

Martin Hayes

reflection questions & episode transcript

In a typical year, Corrymeela’s meeting rooms — and dining and welcome areas — are filled with people discussing matters of politics, history and religion that have separated them. During this time of Covid, we are providing you with a transcript of each podcast episode, along with some discussion questions, to aid your consideration of the themes which emerge. You may wish to discuss these questions with friends, family, a group you establish on zoom, or use them for your own writing and consideration.

In group discussions at Corrymeela, we seek to locate political and religious points of view within the story of the person speaking. If you’re gathering as a group, consider how to create a sense of connectedness within the group. It might help to choose one of the [Very Short Story Questions](#). As with any group process, if you are talking about this episode with others, make sure to check that people feel safe enough, that the time is right for them, and make it easy for anyone who wishes to keep their considerations to themselves, or for anyone who doesn’t wish to join such a conversation.

1. A consistent feature in the conversation with Martin Hayes is the *place* of East County Clare. It’s the heartland of his music, his references, his artistic imagination and his vision. What are the places that shape or have shaped your sense of self? How do they influence your work, life, aspirations, and affiliations?
2. Martin speaks with great insight about how a group of musicians can connect through and create beautiful music even when tension or conflict exists between them. What are your thoughts about this? Have you ever experienced something similar in the context of your own personal/professional/community relationships?
3. Martin's commitment to his musical heritage seems to pose a gentle challenge to the idea of personal renown. He makes music to honour a tradition older than himself, accepting willingly that some of his own compositions might be credited to others. What does this highlight to you in terms of his — and your own — ambition, envy, competition and reputation?

Martin Hayes’ website is martinhayes.com His albums can be found online or in music shops or [directly from the store on his website](#).

Interview with Martin Hayes. Transcript.

Welcome to The Corrymeela Podcast, a series of interviews timed to coincide with this first year of Brexit, and the centenary of the partition of Ireland.

For this season of podcasts, I've been in conversation with guests who've brought rich and varied insights to aspects of Irishness and Britishness through the lenses of politics, the arts, history and theology.

This week, the final podcast in this season of 12, my guest is the internationally renowned fiddle player, Martin Hayes.

He's a giant in the traditional music world: Martin is one part of the Celtic supergroup The Gloaming, has won countless awards for his compositions and collaborations, and has played alongside artists like Sting, Paul Simon and Yo-Yo Ma.

Martin explains to me how the best music comes from the musician's heart, and also tells me about the unifying power of a melody:

“In Northern Ireland as well, it should be noted that both sides of the political divide played this music without thinking of it as a nationalistic music one way or the other”.

“I even encourage students in the early years of their journey to begin to access feeling and to allow themselves to do that and to begin to experience it and let it grow. And that the practice of that is every bit as important as the practice of figuring out the technical requirements needed to play your instrument or to play the particular piece of music”.

Hello, my name is Pádraig Ó Tuama, and you're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. With me today is the musician Martin Hayes, one of the world's most celebrated fiddle players and an influential figure in Irish music; with solo albums and collaborations with Dennis Cahill, with Triúr, with The Gloaming, with the most recognisable names in Irish music, and lately with the Martin Hayes Quartet. Martin, thanks very much for joining us.

Martin Hayes:

Thank you, Pádraig. Delighted to be here.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Where are you talking to us from today, Martin?

Martin Hayes:

I'm talking to you from Madrid. I've been living here for a number of years; my wife is Spanish, so. Just to give you some context or explanation for why that is, so there you go. And I'm right beside the Senate building here, and just a stone's throw away from the royal palace and the cloistered convent. See that makes it completely kind of a city Spanish experience.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Amazing. You were born in Feakle in East Clare to a musical family. And was it in the village of Feakle? Or was it even outside of that that you were born?

Martin Hayes:

So yeah, I was born in a small farm, on the side of a mountain with a fiddle playing father, and cows and cattle and donkeys and sheep and pigs and you know, one of those small farms that did everything when I was a child. In fact, the farm was run and managed using horsepower, at the time, you know, we cut hay with horses and did all kinds of things, so there was no tractor on the farm; it was very, very much like I got a glimpse of an older way of life growing up. Maybe by the time I was a teenager, and we were all in the EEC and whatnot, it seemed to change by then gradually, it became automated and more specialised and whatnot. But it was quite a mixed and rustic kind of experience in my earlier childhood.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Your father P.J. Hayes was a founder - or one of the founding members - of a céilí band. That he was involved in the farm, as well as being quite a renowned musician locally and around Ireland, did that kind of give an impression that music was something you did while you had other jobs to do too, rather than music as a way of professional life?

