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Special Issue: Women and Traditional/Folk Music

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Editors' Preface

This special issue of *Ethnomusicology Ireland: Women and Traditional/Folk Music* is the published proceedings of the 2019 "Women and Traditional | Folk Music" research symposium hosted by Comhrá Ceoil, at the Centre for Irish Studies, NUI Galway, in partnership with FairPlé. Both the symposium and this special issue are efforts to address the historical deficit of discourse and published research in the area of women and traditional/folk music. Contributors to the original symposium included practitioners, academics and practitioner-academics and in this issue, we continue that variety of voices. To that end, contributions range from reflective pieces to records of women musicians' practice, to critical and investigative articles. All share the same goal: to document, expand and reflect on the experience of women in the world(s) of folk and traditional music.

Ní Fhuartháin provides a rationale and context for both the above-mentioned symposium and the resulting hereunder proceedings. **Slominski**, keynote speaker at the symposium, interrogates the embedded metaphor "tradition bearing" and in particular its effects on discourses of gender and sexuality in Irish traditional music. A number of contributions give expression to previously unheard stories and hidden voices. Through a thematic analysis of 121 questionnaire responses, **Monaghan** evidences how gender affects participation in Irish traditional music. Amplifying these collective voices leaves the reader with stark questions about contemporary Irish traditional music practice. **DeLapp Birkett** examines American folk music by Shaker women and girls, in particular the manuscripts of Ann Maria Love, alongside a detailed description of the role of women and music-making in Shaker communities during the nineteenth century.

The consistent absence of women musicians in narratives, sounds and texts of traditional and folk musics emerges in a number of contributions. **Commins**, examining the exclusion of women in Irish traditional music texts and collections, and **Cattaneo** explaining the erasure of women flamenco guitarists, both reveal complex dichotomies between musical practice and the telling of that practice. In each case, authors demonstrate evidence of women's musical practice and the historical erasure in the process of narration or documentation. **Fons** and **Streit** explore women musicians as innovators, discussing Nóirín Ní Riain and Ilse de Ziah, respectively. In Ní Riain's case, this is within the sacred space and Streit's consideration of cellist de Ziah's practice spotlights the relatively new role of cello in the material culture of Irish traditional music. Innovation is also central to **Cusack**'s discussion. Irish traditional music underwent a dramatic process of globalisation in the 1990s, driven significantly by *Riverdance* and other dance shows, but also a broader concert tour scene. Cusack analyses the consequences for women musicians, who were front and centre on the concert stage, and reveals challenges faced by women musicians in that performance domain.

Ní Shíocháin and **Thompson** provide a new reading of gendered practices associated with the domestic space and interrogate the way they have previously been evaluated. Through textual analysis of several Irish traditional lullabies, Thompson considers diverse and ambiguous narrator identities, broadening perceptions of the caregiver, moving the lullaby beyond strict associations with single-gender and maternal caregiving. Ní Shíocháin considers the creative practices of female musicians and singers before the widespread growth of the professional sphere through a renewed exploration of creative practices associated with two iconic female performers, Elizabeth (Bess) Cronin and (Mrs) Elizabeth Crotty.

Further emphasising the importance of singing in the experience of women in folk and traditional music practice, **Ryan** presents personal observations and responses to her experience as a practitioner, through her song “Unheard”. In the final article of this volume, **Casey** interrogates her own practice and explores the intersection of performance and activism through the lens of her lived experience of song and singing.

The special issue editors would like to thank all contributors to this volume, the external referees and indeed the general editors of *Ethnomusicology Ireland* for their openness to publish this special issue.

Verena Commins, Síle Denvir, Úna Monaghan and Méabh Ní Fhuartháin
March 2021

Women and traditional/folk music: Building a research field

Méabh Ní Fhuartháin

Abstract

This introductory article offers a brief overview of the context and rationale leading to the publication of the special issue of *Ethnomusicology Ireland* with Women and Traditional/Folk Music as its theme. It situates this volume as a response to international and national movements of equality and change. Finally, it offers a summary literature review of available scholarship on the specific theme of Women and Irish Traditional/Folk Music, acknowledging the significant contribution of this issue to that field.

Keywords: Women, traditional music, folk music, research

Introduction

Recent social action movements in Ireland and elsewhere draw stark attention to matters of (in)equality in the public sphere. In particular, inequality in sites of cultural production and the workplace are central to that reckoning. Responding to these initiatives, this special issue of *Ethnomusicology Ireland* is built on the theme of "Women and traditional/folk music". It gathers together proceedings from a research symposium of the same name hosted by Comhrá Ceoil (the music research network at National University of Ireland Galway) in response to and in partnership with FairPlé. This introductory article provides context to that research event and a brief survey of the research field of women and traditional/folk music, with particular reference to an Irish framework.

National and international contexts

The centenary celebrations of the 1916 Rising in Ireland presented an opportunity, or more correctly, laid bare the necessity, to recalibrate contributions of those outside received hagiographies of nation building and identity making. In particular, almost one hundred years on from suffrage, the role of women, a role typically and historically occluded from sanctioned histories, was reassessed. The significance of Ireland's centenary celebrations should not be underestimated in this regard, forcing and facilitating in equal measures reconsiderations of identity, nation and (in)equality. Commemorative celebrations are necessarily reflective of the past, the present and what has taken place in between. In Ireland in the run up to 2016 "critical debates on Irish history and where the nation is headed next" took place (O'Toole 2017: 134) coming at the tail end of years of harsh fiscal austerity. There was a coincidental intersection of Ireland's own commemorative (reflexive) period and revitalised equality and feminist movements transnationally (Cochrane 2013). In addition, within Ireland, the successfully passed Marriage Equality referendum in 2015, meant that the

language of equality and inclusion was pre-animated in public discourse, creating, at the very least, a possibility for forging change.

Chief among the activist responses in Ireland to historical and continuing structures of exclusion in the area of cultural production was Waking the Feminists (WTF), a "grassroots campaign calling for equality for women across the Irish theatre sector that ran from November 2015 to November 2016" (Waking the Feminists, 2019: web source). Initiated as the online hashtag #WakingtheFeminists in reaction to the publication of the Abbey Theatre's 2015 *Waking the Nation* centenary programme of events, the planned programme evoked a swift and robust response from women (and many men) in Irish theatre and beyond. As devised, the national theatre's Waking the Nation programme included plays by lions of Irish theatre (Sean O'Casey and Frank McGuinness) and contemporary dramatists (Sean P. Summers, for example); remarkably, though not unsurprisingly, of twenty writers and directors listed on the programme only two were women. The intense and immediate reaction coalesced into WTF, a one year campaign which declared as its mission to demand "sustained policies in achieving female inclusion in the arts, equal championing of female artists by Irish arts institutions, and economic parity for women working in the sector" (O'Toole 2017: 138). The very public success of WTF functioned as a template of possibilities in other cognate areas. As O'Toole notes, "the questions raised by WTF are important not only for women in Irish theatre, but for many feminist movements struggling to change patriarchal national and political narratives" (136).

In the cultural field of music, Sounding the Feminists (STF) held its first public meeting in 2017 as a response to the lack of female composers in the national *Composing the Island: A Century of Music* in Ireland concert series announcement in 2016 (another in the commemorative cultural cycle and similar in its deficiencies to the Waking the Nation programme). A sister movement to Waking the Feminists in Ireland, STF declared its purpose to promote and publicise "the creative work of female musicians" (Sounding the Feminists 2019: web source). Other music practitioner-focused organisations and initiatives were also established during this period including Mnásome "celebrating badass women in music" (Mnásome 2020: web source), the Gash Collective, Girls Rock Dublin, She Said So Dublin and most recently, The X Collective (Hayden 2020) and We've Only Just Begun (Smither 2020). These networks share a common interest in providing and advocating for increased support and opportunities for women in music across a range of genre territories and roles.

It is in this wider national and international context that the genesis of FairPlé is rooted; a grassroots organisation seeking equality in the world of traditional and folk music. Established in 2018, FairPlé is part of a broader insistence by individuals, networks and organisations, in Irish and transnational contexts, to address inequalities of participation, representation and reward in public life and private music-making domains. Similar to its sororal campaigns, it emerged in a moment of frustrating clarity in early 2018. Singer Karan Casey, a long established, successful performer in the Irish folk-traditional music world, found herself once again on stage in a woman-free zone (barring her own company) (see Casey in this issue). A subsequent call to gather, discuss and address the realities of gender disparity in traditional and folk music provoked a modest response, but gained currency as the campaign sought to identify obstacles to gender equality, propose solutions to those structural barriers and demand inclusion. Discussion days, workshops, professional development seminars and a "Day of action" followed suit (O'Halloran 2018).

FairPlé in name encompasses a number of layered meanings: the expression "fair play" to indicate all that is being asked for is a level playing field, but aligned to that is the Hiberno-English understanding of the expression, "fair play", an encouraging salutation indicating a job well done. Phonetically denoting "play" as "plé" ("to discuss" in the Irish language), adds yet another layer of meaning, proposing an open discursive forum, a conversation to which all, in principle, are invited. Having broadly parallel

goals to WTF, FairPlé's aims set out "to achieve gender balance in the production, performance, promotion, and development of Irish traditional and folk music" (FairPlé 2019: web source) and its work extended well beyond its planned one-year strategic deadline. In conception and structural delivery, FairPlé is practitioner-focused, drawing attention to inequalities from performance to production, providing fora in which those experiences of inequality may be heard and developing pillars of support to counter those patterns of inequality.

Research symposium: Building a research field

These discussions, in theatre making and music making, in Ireland and elsewhere, warranted a coherent contemporaneous response within academia, hence the research symposium "Women and Traditional | Folk Music" was devised.[1] The organising committee (the co-editors of this issue) published an open call to academics, practitioners, researchers, archivists and listeners to contribute to the conversation. The thorny issue of what constitutes traditional or folk music was deftly side stepped, with an inclusive organisational (and subsequently editorial) approach, relying on contributors' self-declared parameters, experiences and interests. Run in partnership with FairPlé, but also offering an opportunity to respond to and critique FairPlé, the symposium afforded a long-overdue chance to explore, challenge and react to the experiences of women in traditional and folk music practice, production and performance. The symposium and the resulting proceedings, published here, can be viewed as another pillar in the developing discourse of Women and Traditional/Folk Music, and in that sense exist in parallel to FairPlé. The symposium's Call for Papers invited contributors to undertake empirical research on gender participation; to consider strategies of equal opportunity and diversity within traditional and folk musics; to explore the experience of women in traditional and folk musics and in traditional and folk music industry. While not prescriptive, further areas of suggested research were media and traditional/folk musics; gender divisions, traditional music and the State; hierarchies and power distributions in traditional and folk musics; and historical perspectives. Though participants were not confined to Irish traditional and folk music topics, the majority of contributions were ultimately in this area.

The paucity of research particularly in the area of women and traditional/folk music in Ireland was brought home most keenly to me when I was preparing a new undergraduate module "Music, Gender and Ireland" a number of years ago (first offered in 2018 at NUI Galway). In its scope, the module is multi-genric and was prompted primarily, though not exclusively, by my own research interests in popular music and gender (Ní Fhuartháin 2018; 2013). The broad field of popular music and gender is a resource-rich one where there is an abundance of output internationally and increasingly, in Irish popular music too (Negus; Miller; Ní Fhuartháin; McLoughlin and McCloone; Sullivan; Dillane). However, when it came to collating the proposed reading list for a dedicated module section on the subtopic of gender and Irish traditional and folk music, the lack of resources that I was able to provide to my students was deeply frustrating. While Davis's work provides a useful exploration of gender and music in an Irish colonial context, it relies on pre-twentieth century historical textual analysis, with orality or the practice of traditional/folk music outside its frame of reference (2006). In this it shares some methodological approaches also applied by Ní Shíocháin (2018). Furthermore, and unlike popular music gender studies, I found limited comparative resources in the field of women and contemporary folk and traditional musics which were applicable for undergraduate teaching in an Irish Music Studies context (one exception I did use was the unpublished PhD thesis, Gall 2008).

In the sub-field of women and Irish traditional/folk music what scholarship is available can be broadly categorised under the methodological headings of either musical folklore or ethnomusicology. Musical folklore, a practice reaching back to the

nineteenth century, concerns itself with the collection and documentation of repertoire from the "folk" and often a coincidental documentation of attendant stylistic practices (Bartok 1992). Though initially relying on transcription, recording technology expanded the possibilities and richness of musical folklore beginning in the late nineteenth century. The project of musical folklore from the twentieth century to now has dissemination as its primary goal with published volumes of repertoire and recordings as vehicles for that. While there are Irish men musicians' biographies and/or life stories (see for example Mac Con Iomaire 2007), with many incorporating repertoire collections (see for example, Graham 2010; Vallely 2001), far fewer are available which have a woman musician as their subject. A notable exception is *The Songs of Elizabeth Cronin: Irish Traditional Singer* (Ó Cróinín 2000) which provides a comprehensive inventory of Cronin's songs, in addition to what Bartok identifies as collateral stylistic and biographical information (1992). Cronin is what can be described as an example of the exceptional woman musician (Slominksi 2010; 2013); she was a singer whose music was documented by national and international collectors, released commercially during her lifetime and played on Irish and British radio (Ní Shíocháin in this issue; Ó Cróinín 2000).

While there are a number of individual research articles, chapters or encyclopaedia entries with women and Irish traditional or folk music as their declared interest (Connell 2013; Lawlor 2012; Ó hAllmhuráin 2016, 2017; Schiller 1993; Spellman 2003; Smith 2008; Waldron 2006; Vallely 2011), substantial scholarship (in importance rather than quantity or scope) on gender and Irish traditional music with women's experience looming large has been published primarily by O'Shea (2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2012) and Slominksi (2012, 2013, 2020, and in this issue). This scholarship utilises ethnomusicology as the primary method and theoretical discipline and sits in the intersecting fields of gender and Irish traditional music studies, which Ó Laoire and Williams have also furrowed in their discussions of Joe Heaney (2009, 2011; Ó Laoire 2020). O'Shea and Slominski offer interesting commonalities of discourse as well as counterpoints of time and reception. An explication of these shared and disparate elements warrants full investigation (outside the remit of this introductory article); nevertheless a number of points may be made. Both O'Shea (2008a, 2008b) and Slominksi (2020) are concerned with exclusionary tactics of identity-making that operate within Irish traditional music practice. These tactics are not just gendered; ethnicity and sexuality also come into play, but nonetheless for our interest here, "woman" as category is clearly demonstrated as one which is frequently othered, silenced and excluded. O'Shea's monograph (2008a) was critically well received, but even in the most positive of reviews, a reluctance to accept her stark findings of exclusivity is found (Motherway 2010). It is yet to be seen if Slominski's work, in 2020, will receive a more nuanced reception, coming as it does in the wake of cultural and societal reckonings of inequality in the past few years.

Conclusion

In the way that frequently happens with such things, when I and my fellow co-editors for this issue (Verena Commins, Síle Denvir and Úna Monaghan) were organising the 2018 research symposium at NUI Galway, a spontaneous short-hand abbreviation for the event emerged in the innumerable emails being exchanged. The symposium title Women and Traditional | Folk Music was acronymised to WTFM, which in intra-editorial written communications then quickly became WTFMná (the first half being the vernacular expletive and widely understood; the latter "Mná", being "Women"). Resonating with WTF and STF, WTFMná as shorthand reflects our frustration with the deficit of research available, but it also acts as an encouraging vocative to those writing and performing, thinking and listening in the field of women and traditional/folk music. This article offers a context and rationale for the special issue of *Ethnomusicology Ireland: Women and Traditional/Folk Music*, however just as importantly it contributes

and looks forward to a continued expansion of research in this area: a beginning of sorts, rather than any ending. WTFMná indeed.

Notes

[1] Other events by cognate organisations included the Sounding the Feminists Symposium: Women in Popular & Traditional Music in Ireland, hosted at Dundalk Institute of Technology in 2018 (Sounding the Feminists Symposium: web source). Before that, Women and Music in Ireland conferences at Maynooth University (2010) and at the Royal Irish Academy of Music (2012) respectively, are acknowledgments of interest in the wider field prior to 2016.

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Taming “the tradition bear”: Reflections on gender, sexuality and race in the transmission of Irish traditional music

Tes Slominski

Abstract

This piece investigates the metaphor of “tradition bearing” as reproductive and argues that this metaphor has had profound effects on discourses of gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity in Irish traditional music, as well as on the lived experience of women, LGBTQ+ musicians, and musicians of colour in the genre.

Keywords: women, gender, tradition, Irish traditional music

The 2019 Women and Traditional/Folk Music Symposium in Galway gave me an opportunity to reflect on the many conversations and moments of musical communion I have shared with fellow musicians since I started playing Irish traditional music in the 1990s. Sharing a tune, sharing a moment, sharing a history—I began thinking of the women musicians and scholars I have gotten to know through the music over the years, and especially of my age peers—those of us who came of age in the 1980s and 1990s and are in our 40s and 50s now. We did not invent feminist activism in Irish traditional music, but thanks to those who came before us, we are able to think critically and publicly about the roles that gender, sexuality, race, and national identity/nationalism play in individual experience, historical memory, and collective action. And now, in the midst of tremendous changes in Irish society and law, the ongoing #metoo/#misefosta movements, and global threats that require people of all generations and nations to work together, we find ourselves in-between—between those we have learned from and those who, in turn, name us as mentors and teachers.

This reflective piece is part of a larger project that will consider the gendered and raced concept of “tradition bearing” in both traditional and art music in Ireland.[1] It comes from my research on the disappearance of women musicians from Irish traditional music’s historical record—research that investigates the role of personifications of the Irish nation in shaping perceptions of women traditional musicians in the early twentieth century. The questions I ask here also come from my own experiences as a forty-something queer American woman whose experiences with Irish traditional music have been influenced by these perceptions. For me, the phrase “tradition bearer” has sounded an alternately worshipful, yearning, infuriating, hilarious, and sobering refrain. It has directed my attention to musicians I wanted to emulate; it has echoed from the mouths of some to welcome me into the fold and from others to exclude me; and it has provided fodder for laughter when it has been misheard as “tradition bear”. When I began teaching fiddle in my twenties, I was surprised to be told that under no circumstances would I ever be considered a “tradition bearer” because I had not begun the lifelong process of learning until my late teens. The speakers—

mostly older Irish-American men heady with bureaucratic power and steeped in the ideologies of various folk revivals on both sides of the Atlantic—then assured me that my younger students might indeed become bearers of tradition. These wielded words were confusing: was this about my students' age? Mine? (I was a mere six years older than my oldest "child" student at the time.) Their surnames? Mine? Or was it that the students most visible outside my local community were boys, and I, then with flowing tresses like Hibernia's, was most decidedly not a boy? In retrospect, I recognise that these words were arbitrary, ridiculous, and bore little relation to the realities and joys of playing, teaching, and learning Irish traditional music for me or for my students. At the same time, they achieved one of their likely goals: to get me to question my right to belong in "the tradition". The past decades have afforded ample time to work through my own anxieties about belonging and to begin to explore larger questions about belonging (and not-belonging) as they relate to "the tradition" and its transmission.

Attempts to chart changing meanings of "tradition" and attendant shifts in the field of folklore abound (see Glassie 2003; McNeill 2013; Noyes 2009; and Ó Crualaoich 2017). The term "tradition bearer" gained currency in Anglophone academic folklore in the early twentieth century as folklorists and music scholars turned their attention to processes of transmission rather than focusing on collecting material. Although I have not yet found the first usage of the term "tradition bearer", it is associated with Carl von Sydow, the Swedish folklorist who greatly influenced Séamus Ó Duilearga and the institutionalisation of folklore in Ireland beginning in the 1920s and 1930s—and thus, the academic study of Irish traditional music. Like "tradition", the meanings and functions of the term "tradition bearer" have changed over time and place, but the concept reinforces connections between the traditional arts and ethnic heritage and generational transfer. These connections are particularly explicit in the United States, where the relationship between ethnicity and nationality remains fraught. The US-based National Endowment for the Arts defines tradition and its practitioners thus: "The folk and traditional arts…are those that are learned as part of the cultural life of a community whose members share a common ethnic heritage, cultural mores, language, religion, occupation, or geographic region". The National Council for the Traditional Arts avoids the term "tradition bearer" in its mission statement but retains a sense of generational transfer: "[The NCTA's] programs celebrate and honor deeply rooted cultural expressions…passed on through time in families, communities, tribal, ethnic, regional and occupational groups". In Ireland, the stereotypical image of a tradition bearer is connected with hearth and home—a connection reinforced by both the 1935 Public Dance Halls Act and the 1937 Constitution (Slominski, 2019).

In the twentieth-century paradigm shift from tradition-as-text (or object) to tradition-as-culture (or practice), folklorists and some members of the general public began to view tradition bearers as members of groups responsible for maintaining cultural practices rather than as individual vessels for the generational transfer of material.[2] In theory, this shift represents a move from valorising the contributions of individuals to broader consideration of collectives. In practice, however, organisations that support and shape the arts in late capitalism have generally done so through recognising individuals for their contributions.[3] In identifying suitably "authentic" practitioners, they often rely on conservative understandings of tradition and/or its bearers to determine which individuals best exemplify their cultural groups. For example, the Louisiana Folklife Program defines a tradition bearer as someone who learns their practice through person-to-person informal transmission (rather than workshops, institutionalised education programmes, or mediated sources), is a member of the relevant cultural group, and whose innovations are in keeping with "traditional" mindsets and practices (Louisiana Folklife n.d.: web source). Irish organisations such as the Arts Council and Culture Ireland are much more expansive in scope within Ireland, but as national organisations, they tend to determine eligibility for funding based on Irish residency or citizenship. For example, the Arts Council Music Bursary

awards require residency in the Republic of Ireland (Arts Council of Ireland 2020: 5). Culture Ireland supports Irish artists presenting work internationally, and one of its requirements is that applications be "in respect of an Irish professional artist/s or arts organisation", though the definition of "Irish" is unspecified (2020). TG4's Gradam Ceoil awards highlight Ireland as a "creative and cultural nation" (TG4 n.d.: web source). By invoking the nation and its creativity, these organisations echo (and at times problematise) the cultural nationalism of the early twentieth century, in which Irish artistic expression was mobilised as a rationale for independence from Britain (for example, see Kiberd 1996). Though it is beyond the scope of this short piece to trace Irish arts organisations' relationships with nation-building, I mean to point out that connections between creativity and the nation necessarily situate Irish traditional music (as well as other art forms) in a long history of Irish nationalism, a political movement that has normalised particular understandings of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity.

Organisations and scholars often seek to distinguish traditional arts from mass mediated popular practices and to guard against the appropriation or misuse of cultural forms. Conservative understandings of tradition and who can (or should) "bear" it raise questions about gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity in discourses of cultural transmission, and anxieties about authenticity—whether of material, practices, or practitioners—further complicate the situation.[4] Terms such as "culture" are easily mobilised to stand in for race/ethnicity, while "traditional" mindsets and practices provide convenient excuses for the exclusion of women and LGBTQ+ practitioners and the marginalisation of genres typically associated with women, children, and minorities such as Travellers. This problem is not new, but in Irish traditional music, these questions have remained largely unasked, even in the tradition/innovation debates of the 1990s, which deepened our understandings of Irish traditional music as a living tradition (see especially McCann 2001; Vallely et al. 1999). Scholarship about women in Irish traditional music and on the musical lives of people of colour in Ireland/Irish traditional music is only just beginning to address these questions (Cullen 2014; O'Shea 2008).

At the heart of the matter is a concern with what tradition is—and who it is for. Often, these two questions—what and for whom?—become a closed circuit, in which tradition is defined by the identities of its practitioners, and its practitioners are similarly delimited by some characteristic of the cultural form—its point of origin, for example. Asking what agendas tradition serves, however, often seems an unthinkable question—one that tends to generate tautological responses ("tradition is what makes us ourselves") and outrage ("how *dare* she suggest that our tradition has an agenda?!?").[5] Future work will examine these issues more fully, but here, I want to begin to explore the repercussions of casting tradition bearing as reproductive, since metaphors of cultural reproduction must always invoke current realities of biological reproduction, in which the anatomical and phenotypical characteristics through which we construct sex, race, and ethnicity are transmitted. Slippages between biology and metaphor raise the stakes of these questions: by linking the transmission of culture to genetic transmission, the metaphor of tradition bearing is dangerously close to suggesting that certain physical bodies can (or cannot) participate in traditional practice.

