as the core fields I've already mentioned. Like the organisation itself, this journal seeks to represent the range of perspectives, subject matter and research approach that exist here and encourage further lively debate.

The editors would like to thank all the contributors to this volume for their insights, patience and perseverance. We are also indebted to the great work of our reviews editor and web designer, both of whose efforts have been invaluable. We are also grateful to our ever-widening web of reviewers – their critical insights and suggestions ensure that this is a journal of substantial quality – and to the Irish National Committee of ICTM for their support and encouragement.

Tony Langlois and Liz Doherty 2015