Martin Hayes:

Oh, yeah, I never dreamt of music as a professional life as a child, as even a teenager, even as a young adult, I actually didn't imagine this as a possibility. Like I didn't- so much so that I didn't even investigate the possibility; it was a foregone conclusion that there was no career here in this thing that I was doing. And so I just more or less fell into this accidentally, you know, and like, as a way of temporarily surviving. I think some years later, when I was living in Chicago, I started playing in pubs and clubs. And that gradually led me to go: you know, maybe, maybe this is what I do, maybe this would be the thing. Having said that, it was also be fair to say that music, nonetheless, was the central passion in my life; whether I was going to have a job or not, the job was gonna be something that facilitated other aspects of life and maybe facilitated my opportunities to actually play music. But I never intended to have a career in music.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I've been struck by how much attention you gave to music even as a teenager, like you'd won the All-Ireland was it six or seven times before the time you were 20? And you were learning a lot - I know from hearing

you talk elsewhere - you were learning a lot from people who came through the house and from parish gatherings where there was music, and so you were learning from people who were steeped in the tradition; ordinary people with their own jobs, their own farms, their own livelihoods in the parish, but nonetheless, who kind of embodied a phenomenal incarnation in the local music tradition in East Clare.

Martin Hayes:

Yeah, exactly. And the thing is, it's important to make the distinction here that there is no real musical distinction between a professional and a non-professional in this music form. Like, people who are dedicated to this can become very, very fine musicians; in fact, some of the finest musicians that have influenced me over my life were firemen, carpenters, farmers... Like Willie Clancy, like the famed piper like, he was a carpenter, he worked with his hands; Tommy Potts, my favourite fiddle player of all time, was a fireman and later a rent collector. And so the idea that there was a separate higher level of art found within the professional sphere didn't exist at all, you know. But it did make sense to my mind to be dedicated to something, irrespective of its financial reward, irrespective of anything like that. So I was quite taken with the old people, with these older musicians, with their subtlety of understanding around these things, and the passion and the heart and the feeling. So I, I fell right into that when I was a young teenager.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

D'you recently release a piece called- is it 'Maghera Mountain', that you had written as a teenager?

Martin Hayes:

Oh I did yeah, yeah, that was erm, that actually happened as a dare with my father. We went to some Fleadh Cheoil [*trans: Festival of Music*] and there was a great accordionist from Tipperary, his name was Paddy O'Brien, you know. And he had written many, many tunes. Like, he was a great musician, but he was also a great writer of tunes. And my father on the way home says: 'I'm amazed at Paddy O'Brien, just the amount of tunes he can write, and how well he has written them. It's incredible'. And I go: 'it's not that big a deal' you know? Like 'it's not that hard to write a tune' I say, you know, not having written any. And so then of course: 'well, where are your tunes?' was the next question. So I decided: OK, I gotta rectify this. So I sat down to write a tune, so that I could kind of, you know... so that anyway, like, a few weeks later, I played this tune for my father. And he wasn't that impressed by it. He didn't want to be impressed by it like, because this was a dare that was laid down, you know, it was much better if I would lose this one. I insisted, but then, on another evening, we were visiting Paddy Canny, my uncle- a very fine fiddle player. And I just snuck the tune out without saying anything. And he goes: 'my God, that's a lovely tune where did you get it?' And vindication!

So anyway, but as happens, you know, with those, with the music in this tradition, it's not like I ever registered the tune or anything like that. It actually got recorded many times before I ever recorded it and it got recorded under various different names. And many- I remember at a session hearing it come up and I said to somebody: 'where'd you get that tune?' And he says: 'oh, that's one of Conor Tully, Conor Tully's tunes'. I

was going like: not alone did he not know who had written it or the name of it, but he actually was quite sure that somebody else had written it! So anyway, it was just- but that's actually how the tradition works, because you contribute pieces of music to a larger pool of music and they're absorbed by the world at large and they pass to a few hands and all of a sudden, nobody owns them, nobody knows where they come from, and people start changing them little bit by bit and so they've- they take on a life all of their own, you know, so it's an interesting process, I think.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I wonder would you play 'Maghera Mountain' or a bit of it for us?

Martin Hayes:

I will try and play a little bit yeah, absolutely.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

It was written by a lovely fella from Tipperary!

Martin Hayes:

Yeah, exactly. Paddy O'Brien, I believe!

[music: 'The Maghera Mountain', written and performed by Martin Hayes]

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

That's such a beautiful piece of music, 'The Maghera Mountain'. I read on your website that you wrote that: 'A fundamental driving belief for me is that the local musical vernacular can be a universal language when fully embraced'. What is it about the local musical vernacular that intrigues you so much?