While the metaphor of tradition bearers as vessels has lost currency (perhaps because of the shift from tradition-as-object to tradition-as-practice), it still appears regularly on both sides of the Atlantic. For example, in the context of the School for Scottish Studies, Andrew Hunter offers this description of a tradition bearer: "he knows he is only a vessel which this is passing through and he must somehow get it on to the next generation...almost a sacred mission" (quoted in Munro 1991: 159). When I began studying personifications of early twentieth century Irish women musicians as virgins and mothers it dawned on me that the term did not imply "bearer of gifts" so much as it referred to that most "traditional" of women's roles: bearing children. In beginning to

think through the implications of tradition bearers as vessels through which cultural materials pass (ideally unchanged) from one generation to the next, I was overwhelmed with anger and dismay. What about women musicians who have historically been cast from "the tradition" for imparting too many changes—or those who have apparently done the work of tradition bearing *too* well and have been lost in the shadows of men whose music carries the memorable imprint of individuality? For example, consider the entry about fiddler Tommy Potts in *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, which notes that his penchant for improvisation likely came from several of his influences, including "a Mrs. Sheridan"—a player unknown even to most Irish traditional music historians (Vallely 1999: 301). Forgotten, diminished by the indefinite article ("*a* Mrs. Sheridan"), Christina Sheridan was a tremendous player active in the earliest days of recorded céilí band performances. She dominated the Feis Ceoil fiddle competitions of the 1910s along with her sister Josephine Whelan, and carried on the legacy of their mother Bridget Kenny, whom Francis O'Neill named "the Queen of Irish Fiddlers" (O'Neill 1913). Yet her name only appears in the *Companion* in the entry on Tommy Potts.[6]

The Irish nationalist movement explicitly identified women's contribution to independence as raising good Irish children and teaching them the tunes, songs, stories, and linguistic and cultural practices that distinguished Ireland from other nations (for example, see Biletz 2002; Slominski 2020). As my work on early twentieth-century Irish women musicians demonstrates, being a tradition bearer—even one forgotten by written history—depended on women's sanctioned fertility as maidens or mothers and on their family affiliations (Slominski 2013, 2020). In this context, the bearing of tradition was linked with the bearing of children—and being on the receiving end of tradition was one part of becoming a proper Irish citizen. But centuries of documentation almost solely about male musicians renders the majority of women tradition bearers invisible. Even in acknowledging the historiographical problem of the erasure of women throughout history in Ireland and elsewhere, we are faced with a confounding disjuncture between gendered metaphor and reality, where "tradition bearer" is a feminised concept dependent on the biological activities of bodies understood as female, yet most of the people who are remembered as tradition bearers are male.[7] Indeed, remembering—re-membering—is really only available to those who were members of "the boys' club" in the first place.[8]

Thinking—*really* thinking—about the gendering of "tradition bearing" requires a dramatic reconsideration of the relationship between a practitioner and the material they practice. As a musician, I often feel as though the tunes are in control, rather than me being in control of the tunes—an ecstatic phenomenon in which body and mind are rendered whole. Irish musicians attribute great power to "the music itself"—ironically but not erroneously aligning ourselves with a brand of now-problematised musicology that asserts that studying the intricacies of musical texts is always more valuable than investigating social context.[9] And there's a flavour of Catholicism in believing that the tunes are in charge: like the Virgin Mary, who says to the Angel Gabriel "[let it] be done to me according to thy word" upon hearing that she is to bear Jesus, the tradition bearer—like Mary—is passive, and "the music itself" is the active force.

Another possibility for understanding the tradition bearer as feminised is the enduring dichotomy between art and craft (and text and practice), defined in embodied terms and reinscribed in cultural policy, as in this definition from Section 3 of the 1976 American Folklore Preservation Act:

> Expressive culture includes a wide range of creative and symbolic forms such as custom, belief, technical skill, language, literature, art, architecture, music, play, dance, drama, ritual pageantry, handicraft; *these expressions are mainly learned orally, by imitation, or in performance and are generally maintained without benefit of formal instruction or institutional direction.* (American Folklore Preservation Act 1976; italics mine).

Many cultural organisations, including UNESCO, share similar language. Although this definition clearly values expressive culture, folklore is of the body, with the customary distinction between art and craft implied: the mind writes (the hand is only involved out of convenience in the absence of a secretary or scribe, with all the power differentials of gender or age contained in those positions), but the ear listens and the breath sounds. Thus, the masculinised genius of high art is in the structurally more powerful position compared with a tradition bearer, who is by definition an embodied being. Mind thus maintains its position over body, and the prestige of text over performance endures despite the best efforts of ethnomusicologists, folklorists, and other champions of intangible heritage.

Further confounding matters is "vessel", a word that connotes emptiness and passivity. For example, this quotation from culinary historian Mark Huntsman emphasises the passivity of the tradition bearer: "The chef is viewed as simply a vessel for tradition, rather than an innovator; being skilled does not mean being creative, it means doing it 'right', making any modifications within the spirit of the law" (Huntsman n.d.: web source). Statements like this one belie decades of folklore scholarship, but they recur with startling consistency when fears for the "purity" or "authenticity" of a cultural practice emerge. "Purity," of course, carries strong religious overtones, and in a genre closely tied to Christianity, any mention of a vessel suggests that archetypal vessel, the Virgin Mary, who bears the Christian tradition in the form of Jesus. Jesus is the treasure and Mary the vessel, exquisitely prepared through her own Immaculate Conception—vital to the whole process but theoretically interchangeable with any other woman without sin. Youthful Erin/Hibernia and mature Mother Ireland, the primary personifications of the Irish nation, complete this circle by reinforcing the importance of both virgins and mothers in establishing an ideal Irish femininity delineated by fertility's promise but sensible only through the institutionalisation of reproductive patriarchal heteronormativity.[10]

The emphasis on person-to-person transmission ("handing down") and lineage in determining whether practices are traditional demonstrates a clear preference for reproductive metaphors of tradition over rhizomatic ones.[11] Definitions of "traditional arts" tend to explicitly exclude transmission via mass media and prefer person-to-person interaction, as in this statement from the United States National Endowment for the Arts: "These traditions are shaped by the aesthetics and values of a shared culture and are passed from generation to generation, most often within family and community through observation, conversation, and practice" (n.d.: web source).[12] The continuing insistence that transmission must happen directly and individually from tradition bearer to recipient suggests an antipathy towards imagining tradition and its transmission as rhizomatic, as being passed among relatively nonhierarchical networks. I believe the metaphor of rhizomes is more accurate in Irish traditional music practice in the early twenty first century.[13]

Now that I have been learning and teaching Irish traditional music for more than two decades, I find it even more impossible to think about the musicians I have learned from as passive vessels—and ontologically devastating to imagine any musician's role as a mere bearer of tradition. As a queer woman who aims to live outside the phallic economy and as someone who is childfree by choice, bearing tradition—with its implicit biological imperative of reproduction—begins to seem downright nonsensical.[14] If the transmission of tunes is still seen as reproductive rather than rhizomatic, where does that put me, as well as the many other women musicians of all generations (heterosexual or otherwise) who find ourselves without children, and perhaps even without students? And would a cisgendered heterosexual man ever, ever ask this question? Similarly, if the transmission of Irish traditional music is understood as reproductive—as is the transmission of ethnicity and often citizenship—how can we understand the roles of an increasing number of non-white and/or non-ethnically Irish traditional musicians in shaping and sharing this tradition? Addressing these questions

is vital in ensuring that Irish traditional music reaches its potential as an instrument of equity, inclusion, and community-building in the twenty first century.

Notes

[1] Questions of race, class, ability, and other social identities are inextricable from gender and sexuality. I will be discussing race, eugenics, and music transmission further in my next monograph, *The Unbearable Bearing of Tradition*.

[2] The shift from individual to collective mirrors the growth of sociology and anthropology, along with these disciplines' focus on the social or collective rather than the individual. See for example Toelken (1979) and Ben-Amos (1984).

[3] A notable exception to this trend is the New York-based Center for Traditional Music and Dance's "Sustaining Cultural Initiative", whose "programs assist immigrant and ethnic communities to carry out independent activities, which help to preserve their cultural heritage and artistic traditions".

[4] Conversations about appropriation tend to be caught in a double bind, where erring on the side of caution ("people from outside a tradition should not participate in it") becomes an argument for restrictions based on race, ethnicity, or gender ("people should only ever play the music of their own people"). White people have a long history of mobilising this argument to obstruct people of colour from participating in classical and other musics coded "white", including Irish traditional music.

[5] These questions invoke foundational work about the invention of tradition begun by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) and taken up by many others since.

[6] Private correspondence with a descendent of Bridget and John Kenny in 2011 confirms my identification of Christina Sheridan as Bridget Kenny's daughter. Name changes after marriage often complicate historical research on women.

[7] Such binarily-gendered metaphors also work against the legibility of trans and non-binary practitioners.

[8] I invite readers to think about the place of "the club" in homosocial male circles that go back at least to the coffeehouses of the Enlightenment (Habermas 2001). The etymology and colloquial usage of "member", too, link patriarchy and masculinity with power. For an application of Habermas's theories to Irish traditional music, see Slominski (2019).

[9] I discuss the agency of "the music itself" in trad in chapter 4 of *Trad Nation*. These ideas owe much to Cusick (1994) and Csikszentmihalyi's work on flow (1990). McClary (1991) and Bergeron and Bohlman (1992) offered early challenges to the primacy of "the music itself". For a brief history of the intellectual trajectory that led to a focus on "the music itself" in musicology, see Mundy (2014).

[10] For more information on feminised personifications of Ireland, see Innes (1993); Kearney (1997); Meaney (1991); Slominski (2013; 2020).

[11] An early version of this piece used the word "viral", but in the midst of global pandemic I hesitate to invoke disease transmission even metaphorically. The relationships among metaphors of genetic, rhizomatic, and viral transmission bear further consideration.

[12] In his textbook *The Dynamics of Folklore* (originally published in 1979), Barre Toelken excludes mass-produced and mass-mediated material on the grounds that it is static rather than dynamic (see especially chapter 1).

[13] For an explication of the theory of rhizomatic connection, see Deleuze and Guattari (2009). While this theory has been somewhat overused in the past decade or two, it still has much to offer the study of Irish traditional music and other vernacular musics.

[14] In using the term "phallic economy", I mean to remind readers of the connections among gender, reproduction, and capitalism (see Rubin (1975, reprinted 1996)). The pull of linear thinking is strong, however, and I also find myself struggling to resist the temptation to locate myself in various "family trees" of Irish traditional music and music scholarship.

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121 Stories: The impact of gender on participation in Irish traditional music

Úna Monaghan

Abstract

This article reports on findings from an open online call in 2018, for experiences relating to gender in an Irish traditional music context. 121 anonymous responses were received from 83 people, mostly women. A thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) resulted in the identification of two main themes to describe ways in which gender affects participation in Irish traditional music: systems, causes and examples of gender inequality, and personal experiences of the effects of gender inequality. The research demonstrates that the mechanisms and structures of the Irish traditional music scene continue to privilege the contribution of men. More generalised societal sexism is present in traditional music contexts and affects participation for women. Impacts of gender are found to be current, complex and longstanding; are present in all contexts in Irish traditional music; affect children and adults; and are not confined to the professional sphere. The study also revealed a range of attitudes to the discussion of gender in Irish traditional music. Some implications of the work are discussed in the final section.

Keywords: gender, Irish traditional music, women

Research aims and context

This research aims to increase understanding of the ways in which gender affects people's experience in Irish traditional music, and the behaviours and contexts that contribute to gender inequality, at all levels of participation, in Irish traditional music.

O'Shea (2008a, 2008b) and Slominski (2013, 2018, 2020) examine gender in Irish traditional music through analyses of the sociological, cultural, historical and nationalist contexts in which it exists. They highlight the power differentials involved, and the role of the places in which traditional music is played. In November 2017, I began work on a performance piece in response to my own experiences of sexism and misogyny, particularly in Irish traditional music, in the course of over twenty years of participation as a musician and sound engineer (Monaghan 2018a). While working on the piece, I encountered many individual stories from peer musicians that alone could not support general conclusions, but taken together warranted examination. I noted that some people were afraid to share their experiences for a range of reasons, including fear of backlash, consequences for their career, rejection by the community, respect for the tradition and accusations of bringing the tradition into disrepute. In parallel with the global feminist movements of 2017 onwards, FairPlé, a campaign advocating for gender balance in Irish traditional and folk music began in February 2018. FairPlé prompted opposition and debate in the Irish traditional music community, including the assertion from some musicians that they did not perceive gender to be an issue at all (Williams 2020: 25-26). In the context of these discussions and debates, and more general national and international awareness of the effect of gender on music making and cultural production (see for example Ní Fhuartháin in this issue; Keychange 2020;

Sisario 2018; Kernodle 2014; Scharff 2017 and Europe Jazz Network 2018) I sought to analyse the impact of gender on participation in Irish traditional music. An anonymous online questionnaire was used to gather and collate current experiences in a structured and protected way, and this paper presents an analysis and discussion of the responses submitted.

Data collection

The online questionnaire consisted of two open-ended questions presented via Qualtrics (2020). In the first text field, “Tell your story”, participants were invited to share their experience of a time when they “perceived gender to be an issue” in an Irish traditional music context. In the second, participants were asked for “any other comments on this topic, or suggestions on what might be needed to address any gender issue you see in Irish traditional music”. Data were also collected on participants’ demographic details[1] and their level of involvement in Irish traditional music. The study received ethical approval from the University of Cambridge Faculty of Music Ethics Committee.

Participants were recruited via social media. A textual description of the research and a video call (Monaghan 2018b) were shared via multiple online platforms. A pilot questionnaire was live from 13 to 24 July 2018, and the public questionnaire from 24 July to 1 November 2018. 123 submissions were received, of which two were later withdrawn by the respondent, resulting in 121 responses from 83 people. Respondent details are shown in Table 1. Responses came mostly from those who consider themselves experienced or expert in Irish traditional music (87%); 25% of respondents were full-time professional musicians or singers. The majority identified their gender as female (83%), and their ethnicity as white (96%).

Table 1: Respondent details.

	Number (*N* = 83)	Percentage
Age		
18-24	9	10.84
25-34	27	32.53
35-44	20	24.10
45-54	16	19.28
55-64	9	10.84
65-74	2	2.41
75 or older	0	0.00
Gender		
Female	69	83.13
Male	10	12.05
Prefer not to say	2	2.41
Gender non-conforming	1	1.20
Undisclosed	1	1.20
Ethnicity		
White	80	96.39
Thai/Chinese	1	1.20
American Indian	1	1.20
Undisclosed	1	1.20
Role		
Singer	7	8.43
Musician	34	40.96
Both	41	49.40
Neither	1	1.20
Experience in Irish Traditional Music		
Beginner Musician / Singer	1	1.20
Intermediate Musician / Singer	8	9.64
Experienced Musician / Singer	44	53.01
Expert Musician / Singer	28	33.73
Not a Musician / Singer	2	2.41
Play Professionally in Irish Traditional Music		
Full-time	21	25.30
Part-time	25	30.12
Sometimes	26	31.33
Never	11	13.25

Of 104 responses that included a date range, most (69%) referred to events in the decade from “2010-present”, while others noted their experiences ranged from the 1970s to date. Table 2 shows the story locations (not necessarily the location of the respondent). 64% of submissions referred to Ireland. Locations marked “Other” included Europe, Asia, Australia and North America.

Table 2: Story location.

Where did this story happen?	Number (*N* = 121)	Percentage
Ireland	77	63.64
Scotland	4	3.31
England	7	5.79
Wales	1	0.83
USA	14	11.57
Other	18	14.88

Data Analysis

Responses to both open-ended questions were analysed using thematic analysis, in the process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This paper provides a broad overview of the whole data set, its complexity and inter-relating issues, rather than focusing on the relative incidence of themes. All responses were read and re-read for familiarisation, the submission order randomised, and each numbered 1-121. Each response was coded to describe the response content: 149 codes were generated and these were then sorted into themes and subthemes. Codes were data-driven and identified based on the content, without trying to match to a pre-existing coding frame (ibid.). As further codes were identified, the data were systematically reviewed to ensure all content was represented in the coding. A data and methodology audit was carried out with a second researcher.

Excerpts from the collection quoted in this article are labelled with the response number and for reasons of space only longer excerpts contain contextual information and age range of the respondent. My expectation was that the questionnaire and all responses would be available to view and listen to online at the Irish Traditional Music Archive. I anonymised submissions and obtained consent for the publication and dissemination of text. Recordings were made of the responses and an audio archive produced, which was voiced by independent volunteers.[2] However, the ethical and professional consequences of this for all involved remain sensitive and complex, and have been part of the challenge of this work throughout. The #Misefosta campaign (Murphy 2020) and subsequent media attention renders the careful consideration of these factors even more critical. Though the housing of the full collection is therefore as yet undecided it will be made available in future. The collection of responses is rich and would support further analysis.

Results

Respondents' experiences of gender affecting participation in Irish traditional music can be understood in relation to two themes: a) systems, causes and examples of gender inequality; and b) personal experiences of the effects of gender inequality. Each theme is comprised of a number of sub-themes, describing collections of related codes. The theme 'systems, causes and examples of gender inequality' comprises the following sub-themes:

- Aspects specific to the Irish traditional music scene
- Mechanisms of the Irish traditional music industry
- Instrumentation
- Sexism and gender roles in society manifested in the Irish traditional music scene
- Assault, aggression and gendered power dynamics
- Physical appearance and image

- Relationships and family life directly affecting participation

The second theme collated the effects of gender inequality as evidenced through personal experiences and its subthemes are:

- Emotional cost, mental load and vulnerability
- Silencing
- Isolation
- Learned behaviour and challenging established norms

Both themes are explored in greater detail in the following sections. In addition, there are a number of more general outcomes of note. Fifty-nine respondents reported that the gendered difficulty they experienced and described in their response was ongoing or longstanding, or had built up over time. Some respondents noted that there were more men in traditional music, and that more men were hired for gigs. Others highlighted the disparity in gender balance in education compared to other areas of life–that equal or a greater number of women were learning in university or in traditional music classes, but this was not reflected in wider traditional music practice.

A) Systems, causes and examples of gender inequality

Aspects specific to the Irish traditional music scene

Respondents' experiences demonstrate that the mechanisms and structures of the Irish traditional music scene privilege the contribution of men. Nine responses contained an assertion that women are generally given less respect than men, nine related gender bias in traditional music to an older generation of men, and nine associated a style of playing with gender. The traditional music community is described in some responses as reluctant to adapt in ways that might make it more accessible to women, and reluctant to embrace change in general. Responses mentioned a legacy of instrument design by or for men, as in this excerpt, from a flute player: "The current traditional instrument design was based around larger hands (men's hands mainly); it's discouraging that this tradition is so reluctant to accept different designs to be more accessible for more people" (#76). Discourses on Irish traditional music often privilege its history and established characteristics (Vallely 2011: 687-689; Breathnach 1977: 88-94; Slominski 2020: 135-152). Responses demonstrate that this is used to give priority to "the music" (#7) or "the tradition" (#46) or "etiquette" (#29) at the expense of the people involved in it–in this research, specifically women:

> Singing Circles are also part of traditional music. Love them but virtually all jokes/funny stories told by men over 55 involve women being fat, belligerent, hairy or expensive to keep. (#101, female intermediate singer, 45-54)

> After a year or two, the other girl on the gig politely said to him that she had a couple of new tunes that she would like to try out, to which he responded," this is a pub and people really need to hear music with BALLS in it, I'm horsing it out here, we're grand". (#70, female experienced singer, 35-44)

The session is in some respects at the heart of traditional music participation. While it is often perceived as a welcoming and egalitarian environment (Kaul 2007; O'Shea 2008a), for women in this study it is not always so:

> I gave up on that particular session. I thought fuck them, if they want to keep it all for themselves, they're welcome to it. No need for me to get stressed out and put myself through that every week just to get a few tunes. (#83, female intermediate musician, 55-64)

Thirty-one responses mention sessions when describing a gendered experience. In seventeen responses, sessions are explicitly presented as uncomfortable contexts:

> I remember once my female friends and I hiding our instruments under the table we were so intimidated by a session in a particular pub… I have actually in some respects now

> fallen out of love with traditional music as it was too difficult to be accepted and play along. The amount of stamina and brass neck I think you need to have as a female to persevere to become admitted to that world is more than I have or have the time to muster up. You never get any encouragement. It's a macho scene. I have been left with a bitter taste in my mouth many times and so with sadness have allowed my talent to dissipate somewhat and no longer really bother with sessions or anything like that. (#29, female intermediate musician, 35-44)

Several aspects of Irish traditional music teaching and transmission are raised in the data. Respondents noted that women often participate as teachers, and in some places form the core of the learning and development of Irish traditional music. Respondents observed that women frequently take care of administration and other organisational roles, while remaining under-represented at sessions and in the professional sphere. Eight responses described an instance of gender affecting the learning or development experience in Irish traditional music as a child: “I started playing bagpipes at the age of 9. I remember being told by the teacher (ex-army as most pipers were) at age 12-ish: ‘Girls can’t play pipes, they haven’t the lung capacity’” (#63).

Learning from peers and previous generations is an integral part of the transmission of Irish traditional music, and a strong association with, or status within, Irish traditional music can run in families (Cawley 2013). The contributions of some of the best players and families are revered, and there are centres of power, as there are in any community (ibid.). However, respondents described that this power was not always considered or understood by the holder, was not always handled responsibly, and was sometimes used to cause harm. Twenty responses mentioned a powerful or prominent man in traditional music, and four mentioned a powerful family: “I've been told ‘you do not want to get on the wrong side of this man and his family’. They are considered Irish music royalty” (#6). However, family connections were also identified as a buffer for some women, shielding them from some effects of gender bias, or lessening their impact.

Some traditional music contexts are closely associated with alcohol use. Alcohol was mentioned in eleven responses, either because it was used as compensation for music playing, or was being consumed at the event. Alcohol was given to male musicians as a gift or in return for services while not offered to women in the same context, and alcohol consumption has been described as a factor making the traditional music environment less safe or enjoyable for women. Alcohol is used as a currency in Irish traditional music, and access to trade in that currency, or even accessing the contexts in which it is exchanged, is not equal with respect to gender:

> I was one of two women in a band of 12 for a special gig at our local music venue. We were on backing vocals that night, standing to the front of the stage. The owner sent up a round of drinks. 10 drinks—for the lads, nothing for us. And again. And again. As if we weren't there. I didn't give a fuck about the drink—it was about not being considered as part of the band. The two women were invisible as musicians. (#84, female experienced musician and singer, 35-44)

Mechanisms of the Irish traditional music industry

In the professional sphere, respondents reported current music industry practices exacerbating, facilitating or perpetuating gender inequality. Some of these resulted from the lack of transparency in opportunities:

> I have been told a male musician was chosen over me as the project involved gigs away from home. Since the project was just two musicians, he didn’t want to travel with “a young girl” (I was hitting 30 at the time) as “people might talk”. (#102, female experienced musician, 25-34)

Some showed blatant professional discrimination, including a gender pay gap, although the realities of self-employment in music renders this difficult for practitioners

to establish. Respondents noted a lack of code of practice or protection in Irish traditional music.

> An agent we really wanted to work with baulked when he heard I was getting married. He said I needed to let him know if I wanted to have children. That I can do whatever I like, but he didn't want to put time, money and resources into someone who would cancel a tour last minute, that I had to be really committed. Everyone else in my band was married, some had kids. No one stuck up for me. I said nothing. I was so shocked, but afterwards when I roared about it one of the guys said: “Well, you can kind of see what he means; I know it's shitty but I get it”. He was powerful and influential and we stood to make good money with him. (#48, female expert musician and singer, 25-34)

> As an independent artist, self-managed, I was pleased to draw the interest of a promoter who was enthusiastic about the prospect of setting up gigs. However, this didn't transpire—and for that I don't blame him in the least as I understand how the market works—and that demand makes bookings. His feedback, though, was harder to digest—which is that people don't want to pay money to see girl singer songwriters. (#69, female experienced singer, 45-54)

> I was continually treated as a prop. At one gig the guitarist insisted my fiddle be unplugged so I was basically miming throughout the gig. It was humiliating. (#106, female expert musician and singer, 35-44)

Instrumentation

Fourteen responses were specific to a particular instrument. Some respondents noted that singers in professional contexts were mostly women, with consequences for that singer as often the only woman on tour:

> On tour as the only female with an all male band, we were collecting a visiting guitar player one morning. He hopped into the van and started relating how great a time he had had the night before at the lap dancing club. Gesturing with his hands the size of the woman's breasts. “Ah jaysus you should have seen her". One of the other band members made eyes in my direction, sliding his finger across his throat. The younger guitar player looked puzzled but stopped. I continued with my knitting down the back of the van, seething. (#94, female expert musician and singer, 45-54)

Other examples include female flute players either being advised to get smaller (and quieter) flutes to suit their hands when they would have liked to buy a standard one, or being told the solution was to practise more on a standard instrument, when they wanted to buy a smaller design of flute to suit their smaller hands. Respondents highlighted ways in which conventions associated with certain instruments in the tradition create assumptions that restricted their potential, both when they were children and as adults. Some instruments such as the uilleann pipes or guitar were experienced by respondents to be mostly played by men, and women players of these instruments reported feeling greater pressure and scrutiny: “I am so fed up that it is so frequently assumed that I will be a bad guitarist because guitar is ‘not a woman’s instrument’” (#104). Or, they endured repeated assumptions that they played another instrument, sometimes with uncomfortable remarks, and always at a cost to their energy, development or enjoyment:

> I was a bit late so the teacher and other participants were already seated. All male. Teacher looks up and said to me “the flute class is next door”. I said “I'm here for a pipes class”. My case wasn't visible. Awkward. (#75, female experienced musician, 25-34)

Sexism and gender roles in society manifested in the Irish traditional music scene

The second most common code throughout, assigned to seventy-one responses, was the evidence of a complex gender bias in society manifesting itself in Irish traditional music. This code was assigned when the respondent explicitly made reference to gender as a societal issue as well as in Irish traditional music, but also

when the respondent described an incident that was common in general society, not specific to traditional music, but happening in a traditional music context. For example:

> I attended a pipes class for the first time at Scoil Éigse, the All-Ireland Fleadh summer school. The teacher was in his 20s, male. All the rest of the pipers in the class were male, it was an advanced class so most of them were older. I was the only female, about 13 at the time. They all seemed to know one another, a few of them were from Dublin and attended Na Píobairí Uilleann classes. It was all very laddish. One guy in particular would roll in mid-morning most days, there was banter with the teacher. A lot of sexual innuendo and drunken tales. I was so uncomfortable the whole time. (#5, female experienced musician, 25-34)

In fifty responses, an incident happened in public with no expectation of negative consequences. This points to a culture of permission, or normalisation of sexism in society generally, but also within Irish traditional music:

> It was very clear that my being accepted in these male-dominated groups was dependent on my acquiescence to this type of behaviour (or at least it was evident that I certainly couldn't challenge the behaviour if I was going to be accepted as part of the group). I got very disheartened and avoided sessions for a long time as a result. (#21, female experienced musician and singer, 25-34)

This normalisation is not confined to interactions between adults; the following example happened while the respondent was a teenager: “At a practice one of our male tutors said that having me as ‘eye candy’ for the adjudicators and audience was a bonus” (#68).

