

# Ethnomusicology Ireland 6

## Editor's Preface

The world into which this sixth edition emerges is fundamentally altered from that of the last edition. The status quo, such as it was, has been radically disrupted, and there is little we can take for granted in 2020, including how we think about, engage with, and experience music. Human beings are in the middle of, or just emerging from, the most large-scale and extreme period of social isolation that we have ever experienced. We are only just able to speculate about the long-term effects that this will have on the way we understand and negotiate our everyday lives. We are also in the midst of an urgent confrontation with systemic racism and the social inequalities that exist across class, race, and gender, a confrontation that leaves me both hopeful about the opportunity for profound change and despondent over the risk of a return to complacency and silence. It is clear that there is a lot of work ahead, and that ethnomusicology in particular occupies an incredibly ambiguous position with regard to how this work might be done. We can only figure out how by listening to each other (and to marginalised voices MORE than other voices) and by making concrete plans, and I know that both ICTM Ireland and *Ethnomusicology Ireland* are committed to providing a space for those plans to be laid and realised.

The performances, stories, and ideas examined in the six articles and six reviews that comprise this edition are in a sense of a different era, an era before before the act of live music-making, not to mention the livelihoods of musicians, became endangered, and before we were rightly and finally challenging the basic structures of our discipline and the legacy of colonialism that continues to shape it. While the articles cannot speak directly to the important questions that will emerge over the coming years, they do attend to other relevant questions regarding music's role in our experience of humanity, from ethnicity and identity to natural disasters, from gender and genre to tradition and change.

We begin with a trenchant examination of music, sound and catastrophe in **Britta Sweers's** wide-ranging exploration of the sonorities (both natural and human-made) of storm tides in Northern Germany. Beginning with vivid descriptions of the soundscapes of these disastrous storms, Sweers articulates the strong connections between sound, memory, and trauma that persist in the minds of those who experienced them. Investigating the ties and discrepancies between these soundscapes and the musical and literary treatment of storms, she moves on to analyse the ways in which sound is used in the oral literary narrations that recount historic storm tides. The final section considers 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century responses to storm tides in popular music, examining quite different responses to storms. Sweers's combined analysis of soundscape, narration, and music demonstrates a nuanced and compelling approach to a topic that cannot be ignored.

We are also excited to include an article based on the excellent keynote given by **Lillis Ó Laoire** at the annual ICTM Ireland meeting in 2018, which asserts an important series of revisions to our understanding of gender in Irish traditional song. Following a brief account of the dominant strands of discourse surrounding gender in traditional music over the last twenty-five years, Ó Laoire steps back into the past and considers transgressive and divergent examples from a history that has long been boxed-in by heteronormative narratives. Using the practice of keening as a focal point, Ó Laoire asks us to reconsider and recontextualise traditional song in order to locate stronger ties between the past and a present in which rigid binaries are no longer desirable or sufficient. The article is a powerful reminder of music's transformative capacity, and of the necessity for thinking about musical history in a dynamic and critical way.

The next two articles speak to and with each other, exploring Irish traditional music scenes outside of the island of Ireland, and preoccupied by issues of circulation, identity, and authenticity. **Caetano Maschio Santos** provides a richly detailed ethnographic portrait of the Irish-Celtic music scene in Brazil, tracing its spread from the Celtic Tiger period up through more recent times. Relying on his own insider knowledge of the scene as well as interviews with key interlocutors, Santos looks at the scene in a number of virtual and physical sites. By tracing individuals and groups across cities in Brazil, Santos is able to demonstrate the diversity of motivations, influences, and practices that different musicians bring to the performance of Irish traditional music, and the varied meanings it is therefore capable of producing. In addition to calling attention to issues of authenticity and romanticism in a globalised borrowing such as this, this article is also a fascinating portrait of grassroots music-making from the ground.

**Felix Morgenstern** takes a more historical approach to his exploration of Irish traditional music in Germany as he examines the ways in which music both articulates and challenges constructions of ethnicity, nationalism, and identity. He begins by teasing apart the complex and problematic categories of German folk music and Irish traditional music, highlighting in particular their ties to nationalist ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He then explores the ways in which the affinities between the two were mobilised by German musicians in a post-war context in order to forge a replacement for the German folk that was so associated with Nazi-era connotations of racial superiority. Moving through the lens of Celticity, Morgenstern ultimately asserts the ways in which Irish music in Germany today has shed many of its ties to nationality altogether, operating through 'sonic' rather than 'ethnic' Irishness.

The next article is another consideration of an imported musical genre, but this time the topic is a genre brought *into* the Irish context, as **John Millar** considers some of the reasons behind the sustained popularity of country music in Ireland, particularly in the West and Northwest. He makes a strong argument for understanding social dances as a primary site of continuity for 'country and Irish' music, from the height of its popularity in the 1970s and 80s through a period of relative decline, and into its current resurgence. Using three ethnographic vignettes as a focal point, Millar describes the ways in which social dances today create and affirm the country music scene in a palpable and embodied sense which cannot be removed from the music itself. Here, he is less concerned with issues of authenticity and appropriation in terms of genre; instead, he paints a vivid picture of the integral role that dance plays in forging both musical and social realities.

We end with yet another variation on the theme of circulation – in this case the far-reaching effects caused by the cross-cultural movement of instruments. **Anaïs Verhulst** examines the impact of the adaptation of the Western violin to Karnatak music in South India through the close musical analysis of two specific contrasting performances of the same *krti*, or vocal composition. Her first example examines adaptation by focusing on how and why the violin was already well-suited for accompanying Karnatak vocal performance. The second example shifts its focus to the ways in which the instrument has pushed this classical tradition to transform, having impacted not only performance practice (through the introduction of purely instrumental performance), but also the formal and musical characteristics of the genre. Based on interview, fieldwork, and her own study of Karnatak playing, Verhulst offers a new perspective on our understanding of both the violin and South Indian classical music.

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