Martin Hayes:

The deeper you go into this thing, the more, the more it just goes directly into a world of feeling. And the further you pull back from it, and try to create like universal dressing on it, the more you seem to move away from its centre. And, like so it's feeling that's universal, it's heart that's universal, it's the deep feelings that drive music that are actually universal; so the closer you can get to those things, the more resonance these things have, I think, on a global scale, you know. Like, musicians, we get lost a lot in terms of, like, we get caught up in the techniques and the technical elements of all the things we do and there's a lot of admiration for it, a lot of enjoyment actually, just in seeing what people do, and hearing the way they do it.

But outside of our musical fraternity, that largely means nothing, you know. Like even to a great jazz musician, there's kind of complexities in scales and patterns that they play that is generally lost on people who are not like schooled in that. And so that- like music can be reached in that form, and yet actually be lacking in communicative powers, you know. And so the same- it happens in all music forms. Well, not all

music forms- like pop music just doesn't get caught in that trap cause it's actually intended to connect directly, you know - one way or another, whether superficially or deep - but it's never not about connecting. But in these other music forms, we get trapped very often in ways of seeing and experiencing these that prohibit us from really connecting, I think more deeply in a human level, you know?

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I know that you've said that, d'you know, you were taught earlier on that, you could have all the technical prowess, but if you weren't playing with feeling and for feeling that the technical prowess would fall away. Who taught you that? Did you pick that up or did somebody say that to you particularly?

Martin Hayes:

Well, yeah, that was kind of a general understanding among the musicians that I had known that it wasn't, it wasn't that they were opposed to technique or having all your technical capacities in place, but that if that was your focus entirely, you were still fundamentally missing what was going on in this music. And that if one of those things had to be missing, it'd be better to be missing technical proficiency, than to be missing genuine expressiveness and feeling. And, and so there's- you end up in a situation where you will have technical masters delivering something quite empty sometimes, and people who have a modest capacity on an instrument somehow managing to get to the heart of the matter. And I'm sure it's probably a similar experience in many art forms, you know, that you have that kind of discrepancy as it were, you know.

I mean, the best outcome of course, would be to be a complete technical virtuoso with lots of heart and feeling, I think that would be- that's the final goal. But, but not everybody can achieve that goal. And it's one of those things in a music form that's not necessarily considered to be like a professional performance - performance music in the normal sense - it's a kind of a music form of participation. And people can participate in this music. And I even encourage students in the early years of their journey to begin to access feeling and to allow themselves to do that and to begin to experience it and let it grow. And that the practice of that is every bit as important as the practice of figuring out the technical requirements needed to play your instrument or to play the particular piece of music. So just connecting yourself to feeling in a very innocent, very vulnerable, very naive kind of way- I think it's a good practice right from the beginning of your practice. So I tell students that in a certain sense, once you access that you've already hit the gold, because that's all it's about. So the rest of it can continue to improve, but all the time you are then actually playing music.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I've heard you a few times demonstrate what something that sounds like it's filled with great kind of decoration and flourishments and embellishments sounds like, and then something that has maybe more the plaintive note of the original melody with less decorations. I wonder, could you give us an example of that somehow to draw out the feeling that you're talking about?

Martin Hayes:

Yeah, I mean, I think what I'm talking about there is like when, you know, like fiddlers often play for other fiddlers - they may not admit that - and when they do that they like other fiddlers to be very impressed by the things which they can do. And so you would tend to like:

[Demonstration on the fiddle]

Martin Hayes:

You know whereas just the clean simple phrase is actually a much truer experience of music, (I gave you a very short sample there, unfortunately). But the point- like simplicity is something to embrace also, and it's something that you know, it's not hard to do, but it's hard to get yourself to do it like, it's hard to feel comfortable, and certain that you have value while you do the simple. And, and it's particularly difficult as a performer to actually sit on the stage sometimes and look out and see a lot of people in the audience who, you know, yeah, I guess they're sitting out there, and they could technically do what I'm doing, but they would feel very vulnerable doing it and are unlikely to do it on the other hand, you know. So it's just one of those kind of paradoxes, you know, like embracing the simplicity is, I think, a necessary part of the music that I do.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

So much whenever I hear you talk about music, and the idea of going into the plain style of the music and knowing what technical capacity is for, and knowing when not to be led by that, but to be led by something else; so much of that sounds to me like lessons for life, not just lessons for, you know, performance, or for playing in a musical troupe.