Women respondents described being penalised for the same behaviour as men. When women displayed similar attributes, they were viewed negatively: “being categorized as ‘fiery’ or ‘a battle-axe’ or ‘a handful’ where my male counterparts with similar management skills would be considered ‘confident’ or ‘well organized’ or ‘proactive’ or ‘detailed’” (#37).

Some respondents struggled to articulate exactly what was amiss in the situation they were describing. As a result, they had difficulty in pointing out the problem, could not say categorically that something happened because of their gender, and often let it go unchallenged, despite stating with confidence that the same thing simply wouldn’t happen to men, or doesn’t happen as often to men:

> …it is just an example of how you constantly have to negotiate your space as a professional female musician so as not to bruise the ego of others in a male dominated space. It wouldn't have happened if we were male lead musicians. (#81, female expert musician, 25-34)

Some reported a lack of outward recognition of women’s contribution generally, in both professional and non-professional spheres: “Just want to mention my lack of recognition when playing in a room full of men. They get the props, I get nothing” (#36) and “The women are often marginalized at best and abused at worst” (#19).

Forty-three of the responses described an instance of unconscious bias in which women were negatively impacted without being deliberately discriminated against. Several respondents reported that male colleagues or peers would not necessarily notice anything problematic. This had consequences for the way women responded to what was happening, and their options for seeking change:

> I co-lead a band with a male colleague. The majority of the band are male musicians, we have around 25% female musicians. I have on many occasions directed the band in rehearsals and at various times during this direction some of the men will look to my male colleague and 1. blatantly ask him (in front of me and the rest of the band) what he wants the band to do as if I have not spoken at all 2. look for assurance that what I have just asked of them is what he wants (as if I have spoken out of turn) 3. screw their faces up making the inference that "why does she think she runs the band?" And one of the most annoying things about this is that I had to take my co-director away and tell him this was happening. He didn't notice it!!! The women in the band noticed but none of the

> males. My confidence slowly deteriorated throughout that time. (#67, female expert musician and singer, 45-54)

In four responses, a confidence disparity between men and women was considered to affect advancement in Irish traditional music. Confidence deteriorated as a result of some respondents' experience of participation, or in some cases was deliberately eroded. In addition, women described the need to do or achieve more to get the same recognition as men in Irish traditional music. This demonstrates that as confidence drops it becomes harder to challenge discrimination, especially if it is not acknowledged as such.

Assault, aggression and gendered power dynamics

Women participating in Irish traditional music suffer the effects of gendered power dynamics, male violence, domination and aggression, including sexual violence. Eleven responses recounted a sexual assault, and sixteen sexual harassment. Twenty-one responses contained a sexual innuendo or comment, and thirty-one evidenced the general objectification of women: "Overheard a guy addressing my band members in a neighbouring dressing room: 'So which one of ye is banging the fiddle player?' I don't even know where to start with how humiliating that is." (#41). There are examples of a general power disparity affecting women's participation, which is at times deliberately exploited:

> When…invited me to his house to discuss my participation in a festival that was upcoming that he was part of the programming board, as a young singer I was thrilled. He started the evening with talks about my singing and songwriting and commended by efforts in certain areas. At about the time that I was due to leave (he was my lift back to a bus back to the city), he had gone to his room got changed into a bathrobe and tried to get me to take a bath with him. He would have been nearly as old as my father at this stage and I was a very confused young aspiring musician as to how the evening had taken this type of turn. I asked to be taken back to the bus which he refused. He tried to take advantage of me in many ways that evening and when I refused on all accounts he got silent and passive aggressive. He didn't offer me anywhere to sleep apart from his own bed as the last bus now was gone, and I waited until the morning sitting on his couch until he silently drove me back to Dublin. He never offered me a spot on that bill and after telling the story to another female musician at the time she admitted that many women including herself had slept with this predator in order to get on festival bills. (#47, female expert musician and singer, 35-44)

Additionally, respondents reported bullying, experiencing a "boys' club" or "laddish" behaviour, and in some cases a veiled threat, or apprehension about challenging a man's behaviour in an Irish traditional music context. In two instances it appeared that respondents became an outlet for a man's frustration, suffering some form of punishment because they were a successful, skilled or talented woman.

Physical appearance and image

The responses show women's appearance and clothing is scrutinised, affecting their participation at all levels of Irish traditional music. Nineteen responses contained an instance of appearance being prioritised over musical ability: "After I had sang a song during a session, a male fiddler said that I was the hot blonde version of another female singer" (#1). This also affected women's access to work in traditional music, and was particularly evident in the context of Irish dance stage shows, where musicians for such shows were chosen on the basis of how they looked:

> I suggested a list of three musicians, 2 of which were women and the promoter immediately asked if they were "pretty" or whether or not they were "overweight"—because he did not hire ugly or "overweight" musicians. (#62, male expert musician, 18-24)

Relationships and family life directly affecting participation

Respondents commented that family commitments disproportionately and directly affected women's participation in Irish traditional music. The effect of having children on participation was mentioned in seven responses. Some of these were in relation to working as a professional musician, but not all:

> I suspected that my new domestic status with the inherent responsibilities led to me being ruled out for consideration. But I noticed that men in similar circumstances were still given opportunities. I could have fought more for these opportunities and made myself more visible by going out more, but by the time I managed to finish a long day at work, worry about a teenager and keep a home running, I just didn't have the energy to drag myself out to noisy bars late at night and play really fast music with a load of men who weren't interested in conversation with females and seemed to have no lack of energy and wanted to dominate the session. (#30, female experienced musician, 45-54)

Respondents reported that relationship status matters for women in Irish traditional music: "the woman in a band or duo *must* be 'the girlfriend'" (#89). Other examples included being consistently described in relation to their musician boyfriend rather than in their own right, or being accepted or welcomed into a group at first because of their relationship with a male musician. Relationships can also have a detrimental effect on participation:

> I have also witnessed a very close female friend and talented musician be subjected to abuse and misogynistic behaviour by a powerful musician ex-boyfriend. He has used that power many times to stop other musicians engaging with her, to prevent her playing where she likes or prevent her playing with certain people (#29, female intermediate musician, 35-44).

B) Personal experiences of the effects of gender inequality

Five women reported a positive experience in Irish traditional music, and that they never felt discriminated against with respect to gender. However, four of those noted that women were under-represented in their experience, at festivals, concerts or sessions.

Emotional cost, mental load and vulnerability

Seventy-eight responses described extra emotional cost or effort as a result of gender in an Irish traditional music environment, whether a short-lived emotional response, a sustained emotional investment, an extra mental load, or disguising an emotional response to an incident (Hochschild 1979, 2012). All responses with this code were submitted by people who identified as women or who were gender non-conforming. This was the most common code, present in all contexts: in traditional music classes "I do think my young age at the time also made me easy to overpower but I think being a woman was a key factor in this" (#42); in administration "There was an awkward moment and he moved on" (#8); professionally "I was shocked and mortified" (#25); and at sessions "But when I really think properly about that incident, which I had almost erased from my mind, the overwhelming feeling I remember is humiliation. Humiliation and shame" (#9). Women musicians learned to avoid embarrassing men or bruising their ego. They reported a reluctance to speak out about a bad experience as they did not want to ruin the atmosphere or cause a scene, but also reported feeling guilty about conforming, or frustrated that they said nothing. Eleven responses reported a clear fear or vulnerability in an Irish traditional music context and eleven described shame or humiliation. Seven described a sacrifice–accepting gendered disadvantage to avoid upsetting the status quo, or to stay safe. Some responses detailed a realisation or coming to terms with the reality that gender is an issue in music, or women feeling despair or disappointment that they would always

be at a disadvantage participating because of their gender. Women respondents reported an erosion of confidence, that their experience of traditional music was tainted as a result of an incident, and that experiences affected their participation in Irish traditional music into the future.

Silencing

The responses contain many examples of the silencing of women, whether intentional or unconscious. Thirty-three responses contained evidence of women being ignored, their opinion disregarded, or being told "I know better" in traditional music contexts.

> That night, I went home and I cried. I was so angry. The drunken idiot was one thing, but being ignored, laughed at, and mansplained to when I needed help was infuriating. Nobody else had to deal with him. No one else left early because of him. He was my problem. (#7, female experienced musician, 25-34)

Others reported deliberate attempts to erode self-esteem, to control, to belittle, or to police behaviour:

> Eventually I confronted the manager on the tour bus and asked for money when we stopped for lunch. He took out a wad of cash, pulled out a few notes and then stuffed them into my bra—yes, my bra—in front of everyone. I was humiliated - humiliated and felt so degraded. He handed the cash over to the male musician with no fuss. This was 11 years ago and I still rage and well up when I think about it. I am such a strong and vocal person but put on the spot I froze and said nothing—completely disempowered which is exactly what he was trying to achieve. (#52, female expert musician, 25-34)

> When I joined the band, their "manager" took me aside and told me that I wasn't to get above myself (this was our first gig), and that they were a great band before ever a woman came along. To remember that. (#79, female expert musician and singer, 35-44)

Sometimes a man or men adjusted reality to fit their expectations of a woman's status or behaviour, finding an alternative explanation to match assumptions:

> Was asked by a reporter what it felt like being the token female musician in the band. The band name was my name, it was on a banner behind us on the stage, which the journalist could still see when interviewing me, I had been centre stage all night presenting the gig to the audience as well as being the lead musician, it was either my own compositions we played or my arrangement of trad tunes in the public domain and I had hired all other members of the band. But sure... token female! How the hell can I be the token female in my own band! (#18, female expert musician and singer, 35-44)

In seven of the responses, a woman was believed only when a man was alerted, or a man had corroborated her story. Furthermore, there were twelve instances in which an attempt to resolve an issue had no effect or was actively shut down. For example "I just think her protests were seen as awkward teenager" (#50) and "I emailed them very politely and respectfully to open the conversation and none of them have emailed me back about it" (#61).

Isolation

Isolation was a recurring theme, both to describe how women felt, but also as a self-imposed coping mechanism to escape difficult situations: "I left before they said anything else" (#13); "I took some deep breaths and decided I'd rather go home then try to fend off his attention anymore" (#7); "I got very disheartened and avoided sessions for a long time as a result" (#21). Women were cast as being a killjoy, as interrupting the norm, as being an other or outsider. There were specific mentions of being the only woman in a range of contexts, with resulting discomfort.

Learned behaviour and challenging established norms

The research demonstrated that after long term participation in a community it is difficult to depart from its norms, even for those who recognise the issues and no longer wish to comply with certain paradigms:

> I have sat in silence for a multitude of experiences as I have felt conscious of my position as an intermediate musician and rattling the status quo, friendships and breaking the scene. (#91, female intermediate musician, 25-34)

The responses described ways in which women have deliberately enabled, allowed, normalised or condoned gender bias. Some respondents reported that they had a mostly positive experience in Irish traditional music, before going on to report an instance of bias. In exposing an instance of gender bias, some women respondents described relevant personal characteristics, or their breadth of experience. This is perhaps a way of validating their right to make such comments, having learned over time a need to justify or defend their music participation:

> A sound engineer TOLD me I didn't need more fiddle in my monitor mix when I asked for it in a sound check. I had been gigging full-time for 6 years at this stage. He didn't tell the lads what they needed or didn't need. (#72, female expert musician and singer, 25-34)

Women downplayed the significance of an incident perhaps as a coping mechanism, or simply because it was so common. There were attempts to rationalise or explain the situation they were reporting:

> My story is more a list of micro-stories rather than one event. And all could potentially include other factors than just gender, but they certainly don't happen to my male colleagues at the same rate that they happen to me. (Look at me qualifying it already.) (#37, female experienced musician and singer, 35-44)

Some internalised and normalised their experiences, then remembered or reassessed when prompted by a recollection. There were eleven instances of women showing frustration at their inaction at the time of the incident they report: “I said nothing”. There were examples of feeling complicit in a system or status quo, and of feeling peer pressure not to speak up. Some respondents tentatively identified a problem, but failed to acknowledge the extent of the consequences because of their particular lived experience.

Responses to the research

In addition to responses to the research question, many participants included comments about the research itself, the FairPlé campaign, and general comments on discussing gender in relation to Irish traditional music. I include this information to provide insights into the context in which the research was carried out, the receptiveness of the community to this discussion, and the range and strength of responses it provoked. Some people completed the questionnaire specifically to record opposition, without giving an answer to the research question.

Several respondents expressed frustration with FairPlé–that it was not good enough, that they felt it focused on the professional aspect of Irish traditional music, or they were disappointed that existing female traditional musicians continued to work with someone they deemed sexist. However, there were many comments involving positive developments, or hope for change. These included reports of efforts towards gender equality, instances of male solidarity, the importance of role models, and comments that a concerted effort from all was necessary to make change. Sixteen responses expressed that the movement for gender equality in traditional music, this research, or the FairPlé campaign was positive and appreciated.

There were seven responses explicitly expressing opposition to the research, FairPlé or discussions regarding gender in Irish traditional music. Some respondents attempted to explain or excuse the differences in participation according to gender. Ten responses categorically stated that the author had not seen any form of gender discrimination, or that it does not happen. These included a suggestion that “the

gender issue is sometimes taken to extreme" (#34); incidents framed as the behaviour of individuals rather than a systematic problem; asserting that the problem is simply lazy untalented women complaining, that women should practice more, try harder, or be better.

> I think your movement is absolutely laughable! Every well-known band has been fronted by a woman and indeed these bands have been the starting point of careers!.... If women want to be acknowledged more as instrumentalists then practice more and stop throwing tantrums!! There is no gender problem in trad! At least there wasn't until you created one! (#17, expert musician and singer of undisclosed gender, 55-64)

> Some members of FairPlé have made their money from being talented singers, and now, as they are not flavour of the month because of personal choice, they pull this sexism and oppression card. This is damaging to the tradition....I experience the same amount of disrespect as women do, I do not blame the whole Irish music culture and accuse it of sexism because of isolated incidents with some perhaps sexist people and choices I have made. (#46, experienced musician and singer of undisclosed gender, 18-24)

These same respondents were keen to separate "the music" from gender, and from the reality of the human experience:

> What your (sic) talking about is a generation problem in Ireland! A way people think and talk! But that has nothing to do with music! Grow up and stop ruining what is supposed to be fun. (#17)

> Good music is good music, it isn't about this ridiculous notion that life should be always 50/50. Yes, traditionally women did not record as much, or play the pipes as much, but this is more of a societal issue as opposed to being rooted in music. (#46)

Some responses were openly hostile, ridiculing the premise of this research, stating that I created a problem by carrying out the research "there was no issue until you created an imaginary one" (#99), or that the research and discussion was motivated by a desire to get more performance work. The popularity or success of specific women was used as evidence that gender does not affect participation or achievement in Irish traditional music. Gender disparity was framed simply as the outcome of choices women might make, or that gender discrimination is from an earlier period and does not happen now.

Discussion and implications

It is clear from respondents' experiences that gender affects participation across all contexts in Irish traditional music. Impacts are not confined to the professional sphere, nor are they confined to the past. While some of the submissions describe clearly abusive experiences, the majority represent subtle incidents that individually may be dismissed as being one person's behaviour, unrelated to gender, or a mistake. Collectively, the responses provide the first empirical data documenting the ways in which gender affects participation in Irish traditional music, and thus provide crucial evidence to a field in which gender has historically been overlooked. Those who contribute to gender inequality in Irish traditional music and those who experience it, struggle to see it happening, and there is not one simple cause or solution. This makes it difficult to identify, describe, or challenge factors contributing to gender inequality, and difficult to prove that it exists at all. The complexity of the issue is illustrated both in the nature and prevalence of the three most frequently assigned codes: women's extra emotional and mental load, societal sexism manifested in Irish traditional music, and these experiences being repeated or sustained over time. The findings highlight that this hidden, longstanding, unacknowledged complexity is wearing, and when considering the broader implications of this, respondents noted a decline in women's involvement with age, and lower numbers of women in professional traditional music contexts.

Some respondents used the prevalence of sexism in general society as a reason to oppose attempts to address it in Irish traditional music. They viewed its presence in

Irish traditional music as inevitable, and felt it was therefore inappropriate to interrogate questions of gender in that arena, or to find fault with the scene itself. However, it is clear from respondents' experiences that some of the systems of Irish traditional music allow gender bias to continue, and in some cases actively perpetuate it—from sessions and summer schools, to the ways in which traditional music is sold and promoted. In addition, a worrying tendency to protect the tradition from disruption was noted, a further illustration of the silencing of women participants described by respondents.

The findings highlight women's experiences of isolation in traditional music, and the consequences of this isolation warrant further consideration as it affects their development, their perception of themselves and their confidence. Women removing themselves from sessions and other musical environments affects their musical development in a way that it does not affect the equivalent male musician's development. The isolation is both physical and mental. When women remove themselves from such musical encounters for whole evenings, or whole lifetimes–they lose out on equivalent group playing time, networking, relationship-building, making personal and professional connections, cementing musical partnerships, rehearsing more, and playing more. These are significant factors in success and skill level generally, and career development in music for those who desire it.

Sessions are noted several times to be uncomfortable contexts. In terms of the implications of the findings it is important to consider and promote other ways of playing and participating in traditional music. Session mechanisms, culture and etiquette often highlight hierarchies, which are not always hierarchies of ability, but of certain types of power. Many festivals now have beginner, intermediate and advanced sessions. The findings suggest that further consideration must be given to acknowledging these different types of power hierarchies and considering the steps that can be taken to adjust certain contexts for traditional music.

It is important to have an awareness of which groups these structures serve or exclude, as these effects are not confined to questions of gender. The demographic information of the current sample shows little gender or racial diversity. The research is therefore limited in that it overwhelmingly describes the experiences of people who identify as white men and women, and contributes nothing to our understanding of intersectionality in this context. More work is required to reach and hear about the experiences of minority groups.

When considering the implications of the findings, although the complexity of this issue makes it difficult to define and address, it does also mean that everyone is in a position to help bring about change. Many roles and stakeholders arise in these testimonies, including but not limited to: teachers, camera operators, session leaders, production companies, instrument makers, promoters, well-known musicians, managers, musical families, booking agents, the media, bar owners, band members, and sound engineers. Nineteen responses mentioned existing traditional music organisations who hold power in this area. Several respondents stated the need for men to take action, and to work together with women to effect change, including to overcome instances where "men do not act for fear of other men" (#119).

Those who have the greatest effect of all are peer musicians and listeners–those who listen and play alongside the survey respondents. It is only when these stories are viewed collectively can we begin to understand how they intersect with culture, society, race, politics, class, gender, specific events, general experience over time, sessions, history and performance. It is only then that we can begin to take steps towards making Irish traditional and folk music a more welcoming place for everyone, with better equality of opportunity.

Notes

[1] The questionnaire was designed according to best practice outlined in Sommer & Sommer (2002). Categories on ethnicity were taken from the UK Government Statistical Service standards with special relevance to Northern Ireland (Office for National Statistics, 2015).

[2] The recordings were presented at listening stations at the Symposium on Women and Traditional | Folk Music at NUI Galway, 9 February 2019; Women's Work Festival, Belfast, 8 June 2019; and Féile an Phobal at Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich, Belfast, 2 August 2019. Excerpts were also featured on BBC Radio 3's Music Matters programme, in a segment about this research, on 8 June 2019.

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American folk music by Shaker women and girls: The case of Ann Maria Love

Jennifer DeLapp-Birkett

Abstract

Due to the egalitarian religious beliefs and cultural practices of the Shakers, an American communal sect that flourished in the nineteenth century, women were active composers and transcribers of many thousands of religious folk songs. Most Shaker music, by women and men, remains in manuscript, awaiting transcription from Shaker letteral notation. This examination of two manuscript tunebooks by Shaker musician Ann Maria Love reveals previously unexamined sources of Shaker music and the names of dozens more female musicians from her community at Groveland in New York State. Additional studies are needed to fully document the contributions of women to this unusual repository of American sacred folk music.

Keywords: Shakers, America, nineteenth century, hymns, song, dance

One summer Sunday in 1840, according to membership records, a 26-year-old woman named Susan Love arrived at the Shaker community of Groveland in Western New York State, bringing her 5-year-old daughter Ann Maria (Anonymous n.d.). Her reasons for coming are unknown. Some women joined the Shakers out of religious conviction, with or without family members; others were widows, or fleeing abusive homes, or simply seeking economic security. Whatever her mother's reasons for joining, Ann Maria would have been swept into the rhythm of daily activities of the roughly 140-member community "conform[ing] to adults' expectations in work, school, and worship" (Wergland 2011: 56). Overseen by a Shaker sister known as a caretaker, she and her cohort of Shaker girls would have been busy learning to sew, knit, embroider and spin, setting and clearing tables in the dining hall, milking cows, picking apples, or making butter and cheese; occasional outings devoted to play were a special treat (Wergland 2011).

One of Ann Maria's activities, as soon as she learned to read and write, was to notate songs. Ann Maria, like many other Shaker girls, worked on filling songbooks much as seamstresses would create samplers or quilts. She quickly mastered the simple, efficient Shaker music transcription system known as small letteral notation (Bell 1998; Cook 1973; Patterson 1979) and started writing music.

By the time Ann Maria was seven, she was writing poetry and composing simple songs. She created her own melodies and transcribed those sung by others, most likely on individual sheets of paper. She continued to collect melodies by herself and others throughout her childhood. As she neared the age of twenty-one, at which time children raised by the Shakers could make a permanent commitment to the Shakers, she compiled the songs she had composed herself into a manuscript tunebook called *A Collection of Various Songs, Composed by Ann Maria Love, Commenced in the 7th year of Her Age 1842 And by Her herein Transcribed in the 21st year of Her Age, In the Town of Groveland, Livingston Co. New York State, in the year 1855* (See Figure 1).

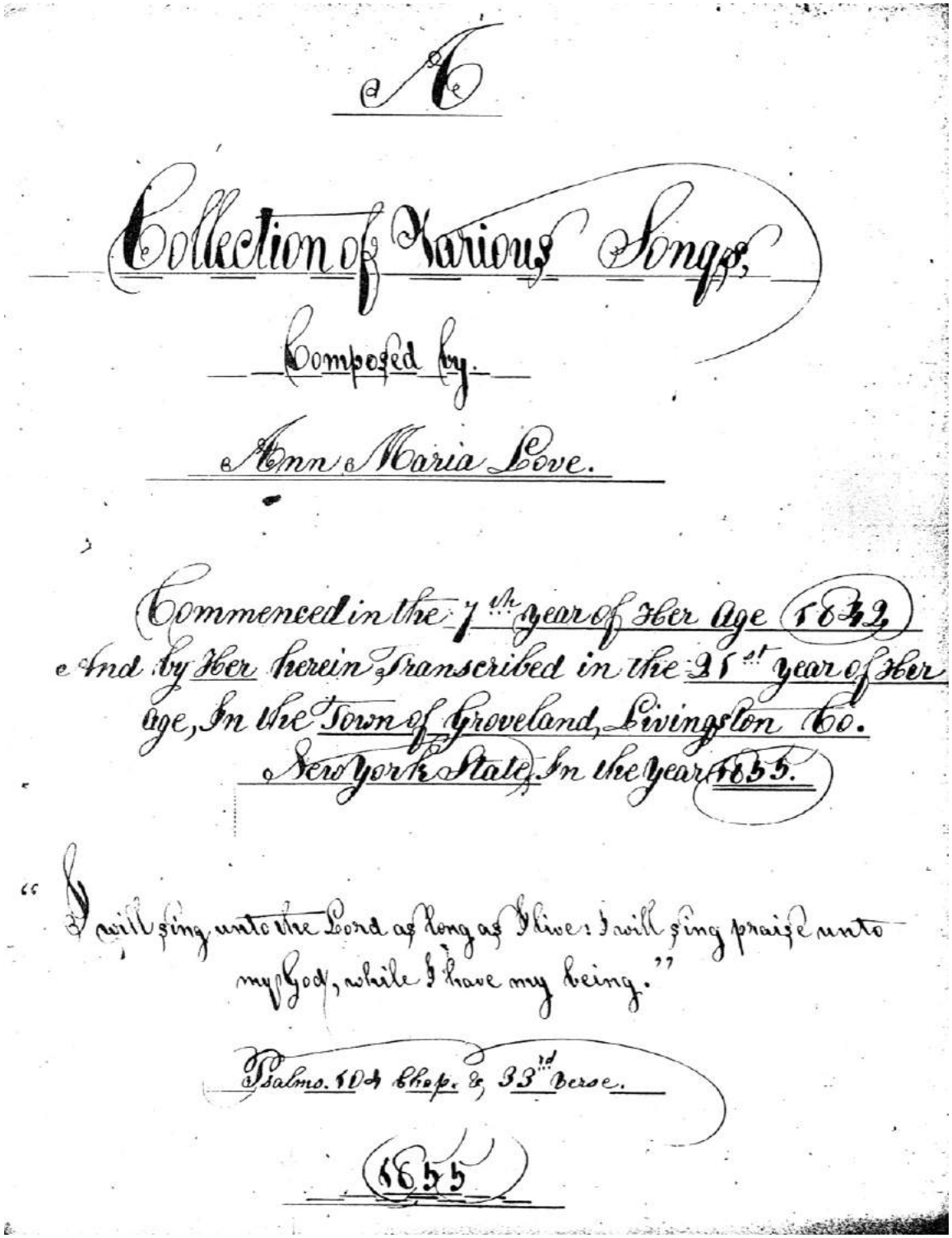

Figure 1: Cover of *Collection of Various Songs* (1855).

After completing the *Collection* of her own songs, she began another, this one a gathering of 163 songs, most by other Shakers in the community and eight of her own. She titled this second manuscript *A Book of Divine Songs Composed by Members of this Society While Residing at Sodus Bay; and since their Removal to Groveland. Those originated at Sodus will have the Name attached. By Ann Maria Love Groveland 1858*.

In many respects Ann Maria Love was a typical Shaker: her musicality, her gender (most communities, and certainly Groveland, comprised more women than men), her productivity, and her participation in Shaker life at a time of the movement's peak membership. Although every Shaker girl did not compile tunebooks, most Shakers were dedicated participants in the learning and performing of music, and most, to some degree, contributed new songs to the repertoire. Patterson (1979: 201) writes "most Shakers could put together a short song. They knew good tunes, shared the attitudes of the group, and had absorbed the verbal commonplaces and symbolism used in Shaker discourse".

Until I began my research into Ann Maria Love's musical life, she and her manuscripts were unknown apart from her listing in the standard studies of Shaker music (Cook 1973: 67-74; Patterson 1979: 479-528). Furthermore, although there are studies of Shaker music (Cook 1973; Goodwillie 2002, 2009; Hall 1993; Patterson 1979) and studies of Shaker women (Procter-Smith 1985; Thurman 2002; Wergland 2011), there is relatively little scholarly consideration of Shaker women musicians as a group. Here, I draw from previously unexamined music manuscripts and other primary sources to bring to light information about Ann Maria Love and her fellow musicians at Groveland, using secondary sources to illuminate the broader context of music composed and sung by Shaker women from across the movement.

The Shakers: An introduction

The Shakers are a pacifist, celibate and highly musical American communal religious sect with origins in England; they flourished in the nineteenth century. Shakerism as a movement still exists, though only two Shakers remain as of this writing, at the community in Sabbathday Lake, Maine (Sharp 2017). Their founder and leader was an Englishwoman named Ann Lee. Born in Manchester in 1736, Lee married at age 26. She bore four children, none of whom survived early childhood. Eight years after her wedding, she claimed to have received from heaven a revelation of celibacy (Crosthwaite 2009; Wergland 2011). Carnal love, she asserted, was a corruption of the true, Biblical love of Christ. Four years later, in 1774, Lee and a small band of followers sailed from Liverpool in search of greater religious freedom and opportunity in America. There they attracted new members and suffered persecution for their controversial belief that Lee was the second coming of Christ in female form, and for their practices. These included communal living with men and boys separated from women and girls, the splitting up of biological families who joined the Shakers, promoting pacifism at a time when the colonists were taking up arms against British troops and for their unusual (but not unprecedented) practice of dancing in worship. Dancing in worship was also practiced by sects including the Ranters in England and the New Lights in America (Patterson 1979).

"Mother Ann", as Shakers called their founder and leader Ann Lee, was known for her singing. An early Shaker convert, Elizabeth Johnson, described her first encounter with Mother Ann (Patterson 1979: 19):

> [Mother Ann] came singing into the room where I was sitting, and I felt an inward evidence that her singing was in the gift and power of God. She came and sat down by my side and put her hand upon my arm. Instantly I felt the power of God flow from her and run through my whole body. I was then convinced beyond a doubt that she had the power of God, and that I had received it from her.

Additional descriptions of Mother Ann's musicality abound (Francis 2000; Patterson 1979).

The generation of leaders that succeeded Mother Ann, between her death in 1784 and the mid 1830s, organised the growing Shaker membership into self-supporting farming communities, shown in Figure 2, and codified their doctrine and religious practices (White and Taylor, 1905).

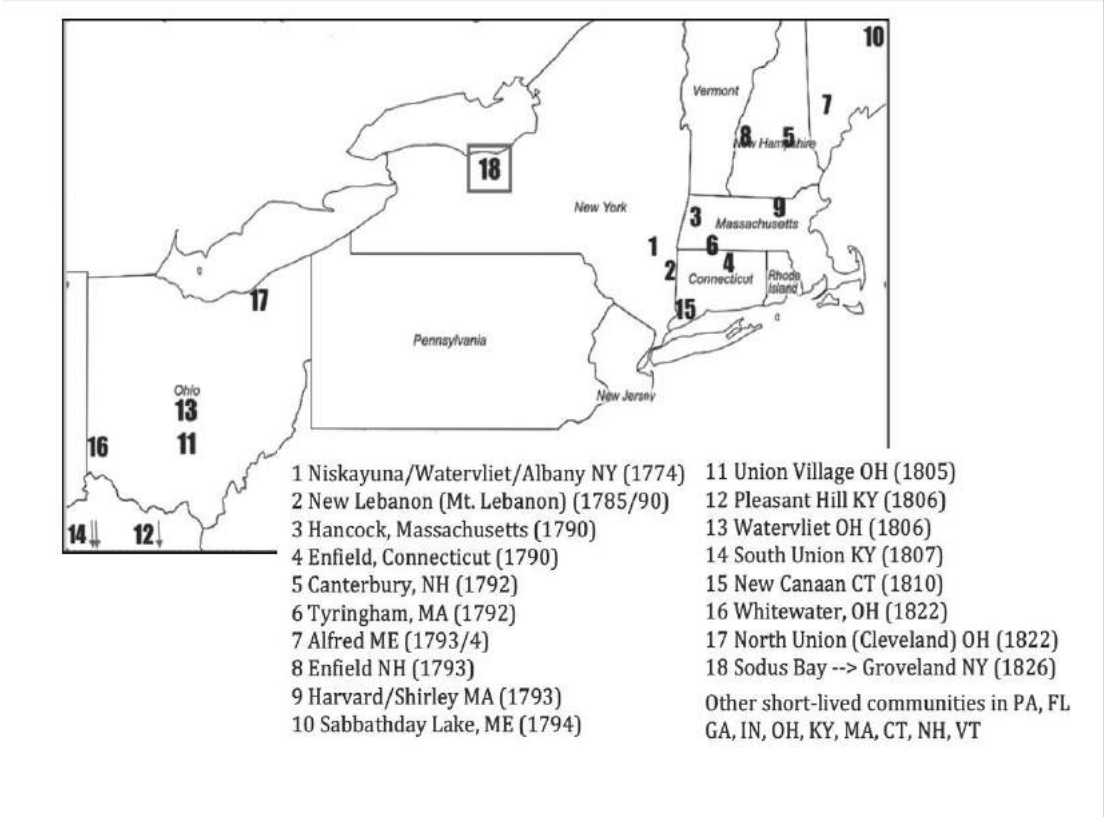

Figure 2: Locations and founding dates of Shaker communities (based on Patterson 1979: 12).

When the five-year-old Ann Maria Love arrived at Groveland in 1840, the Shaker movement was at its peak membership. From the 1830s to the 1850s there were between 4,000 and 6,000 members living in eighteen Shaker communities, mostly in New England and New York State, but also in some more western states including Ohio and Kentucky (Patterson 1979: 12-13).

Mother's Work, or the Era of Manifestations

The most important religious influence upon Ann Maria's experience as a Shaker musician was the spiritual revival known as "Mother's Work", or "The Era of Manifestations". Ann Maria's tenure as a Shaker coincided directly with the middle and later part of this revival, which began in 1837 when girls at the Shaker community in Watervliet, New York were said to be "visited" or possessed by spirits. Accepted as welcome phenomena by the leadership, the spirit visitations spread rapidly throughout the Shaker communities through the 1840s, tapering off slowly during the 1850s. An unprecedented outpouring of new songs of many types accompanied visits by spirits of the deceased, appearances by biblical characters, visions, and outdoor worship pageants or "feasts" (Goodwillie 2002; Patterson 1979). At nearly every community, the spirits gave "gifts" of imaginary objects (pens, doves, baskets of fruit, satin slippers) and often gifts of—quite audible—song. For example, Shaker writer Freegift Wells reported that at the Union Village community in Ohio in 1838, a girl named Vincy McNemar lay on the floor for

> some length of time with her hands in motion, sung a beautiful new song, & before 10 Oclock she sung two more new songs. Soon after this she was taken to the Office being stiff, & helpless; after this she sung another new song, & by 11 Oclock she come too [*sic*], so that she was able to go home (quoted in Patterson, 1979: 317).

In Ann Maria Love's community, during Mother's Work: "Matilda Southwick at Sodus had fifty new songs in one week" (Cook 1973: 50; Patterson 1979: 317). Little else has been published about Southwick, whose name appears in neither of the Shaker manuscript checklists (Cook 1973: 67-74; Patterson 1979: 479-528); but my examination of Love's second manuscript reveals that nine of Southwick's songs were collected by Love (1858). Shaker membership rolls for Groveland indicate that Southwick died a Shaker in 1847, at age 26 (Anonymous n.d.).

The Era of Manifestations tapered off throughout the 1850s, thus coinciding almost directly with Ann Maria's tenure at Groveland, though its origins preceded her arrival. During the first years of Mother's Work, while the revival was unfolding, worship was closed to visitors at Groveland and all the communities. By 1845, the year Ann Maria Love turned ten, visitors were allowed to enter once again. Groveland worship on Christmas day that year featured pageantry, emotion, figurative gifts (trumpet, vessel, box), singing, and unknown tongues, according to a ministry elder's description.

> We…commenced our devotions by bowing four times to the power of heaven. We then sang the savior's universal prayer…Elder John…then placed a box of gifts on the table, and blew his trumpet for all to come forward and partake…four spirits dressed in pale blue appeared, two males and two females, bearing a large vessel filled with holy waters of repentance, for all to wash and bathe in…Some [Shakers present] gave vent to their feelings in a flood of tears… others were singing new divine songs, speaking in unknown tongues…(quoted in Kramer 1991: 26-27)

The longstanding Shaker value of progressive revelation fuelled the outpouring of new songs brought by Mother's Work. From the early part of the century, Shaker doctrine emphasised that truths and religious practices were given for a limited time and should remain a part of Shaker culture only as long as they were deemed "useful" by the movement's leadership (Crosthwaite 2009: 29; Patterson 1979: 32). Progressive revelation led Shakers to compose and experiment with new music rather than relying mainly on a canon of established, accepted songs.

Women in Shaker life

Shakers were, and remain, well known for practices and beliefs that gave women a greater degree of authority and equality with men than their peers outside Shakerism (Cook 1973). Thurman (2002: 177) writes "[b]asing the most fundamental aspect of community—human relations—on the theological principle that God is both female and male, the Shakers worked hard to build a system that valued equally the labor, the religious experiences, and the ideas of the men and women who committed their lives to Shakerism".

By all accounts, the Shakers' views of women were radical for their time. Suffragists and reformers who championed women's rights in the mid-nineteenth century praised the Shakers for promoting equality and fair working conditions for women (Thurman 2002). Recently, writers including Thurman and Wergland (2011) have brought renewed recognition to the equitable living conditions and feminist leadership models that the Shakers provided. Crosthwaite (2009: 27) underscores the theology behind the Shaker's gender equality and "rejection of a carnal life", writing "[t]heir theological structure rested directly on a binary male and female universe … [and] … embraced … a gender balance in both heaven and earth". Shaker women engaged in less labour than their counterparts in the non-Shaker world, held positions of social and spiritual authority and were freed from the physical toll of pregnancy and childbirth.

In contrast, scholars writing between 1970 and the early 1990s questioned whether Shakerism provided a suitable model for contemporary feminists. Their reappraising perspective pointed to Shakers' customary separation of the sexes, their traditional division of gender roles and their ultimate inability to step entirely outside the patriarchal societal framework of broader American culture (Brewer 1992; Campbell

1978; Procter-Smith 1985). However, one of these scholars, Procter-Smith (1985: 67-68), acknowledges that "compared with the life of women in 'the world', Shaker sisters had increased possibilities to develop leadership potential … they had considerably more financial and personal security … and they could rely on the physical and emotional support which developed among 'sisters in the gospel'". Thurman and Wergland's more recent arguments convincingly acknowledge the broader sociocultural context within which Shakers flourished and credit them with an exceptional degree of gender equality for their day and time.

Ann Maria Love's first tune book

The first of Ann Maria Love's two books, *A Collection of Various Songs* (1855), is sixty-two pages long and contains 159 tunes, arranged by genre. The most immediately apparent feature of the manuscript is the notational system used. Love uses a script known as small-letteral notation, a Shaker invention, which was by then standard practice among Shaker communities. Using alphabet letters placed in undulating lines across a stave-less page, this notation indicated approximate contour and pitch name. Beams connected eighth notes (quavers), double beams sixteenth notes (semiquavers), and a vertical line next to a letter indicated a half-note (minim). With a common notational practice established, Shakers could—and did—share their repertoire in written correspondence with their brethren and sisters in other communities and with the Central Ministry in New Lebanon, New York, allowing for the expansion of the written repertoire and facilitating the spread of new songs.

The musical style of Love's melodies is typical of mid-nineteenth century Shaker music, in that the songs are monophonic, and usually divided into two halves of eight measures, each half repeated. Nearly all melodies are diatonic, natural minor or major (some other communities used dorian mode) and written without key signatures, using the note C as tonic for major songs and A as tonic for minor. Some outsiders likened Shaker music to Protestant psalm tunes, others heard echoes of familiar English ballad melodies or songs from England and Ireland (Patterson 1979).

Many of Love's tunes, like those of her peers, had no words, or only partial text underlay, and would have been sung to vocables. The neutral syllables "lo" and "lodle-lo" have been passed down through aural tradition (see for example Hall 1996; Patterson 1979: 56, 63-64). Instruments were likely too expensive for the struggling young sect, but even as the movement grew, musical instruments were viewed as unwelcome intrusions from the "worldly" non-Shaker culture. Harmony, likewise, was believed to be too decorative and fancy for a Shaker sensibility that prized simplicity.

Labouring songs

Many of the songs Love recorded were what Shakers called "laboring songs," tunes used for dancing in worship (Figure 3).

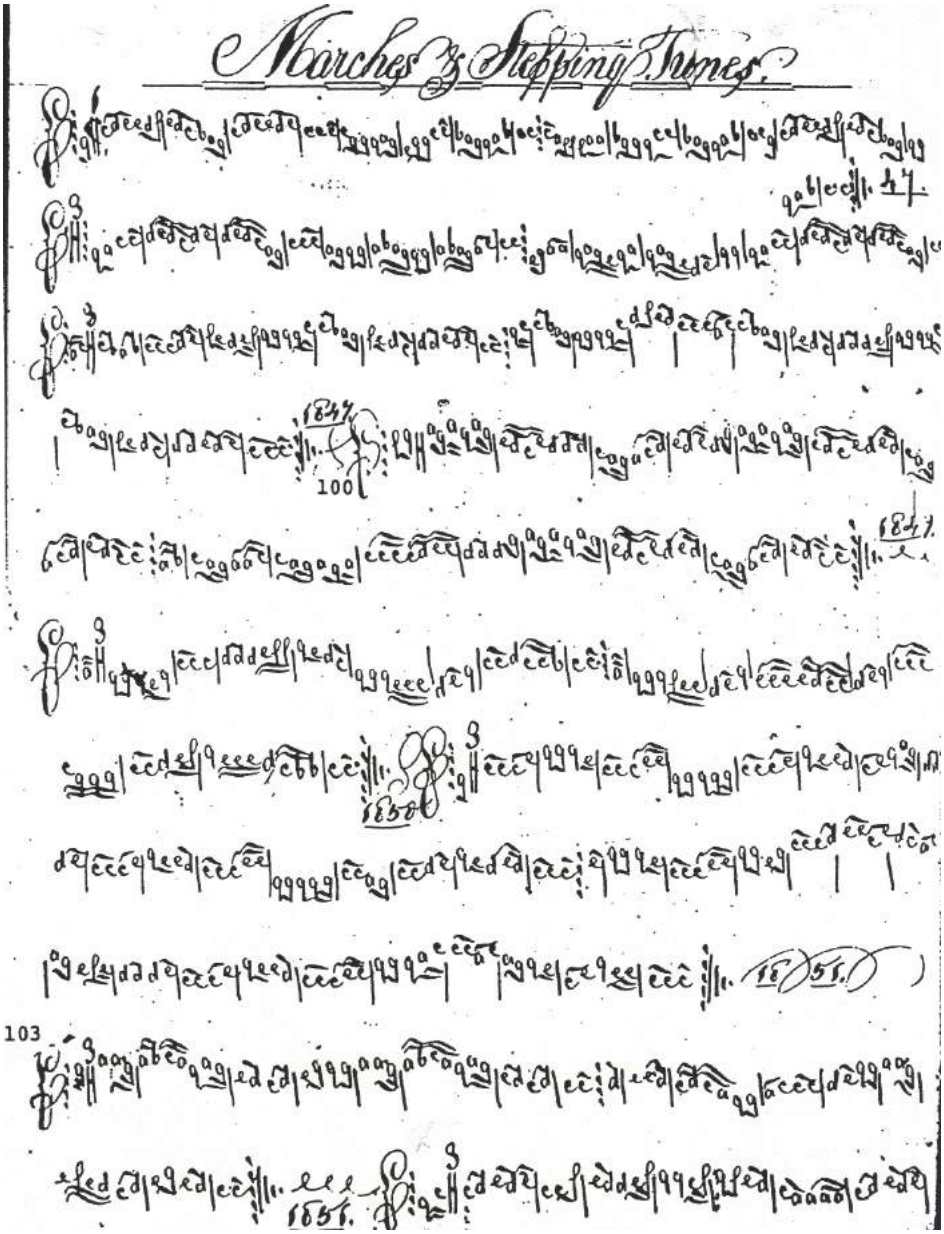

Figure 3: First page of "Marches and Stepping Tunes" (Love 1855: 42).

When Shakers "labored", a stationary group of eight or ten singers sang the tunes to vocables. Although early dances had often been free and ecstatic (the term "Shakers" itself initially was a derogatory reference to Shakers' trembling, whirling motions, before it was adopted by the sect's own members), by 1840 dancing in formations had become the norm. Paralleling the codification of Shaker social and spiritual beliefs in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the Shakers' dances also became more organised, into patterns resembling American square or country dances, but maintaining strict separation of sexes. Patterson presents what is known of Shaker dance formations and genres in four chapters on "Laboring Songs" (1979: 99-130, 245-315, 377-396). That the music was normally monophonic and unaccompanied reflects the Shaker value of simplicity. Patterson (1979: 103) notes that early labouring tunes were often derived from popular music "related to dance, fiddle, and fife tunes popular at that or an earlier day in New England and the British Isles".

Ann Maria Love's manuscript has three sections of dance music. The first group of eight dancing songs she classifies as "Round Dances & Square Order Shuffles". All of these are in compound duple meter. According to Patterson, the round dance consisted of skipping by same-gendered pairs in a large circular pattern. What the

Groveland Shakers called the “Square Order Shuffle” was also known as the “Holy Order Shuffle”, and it dated back to the years immediately following Mother Ann’s death. Again, Patterson (1979) describes the dancing patterns in depth. Shaker Isaac Newton Youngs of the New Lebanon, New York community, referred in 1856 to a dance called the square order shuffle in the 1850s, indicating that it was “generally practiced” after an 1807 awakening, “increasing the speed to what was called the ‘skipping manner’” (quoted in Goodwillie 2009: 9). “I Will Go” (Figure 4) is a typical round dance beginning with vocables that may have been intended to approximate Native American speech (Goodwillie 2002: 62).[i]

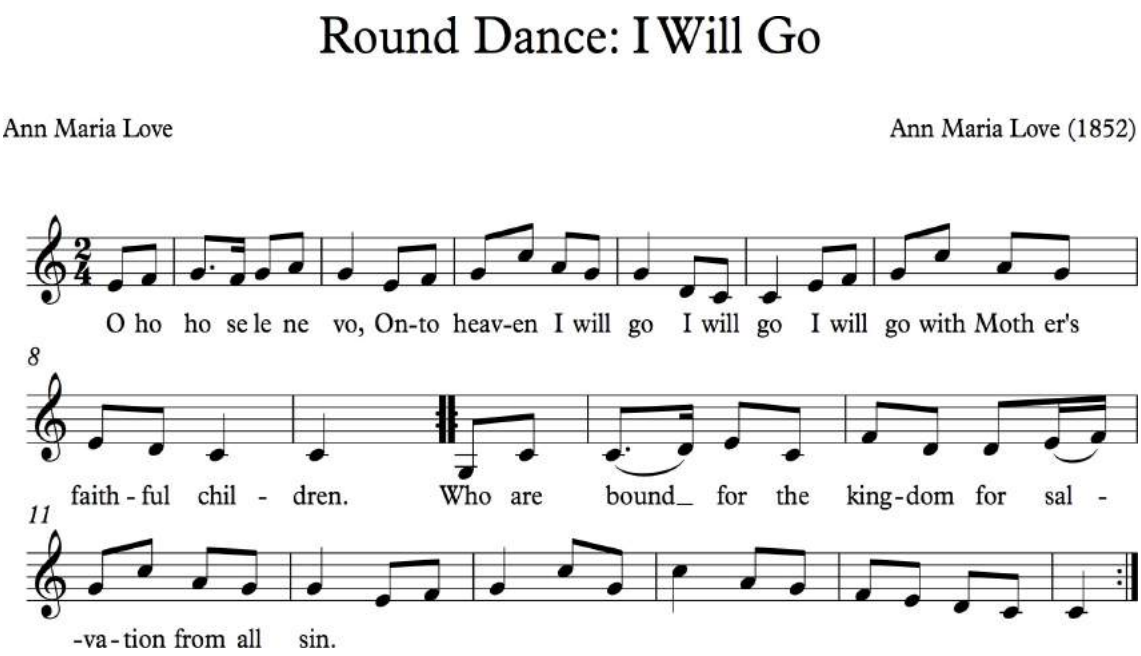

Figure 4: Round Dance: “I Will Go” #76 (1853) (Love 1855: 36).

Love’s next category is “Marches and Stepping Tunes”, to which the Shakers would have moved from one location to another—even one building to another—in an orderly, rhythmic fashion. Love gives sixteen of these; all are in simple duple meter. An example follows in Figure 5.

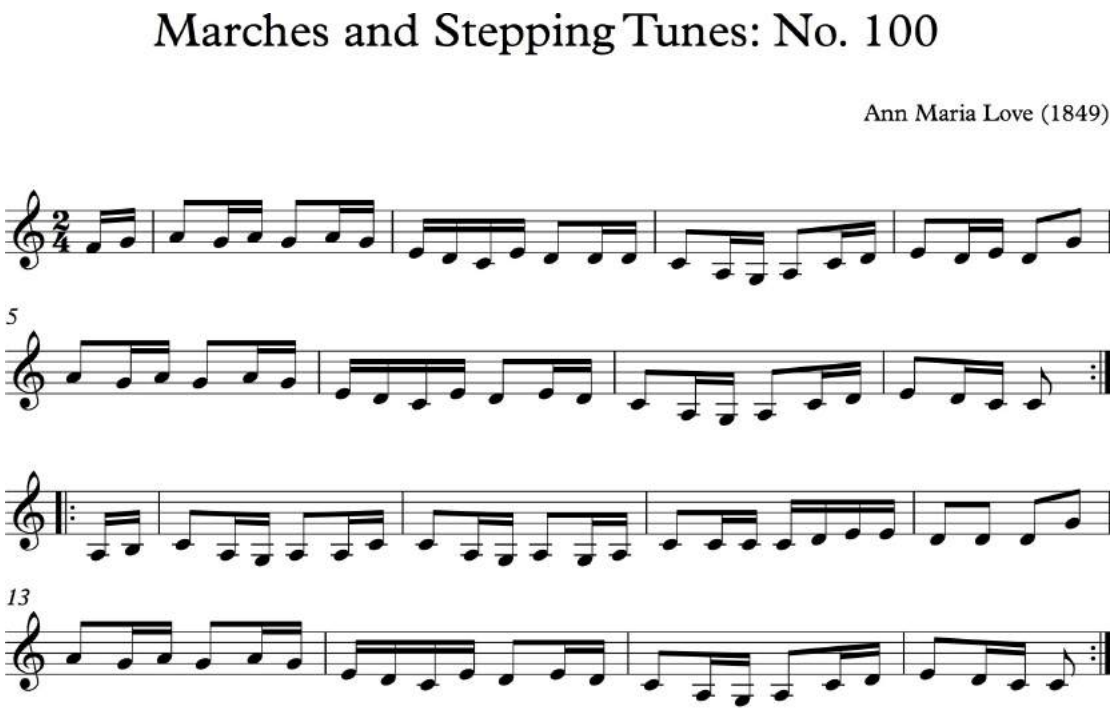

Figure 5: March and Stepping Tune #100 (1849) (Love 1855: 42).

The "Even Sub-Measure Lively Tunes", similarly duple-metered, are not mentioned in Patterson's study, but he does describe "Quick Dances" (similar to, and older than, the round dances, using two smaller circles instead of one) and the invention during Mother's Work of a number of new, vigorous dances, of which this may be one (Patterson 1979). More than the labouring tunes in Love's previous two sections, these bear a resemblance to certain North American fiddle tunes meant for dancing that featured repeated shuffle notes (measures 2, 4-5) and frequent groups of four semiquavers, in duple meter; see Figure 6.