Martin Hayes:

Yeah, I think, I think it is a lesson for life. I mean I think one of the sad ironies is that I know all these things myself and I haven't applied all these lessons to my life. But music is a great little laboratory where I get to try out these things in a certain sense. And, and in a way, the proof is in the pudding really, you know, because like, it does generate the actual results one is looking for if communication is in fact your desired outcome here. In a way, going into the simplicity, going into the directness of it is like fundamental, you know.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

That phrase you use there: 'if communication is your desired outcome'. It's such an easy phrase, but I think it's an important thing to pick up. I think often in conflict even, communication is not the desired outcome - winning is, or not losing, or proving yourself - and I think the desire to communicate (and to be communicated back to) is actually strangely evasive, because it does require some kind of vulnerability.

Martin Hayes:

It does, like you kind of have to- vulnerability is a key element. And, and I think a desire to kind of commune, to connect, to open your heart out and feel that that openness of your heart is actually reaching others and their hearts are also opened in that sense, you know. Like, you know, I mean if one thinks about performance for a while that, you know, there are a lot of things you can achieve in the area of performance; I mean, maybe one is to impress, to disturb, to distract... There's all kinds of things one could imagine doing, but I definitely have chosen (because of the nature of the music and 'cause of what I've thought and how I experience it) that the heart feeling of the music is something I want to have exist in the room in the moment when I do it, and that I want others to experience it, know it, share it, feel it, you know? So then life is relatively simple when you kind of finally narrow it down to that, you know.

Corrymeela is Ireland's oldest peace and reconciliation organisation. Working with thousands of people a year, Corrymeela supports groups to deepen inclusion, peace and belonging.

This is the final episode of the first season of The Corrymeela Podcast. We've been delighted to bring these conversations to you, from our kitchen table to yours, in this important year.

If you had three or four minutes to give us some feedback, we'd be grateful. We have a feedback form, and you can find it - as well as the transcript and discussion questions for this episode - on corrymeela.org/podcast or linked through the show notes in your podcast app.

OK, back to the interview.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

You're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast and I'm Pádraig Ó Tuama. With me today is the musician Martin Hayes, whose solo work, collaboration work with Triúr, The Gloaming, the Martin Hayes Quartet and others have won him Irish and international renown over decades.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Martin, obviously, this is The Corrymeela Podcast, and for 2021 we're especially interested in thinking about Britishness and Irishness; you know, it's the centenary of partition, it's Brexit year, and I'd like to talk to you about music from different regions across Britain and Ireland. And I would get the impression from you - although I haven't heard you talk about it - that in the kind of political narrative of Britain and Ireland as these two monoliths, that actually you would see it on a much more regional level in terms of East Clare or the Aran Islands or Donegal or the Glens of Antrim or Dingle or Hebridean music or Arcadian or Cumbria or Cornwall, or Welsh or Shetlandic. You know, could you talk about the musical traditions that you know of from across kind of parochial and small regional levels across these islands?

Martin Hayes:

Well, you kind of said it all there like, I mean it was an interesting way to say it, like [to] mention regions in Ireland and regions in the UK, and not fundamentally make a distinction. And yet there is a distinction between all of them- there is as much distinction between Clare and Donegal as there is between Clare and Northumbria; there are as many tunes from Newcastle in the repertoire of Clare fiddle players as there are from Donegal. It's a very interesting kind of thing and I mean, I think in Northern Ireland as well, it should be noted like that both sides of the political divide played this music without thinking of it as a nationalistic music one way or the other. And it has always been important for me to, you know, understand that primarily, this is music. And it is music, that is - because of its nature and relative simplicity - is easily connected to one's heart and one's fundamental, you know, being. So I think that the music of the British Isles - now there is a very controversial way to actually put it - but like, let's just for the sake of (we can call it the Irish Isles, if you like) but either way, it's a- there's a direct connection; and as you go back into the older music, you can, like when you scale back the melodies, you can see that, yeah, it's one music actually, you know, like, it's just not that different. Like, if you boil it back to the direct melody, there's not huge differences.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Could you give us an example?

Martin Hayes:

I don't know if I could- well, like, for example, like I've been out like playing this tune- I've recorded it many times:

[Demonstration on the fiddle]

Martin Hayes:

Now, that sounds like something from West Clare. It sounds like it's got a crying sound to it. But it's also a Morris dance tune. And it's also a mummery's tune from the south east of Ireland. And so I think, like, the kinds of people and the kinds of experience they have, when they put these tunes in their hands, certainly something different happens. There's a melancholic experience in the west of Ireland that's more distinct and more obvious than you would hear in English folk music, for example. So the melancholia of music was very attractive to the old players that I knew. And I wouldn't be surprised if the famine didn't in fact drive some of that, you know, and the landscape and the- maybe the harshness and challenges of life itself would have made people kind of wallow in their own melancholia and sadness in some ways. And what's interesting about it is that melancholia is something that allows us to access our heart quite easily. Now it might sound like a negative and a dark thing, but once you access your heart, it's irrelevant what it was that got you there; your heart actually opens up, you know. So sometimes the melancholic music- people think of it being sad whereas like, my feeling was actually kind of euphoric in a way, when we actually touched that, when we really touched upon that and it got into you, you know, there was kind of like uplifting in some strange way,