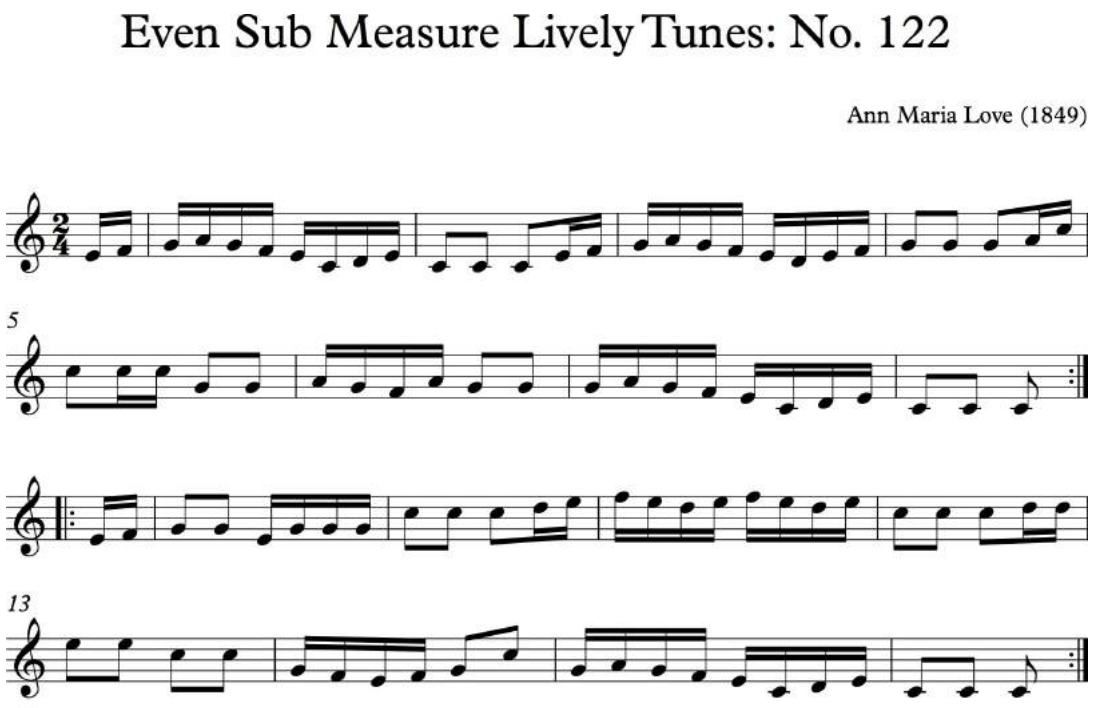

Figure 6: Even Sub-Measure Lively Tunes #122 (1849) (Love 1855: 45).

Other genres in Love's manuscript

Placed at the front of Love's 1855 manuscript, before the labouring songs, is a group of seven hymns. The Shaker hymn genre consists of rhymed, metric poetry, in multiple stanzas, the first written beneath a monophonic melody that suits all stanzas. Shaker musicians often wrote their own texts and Love is no exception. Since hymns normally conveyed doctrine (Goodwillie 2009), the writing of hymns seems to have granted Shaker women a voice in shaping the communities' religious beliefs. However, with titles like "Youth's Petition", "God My Dependance [*sic*]" and "Fervant [*sic*] Call", Love's hymn texts are skewed toward personal devotional expression rather than doctrinal exposition.

Following the hymns and the labouring songs already discussed are sixty-eight short, single-stanza songs that are best classified as "gift songs" or "extra songs", which normally had two strains, each repeated. Extra songs, according to Patterson (1979), had been in use among the Shakers since about 1810. Gift songs were extra songs received during Mother's Work. Because of their brevity and versatility, they could be assembled into sets and used for dancing or sung between strenuous dances to provide recovery time. Patterson (1979: 201) writes "[i]t is no surprise that the one-stanza songs far outnumber all others in the Shaker manuscripts, that they were created by all classes of Shakers, or that they are the ones in which the Shakers made their most creative use of their folk-song heritage". Love's extra songs have titles like "Praise to Mother", "Comforting Word", "Youth's Petition", "Angelic Desire", "Little Dove", "Courage Indomitable" and "Savior's Call". Like the labouring songs, these were usually in binary form, with each eight-bar half repeated. "Praise to Mother", composed in 1852, has an undulating melodic contour presented in the natural minor mode (Figure 7).

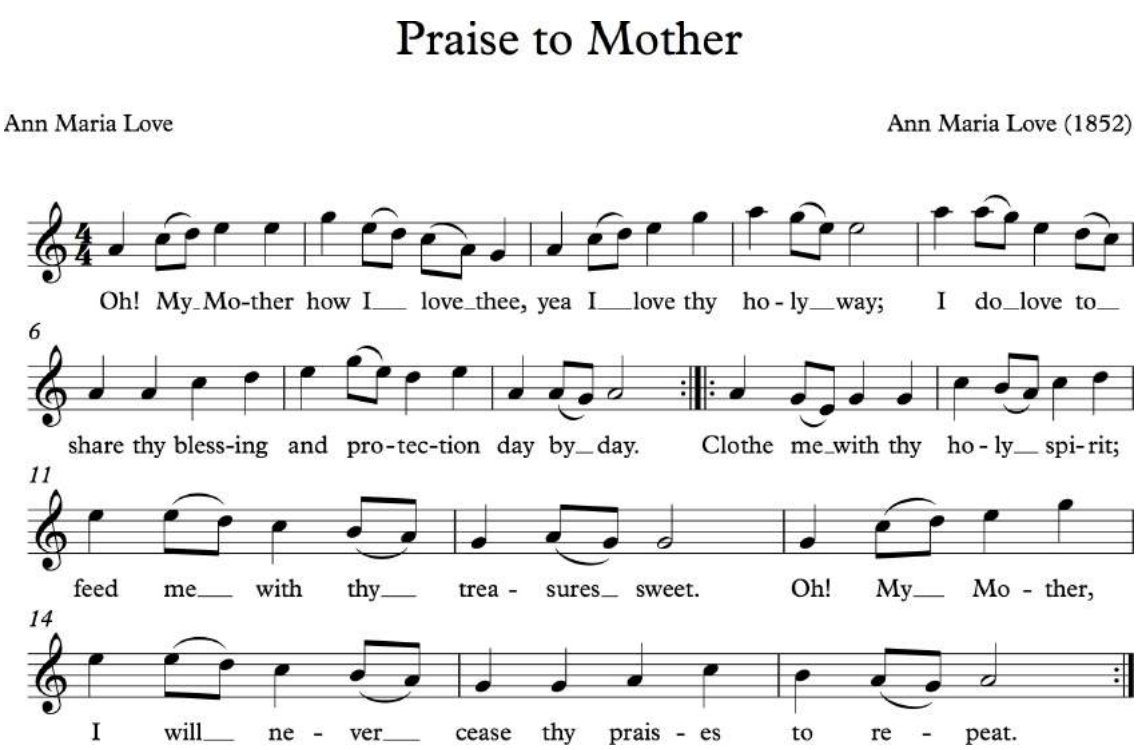

Figure 7: "Praise to Mother"(Love 1855: 9; Hall 1996: 11).

The last section of the manuscript mixes hymns, extra songs, and occasional songs. This latter category commonly celebrated specific events in Shaker life. Love's occasional songs include "A New Year's Song", "A Welcome for the Ministry" and "A Hymn Composed on the Dedication of the New School-House". The titles of such

occasional songs indicate their function in Shaker life: to celebrate a holiday, to welcome leaders visiting from Shaker headquarters, or to inaugurate a new building. The last section is written in a different ink, and may have been an afterthought, as there are multiple genres represented.

Music in Groveland and Love's daily life

Music was part of the fabric of daily life for Ann Maria Love, and indeed, most Shakers. It was heard at special occasions and throughout worship services. In addition, music likely accompanied daily work and informal social interactions. We know that music was a focus of several different types of scheduled weekly meetings the Shakers attended in the evenings. The typical Shaker community held "various kinds of services and meetings: union meetings, in which small groups of brethren and sisters gathered for singing, refreshments, and social conversation; singing meetings for the practice and learning of songs; family meetings in the dwellinghouse for worship in song and dance; and church worship in the meetinghouse" (Patterson 1979: 74). In most cases, Shaker communities instituted music education long before local state and municipal governments did (Klein 1990). Music at Love's community, Groveland, fell into a typical Shaker pattern, with evening singing meetings twice weekly, two more weekly meetings to learn dance, and additional meetings for the learning of new songs (Kramer 1991).

Music was used for singing and dancing in worship services at the meetinghouse. When Ann Maria Love first arrived with her mother, the Groveland Shakers had only recently completed a major relocation. The community of approximately 125 members had moved from their original location at Sodus, about seventy-five miles northeast on the shore of Lake Ontario, to 1700 acres of fertile farmland along the Genesee River valley, completing the two-year process in 1838 (Kramer 1991; Wisbey 1982). Groveland's new meetinghouse, completed in 1841, had a main room for worshipping that was fifty feet by forty-five feet. It was said to seat 500, though during Ann Maria's time, about 200 Shakers usually attended on Sunday mornings (Kramer 1991). Meetings were lively, full of singing and dancing. A visitor in 1850 offered the following description of worship at Groveland:

> They marched to the meetinghouse which is divided into two rooms, the ladies in one room and the gentlemen in the other. They take off their bonnets and hats. Then they march two by two to a very large room, hang their handkerchiefs on a peg, and take their places on the floor in rows of six each where they sing the Lord's prayer. Then they march and dance about three quarters of an hour. When they are dismissed, they march two by two to the brick building to eat their dinner (Kramer 1991: 57)

Groveland, like most Shaker communities, welcomed spectators to Sunday worship meetings (Anonymous ca. 1841), hoping for converts. By 1852, the year Love turned seventeen, a Shaker leader who was visiting Groveland from the New Lebanon headquarters estimated there were 300 spectators at one Sunday service (Kramer 1991: 27-28).

Love is not the only Groveland Shaker known to write songs or create tunebooks. Mentions of Sodus and Groveland in the literature about Shaker music are rare, but Patterson does discuss musician and spiritual leader Polly Lawrence, who moved from New Lebanon to Sodus shortly before her death at age 34 (Patterson 1979: 276-277). Patterson's checklist of known Shaker music manuscripts lists, in addition to Love's tunebooks, those created by Sarah Cutler, Emeline DeGraw and Sophronia Dole (one each); two by Laura Dole; five anonymous Groveland songbooks; and two more by Gabriel Thompson (Patterson 1979: 492-493), indicating the archival locations of each. Love's are held by the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, Ohio. Cook's list of Shaker scribes names, in addition to Love, musicians John Lockwood and Elija Blakeman. Furthermore, four tunes from Sodus/Groveland appear in *Love is Little,* a

songbook and recording compiled and edited by Roger Hall (1996: 10-11; 1992): two of these are anonymous while the other two are by Eldress Lydia Dole (transcribed by Mitzie Collins), and Ann Maria Love (transcribed by this author). However, my examination of Love's *A Book of Divine Songs* (1858) has revealed the names and music of more than seventy hitherto unknown Groveland musicians, forty-seven of them women. The list of their names, given in Table 1, increases eight-fold the number of known musicians at the Sodus/Groveland community.

Table 1: Composers in Love's 1858 Manuscript, by gender.

Female composers	Love's numbering in 1858 manuscript	Annotations	Number of Songs
Austin, Caroline	150		1
Bennett, Eldress Esther, spirit of	9, 10, 11, 12, 72*	*Love attributes all but song 72 to "spirit of" Bennett	5
Brace[?] Esther	64, 143?		2
Brown, Sister Lucy	67		1
Chapman, Ann Eliza	85, 86		2
Coe, Hannah	19, 25, 52, 53, 93, 154		6
Crary, Sarah Ann	20, 51		2
Crowell, Electa[?]	96		1
DeGroat, Orpha	4, 7, 8, 14, 22, 49, 61, [102?],		8
Dell, Elizabeth*	6, 39, 98, 106, 153	*Love names Dell as the "instrument" for songs 9-12, which are attributed to the "spirit of Eldress Esther Bennett"	5
Dole, Ascenath	13		1
Dole, Eldress Lydia	107		1
Dole, Elizabeth	26		1
Dole, Laura	16, 18, 47*, 129, 132, 161	*Love dates song "January 15, 1854"	6
Dole, Philura	33, 36		2
Dole, Sophronia	27, 131, 133, 134		4
Dry[?], Sister Cynthia	55		1
Dryer[?], Mary	62		1
Dutcher, Cynthia	124, 126		2
Ellison, Eunice	121		1
Everett, Mary Ann	82		1
Frizine, Charlotte	44, 50, 80		3
Greening, Elen	21		1
Greening, Hannah	164		1
Hall, Sarah	38* 115	*Love adds "instrument for King David"	2
Hubbard, Adaline	112		1
Johnson, Louisa	54, 145		2
Larson, Ann	58		1
Leonard, Clarrissa	42, 43, 65, 87, 127		5
Love, Ann Maria	94, 95, 122, 123, 135, 149, 158, 162		8
Love, Susan	120, 168*	*Love adds "Given in a dream by"	2
Ma'Goon, Angeline	165		1
Otis[?], Anice[?]	57, 155		2
Pelham, Susan	35, 111, 136		3
Pelly, Nancy	125		1
Seaton/Sealon, Sister Tina	89		1
Serisi[?] Esther	116		1
Smith, Elder Sister Polly Ann	15, 119, 167		3
Southwick, Matilda	3, 56, 63, 66, 69, 74, 76, 81, 84		9
Spoon, Sister Eliza (Sodus 1838)	31, 32, 77, 88		4
Swingle, Elovia[?]	152		1
Tracy[?], Polly (Sodus)	59		1

Truair, Abagail	144*	*Love adds “these words were seen written on a spiritual sword. Tune by A. Truair”	1
Truair, Hagar	142		1
Truair, Philonia	17, 75*, 78, 90	*Love adds “sung by”	4
Warren, Harriett	156, 163, 166		3
47 women			**116**

Male composers:			
Brewer, William	68		1
Chapman, Tracy	29, 30,		2
Cramer, Kevin	45		1
Cramer, Rollin	110		1
Crysler, Dunbar [or Crysler Dunbar]	5, 34, 79, 83		4
Dickinson, William	105		1
Frizine, Chancey	91		1
Gibbs, Eliette	60		1
Green, Fredrick	99		1
Hall, William	41		1
Harper, Leonard	108, 146, 147		3
Hewitt, Noah	109, 113, 114		3
Kingsley, Andrew	117		1
Leonard, Franklin	118		1
Leonard, Solomon	37		1
Otis, Francis[?]	157		1
Pelham, Joseph	1, 70*, 71**, 73	*Love adds location: “Groveland” **Love adds location: “Sodus” (Pelham was a founder of Sodus colony.)	4
Pierce, Wadsworth	97, 104, 128, 137, 138, 159		6
Sanford, Malichi	92, 148, 160		3
Sevingle, George	46		1
Simms, Francis	24		1
Siskman[?] William	103		1
Tratt, Henry	48		1
Truair, Jemison[?]	130		1
Truare, Jerusha	28, 40, 100		3
Van Stiper[?], Garrett	23		1
26 men			**46**
Anonymous /illegible	2		1
TOTAL SONGS:			**163**

Conclusion

Largely because of Shaker beliefs and practices that fostered gender equality, Shaker women were full participants in composing, performing and notating music. Most other North American religious traditions strongly favour male composers. Tick and Tsou (2013) write that Shakers and members of the Ephrata Cloister in Pennsylvania are the two notable exceptions to the almost exclusively male domain of religious music in pre-1850 America. Bringing to light the songs of more Shaker women musicians will therefore increase women’s representation in American religious traditional music as a whole. An added benefit is that in many cases, the names of the composers are well preserved and remain connected with the music. The Shakers provide a substantial body of work by women composers of religious folk music, much of which still awaits transcription, publication and scholarly attention.

Ann Maria Love left the Shakers on 8 January 1860 (Anonymous n.d.), and I have been unable to trace her after her departure. It was not uncommon for Shakers to “turn

off" and leave the community for marriage or another living situation. Love's manuscripts are but two of nearly a thousand known Shaker tunebooks held in museums and private collections around the United States (Goodwillie 2002, Patterson 1979: 484). Fifty-one percent of the 798 manuscripts examined by Patterson were composed or collected by women, as my analysis of his checklist (1979: 479-528) indicates. Scholars estimate there are perhaps tens of thousands of individual hymns, songs and other Shaker melodies in existence (Patterson 1979), but only a small fraction of these have been transcribed into modern notation (Goodwillie 2002).

Besides this sampling of Love's music, many more Shaker songs, a substantial proportion of them by women, await discovery. A closer examination of the manuscripts may reveal, as Love's second book does, the names of many more Shaker women and girls who composed music. Without case studies like this one, the lives and music of perhaps hundreds of Shaker women and girls will remain lost to history.

Notes

[1] This and all other transcriptions into modern notation are by the author.

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The folk musician Mitzie Collins, based in Rochester, New York, first alerted me to the vast, untapped repertoire of Shaker music described in Daniel Patterson's checklist of manuscripts when she spoke at the Rochester Museum & Science Center's 1991 exhibition "Simply Shaker: Groveland and the New York Communities", curated by Eugene Umberger with Fran Kramer, consultant. I am grateful to Dr Ralph P. Locke, my professor (now emeritus) at the Eastman School of Music, who encouraged me to step outside the traditional scope of a seminar on nineteenth-century concert music and pursue research on the American Shakers. Thanks are also due to the performing circle Women's Works in Ithaca, New York, with whom I further developed this material for a February 2017 concert of music by women of upstate New York.

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“The man and his Music”: Gender representation, cultural capital and the Irish traditional music canon

Verena Commins

Abstract

Through a re-examination of canonical Irish traditional music texts and the music-making spaces and practices these inform, this paper proposes that Irish traditional music, as social practice, has normalised hegemonic power structures and relationships, and further, finds that these texts consolidate gender bias, prejudice and discrimination in ensuing practices. Power and authority inherent in music practices and linked to cultural identity and status are a significant form of cultural capital, revealing, amongst other things the complexity of relations between gender symbolism, gendered social organisation and the diversity of gendered dispositions in society. Restrictions to cultural capital accumulation created by gender inequality in the performance and documentation of Irish traditional music practice is highlighted and Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital is employed to address ongoing social implications of the reproduction of gender inequality in Irish traditional music practice.

Keywords: Irish traditional music, gender bias, inequality, cultural capital

Introduction

Irish traditional music, like any music genre, is shaped by performance practices, transmission modes and discourses, all of which inform how gender is constructed and experienced within that musical world. Gender and Irish traditional music is not, therefore, simply about who is performing music but rather how those performers are represented, and interpret discursive intersections as they impact social contexts and the musical activity that occurs in them. In the context of this special issue, the present paper sets out to document and trace the absence of women’s voices from the Irish traditional dance music canon in order to demonstrate how that has served to construe and perpetuate music-making arenas as men-dominated spaces. In particular, it examines texts, narratives and collections that date from the revival period of Irish traditional music in the second half of the twentieth century in order to determine the ways in which an Irish traditional music past is accessed and remembered. It employs Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, which extends the logic of economic analysis to non-economic goods and services by identifying the location of power within the complex social practice of music-making, and uses this to address the ways that social inequalities are reproduced (2007).[1] Bourdieu’s “habitus” and “field” are integral to understanding cultural capital. In this case, Irish traditional music practice denotes the field in which cultural capital accrual is possible, and the set of dispositions (i.e. taste) of musicians and others active in the field is the habitus (Laberge 1995). Implicit in the use of the term cultural capital is the understanding that forms of capital are not equally available to all, but rather are dependant on other material factors constituted by institutions and structures, educational credentials, expertise, genealogy, social class attributes (Navarro 2006) and gender.

Collecting the (homosocial) tradition

The received Irish traditional music canon is informed and shaped by the practice of Irish traditional music collection: a process arguably initiated by the employment of Edward Bunting at the Belfast Harp festival in 1792 (Commins 2014). According to Honko's description of the "folklore process", this initial collecting foray reflects the "first life of folklore" driven by an imperative to preserve the melodies played by the harpers and transcribing the music performed by these vestigial "agents of memory" (Honko 1990: 185; Beiner 2005: 60). Subsequent collecting activity, however, transfers into the hands of practising traditional musicians, moving chronologically from collectors such as Canon Goodman and Francis O'Neill in the nineteenth century to Breandán Breathnach in the twentieth. The narratives that describe this shift suggest an increasingly democratic access to a transcribed native repertory within the community of practice from which they emerge, underscoring a shift from documentation and conservation to revival and performance (Commins 2014; Cooper 2002; Ní Fhuartháin 2011). The cultural disposition (habitus) of eighteenth and nineteenth century collectors and the "field" in which revival and collection took place was within sight of the colonial gaze, a process constructed as rational, scientific and male. Unequal power relations between collector (generally men) and collectee (predominantly men) and the exclusion of women musicians from collection methods resulted in the transfer of cultural capital to the collector. Ensuing gender anomalies inhered to the process of collection, subsequent publication and documentation throughout this canon-forming process.

Constructing the (homosocial) tradition

Bourdieu explains social class exclusion as a means of securing the reproduction of the status quo (Ashley and Empson 2017; Bourdieu 1984). Exclusion acts as a defence mechanism practised by existing insiders and when translating this to the field of Irish traditional music, it serves to protect cultural capital and privilege embedded in the handed down, homosocial, tradition. This is exemplified by changes in performance contexts from domestic to public settings which occurred throughout the twentieth century, altering the spaces in which music was collected and performed. When the key site of performance practice was situated in the domestic, an interactive exchange structure facilitated the roles of both men and women musicians, in what Bourdieu (2007) would refer to as the circulation of symbolic power.

Intergenerational transmission and learning in the home are key markers of authenticity, informing this symbolic power. As music practices travelled beyond domestic thresholds, the symbolic power previously available to women musicians was eroded by societal obstructions hindering their ability to access external, public spaces. Authenticity is socially constructed, a discursive trope, predicated on the way that people give music, place, other people and indeed themselves, identity and authority by attributing Irish traditional music with particular social, cultural and ideological characteristics (Stokes 1994). It is structured and defined within discursive contexts in which the community of practice talk about music and decide what is significant about music, informing the embodied properties of cultural capital as it relates to the field of cultural production. When the field primarily consisted the domestic sphere, women potentially had access and input into the value judgements relating to music aesthetics. O'Shea touches on the roles available to women: "play[ing] music for dancing and listening within the domestic domain [and] to a mixed audience of friends and relations" (2009: 13). Such sharing of cultural repertoire and aesthetic understanding within the home is demonstrated by the innumerable citations of women musicians; grandmothers, mothers, aunts and sisters as influence, teacher, or key modality for transmission. These are found embedded, or indeed buried, in musician biographies,

particularly those that preceded the commercialisation of Irish traditional music.[2] The cultural authority available within the symbolic domestic sphere and the governance and access to these roles for women musicians disappears with its disruption. As a result, authenticity is rarely cited as being located in women's performance. Cultural capital, therefore, remains unaccrued due to the assembly of gender boundaries around the new discursive space in which definitions of authenticity are constructed. The outcome for people (in this case women musicians) who do not have access to legitimated forms of capital, in this instance public space, is marginalisation and invisibilisation.

The transference of Irish traditional music performance practice to the pub, and the overt dominance of the pub as a heteronormative male space, replaced the informality of practice and transmission pertaining to domestic space (Donkersloot 2012; O'Shea 2008, 2009). Implicit in this change is the creation of a particular social order that commutes the intersection of gender with inequality and power relations. The advance of the pub session, a development privileged by Irish traditional music scholarship (see for example Hall 1995 and Kaul 2007), is party not only to maintaining, but solidifying covert and overt gender boundaries, engendering a set of norms that continue to be reproduced in the present in both Ireland and the diaspora, shaping the sights and sounds of music as it journeys through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Discourses that describe the shift from domestic to public space, narrativise this change in the context of modernity, rather than interrogating the agency which transfers music from the relatively accessible domestic sphere to one that not only normalises social exclusion based on gender, but controls gender behaviour as a means of controlling the social and political order (Stokes 1994).

Bourdieu lists repeated contact and aesthetic competence as sources of cultural capital and these are embedded in an intuitive understanding of performance practice. While access to cultural capital continues for some women through domestic performance and transmission roles, it is gradually withheld or taken out of circulation on account of diminished access to the field. The agency of societal change in which spaces that permit deliberate exclusions, even if the level of intentionality is not explicitly conscious, are formed remains under-researched. Recording studios and the professional production of music, other substantially male domains, produce both cultural and economic capital and supporting social structures that reproduce themselves according to what is valued in the field (Leonard 2017; Lieb 2013). The construction of boundaries around music-making via its transfer to these new spaces; the public house, concert spaces and recording studios equates to the erasure of many women musicians by diminishing their access to cultural capital as it is traded by individuals who each have a sense of their value within the social structures of the public and published realm.[3]

Breathnach the collector

Key to the period in question in this paper is the voice of Breathnach (1912-1985), an authorial figure in the historiography of Irish traditional music and whose writings, "the artistic bible-tracts of the music revival" (Vallely 2005: 60), shaped discourse and influenced research methodologies, and ultimately the sound, shape and gender of the ensuing canon. Collector, uilleann piper, documenter, commentator and scholar, Breathnach was a pivotal actor in much of the institutional infrastructure of Irish traditional music that developed during the second half of the twentieth century including Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, Na Píobairí Uilleann (NPU), the Willie Clancy Summer School and latterly, the Irish Traditional Music Archive (ITMA). As a result, his outputs have impacted significantly on virtually all aspects of the genre of Irish traditional music and continue to inform contemporary practice. Breathnach came of age in the new state, in which "culture, as the self-conscious construction and

mobilization of difference, was subordinated to the service of politics" (Whelan 2004: 184). Additional attention is required to consider the ways in which the Irish traditional music that Breathnach documented, encoded and enacted a gendered public performance style in keeping with the values of a socio-cultural music and normative gender model of twentieth century Ireland. To what extent did Breathnach play into the discursive production of Ireland and its "native" tradition?

As a twentieth-century collector, a distinct shift in agency is apparent within the collected outputs of Breathnach. Rather than foregrounding tunes as discrete texts, the musical authority of the tradition-bearer is layered onto the tune collection process. If a key aspect of the canon is created, shaped and reshaped in the moment of performance, then tunes are the essential ingredients of this enactment. Breathnach's tune project, begins, not unlike Francis O'Neill's, as a personal collection before the prospect of publishing emerges (Carolan 1997). The subsequent dissemination of the rich ethnographic material gathered in the process of his collecting emerges in *Ceol Rince na hÉireann* (*CRÉ*) a tune collection series which runs to five volumes (two of which were published posthumously) and present a detail-rich, in-depth collection (Breathnach 1963, 1976, 1985; Breathnach and Small 1996, 1999). *CRÉ* treats tunes not as singular, unrelated units, but as part of a wider process; recognising distinct tune versions and acknowledging the hands of the tradition-bearer from whom they were collected as an elemental part of a living tradition.