you know, or as if, as if that melancholia itself was suddenly transformed into something euphoric and joyful, you know.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I mean, as I think of reconciliation and peace and Troubles and conflict and murder and colonisation and dispossession and revenge, and all of these things, they're all subjects to do with melancholia. But it strikes me that as a musician who has worked in melancholia and lament for a very long time that you've thought about these in ways that other people haven't, in the sense of that you're saying: if it gets you to the heart, it's not such a bad thing.

Martin Hayes:

Exactly. I mean, I think, you know, one [of the] things that we forget is that children and young teenagers have lots of tragic experience in their relative world, let's say, you know, and lots to feel traumatised by and lots of angst and stuff like that. So I had no problem as a young teenager accessing this melancholic world and was drawn to music that had that; I still am, you know- I look for the slow movements in classical music, I look for the ballads in jazz; I still do, you know, I am drawn to that side of music very strongly. And I would consider it the most meaningful and deep part of music. But it's not that I'm looking for sadness, I'm looking to get to the bloody root of the thing, you know, and a sense when you, when you actually experience that then, like you're sitting there with tears of joy like, as it were, you're kind of- you transform it, you use the energy of that and it becomes something beautiful or something like that. It's hard for me to explain it, but...

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

You're explaining it beautifully. I mean, am I hearing you saying that from some of the West Clare music, that the laments would have kind of longer rolling drawn out phrases of music that are elongated for maybe the sound of a sigh?

Martin Hayes:

Exactly, I mean, it would be kind of like a bent note:

[Demonstration on the fiddle]

Martin Hayes:

You know, so like, those notes are kind of like keening, you know, which was like used in the funerals in the waking of people and stuff, and the Sean-nós itself is just full of it, you know, particularly in Connemara. Like, it's in the piping, it's as if the pipes are built to make those sound[s], like a pipe doesn't go *[mimics pipe music]*. Like it's not a clear definitive note as we see it on a page as a dot, you know, it's more like a smudge. So the relationship with music like that, where we're bending and, and kind of looking for emotion just inside one note itself. As if there's a story in the note itself.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Are there instances of music or pieces of tradition of laments about Britishness and Irishness? Maybe those are collected in ballads about, you know, an Irish girl marrying an English boy or something, or are there other particular things that you can think of that speak of that?

Martin Hayes:

It's hard to know because one of the things that happened with melodies in Ireland is that they acquire new lyrics almost constantly, and they keep mutating and moving around. So like, so the more abstract melodic expression is kind of lost in terms of that description, in terms of being specifically about one thing or another. Like I could play- there's an Air I play, and it was kind of- there's a song about these people who died during the War of Independence: the Killaloe martyrs. But it's also a song like further over the road about hurling lore and about Tommy Daly and great hurling history in County Clare (equally sad, I should say, but anyway...) So like to draw a specific literal historic meaning in relation to a melody is quite difficult, because the melody is used to underlay the feeling of the words, like to be harmonious with the feeling of the words, you know? Like you don't want to sing something about the Killaloe martyrs with the Air of *Raindrops are Falling on my Head* or something, d'you know what I mean? Like, suddenly, that doesn't make any sense. So they look for the appropriate melody that reflects the feeling required by the lyrics, I think.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

That's so interesting. Are there specifics of things that you can highlight in terms of, say, Hebridean music or Shetland music or Cornish music that you think are quite distinctive that are beneficial to hear?

Martin Hayes:

Well, d'you know, this will sound strange, but I've avoided my interaction with all other Celtic forms of music: I've restricted myself, I play none; it almost feels like it's incest, as if I was crossing a line here, where these things shouldn't interbreed, because if they interbreed, they will become one.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Aha.

Martin Hayes:

And so I leave it- I leave it to them, and I leave the Kerry music to the Kerry people. And the Donegal music to the Donegal people. I mean, I'm influenced by those things, for sure. And they give me certain licence and certain understanding. But on a fundamental level, I like to say: you know, I'll just do this Clare thing, because you know what, it's like found art, it's like it was what was on my doorstep. It's like the universe in a small space, you know, an entire universe of music inside one parish.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

That's fascinating. I mean, when I think of Irish music, I used to always just think of Irish music as Irish music. And then I was at an event a few years ago- in fact, it was the last event that Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin was performing at, an extraordinary event in the national concert hall. And in the notes for the concert, it spoke about the baroque influences in certain periods of Irish music. I mean, I haven't studied music, but it had never occurred to me, but then suddenly listening to the way that it was performed, I heard all of these pieces of baroque in Turlough O'Carolan (the blind harpist) and other things...