A civil servant, Breathnach was not a trained ethnomusicologist, developing or adhering to a rigid collecting methodology or self-reflexively taking account of the subjectivity he brought to his scholarship. In hindsight, however, Breathnach's legacy can be viewed as an early contribution to the ethnomusicological study of Irish traditional music. Nicholas Carolan gave expression to the informal, non-scientific basis of his collection methods referring to Breathnach's collectees as personal contacts who "formed a part of [his] social circle in Dublin" (2019). Breathnach's daughter, Éadaoin Breathnach, confirmed this, describing the incessant flow of musicians through the Breathnach household, visits made to the homes of musicians and the pervasive memory of her father at home with paper and pencil, recording and transcribing tunes (2019). Breathnach's music documentation carries a set of normative values situated primarily within the bounds of male socialisation. His methodology, therefore is representative of ethnographers of the time; focusing on the public, accessible sphere occupied by male musicians (Koskoff 1987).

Simultaneous to the publication of the first *CRÉ* in 1963, Breathnach founded the subscription-based journal *Ceol*, a platform for research to inform the revival of music. "Initially provoked by mistaken assumptions current in the early 1960s about the nature of Irish traditional music and song" (Carolan 1984: 5), it was published somewhat irregularly between the years 1963 and 1986 and received a small subvention from the Arts Council to allay printing costs in 1967, 1971 and 1973 (Vallely 2011: 24). *Ceol* provides an example of one of the many outlets for Breathnach's voice and brings "a critical eye to a subject plagued by myth-spinning, and attitudinising, opening up aspects of Irish music for study for the first time" (Carolan 1984).[4] Within the pages of *Ceol* Breathnach created the series "The Man and his Music" which as well as providing the problematic title for this paper, formally situates Irish traditional music cultural capital in the masculine. Beginning in the second issue of *Ceol*, each of these short articles highlights a specific man musician with a biographic detail asserting their musical credentials, a comment on performance style, followed by a selection of annotated tunes from their repertoire. Most of these musicians are still familiar names within Irish traditional music discourse (see Table 1), their championing by Breathnach in this forum contributing to their subsequent status.

Table 1: The Man and his Music series, *Ceol* 1963-1984.

1.	Breandán Breathnach 1963	The Man and his Music – Sonny Brogan	*Ceol* 1 (2)
2.	Breandán Breathnach 1963	The Man and his Music – John Egan	*Ceol* 1 (3)
3.	Breandán Breathnach 1964	The Man and his Music – John Kelly	*Ceol* 1 (4)
4.	Breandán Breathnach 1965	The Man and his Music – Andy Conroy	*Ceol* 2 (1)
5.	Breandán Breathnach 1965	The Man and his Music – James Seery	*Ceol* 2 (2)
6.	Breandán Breathnach 1965	The Man and his Music – Willie Clancy	*Ceol* 2 (3)
7.	Breandán Breathnach 1966	The Man and his Music – Dennis Murphy	*Ceol* 2 (4)
8.	Breandán Breathnach 1967	The Man and his Music – Johnnie Maguire	*Ceol* 3 (1)
9.	Breandán Breathnach 1969	The Man and his Music – Paddy Taylor	*Ceol* 3 (3)
10.	Breandán Breathnach 1970	The Man and his Music – Micko Russell	*Ceol* 3 (4)
11.	Breandán Breathnach 1981	The Man and his Music – Johnnie O'Leary	*Ceol* 5 (1)
12.	Breandán Breathnach 1982	The Man and his Music – Séamus Ennis	*Ceol* 5 (2)
13.	Breandán Breathnach 1983	The Man and his Music – James Kelly	*Ceol* 6 (1)
14.	Breandán Breathnach 1984	The Man and his Music – Liam Ó Floinn	*Ceol* 7 (1-2)

Published over a period of twenty-one years in fourteen of twenty-two volumes, the contraction of these articles into list form (in Table 1) presents on face value a particular and quite singular vision of the tradition. An initial examination of the Breathnach reel-to-reel tapes held at ITMA and subsequent research suggests that the articles were based on information gathered by Breathnach during the process of collecting and recording tunes from these and other musicians. The tapes also demonstrate the contemporaneous presence of women musicians, including those whom Breathnach recorded,[5] all of which confirms that while the discourse may be biased, performance practice is much less so.

Coleman pinpoints a key aspect of the tradition when he describes how "musicians carry…*other people*…as living memories and presences in the here and now" (Coleman 2012: 163, emphasis in original). In effect, the *Ceol* articles "carry" and privilege the cultural capital of the named musicians upon whom they dilate, embedding and perpetuating patriarchal practices into written discourse. Rather than venturing beyond his homosocial circle to incorporate practising women musicians, Breathnach adheres to the gender boundaries in his music-making sphere, which as Stokes maintains, were already in existence, and not uncommon to other social and political boundaries in twentieth century Ireland (1994). In publishing these articles, Breathnach subordinates the voices of women musicians in the documented canon through exclusion, depleting their symbolic and cultural capital by doing so (Bourdieu 2007). Thus, socio-cultural developments between the start and middle of the century further disrupt the symbolic power embedded in the home-centred, cultural repertoire and performance practice of women, none of whom subsequently trouble the gendered series that Breathnach creates.

Regardless of intentionality, Breathnach exerts a gate-keeping function. This selective collected memory subsequently informs the collective memory of the Irish traditional music canon via the pages of *Ceol,* and indeed the many print outlets through which Breathnach authorises a voice for Irish traditional music. McRobbie and McCabe remind us that "our ideas come from who we know, what we read, what we see and listen to" (1981: 7). Situating this within Honko's definition of culture, one can extrapolate that Irish traditional music is not so much "in things, but in people's way of seeing, using and thinking about things" (1988: 11). The canon acquires a systemic character through an ordering process of selection, effectively resulting in a selective, rather than collective, tradition. As no woman musician is included in Breathnach's biographical series, it transpires that we do not know, we do not read, we do not see and we have a limited opportunity therefore to listen to any of them. Instead, the repetition of this title the "Man and his Music" across a span of fourteen issues and twenty-one years normalises the concept and what it inheres. Furthermore, and as

demonstrated in Table 2, the Irish traditional music community conceptually embraces the term “Man and his Music”. It subsequently takes on a life of its own as a viable title for further publications and performance-based events from a variety of authors and contributors (including the collated Breathnach posthumous anthology) right up until 2016.

Table 2: Selection of “The Man and his Music” publications and lectures contemporaneous with and succeeding Breathnach’s *Ceol* articles.

Harry Hughes & Muiris Ó Rócháin	1972	Willie Clancy: the Man and his Music	*Dal gCais*, 1
Tom Munnelly	1972	The Man and his Music-John Reilly	*Ceol*, 4
Séamus McMathúna	1977	Patrick Kelly: the Man and his Music	*Dal gCais*, 3
Breandán Breathnach	1983	Séamus Ennis: A Tribute to the Man and his Music	*Musical Traditions*, 1
Dermot Hanifin	1995	Pádraig O'Keeffe: the Man and his Music. Castleisland:	unpublished leaflet, available at ITMA
Sean Potts, Terry Moylan & Liam McNulty	1996	*The Man and his Music: an Anthology of the Writings of Breandán Breathnach* (Na Píobairí Uilleann)	
Alan Jones	2011	Paddy Keenan-uilleann piper: the Man and his Music	*The Pipers' Review*, 30
Pat Mitchell	2012	Willie Clancy: the Man and his Music	*Lecture WCSS*
Mick Moloney	2016	Ed Reavy: the Man and his Music	*Lecture WCSS*

Of course, Breathnach and the authors listed in Table 2 are not operating in a vacuum, nor are they out of sync with the documentation of other contemporaneous music genres. The concept of the “Man and his Music” was well established in 1963. Other research findings in scholarship on music and gender demonstrate how prestige and power continue to be assigned to male-only behaviour, in a broad swathe of social contexts, not just musical (Koskoff 1987). During their interviews, Éadaoin Breathnach and Nicholas Carolan both used the term “a man of his time” to describe Breathnach, a concept prevalent in gender scholarship, and a reflection on how in society, both men and women “accept and internalize“ ideas about male power and prestige (ibid.: 10). Indeed, Éadaoin described her father as progressive rather than conservative, in relation to her upbringing, asserting that she and her four sisters were encouraged by their father to challenge the patriarchal norms he espoused (Breathnach 2019). As Koskoff submits, it is often only in hindsight that “inequalities” in the behaviour (of both men and women) living within that framework, which received little heed at the time, are recognised and identified (1987).

Handing down the (homosocial) tradition

Breathnach’s presentation of the tradition has wielded a considerable influence, consciously and subconsciously pervading the canonical backbone of Irish traditional music. Carolan, a key actor in the research and dissemination of Irish traditional music knowledge, founder and Director Emeritus of ITMA, synopsises this influence, “I was already entranced by the sounds and sights and the personalities of Irish traditional music, but *Ceol* revealed ways of thinking about traditional music, and studying it, and presenting it” (2005: np). Gauging the wider contemporaneous readership of the journal *Ceol* is more problematic. At its height, it had a print run of one thousand, but its fortunes waxed and waned during its existence (Carolan 1986b). The *CRÉ* tune book series, on the other hand, is a standard in the collection of traditional musicians and is indeed still in print. In *CRÉ* 1-3, Breathnach presents tunes collected from musicians, manuscripts and recordings. Published by An Gúm, the state’s national Irish language publisher while Breathnach was an employee of the Department of Education, it encompasses high production standards. Unlike previous collections, its rich annotation of tune versions, tune names and index informs the reader of Breathnach’s

source for each tune. Women musicians are poorly represented: less than 1% of the tunes that appear in *CRÉ 1* were collected from a woman musician and this extends to just 7% and 11% in *CRÉ 2* and *3* respectively. As stated earlier, cultural capital is tied to constructions of authenticity and its parameters of inclusion (and thereby exclusion). Validation is awarded "primarily through repertoire and style of performance [where] what is performed and how it sounds are the crucial elements in creating consensus on what is traditional…and what is not" (Ní Fhuartháin 2011). As the bulk of extant repertoire and its coexistent style parameters are determined through the performance of tunes, and most tunes have been collected from men musicians, then the repertoire itself is the bearer of (in)equality baggage. Slominski concisely summates this "duality of past and present in performing, thinking and writing about music" (2010: 25). The "authoritative and prestigious" *CRÉ* series persists into the twenty-first century with "unprecedented popularity" (Small 2011: 119), continuing to accumulate and mobilise cultural capital for the (predominantly) male musicians from whom its tunes were collected.

While indisputably the most important, Breathnach was not, however, the only collector and publisher of tunes during the second half of the twentieth century. Bulmer and Sharpley's *Music of Ireland* Volumes 1-4 was published in the UK in 1975 contemporaneously with *CRÉ* 2 and in the United States, Miller and Perron published the joint edition of *Irish Traditional Fiddle Music* in 1977 (which combined volumes 1-3 published between 1973 and 75). Differences between these two publications and Breathnach's abound. While all are ostensibly tune collections, the diasporic publications of Bulmer and Sharpley, and Miller and Perron satisfied tune-thirsty, intergenerational, second and third generation music communities abroad. The ring bound A4 format of *Music of Ireland* is cheap and cheerful, *Irish Traditional Fiddle Music* has marginally higher print production values, but in both, the focus is on the skeleton of the tune itself, rather than the source or particular tune-version (although this information is provided for some of the tunes). In Bulmer and Sharpley's volumes, source musicians are included only occasionally and the editors admit, frankly, in their introduction that some of the tunes were snatched out of the ether. However, the citation by Bulmer and Sharpley of some source musicians does facilitate a partial gender breakdown. Across the four volumes, just three tunes are acknowledged (out of 335) as collected from women musicians (from Mary Bergin and Katie Taylor). In Miller and Perron, four women musicians (Peg McGrath, Deirdre Collis, Mary O'Hara and Jean Carrignan) feature in the listed discography of twenty musicians from whom the transcriptions are sourced. Notwithstanding their differences, comparing the gender breakdown of tune sources reveals a clear similarity across the three publications.

While not a publisher of tunes per se, Seán Ó Riada (1940-1971), a contemporary of Breathnach, is also active at this time in the formation and articulation of the Irish traditional music canon. Ó Riada's radio series *Our Musical Heritage,* self-presented on RTÉ radio in 1962, was a key platform for his voice. In the book of the same title published twenty years later in 1982, he directs his audience to specific individual music examples; twenty-five musicians in total (not including singers) (Ó Riada 1982). Like Breathnach's *Folk Music and Dances* and Ó Canainn's *Traditional Music in Ireland*, this is an important and canon-forming text (Breathnach 1971; Ó Canainn 1978). Notwithstanding the widely vaunted perspective of Ó Riada as innovator, he too adhered to the normative gender model available, incorporating the description "vigorous masculine music" (1982: 79) and featuring just one woman musician, Mrs Dalton, in the examples given.[6]

At the start of the century Richard Henebry wrote that "almost every funeral of an old woman of eighty means the loss for ever of an uncollected treasure of far greater worth" (1903: 22). Henebry's old women remain unnamed, and notwithstanding the role they may have played as tradition bearers, are otherwise invisible in the public domain, yet they informed a musical space that facilitated/s the creation of visible men

musicians. Male musicians of the twentieth century, on the other hand, thrived, as not just their tunes, but their individual tune-versions were collected. Breathnach copper-fastens inequality in the ascription and thereby cultural capital to particular men and "master" musicians. These foundational texts emerge at a particularly formative time, because in superseding Henebry and his colleagues, they feed directly into the growth of the academic study of Irish traditional music at third level as the work of Ó Riada (appointed to University College Cork in 1963) and his successor Míchéal Ó Súilleabháin starts to take root. The canon, with all its invisible gender biases moves into academia and informs a new generation of musicians and musician scholars.

Narrating the (homosocial) tradition

Gender assumptions are implicit in the revival process and the resultant canon conflates masculinity and authenticity. Irish traditional musicians continuously learn from, look to and privilege the past in their performing present. Therefore acknowledging that the Irish traditional music past is an overtly male-authored space is important because this received canon, regardless of the gender of who is playing now, continues to inform the narrative and discourses of contemporary music making and is problematically complicated by the "gender of nostalgia" (Commins 2014: 204). The deployment of a master-apprentice syntax and gendered language with a preponderance of male pronouns serves to sustain a system of patriarchy (ibid.: 116-118). Carolan suggests an element of patronage underlay Breathnach's relationship with some of his informants, giving as an example the employment of button accordion player Sonny Brogan to paint the Breathnach household's kitchen. This idea is consolidated by Éadaoin Breathnach's memories of the same event as she recalled her mother's exasperation at the length of time it took to complete what was essentially a small job: "My memory of Sonny was the ladder blocking the door (into the kitchen). He seemed to be permanently there. Daddy sitting at the bottom of the ladder, with his little index cards. He'd be checking things with Sonny and Sonny would be at the top of the ladder. It took months". She noted the frequency with which the selection of handymen to do jobs in the Breathnach household was based on musical rather than manual abilities, echoing the employment of musicians by Francis O'Neill during his role as Chief of Police in the Chicago Fire Department at the beginning of the twentieth century (Carolan 1997). Breathnach's documentation of Irish traditional music naturalises masculine ideologies, thereby complicating the musical habitus of women musicians performing a tradition in which authenticity is constructed on the basis of masculine identities. In his revised *A Short History of Irish Traditional Music,* Ó hAllmhuráin draws attention to the recent appearance of women's voices in both musicianship and scholarship (2017). Irish traditional music is a living tradition; it evolves and changes over time. Many more women musicians are visible now than in the past, traditional instrumental associations have been breached (the uilleann pipes is a case in point)[7] as is the shift in the gender of Fleadh Cheoil winners (Vallely 2011: 303). However, contemporary women musicians continue to perform in a tradition in which their contribution has historically been marginalised, and generational layers of occlusion has left a cultural capital deficit in women musicians' banks that remains in the red.

Conclusion

Gender influences the very way we organise, think and know about the world. Looking at the "Man and his Music" series through a twenty first century lens, it becomes clear that the historical absence of overt references to Irish traditional music performance by women has enabled masculinity to universalise itself powerfully as the norm. However, cultural capital, develops and accrues within the deeply entrenched discourses on authenticity and Irish traditional music that pertain to this norm. A second updated and revised edition of the Miller and Perron collection published in 2006,

brought to light an additional three women musicians as tune sources. Obscured in the original edition by their male counterparts, they remained, for nearly 30 years, undocumented, evidence central to the argument made here, that historical performance practice was more evenly gendered than current discourse discloses. Criticising Breathnach's efforts on behalf of Irish traditional music, or indeed any of the authors cited here is not the object of this paper. Neither does it set out to dismiss the validity of the received canon of Irish traditional music. Rather it seeks to challenge the passivity with which this history and revival process is received. There is something inherently unmusical about counting tunes in order to undertake an analysis of their gender provenance. Yet it provides clear evidence of gender imbalance in the Irish music tradition, an imbalance that has normalised the exclusion of women's voices in Irish traditional music.

Contextualising a post-colonial, revivalist mind-set as operating within a particular Irish societal gender ideology, reveals how distinctive forms of value, cultural capital and symbolic power have accumulated within the tradition as a consequence of extra-musical economic, cultural and political dynamics governing the field. Breathnach's selfless contribution to the tradition, and the discourse of urgency that surrounded it, masks the construction of a highly gendered site. Joining church and state, the ongoing prescription of gender roles upheld by Breathnach's "moral authority in the field" of Irish traditional music (Carolan 1986a: 9) bears some responsibility for the erasure of women musicians. Notwithstanding the familial experience expressed by his daughter to the contrary, Breathnach was the product of a patriarchy which was "the organising principle of civilised capitalism" (Earner-Byrne and Urquhart 2017: 313). Until now, readings of Breathnach, Ó Riada and the collectors and documenters that precede and succeed them have focused on their role as revivalists, saviours, innovators, heroes and animateurs. Pioneers all in traditional music documentation, their inherent biases and behaviours have been handed down, as part and parcel of the tradition. What is offered here is a new reading which focuses on challenging the status quo—the section of society that holds power within the field of Irish traditional music—and drawing attention to subconscious bias where it continues to infiltrate the canon.

Notes

[1] This concept is found in much of Bourdieu's work.

[2] Breathnach's "Man and his Music" series is exemplary in this regard for example the articles on John Kelly, Paddy Kelly and Micko Russell. See also Ní Shíocháin in this volume. Slominski gives a detailed account of Julia Clifford (2020) and biographies of men and women musicians in *The Companion* (Vallely 2011) provide further examples.

[3] The contemporaneous experience of women musicians in the diaspora may well differ and while some biographical research has been undertaken (see for example Dillane 2013 and Slominski 2020), this is an area in need of further attention.

[4] A prodigious writer, Breathnach wrote and/or held editorial positions with *Comhar*, *An Píobaire*, *Béaloideas*, *Dal gCais*, *Irish Folk Music Studies-Éigse Cheol Tíre*, *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society*, *Folk Music Journal* and *Musical Traditions* as well as contributing book chapters, newspaper articles and lectures.

[5] Breathnach's reel-to-reel tapes at ITMA include women musicians such as Mrs Crotty; Aggie Whyte and Mollie Myers.

[6] A concertina player from Co Limerick, Breathnach also collected two tunes from her that appear in *CRÉ 2*.

[7] While this increase is not documented in published figures, the number of images of female pipers in the recent *NPU Strategy 2019-21 Sharing the Sound* publication speaks to this increase. See also its reference to "Equality and inclusion for all in the traditional arts" under the section on Purpose, vision, mission and values (Na Píobairí Uilleann 2019).

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“Clap your hands”: Gender role distribution in flamenco guitar

Massimo Cattaneo

Abstract

This article analyses gender imbalance among guitar players in flamenco. While women participate in flamenco as singers and dancers, their presence as instrumentalists is largely eclipsed by men. Using fieldwork data collected through ethnographic research and situating this in existing scholarship, I identify patterns and recent changes in trends. I argue that a series of transformations that have taken place in flamenco are contributing, although slowly, to a positive change in gender representation among flamenco performers. The article concludes by suggesting future approaches to address gender inequality which may help ensure equal gender opportunities for flamenco instrumentalists.

Keywords: women, imbalance, flamenco, guitar, instruments

Introduction

This article analyses the systemic gender imbalance in flamenco guitar playing, a field that has been exclusively male-dominated for nearly a century (Labajo 2003: 77), and focuses on the agency of women and their music making in contemporary flamenco. In recent years, women guitarists have begun to (re)claim their space and legitimacy as instrumentalists, however, as data and findings presented in this paper illustrate, the gap between men and women in participation and representation is still wide.[1] Flamenco guitar may be seen as “a contested site of meaning” (Doubleday 2008: 4) in which a group of individuals negotiate wider, radical social transformations (Moisala and Diamond 2000). As argued by Cruces Roldán, the gender imbalance in flamenco guitar reveals how it “has become an instrument of power [exertion]” (2005: 171). The limited research on the subject may also demonstrate the degree of normalisation of the exclusion of women instrumentalists in flamenco (Cruces Roldán 2005; Lorenzo 2011). In this article, I explore the historical evolution of flamenco guitar as a gendered field, locating women’s roles in traditional flamenco performances and tracing their historical presence. Moreover, I analyse the historical perceptions of women flamenco guitar players and the types of “instrument-human relationships” which are found as a locus for the consolidation of gendered meaning (Doubleday 2008). First-hand fieldwork interviews suggest how these relationships are changing in the field, in the contemporary context of flamenco guitar playing. Rather than forcing a universal theoretical analytical model, as discussed in Koskoff and Diamond (2000), in this article, my aim is to bring forward the current experience, and successes, of women flamenco performers in the field (Moisala and Diamond 2000).

Locating women in performance

A traditional flamenco performance consists of three main elements: *cante* ("singing"), *baile* ("dancing"), and *toque* ("playing"). The singer occupies the main role and is usually accompanied by a guitar player and a *cuadro de palmas* ("rhythmic section") with one or more dancers. While it is common to find women performers in the first two categories, they have until recently been completely eclipsed by men in the *toque* category which traditionally refers to guitar playing and *palmas* ("handclaps"). Depending on the nature of the performance, that is to say whether the main focus is on dance or singing, the *baile* is performed by either a dedicated dancer or by any other performer, usually the singer or one of the *palmeros* ("handclappers"). This role-switching practice is quite common in traditional flamenco. The *palmas* are also played by either a dedicated rhythmic section, consisting of two or more *palmeros*, or by the singer or dancer. In formal stage performances, women do play *palmas* but generally only as a secondary, additional role between sets of *letras*[2] (short vocal performances), in the case of women singers, or, between dance performances, if they are dancers. It is rare to have a dedicated *cuadro de palmas* with women *palma* players, especially in more traditional contexts. However, in informal social flamenco practices, such as domestic events or private parties for christenings and weddings, gender among *palmas* players is generally balanced. It is common for women to play *palmas* in informal settings but not to be hired as professional, remunerated rhythm performers. This lack of professional recognition, and of remuneration, is an indication of the systemic exclusion of women instrumentalists in traditional flamenco as evidenced in research. Labajo (2003) has analysed the gap between formal, professionalised performances and informal social practice tracing gender distribution in both these categories. Cruces Roldán (2015) has carried out a detailed statistical analysis of the percentage of women *palmas* performers in a formal, professional festival setting, in which she compared contemporary and historical data. With regards to guitar players, there is an even greater imbalance, both on stage and in the more informal social performance of flamenco, with the field being almost entirely dominated by men guitarists.

Historical gender roles in flamenco

Women guitar players were common in flamenco until the early decades of the twentieth century, after which they began to disappear (Cruces Roldán 2005, 2015; Labajo 2003; Chuse 2003, 2015; Pablo 2009; Lorenzo 2011). Several paintings from the late nineteenth century, when flamenco was codified as a genre, and also early twentieth century photographs show women playing flamenco guitar (see Figures 1-4).

Figure 1 – Gitanos del Sacromonte, Habichuela Viejo and la Tía Marina, 1920.

Figure 2 – La Cruz de Mayo Sevilla, n.d.

Figure 3 – Gypsy Musicians of Spain (Spanish Minstrels), (Phillip, 1855).

Figure 4 – Aniya La Gitana n.d.

Flamenco scholar Cruces Roldán points out that it was common to find women instrumentalists in early flamenco and pre-flamenco music. Many played several instruments from Spanish popular music traditions such as *bandurrias* (a type of fretted lute), tambourines, violins, flutes and guitars (Cruces Roldán 2003). During the codification of flamenco, which took place in the second half of the nineteenth century on the stage of cabaret-like venues known as *café cantantes*, these instruments were eliminated from flamenco performance, with the exception of the guitar that became the flamenco instrument *par excellence* (Vergillos 1999). According to Cruces Roldán, this instrument selection was parallel to the processes of division of labour of the flamenco subdisciplines (the above-mentioned singing, dancing and playing) and to a sexual division of roles in performance (2005, 2015). In flamenco, this division of labour happened in gendered terms, resulting in a total exclusion of women from playing instrumental music, a practice that became reserved for men, confining women's musicianship to singing, a pattern also identified in other traditions (Doubleday 2008; Moisala and Diamond 2000). Additionally, the *café cantantes* were venues often frequented by bohemian bachelors and associated with prostitution, which resulted in a stigmatisation of the genre as unsuitable for women (Díaz Olaya 2010). This, combined with the consolidation of the image of women in flamenco as exotic, seductive and sensual *Gitano* ("Gypsy") dancers, also contributed to the creation of gendered roles in flamenco performance (Charnon-Deutsch 2004; García 2006; Labajo 2003).

Cruces Roldán also argues that the predominance gained by the guitar resulted in its professionalisation, which consequently led to the exclusion of women instrumentalists. Similar patterns of exclusion have been identified in other contexts. Doubleday, for example, points out that in nineteenth-century European orchestral music "it was socially unacceptable for 'respectable' women both to earn money in the public workplace and to perform in public" (2008: 29). In more recent years, research on Iberian frame drums in Spain and Portugal has suggested that the professionalisation of these instruments, traditionally played by women, led to an increase of men performers in professional (remunerated) contexts (Cohen 2008).

Chuse argues, however, that the exclusion of women from stage performance was due to a change in the role of flamenco guitar as a solo instrument, rather than a direct consequence of its professionalisation (2003). The guitar was in fact traditionally subordinated to singing, however, in the first decades of the twentieth century, it became popular as a concert instrument. Chuse argues that this shift gave more importance and independence to the instrument and led to the consolidation of flamenco guitar playing as a gendered field. Additionally, as Chuse (2015) also points out, in Spain there were two coexisting concepts of guitar: the cultivated, classical instrument and the popular, lower class flamenco guitar. According to Doubleday (2008: 4) "in instrumental performance, a [gendered] relationship is set up between the instrument and performer, creating a contested site of meaning". She argues that "instruments have a personhood of their own" which is shaped by "gendered meanings" that are "fluid and negotiable" (ibid.). Doubleday further nuances instrument-human relationships by dividing them into separate subcategories such as "'basic', 'exclusive', 'negative'" or "'suitable, 'acceptable'" (ibid.). Applying this analytical framework to the conceptual division of 'cultivated' and 'lower-class' guitar proposed by Chuse (2015), suggests that the instrument-human relationship between guitar and women in Spain was seen as suitable, or at least acceptable, for classical guitar but unsuitable for flamenco guitar which became a field exclusively male-dominated.

An important factor that contributed to the consolidation of gendered roles in flamenco was the appropriation of the tradition by the Franco regime (1939-1975) during which flamenco was turned into a symbol of Spanishness by the central government. Flamenco was used as a hegemonic tool in a process of national unification and in the creation of the Spanish tourism industry, converting it into a metonymical representation for the whole nation. This process became derogatorily known as *nacionalflamenquismo* (Almazán 1972). From the 1980s until the present day, flamenco has been used as an identity marker for *Andalusianess* by the Regional Government of Andalusia (Aix Gracia 2014; Machin-Autenrieth 2017; Manuel 2006; Mitchell 1994; Steingress 2003, 2005; Washabaugh 1996, 1998, 2017;). Both identity projects, which overlap in many ways, exploited essentialist notions of "purity" and "authenticity" often associated with flamenco. During the first stage of appropriation, flamenco discourse, both in terms of practice and scholarship, was coerced by the conservative Mairenista ideology,[3] an intellectual movement that aligned flamenco with the idea of Spain as a pure, traditional and Catholic country endorsed by the fascist regime (Chuse 2003; Mitchell 1994). This affected the tradition in a series of ways; among them, it allowed the conservative patriarchal structures promoted by the fascist regime, deeply rooted in Spanish and Andalusian society in particular, to infiltrate and regulate several aspects of flamenco performance and structure, including gender roles. Moreover, the association with prostitution in the early years of the *café cantantes*, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, also contributed to excluding women from the practice. This stigmatisation led to a cultural rejection of the genre that became known as *antiflamenquismo* (Llano 2017; Mitchell 1994;). From the second half of the twentieth century, however, the traditionalist Mairenista flamenco ideology began a process of purification of flamenco, reclaiming it as part of a conservative, Catholic society endorsed by the Franco regime. This patriarchal societal model contributed to further reduce women's participation in performance in public spaces and culminated in further exclusion of women from guitar playing. Research indicates that in spite of this exclusion from performance, women continued to play guitar in domestic settings, abandoning stage performance in favour of teaching, but still performing in informal settings until eventually the domestic practice also died off (Cruces Roldán 2005, 2015; Lorenzo 2011; Pablo 2009).

Perceptions in the field

In the course of my doctoral field research in Spain (2014, 2015 and 2017), I observed disproportionate gender imbalance in flamenco instrumentalists, which was particularly noticeable among guitar players, especially within more traditional circles. Throughout my fieldwork, I reported a variety of reasons based on myth, stereotypes and tradition that are commonly given to justify such inequality. However, although these narratives are still present, the interviews that I have conducted with women flamenco guitarists for the present article (2020) reveal that significant changes in trend are happening.[4]

On separate occasions during my fieldwork in Andalusia (2014, 2017), I witnessed insiders of the flamenco community (practitioners and aficionados), from different age groups, arguing that the lack of women guitarists was due to the fact that they are not physically able to play guitar. When I pointed out the existing evidence, such as historical photographs portraying women playing guitar, many argued that they did not reflect the reality of the tradition and more than likely were staged. The fact that, in these particular instances, these opinions were voiced by young individuals was particularly surprising to me but, at the same time, it was indicative of the degree to which these ideas have been ingrained and normalised in the grassroots flamenco community. Similar reactions have also been documented by other scholars. Chuse, for example, reports an interview with traditional female flamenco singer Inés Bacán, who argues that guitar playing has always been a male practice and also questions whether the old photographs portraying women playing guitar were actually staged (Chuse 2003: 211). Cruces Roldán (2005) asked several women flamenco guitarists what reasons they were usually given in the field to justify the imbalance. The answers she received were either based on the defence of an abstract idea of tradition as an immutable object, or on "naturalist", pseudoscientific arguments, quite common in the *emic* discourse of traditional conservative flamenco ideology. These included an alleged lack of predisposition to play the guitar, a "hard instrument" that requires certain "strength and speed to pluck the strings" or that women do not have the right anatomic features to play flamenco guitar, their "hands are weaker and smaller than men's", their "shoulders are not wide enough" or their "breasts get in the way" (ibid. 2005: 170). In some cases, female guitarists have been told that women do not play guitar because it is impossible to tune the instrument when they have their period (Cifredo 2014). Some of my interviewees were also told that women lack a sense of rhythm (Jimenez A. 2020), despite the irrefutable evidence to the contrary, while, others were bluntly told to "cut [their] hair and get a penis" (López 2017).[5] Guitarist Mercedes Luján instead points out that the amount of time required to raise a family and to carry out housework, roles that traditional Spanish society has historically burdened exclusively on women, is incompatible with flamenco guitar, a highly demanding instrument that requires a lot practice and time to be played proficiently. She also notes that to play flamenco guitar the plucking hand requires strong, medium-long fingernails which may get wet, weakened or break doing daily house chores (Luján 2020). These comments reveal the challenges faced by women guitarists women guitarists as the result of conservative societal structures operating within musical practice. Gendered roles in society affect the creation of gendered musical fields. All these justifications, whether based on cultural myths (predisposition, anatomy) or the result of traditional social structures (roles), reveal societal patterns of inequality that create a "negative instrument-human relationship" for women, which indicate the degree of hegemonic masculinity, of male dominance that governs the subdiscipline of flamenco guitar playing (Doubleday 2008: 5).

Changes in the field

Although the field remains largely male dominated, and, as seen above, a certain type of mentality is still ingrained in attitudes towards women, my findings suggest that there has been a significant shift in the way women flamenco guitarists are being received in practice in different traditional contexts such as *peñas* ("private flamenco clubs"), *tablaos* ("tourist flamenco venues") or festivals. This is the result, on the one hand, of wider societal changes, and on the other of the intersection of gender with other elements such as age, origin, ethnicity, and education of both performer and audiences (Moisala and Diamond 2000). The "instrument-human relationship" proposed by Doubleday (2008) appears to be more positive for younger flamenco guitarists than for older musicians. For example, Alba Espert and Teresa Jimenez, both in their early twenties and the youngest guitarists I interviewed, told me that while they generally feel welcomed, on occasions they have been received with scorn or even surprise. For Espert, "*machismo* in flamenco is decreasing, although is still there […] there are always people who are surprised to see a woman playing flamenco guitar" (Espert 2020). Teresa Jimenez told me: "in general I've always been well received as a female flamenco guitarist, I never felt discriminated [against] although [when] it happened. . .I didn't feel respected" (Jimenez T. 2020). Both musicians are regular performers for the traditional *Amigos de Paco Peña* in Cordoba, where Espert is the official guitarist and secretary: a considerable achievement for a *peña*, a space traditionally dominated by men (Figure 5).

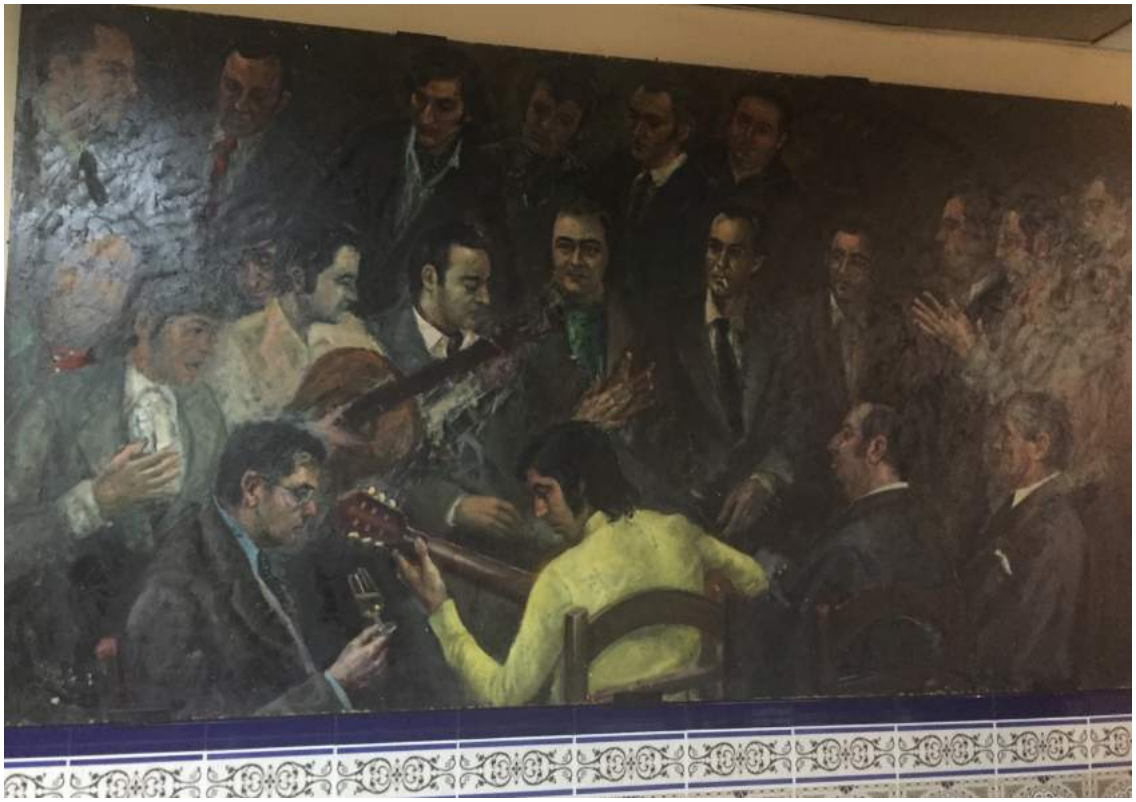


Figure 5 – Painting depicting an informal flamenco gathering at Peña Los Cernicalos in Jerez de la Frontera (image by Cattaneo, 2017).

Pilar Alonso, one of the pioneer women guitarists from the previous generation and now a reference for younger generations, said that she often feels that she is received with a certain lack of confidence and reticence at first, which however usually dissipates once she starts playing (Alonso 2020). Another woman, the oldest woman guitarist that I was able to contact, born in the late 1950s, preferred not to answer my questions. She stopped playing flamenco guitar thirty years ago asserting that the discrimination she experienced caused her "too much suffering" and that she had no

desire to talk about it" (Anonymous A. 2020). These three examples involve women that were born and raised in Andalusia, a region in which the connection with the traditional flamenco model is strong. The relationship between their generational age and their experience suggests that there is a change in perspective in the practice of flamenco guitar. In addition to age, other elements such as origin and ethnicity (of both performers and audience), venue and geographical location also play a fundamental role in the type of "basic instrument-human relationship" and in the way in which "gendered meanings are constructed" and perceived in traditional flamenco guitar (Doubleday 2008). Interviews with women flamenco guitarists Afra Rubino (Sweden), Noa Drezner (Israel) and Lola Yang (China) indicate that, although aware of their position in a highly gendered field, for them musicianship supersedes cultural perceptions of gender. Drezner rejects the idea that women are particularly discriminated against as guitar players, arguing that their absence is historical and the product of gendered roles that affect women in all areas of society. For her, her gendered self becomes almost "erased" by the musical self (Moisala and Diamond 2000: 6). Nevertheless, although these testimonies indicate that there is change in the perception and acceptance of women guitarists in traditional flamenco contexts, data analysis of major events shows that a significant degree of gender discrimination still persists in representation and practice in various areas such as festivals (competitions and concerts), education and events in traditional venues.

Representation and practice in context: Competitions

Data collected by Cruces Roldán (2015) shows a significant gap in gender distribution in the three main flamenco subdisciplines of *baile*, *cante* and *toque* in performances at the 2008 and 2014 Seville *Bienal de Flamenco* ("Flamenco Biennale"), arguably the most important flamenco festival in the world. She observes that gender balance is reached only in dance (50%) while women's participation is 30% in the *cante* subcategory. In the *toque* category, guitar is entirely dominated by men as is the non-traditional "other instrumentation" and the ratio of men to women *palmeros* is 4:1 (2015: 32). My analysis of the 2017 and 2018 editions of the *Festival Internacional de Cante de las Minas* ("International Festival of Songs from the Mines") in La Unión, Murcia reveals a similar situation. The event is a prestigious competition festival, "perhaps the largest flamenco festival in Spain" (Machin-Autenrieth 2017: 40), highly regarded in traditional circles (Serna 1997), but also innovative, being the only one that since 2009 holds competitions for non-traditional instruments. The 2017 figures show, once again, that men dominate the scene. Of the thirty-three semi-finalists, there were five guitarists, five other instrumentalists, seven dancers, and sixteen singers. Of the total number, only eleven (one third) were women (Table 1) and of those, none were guitarists or other instrumentalists. The semi-finalists did include four women dancers and seven women singers (Table 2).

Table 1: *Festival Internacional de Cante de las Minas*, 2017. Overall Gender Distribution. Fieldwork data extrapolated by the author from official Festival Programme.

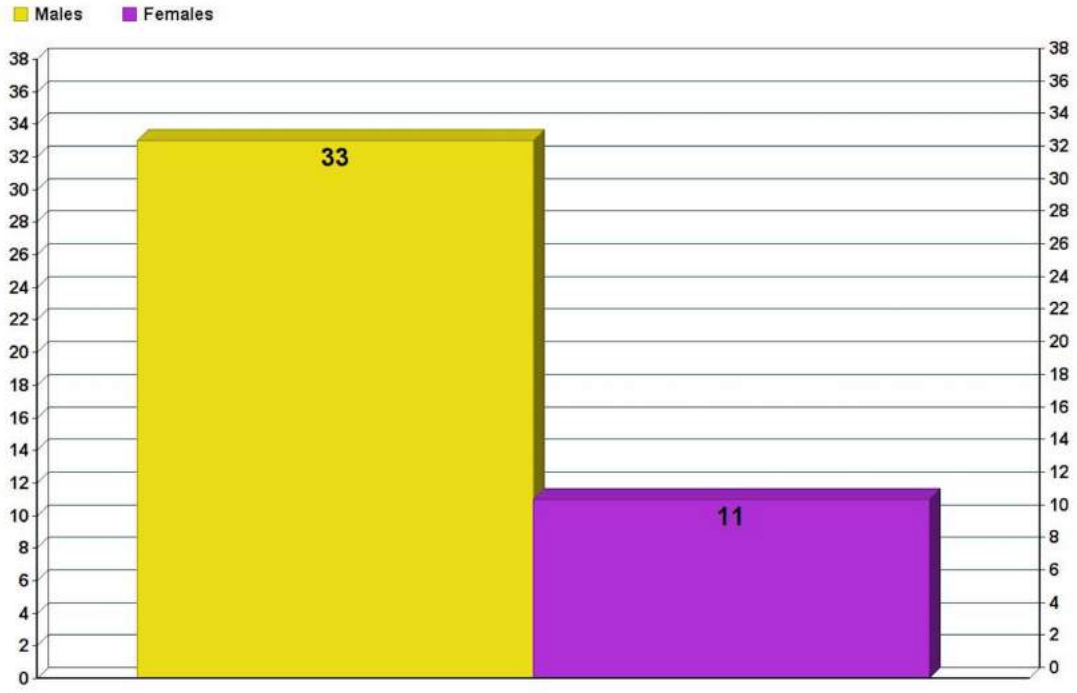
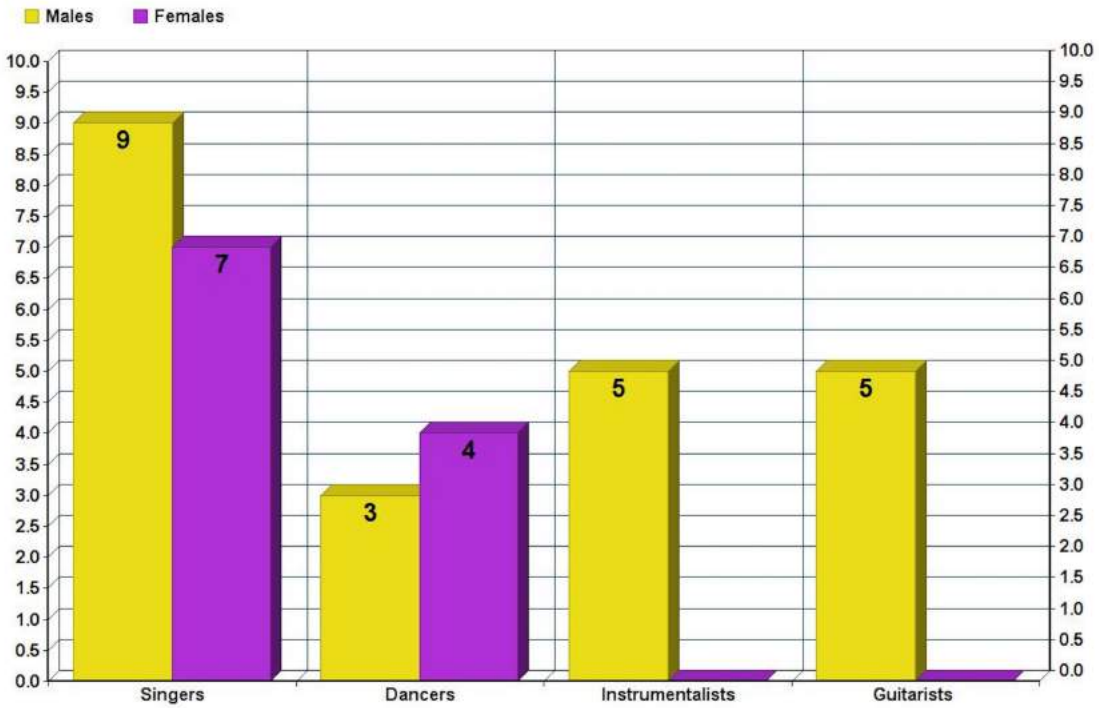


Table 2: *Festival Internacional de Cante de las Minas*, 2017. Gender Distribution Subdisciplines. Fieldwork data extrapolated by the author from official Festival Programme.



A comparison with data from the following edition (2018) shows little change with thirty-four total participants which included four instrumentalists, four guitarists, eight dancers, and eighteen singers. Only ten were women (Table 3), with one woman instrumentalist (a piano player), five singers, and four dancers (Table 4).[6]

Table 3: *Festival Internacional de Cante de las Minas*, 2018. Overall Gender Distribution. Fieldwork data extrapolated by the author from official Festival Programme.

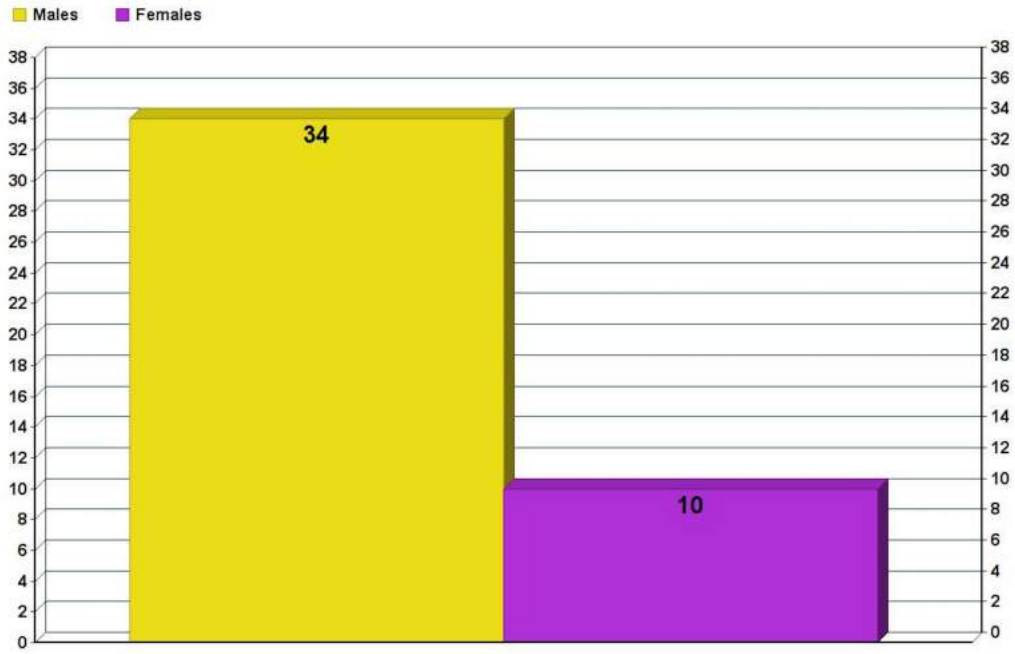
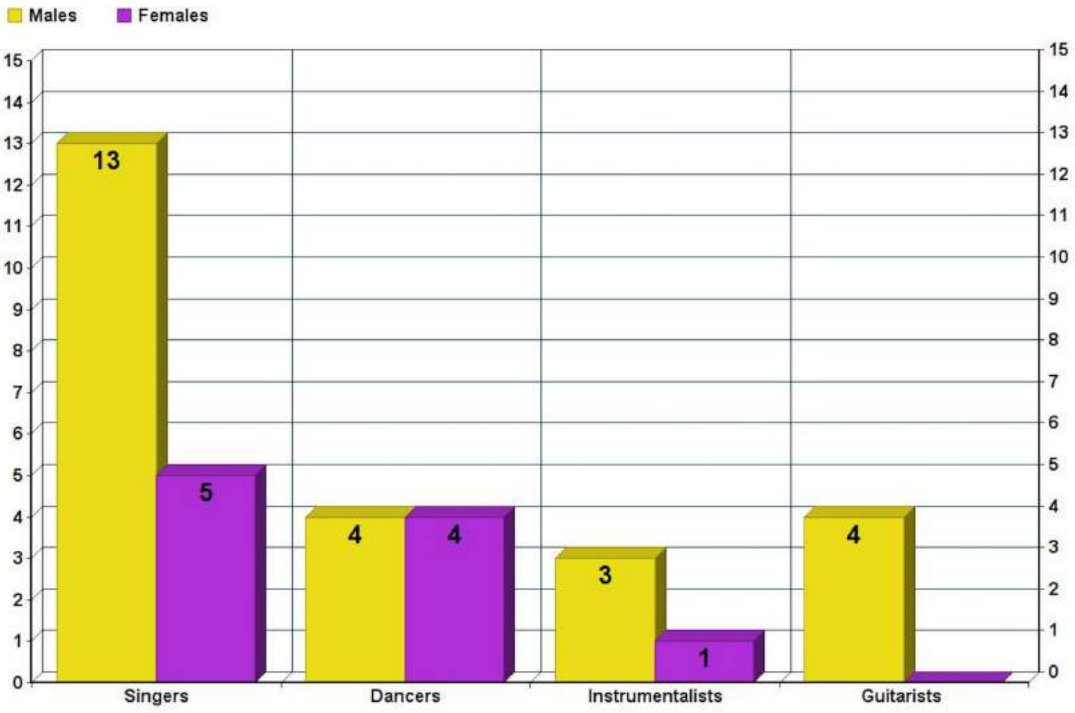
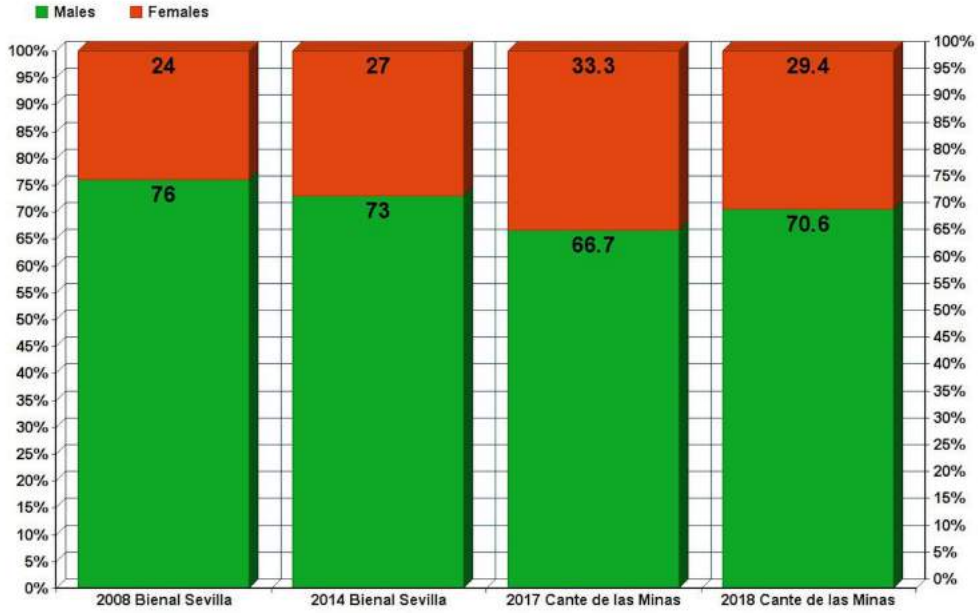


Table 4: *Festival Internacional de Cante de las Minas*, 2018. Gender Distribution Subdisciplines. Fieldwork data extrapolated by the author from official Festival Programme.