Martin Hayes:

Yeah, in fact, if you were to compare the early harp music - the 1600s and stuff like that - with the French music of the time, you would say: wow, they're actually not that far apart here like, you know- we're on similar trajectories here. The one thing that's missing is that different lines of harmony were never actually transcribed; to the degree that they existed or didn't exist we can just draw some conclusions from what has happened in other countries in Western Europe. But it is fair to say that there's a likelihood, had there been a different history, that some of the music that we know as harp music would have ended up as being a larger constructed music had there been a kind of support system for that at the time. But having said that, we're left with the fundamental element, which is melody. And because nothing is written and because it didn't fall under an orthodoxy, it has left us with lines of melody and freedom. So now I sit around playing these tunes like, you know, maybe in a jazz ensemble, or a classical music environment or something like that, but I'm dealing with a core musical element - a line of melody - and great freedom to experiment and play around with that, because what other restrictions may have been with it in history had history been different just simply doesn't exist. And so, you know. Off we go!

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I heard you once say that, you know, in Irish traditional music, it does take a line of simple melody, and then it plays back and it plays back and then it introduced some pieces of variety, until the melody itself is varied totally and then maybe it comes back again to the original melody. What is it about that? I mean even in the conversation here, you've spoken about the relative simplicity of that.

Martin Hayes:

Well, like if a painter was to paint simply in black and white, they would find degrees of greyness and blackness and subtleties within, that would be lost if one just simply existed with all of the colours, so like having to focus on that would bring you into a different realm. Focusing on a line of melody in the absence of harmony brings you to a different level of understanding and engagement with melody. And a very subtle one- this is something I recognised from the old fiddle players and stuff was that, like, they just would see one note as being slightly more important than the other in this thing. And then they would shade that note in very subtle ways to bring out its kind of quality, and then the leadup to that note was very important and you could come with different, slightly different leadups to that point. So they had a very subtle understanding of melody. And yet, if a guitar, a piano or anything played alongside them, they were unaware of what was

happening; they almost were blind to the harmony, like to mix our metaphors here. But they literally couldn't hear it. And they didn't hear it. But the guitar player rarely heard the subtlety of the melody, either.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Could you give us an example of a line of melody that could be open to all kinds of different small modifications to build up a whole kind of tune around that melody?

Martin Hayes:

OK, let's see if I- if I look at the Star of Munster for example, like this, like if you walk into a pub and you hear a session:

[music: 'The Star of Munster' (traditional) performed by Martin Hayes]

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Beautiful. Like, in the context of conflict resolution, often what you're hoping for is that people can talk to and listen to each other - a communication - rather than: 'I say what I'm saying and while I'm saying what I'm saying you're waiting to interrupt to say what you want to say', which is contradictory to that, and often it can be seen like overlapping monologues rather than a conversation or a dialogue. And it strikes me that what you're doing in listening to a melody, and listening to that over the course of decades, and allowing yourself to sink deeper and deeper into all that's implied in that, is a profound form of listening.

Martin Hayes:

Yes, in fact, listening- it is a profound form of listening. And when you play with others, listening is the key element (of course, one has to listen to oneself). But for effective playing with others, your listening needs to be more than 50% to the other. You really need to be hearing every nuance of what the other person is playing. And you need to be feeling it, what's more; it's not enough to just hear, you need to actually be understanding the idea being expressed. And somehow there is some kind of magic that happens where there's a simultaneous kind of coming together, like a large kind of cloud of understanding that we're just simply in together, you know.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Do you think that if a group of traditional musicians are playing in a session, and if they have been in a place of deep distrust with each other as a group of musicians, do you think that comes out through the music; d'you think that the music and the relationship between the musicians has some kind of corresponding nature to it?

Martin Hayes:

No, quite the opposite actually. What can happen is these people can hate each other. And, and they can actually find each other's hearts in a piece of music. And can actually be fully trusting and communicative to

each other in the music form. I say this because I've experienced that- like where a band is not getting along, and then suddenly, we sit and play music and there's actually shared love and communication in that moment. Because the music is probably that important to all of us in the end of the day. And so it's possible like, you will see this with bands like, where, where they don't even hang out afterwards, you know.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

You know, if a band have been in a state of deep distrust, then they pick up their instruments, and they take part in that magic, that draíocht together, like do they pick up their weapons towards each other again afterwards?

Martin Hayes:

Well, you know, within reason like, I mean, I'm not talking about outright warfare or anything like that, because obviously, nothing would withstand that. But you can have a situation where there isn't actually deep human communication on a personal level between musicians. But in music, there is a very deep communication. And so I've had that experience for sure, where people's hearts are suddenly seen. And that's what I found interesting about the old musicians at Clare was, I could see their heart. And other than that I could have thought they were kind of shut down hardened human beings, who just kind of, you know, beat cattle into a pen one morning, you know. But, actually, they were the same people that had this lonesome sweetness and delicacy in their hearts as well, it's just, you know, there was kind of a disconnect there in some ways. And it's one of those things; the other thing is like, while some musicians can be complete assholes and make divine music - and never be mistaken, they are not necessarily angels or nice human beings - but in the process of music, they've been able to access that deeper part of who they are, 'cause there are some very unpleasant musicians who can reach very profound depths as musicians.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

And what I'm hearing you say is that that doesn't mean that there's hypocrisy in the music, that actually the music is accessing a deep truth, rather than...

Martin Hayes:

That's correct. It's the other way around like, yeah: there's a deeper truth in the music than almost anything in that sense, I suppose. So, in the process of making music, one can for certain [be] sure that that human being - if they're a good musician - is actually being real, because it is about being real. And if you're hiding and ducking and dodging and not being real, your music has no power. It doesn't... it doesn't move far from you, like, it doesn't reach out and touch other human beings. Like it's only when it has the, the drive and power of its sincerity behind it, can it actually connect. I mean, that could be my theory on the other hand, you know, like, some of the lowest grade boy band pop music seems to connect as well, but I find that that's a different kind of connection you know, than the one I'm looking for.

[Brief musical excerpt]

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

You're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast and I'm Pádraig Ó Tuama. With me today is the musician Martin Hayes. Martin, I'm always struck when you speak about your homeplace, that you don't just say Munster, you don't say County Clare, you say East Clare. And it's not only the county, it's the particular area within the county, and even the village as well; and a period of your life, too- those very formative years from seven on upwards when you were playing and listening and being taught, there is so much about that time that I think is enormously formative for every person. Are there melodies that you have worked with since a young age that you might have heard even before you could pick up the fiddle yourself, that you continue to come back to as a meditation or as a listening?

Martin Hayes:

They are working their way through my music the whole time, like continuously, right up to the last performance I did. These melodies are baked in, and they kind of have had many lives within me. And so they regurgitate as new and different things every ten years, and so they're, they're constantly being worked and reworked, worked and reworked over and over. And the thing is, if they've been with you long enough, they're actually baked into your physicality, into your nervous system, into your body as it were, you know- they're familiar things within you. My dad and my uncle had recorded this tune back in 1958, or something like that. And I would have learned this early on and played with my father- played with everybody.

[Demonstration on the fiddle]

Martin Hayes:

And so recently, you know, I would have changed keys, I would have made variations and stuff. So suddenly, that becomes:

[Demonstration on the fiddle]

Martin Hayes:

And so, the last performance I did of that was with a great young jazz pianist from Cork. And so he was able to take that then, and then I was able to kind of come back and play older versions of it and impressions of the tune underneath it. And largely, I could do that because the thing is in my bones for so long, you know- I have familiarity with it from so many angles at this stage that, you know, the tune just has lots of possibilities for me now.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Years ago, when I was getting training in chaplaincy, one of the things that I was taught was that anybody in grief needs to tell their story of grief, until they don't need to tell it anymore. And that might be a month, or a decade, or a lifetime, depending as to what the grief is. And as I think of, you know, the griefs and joys of a

local area - like you're talking about in East Clare - that in the melodies somehow, even without words, there's the stories that continue to repeat themselves to tell ourselves back to ourselves in what you're doing. Do you find a sense of connection with identity, that's less political, but more local?

Martin Hayes:

I do, actually. Like there's a kind of heroic quality to these musicians. There's an unspoken, unrecognised depth and beauty and need for acknowledgement, even historically back over time. Like to kind of recognise the depth of the beauty they were carrying, to champion it, to respect it, to offer them the praise that was missing and so well-deserved and needed; the human acknowledgement, the depth of their souls, all of that - that feels important to me that that continues on on some level.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

And d'you think caught up in some of that music is the sadness that some of the people who wrote the tunes knew that they wouldn't be recognised, and that there is the sense of lament in it?

Martin Hayes:

Well, I think the sadness might be ours, because like they were able to do without that concern, it seems, and they were able to go there for the sake of the thing itself. Now, in truth, they were like a secret society, because among themselves, they could recognise and acknowledge each other. Tommy Potts, the great Dublin fiddle player, used to come to Clare at least once a year, and his only mission was to go to three or four houses that were very sympathetic and empathic to what it was he was about. And he would go to the house of Seán Reid, Peadar O'Loughlin, Paddy Canny, and my father. And he would play for us every night. Just him unaccompanied, nobody else playing even though he was in the house of other musicians; we would hear him, we would recognise him, we would feel him. And he would go back to Dublin, satisfied with just a handful of people getting what he did. I mean, if you write a poem, if five people deeply get it, it is satisfying, even if the rest of the world misunderstands it or ignores it. And when I made my first solo album, I wrote the names of six or seven fiddle players on the back of it that it was dedicated to. And my intention with this album was that it was actually for them. And if they accepted and enjoyed and experienced it, I didn't care if another human being ever listened. And I was fine.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I'm struck with the names of the people that you're mentioning that lots of them - in fact, most of them or all of them - are men. Is there something about this music and Irish masculinity of a particular era that... Do you have thoughts about that?

Martin Hayes:

I do, except that the masculinity in this sense was actually - what I was finding was femininity in this, like I was finding their feminine qualities, as it turns out. The kind of qualities that wouldn't be expressed anywhere else in any other time. And so it was as if that feminine side of that male personality was suddenly alive in

these experiences. Now, having said that, I mean, my favourite musical colleague like that I grew up with that I had the most empathy [with] was a woman, but she was just my own age, her name was Mary McNamara. And the two of us kind of had a soul connection when it came to music, as if we deeply, deeply understood each other - which we did - and that was my first music collaboration and sense of communication with somebody else, you know, outside of family. And, and in other parts of the county, there were, of course, very fine women musicians- my own grandmother (who I didn't really know) was a concertina player as well. But, you know, there were people like Aggie White and other great women musicians, but they were absolutely a minority. And there were very few of them. So the musicians I'm talking about are simply the ones that I knew, you know, it wasn't like I was ignoring the women to find the men. I didn't have any choice, you know?

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Martin Hayes, thank you very much for your music and your thoughts, and your insight into how music and community and identity come together.

Martin Hayes:

Thank you, Pádraig. I have enjoyed it very much.

My guest this week was the brilliant musician Martin Hayes. Be sure to listen right to the end when Martin tells us about feeling stateless in the States. Martin was the final guest for our first season of The Corrymeela Podcast.

I've enjoyed talking to all my guests, each of whom have brought something fresh and unique to the questions of identity, Britishness, Irishness, theology, our shared histories, and artistry. Our deep honour and thanks goes to all the guests:

Mary McAleese, Gail McConnell, Johnston McMaster, Anthony Reddie, Claire Mitchell, The Edge, Christine Bell, Eburn Joseph, Peter Sheridan, Michael Davies, Lia Shimada, and Martin Hayes.

We have a feedback form on our website or in the show notes for you to give us any thoughts, and we'd be delighted to get that from you.

We want to thank our funders: the Henry Luce Foundation, the Fund for Reconciliation of the Irish Government, the Community Relations Council of Northern Ireland, and the support of the friends of Corrymeela who give annually or monthly. Enormous thanks to the brilliant researcher and producer Emily Rawling, the magnificent producer at FanFán, and Fra Sands of Safe Place Studios. And of course, huge thanks to *you*- everyone who has listened and been in touch.

I'm Pádraig Ó Tuama, and this has been the first season of The Corrymeela Podcast. Goodbye.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Martin, tell us about a time when your national identity felt important to you.

Martin Hayes:

I think my national identity felt important to me as a kid, when I was like engaging with traditional Irish music and very much in the culture, and my instincts all round were utterly conservative because it was about the conservation; it was about the preservation, it was about identity and it was all of those things in the early formative years of my music.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

And could you tell us about a time when you felt foreign?

Martin Hayes:

I ended up in America without a Green Card, and that certainly makes you quite foreign. In fact, I existed in a kind of a stateless state for a long time, for many years in fact, and kind of learned to exist outside of the safety of any national government or security or anything like that. So I felt like a global citizen.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

I'm so struck by, you know, as you think about the other Celtic musics from around the place, I'm so struck by your admiration and recognition of those, but also your recognition of the borders between yours and them. And out of courtesy, it seems to me, you're not interested in appropriating something and you're interested in being rooted locally. Could you say more about why that's so important?

Martin Hayes:

Well I think, first of all, you're carrying a certain kind of weight of your ancestors with you, in some ways. And so I've just kind of collected a bunch of people around Clare and a few other scattered locations ... where I feel that deep conviction of carrying forward their story in a sense, and so I feel it is others' responsibilities to do that for their ancestors, for their people, for those who they feel deeply about, that you know, I shouldn't really, I don't need to champion them. I shouldn't actually, it would be kind of wrong, almost.

Transcription by FanFán Ltd.