A comparison of the total gender distribution percentage between the numbers published by Cruces Roldán (2015) for the 2008 and 2014 editions of the Seville Flamenco Biennale and my fieldwork data from the *Festival de Cante de las Minas* (2017 and 2018) shows a slight increase in women's participation in the latter (Table 5). However, this variation is too small to be interpreted as a significant change. Moreover, there is no difference between Cruces Roldán's data and mine in the *toque* ("playing") category and guitar playing in particular.

Table 5 Overall gender distribution. Fieldwork data Cante de las Minas (Cattaneo: 2017, 2018); Bienal Sevilla (Cruces Roldán: 2008, 2015).



Representation and practice in context: Education

Participant-observation at two separate workshops for melodic flamenco (instrumental flamenco without a singer) taught by flute pioneer Jorge Pardo (Madrid, 2015 and Sanlúcar de Barrameda, 2017), revealed a considerably higher participation of women playing non-traditional instruments compared to flamenco guitar. In both workshops gender distribution was generally balanced, with a slightly higher number of women participants. Nearly half of the women who attended the workshops were full-time musicians who specialised primarily in flamenco but also worked as teachers and performers in other fields, mostly jazz or classical music. Although these findings indicate that the percentage of women playing non-traditional flamenco instruments is higher than that of women guitarists, these numbers contrast with the data from competitions analysed above. The introduction of new instruments into the tradition is expanding the presence of women instrumentalists and shifting the perception of other flamenco practices, such as guitar playing, as gendered fields. Arguably, this is the result of a process of hybridisation and of the consequent intersection of flamenco with non-native instruments that developed in other traditions, which present a more equal gender participation (Cattaneo 2021).

In official institutions that teach flamenco guitar, data shows, once more, a gender imbalance among flamenco guitar learners. According to Alicia González, scholar and former lecturer in *flamencología* ("flamencology")[7] at the Cordoba Conservatoire of Music, during the 2017-2018 academic year, there were sixty registered flamenco guitar students and of them only six (10%) were women (González 2019). She also mentioned that research carried out by the conservatoire indicated a decreasing pattern in the percentage of women continuing to play flamenco guitar in advanced

conservatoires, compared to the numbers registered in elementary and professional conservatoires.[8] As discussed with González, the reason for this drop in numbers may be related to the lack of career opportunities that flamenco offers to women guitarists, a scene that, as seen throughout this article, is still largely male-dominated. Thus, other advanced guitar degrees, like classical guitar, may be more attractive to women from a professional point of view. Of the twelve women guitarists that I interviewed three of them (Alonso, Espert and Morales) work as flamenco guitar teachers in other conservatoires and all confirmed González's observations.

Private flamenco schools such as the Cristina Heeren Foundation in Seville attract many guitar students from abroad and from regions of Spain traditionally not associated with flamenco. Some of the guitarists that I interviewed attended the school (Castro, Rubino). The international reach of the Foundation contributes, to a certain to degree, to the perception of flamenco guitar playing as a more gender balanced practice than historically found. Other non-institutionalised traditional flamenco guitar academies have had an increase in women guitarists in recent years (González 2019). For example, in an email exchange (Anonymous B. 2019), one flamenco teacher noted to me that in recent years the number of female students in his school had increased and was now 15% of the total. The teacher also mentioned that there are several women who play flamenco guitar quite proficiently in Jerez de la Frontera, however, he could not remember their names and had never heard them accompanying singers, which is traditionally the main role and the main source of income for flamenco guitarists. This indicates that although the situation for women guitarists is changing, there is still a systemic pattern of discrimination, deeply ingrained in the social structure and organisation of flamenco, as suggested by the absence of hired women guitarists in traditional contexts or my teacher's inability to remember their names. These findings, however, may suggest that the internationalisation of flamenco and its institutionalisation in conservatoires or other academic settings, removed from the social context of flamenco, can contribute to destigmatising women flamenco guitarists.

Representation and practice in context: Events and venues

An analysis of programmes from four shows that took place in 2017 and 2018 provides further evidence of gender exclusion, notwithstanding the fact that these shows were part of a series of events dedicated to the the role of women in flamenco. The first two posters (Figures 6 and 7) are part of a series of concerts, held respectively in Seville and Cadiz organised by the *Instituto Andaluz de Flamenco* ("Andalusian Institute of Flamenco"), a cultural department of the Government of Andalusia. These events culminated with the 2018 celebration of the International Day of Flamenco (16 November). As these two posters indicate, although the events were part of the series *Mujer y flamenco* (Women and flamenco) in both cases they featured men guitarists.

Figure 6 - *Ciclo Mujer y Flamenco*, 13 November 2018.

Figure 7 - *Ciclo Mujer y Flamenco*, 15 November 2018.

Similarly, in the 2018 edition of the Archidona flamenco festival in the province of Malaga, *Archidona Tiene Nombre de Mujer* ("Archidona is a woman's name") all guitarists listed were men, in spite of the fact that the event was specifically dedicated to women in the tradition (Figure 8).

Figure 8 - *Archidona Tiene Nombre de Mujer*, 2018.

A more proactive effort was made by the University Pablo Olavide of Seville, with the 2017 concert series *Mujeres Guitarristas, Recuperando su Sitio* ("Women guitarists, reclaiming their place") which gave space exclusively to women guitarists (Figure 9).

Figure 9 - *Mujeres Guitarristas, Recuperando su Sitio*, 2018

Every year, the flamenco concerts celebrating International Women's Day (8 March) throughout Andalusia and Spain feature women guitarists. For most of my interviewees, these celebrations are positive as they increase women's visibility, however, some see them as a form of tokenism that project an image of equal opportunities for women guitarists without demonstrably improving their working conditions and legitimacy in the field. Inma Morales and Mercedes Luján, for example, suggest these events have a negative effect on professional women guitarists. They argue that these concerts contribute to further marginalise women by limiting their performance to an allocated time and space and believe that women should refuse to participate in them (Luján 2020; Morales 2020).

Concerts in *peñas* or *tablaos* also reveal a generalised pattern of discrimination towards women instrumentalists. These venues usually have one or more official guitarists who tend to be men. Surprisingly this was the case also in the only existing woman flamenco *peña*, in the city of Huelva.[9] Figure 10 shows a frame from a video performance on the occasion of the 2017 International Day of Flamenco dedicated to women. However, my fieldwork indicates that this is changing, although slowly. Inma Morales and Antonia Jimenez for example regularly work in traditional settings as accompanists for singers while, as mentioned above, Alba Espert and Teresa Jimenez are official guitarists in the *peña Amigos de Paco Peña* in Cordoba. Most of the other guitarists I interviewed, however, work mainly in non-traditional venues, playing their own compositions or as solo guitarists.

According to some of my interviewees, in their experience, festivals do not programme more than one female guitarist at a time. Whenever they do, they group them together in a special event dedicated to women. Marta Robles points out that the same never happens to men. She argues that if the situation was reversed, that is to say if festivals were to programme only female artists, they "would be labelled as extremist or feminist" (Robles 2020). The analysis of these events and the testimonies of my interviewees indicate that more significant changes need to be implemented in order to guarantee equal gender opportunities and access to flamenco guitar.

Figure 10 - Peña Flamenca Femenina de Huelva, *Dia del flamenco*, 2017.

Conclusion

Decades of excluding women from the process of instrumental music making in flamenco have created a deeply ingrained systemic discrimination towards women guitarists. This phenomenon has been normalised and has remained, until recently, largely unchallenged (Lorenzo 2011). Furthermore, the absence of women artists from performance and from the creative process has deprived flamenco of a significant section of creative and interpretative voices that the tradition has to offer. A more inclusive approach to gender participation, especially with regards to instrumentalists, would be representative of the contemporary society in which it is created. Quantitative results, combined with qualitative findings that emerge from the experiences shared by my interviewees (who represent about half of the women currently active in the flamenco scene as professional guitarists) indicate that patterns of inequality are still present. The figures, as indicated by data presented in this article from past analysis and more recent original research are stark.

My findings suggest four elements that contribute to the limited, but currently increasing inclusion of women guitarists in contemporary traditional flamenco. Firstly, the international popularity gained by the genre contributes to a dissociation of guitar playing from the traditional social context where it is still perceived as a gendered practice. Secondly, the institutionalisation of flamenco guitar, in more neutral and balanced academic settings, also contributes to distancing guitar playing from a context in which it is still perceived as a male-dominated discipline, narrowing the gender gap. Thirdly, the introduction of non-traditional melodic instruments and of other musical systems, normalises the presence of women instrumentalists in flamenco. A further consolidation of melodic or instrumental flamenco as an independent sub-genre, dissociated from the most traditional song-based model, may contribute to normalise women's participation as instrumental performers. Lastly, gender imbalance in flamenco in general may be due to wider societal issues, which are similar across different musical traditions (Doubleday 2008; Koskoff 2014; Moisala and Diamond 2000). Therefore, as argued by Noa Drezner (2020), change will happen in due course as an effect of a wider social transformation. This emerges from the interviews I carried out with younger guitarists who seem to feel less stigmatised than those who preceded them. However, while it is true that gender discrimination is an issue that affects many other fields of cultural production and professional sectors, the degree of systemic exclusion of women from guitar playing in flamenco in the twenty-first century is particularly striking and suggests that there is a considerable resistance in changing the deeply ingrained, historical and cultural stigmatisation of women in the tradition.

Notes

[1] Flamenco presents other gender issues that are worthy of study, but beyond the scope of the present article. These include the conceptualisation of resolving harmonic sections into major keys as *macho* ("male", Nuñez Flamencopolis, 2011: web source) or the performance of lyrics that openly promote, or at least condone and normalise, gender discrimination and domestic violence. These lyrics, as also noted by Chuse (2003), are sung indiscriminately by men and women alike.

[2] The term *letras* literally means lyrics however, in the specific flamenco context, it is employed to refer to the short poems performed by singers.

[3] Named after its main exponent, singer, collector and flamenco researcher Antonio Mairena (1909-1983).

[4] Due to geographical distance and to the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, all my interviews were conducted online and through a variety of channels, which included written communication via

emails and social media messages, audio interviews via messaging services such as WhatsApp, and VoIP phone calls.

[5] All fieldwork interviews were conducted in Spanish and translated by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

[6] These numbers are obtained from the official festival programmes and have been extrapolated by the author.

[7] *Flamencología* is a term coined by scholar Anselmo González Climent in his homonymous book (1956). González Climent attempted to create a discipline for flamenco studies. It was only in the latter part of the twentieth century when a reconceptualization of flamenco studies as a multidisciplinary field of research rather than a discipline *per se* took place.

[8] Spain offers three levels of conservatoires of music: elementary, professional and advanced.

[9] The club was originally created in the 1980s by local women as a response to the ban on women in other local *peñas* with the objective of giving a platform to women performers (Chuse 2003).

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Where she stands: Conversations with Nóirín Ní Riain

Sarah Fons

Abstract

In the face of stark gender divisions in the Catholic Church and a male-dominated Irish music industry, Nóirín Ní Riain has forged a space to sing and pray. For decades she has been collecting and performing musics, from Irish sean-nós to Gregorian chant to Indian ragas, aspiring to understand and share sacred experience. Through a number of interviews, I explore the propulsive force that is Nóirín Ní Riain's spirituality, the indispensable role of music therein, and her life-long struggle to reconcile a deep love for the Catholic ritual and Irish song of her upbringing with conspicuous gender inequality within the Church. Music has been a refuge for Ní Riain; birthing shared moments of presence and genderlessness within ephemeral sound. Nóirín's is a story of the struggle and power of living between–between faiths, cultures, sometimes even genders–creating space for her own spiritual, musical experience.

Keywords: spirituality, gender inequality, Catholicism, sean-nós, ministry

Life stories

In a 1980 article, Titon argues that the field of folklore ought to value, as an unqualified academic contribution, "the life story". He writes that "we can learn much from life stories" (290):

> We can learn how the tradition bearer thinks of himself, and why he or she continues to make chairs or play the fiddle or preach as the Spirit moves. What is it about this person, we ask, that makes him an artist in the face of all the pressures to stop? What makes him an exceptional artist? Obviously, his self-conception, who he thinks he is, is greatly responsible for what he does. We get behind the mere facts of his life, the historical data, when we let him tell his story. (ibid.: 290-1)

The value of a life story, Titon argues, is not dependent on its usefulness as an informational tool or part of a dataset; it "need not be 'used' for anything, because in the telling it is a self-sufficient and self-contained fiction" (ibid.). The word fiction, Titon explains, comes from the root *facio,* or "making", as opposed to history, which come from *istorin*, or "found out" (ibid.: 278). He contends that a life story is fiction, a "making", because one tells her story from flawed human memory. Recollecting one's story, "drives toward enactment"; the teller re-experiences events of the past "by means of storytelling" (ibid.: 280). This act of creating that is inherent to storytelling is precisely what makes the life story valuable according to Titon, because "even if the story is not factually true, it is always true evidence of the storyteller's personality" (ibid.:290).

Titon's advice is particularly useful in this current moment. Movements such as #MeToo, Fair Plé, and other initiatives confront injustice and engender hope for the future by establishing spaces to share experiences of gender inequality, and in particular, empowering women to demand the rights and respect they deserve. This

special issue is an example of another kind of response. While generating actionable ideas is a natural and important response to this challenge, however, contemplative reflection is equally valuable. Considering the contributions and struggles individual women have made, faced, and continue to encounter, can fuel discussion and advance our understanding of the lived experience of those who move through the world of folk and traditional music in Ireland.

In this article, I explore the life and lessons of one such woman. In the face of stark gender divisions in the Catholic Church and a male-dominated music industry, Nóirín Ní Riain has fashioned a personal sanctuary; a place to sing and pray. Ní Riain's spirituality and the indispensable role of music therein has been a propulsive force throughout her life. Multi-instrumentalist, teacher, and minister, Ní Riain is best known for her sean-nós and Gregorian chant performance. Whether performing on her own, with the monks of Glenstal Abbey, or with her sons Owen and Moley Ó Súilleabháin, her constant aspiration has been to understand sacred experience; with the hope of helping others reach it as well; an aspiration which eventually led to a doctorate in theology (1999-2003), and ordination as InterFaith Minister (2015-2017).

Though her ever-evolving faith incorporates numerous religious and musical traditions, Ní Riain remains rooted in her cultural upbringing and maintains a deep love for Catholic ritual and Irish song. She feels the scars, however, of a life-long struggle to reconcile that love with conspicuous gender inequality within the Church.

> I find it incomprehensible that the notion is still widespread that just because we are women our connection with God, our belief in God, our intimate dialogue with God is inferior. And I don't know what to do about it! I don't know why the penny doesn't drop! Or why we put up with it!
>
> [Music] is a way to dispel that…I always say that when we're singing together, myself and the monks, it's almost as if there's a third gender there. We are neither male nor female. When we're singing, we become genderless. And then you come back off the altar and it's back again to male and female. (Ní Riain 2013)

That fleeting glimpse of equality has been a source of reconciliation for Ní Riain, but more precious is the "space [to] go into, to pray, to heal, and to come to terms with grief" that she finds in song (ibid.).

It is my intention in this article to facilitate Ní Riain to tell her story, recognising "its validity as a fiction, quite apart from its value as a historical document, [and placing] it squarely in the human universe" (Titon 1980: 291). Ní Riain's free-flowing narration of her life combine with my own interpretations and impressionistic (Van Maanen 2011) field notes to paint a portrait of one woman's life and work, and the broader world in which she exists. Despite the fallibility of human memory and the fact that Ní Riain is not the same person at the time of storytelling as she was when she experienced the events in it, her tale is nonetheless valid. It is a self-contained "making" that might enlarge the human universe, "even as we are enlarged, by the complementary stances of finding out and making, of fiction and history" (Titon 1980: 292).

Tea with Nóirín: Notes from the field, 8 Dec. 2018

As I disembark at Limerick Junction and walk alongside the train, I notice a familiar figure at the far end of the platform. I immediately know Nóirín by her posture: upright, self-assured and leaning slightly forward, as if she can hardly hold herself back from whatever adventure is next approaching.

Though we have maintained contact, it has been five years since we last met. She greets me with a warm smile and a hug, and immediately demands a detailed account of what has been happening in my life.

We drive to the golf resort and hotel where we will conduct our interview. Nóirín explains that she wanted to invite me to her home, but the drive would have been too long for her schedule which has become so full she nearly thought of rescheduling.

"But," she declares, "it's no use to cancel simply because you're busy! There is no end to the busyness!"

We arrive, we order tea and coffee, and find our way to a quiet corner, the silence punctuated on occasion by laughter from a large group of women a few tables over. Our conversation twists and turns. I cannot help but notice that during the course of our interview the sky over the greenery outside has turned from gloomy and cloud-filled to brilliant sunlight, causing the earth below to glow: vibrant and colourful as the woman who sits before me.

God and song

Ní Riain was raised Roman Catholic, in Limerick, in a loving family, and surrounded by music (Ní Riain 2013) and she stated that "Early childhood prepared me for a life committed first to God, and then to song" (ibid. 2009). The themes of spirituality, home, family, and music reverberate through every conversation we have had. At family gatherings, "everybody had their own song" (ibid. 2013), she told me, and her own natural talent shone through at a very early age.

> My parents always said I sang way before I spoke.
>
> They brought me into a singing teacher at the age of seven. She trained me, and entered me in competitions. I was winning all around, not necessarily because of talent, but because I was highly trained. She entered me into the under-sevens, I won that. The under-nines, I won that. The under-elevens. And then she would dress me up and put me into a bra, to cheat and say that I was older than I was! {Laughter} (ibid.)

Despite her active singing life and close-knit family, Ní Riain describes herself as a "solitary child" and "deep thinker". The youngest child of busy parents, with older siblings in boarding school, Ní Riain spent much of her youth alone (ibid.).

From the moment of her birth on 12 June 1951, the sacred spaces of her familial and cultural history touched Ní Riain's life. "I was conceived beside the oldest sacred site in Ireland, the ancient stone circle near the beautiful Lough Gur, Co. Limerick", Ní Riain says in her autobiography, *Listen with the Ear of the Heart* (2009: 17). Four years later, when her family moved into a new home six miles from Glenstal Abbey, the Benedictine monastery, it became the second sacred space to seize her heart.

> I always felt at home in Glenstal…some peace about that place. It keeps drawing me back like an elastic band. I don't know what it is. I'd go over on my bicycle and I'd drop my bicycle at the gate. I'd go up the avenue, I'd walk in under the mock-Norman castle there and I'd go in, and I just felt at home. (Ní Riain 2013)

Later in life, as a university student and young graduate, Ní Riain discovered a passion for ancient Irish cosmology and formed lifelong friendships with the Glenstal monks (renowned for their Gregorian chanting, and with whom she has often collaborated). Though not yet aware of the significance these sacred spaces would have throughout her life, a young Ní Riain dreamt of becoming a priest. A favourite childhood activity was to sneak into her parent's bedroom when no one was around, to say Mass. In the imagination of a child, the bedroom became a chapel filled with a large congregation, and the trees just outside the window became a choir singing sweetly as they swayed in the wind (Ní Riain 2009: 37). There she would minister to an invisible assembly, practicing and planning her future.

> [My parents] had a little fireplace and on the mantelpiece stood a little black and white cross. I would stand up on the ledge. See, my father was a very successful business man and my mother was a school teacher…so very often I was at home [alone]…every evening I would go into their bedroom at four o'clock. I had these little white silver mints, and I would go and say mass, giving out communion to these thousands in front of me. (Ní Riain 2013)

Ní Riain fondly remembers the joy of "that little space" (ibid. 2013) until a pivotal moment when one day, following her imagined mass, Ní Riain met her brother on the

landing as she was exiting her parent's room. "I can't remember exactly when I began the ritual," she reflects, "but I can recall vividly the moment the whole fantasy fell apart" (Ní Riain, 2009: 37).

> One day, I came out the door, and my brother was standing there and he said, "what are you doing?" I said, "I'm saying mass." He said, "why?" I said, "well, I'm going to be a priest." He said, "well don't be so ridiculous, you can't even be an altar boy!"
>
> And that was the first time, Sarah, I realised that the person saying mass every Sunday was a man. I was just waiting for a woman to come out, you know? (Ní Riain 2013)

At seven years old, Ní Riain came face to face with the gender discrimination that has deeply affected her ever since. At first, undeterred, she decided that if ministry to her fellow humans was denied to her, she would instead preach to animals, beginning with her family dog, Banner (Ní Riain, 2009: 38). As an adult, she turned more and more to music as ministry; if she could not preach from a pulpit, she could run music workshops and retreats for healing. Music became a refuge. "Even as a very young child," she says, "music was always a tool to access the transcendent" (Ní Riain 2018). During a lonely secondary education in boarding school, Ní Riain relied on music for comfort, and subsequently, her university path was dramatically changed when a music lecturer from University College Cork (UCC) examined the music portion of her matriculation exams. This lecturer, Pilib Ó Laoghaire, was so impressed with her talent that he paid a visit to her parents to convince them that music was the right career path for their daughter (Ní Riain 2013).

Journey to theosony

Ní Riain describes her years at UCC as "a very happy time" (ibid.). She met future husband, classmate Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin. She studied under famed composer and lecturer, Seán Ó Riada, whose passion for traditional Irish culture proved to be contagious; the girl born Nora Ryan became Nóirín Ní Riain. She became captivated by Celtic spirituality and the Irish language, a language so ancient, she says, that "the veils are lifted between the living and the dead, the spiritual and non-spiritual" (Ní Riain 2018).

Ó Laoghaire, a "closeted sean-nós singer" as Ní Riain describes him, taught her "dozens of songs" (Ní Riain 2013).

> He taught me one religious song, and I couldn't understand…I found it so much easier than all the other songs to sing: love songs or songs about the country or politics.
>
> This song was "The Seven Sorrows of Mary". I used to say, "why is it that I can sing that song and I didn't have to learn it?" It just came so naturally.
>
> …so because of my real identification with that particular song, I said, "well what about the other spiritual songs in Ireland? Where are they?" So I went around the country just talking to singers and asking them to sing spiritual songs. (ibid.)

Ní Riain has been expanding her repertoire of spiritual music ever since. Perhaps the most influential expansion began in the mid-1970s when Ní Riain and her new husband, Ó Súilleabháin, were introduced to the monks of Glenstal. They formed strong bonds of friendship, shared music (exchanging plainchant for sean-nós songs) and discussed the universe's greatest mysteries. Eventually, Glenstal became Ní Riain's support as her marriage began to deteriorate; and when she took the leap into doctoral research, she was granted a hermitage on the monastery grounds.

> I was wondering about singing, wondering about healing, wondering about the power of sound to transport one and to connect to the Divine. So I decided I would do a doctorate. This was back in 1998. I was going around to different universities saying, "I don't want to do a doctorate in music, I want to do it in theology." And they said, "listen, dearest, you can't even *spell* God! You have no degree in theology." (ibid.)

Upon reflection, Ní Riain describes her PhD journey as "bringing so many strands of [her] life together", and mortar between them is what she refers to as the "Divine"—

more specifically—the sound of the Divine. Just as she feels the power of sound can connect one to the Divine, she also believes that human-Divine interaction "is what makes music come alive" (ibid.). It is the intangible substance between it all that gives meaning and power.

> I kept going, because I knew, Sarah, what I wanted to say was wider than music. It was all about sound and listening and that every sound could be the sound of the Divine.
>
> …the sound of God, the voice of God, the silence of God. You know, you can't talk about sound without talking about silence. Then listening to God and hearing God are two different things. There were so many aspects of it that I found I'd have to devise one term which would mean everything about the sound of God. (ibid.)

On a nature walk at Glenstal that term came to her—Theosony—a combination of the Greek words *theos* and *sonans*, meaning "God-sounding" (Ní Riain 2011). Eventually she found a school and supervisor to take her on in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, and Dr. Eamonn Conway. In her dissertation, titled *Theosony* (2011), Ní Riain delineates three types of sounding and listening:

1) "cosmic theosony"—sound for the sake of sound,
2) "kerygmatic theosony"—sound which carries a message,
3) "silent theosony"— the highest form of listening.

Silent theosony "brings you into the presence of God" (Ní Riain 2013). The contradiction in the term silent theosony is very intentional; like the interaction between the human and the Divine in the creation of spiritual music, the interplay between silence and sound is precisely what gives it power. This also resonates with the contradictions which suffuse Ní Riain's life: her precocious yet solitary childhood, her enriching yet painfully unattainable calling, the friendships which embody both equality and inequality.

After more than a decade living at Glenstal in the groundskeeper's cottage—singing for masses, vespers, and evening prayers, running workshops, and recording music—and despite her deep connection to the people and sacred space of Glenstal, the struggle to feel on equal footing with her friends there finally became too much.

> I did get quite disillusioned, Sarah, with the exclusivity…that conservatism, it's pushing the gender issue further away. By joining this club, you are protecting yourself from any encounter with the other side, be it masculine or feminine because there are both sides in each of us. If you deny the expression of either gender in yourself or in others, it will eventually catch up with you. (Ní Riain 2018)

Finding her desire to minister too tenacious to be restrained by a church that does not ordain women, Ní Riain trained for two years with the One Spirit InterFaith Foundation. In 2017 she was ordained and left the Abbey (ibid.). It was one of her monk friends who first suggested that Ní Riain seek ordination. Among the Glenstal community the response to her ordination has been mixed; some feel she has turned her back on Catholicism, but many have surprised her with genuine enthusiasm for her ministry (ibid.).

> It's changed my life, Sarah! [It] has given me a huge sense of purpose, vocation, and rightness. You're standing beside people at these important times!
>
> You're seeing two people come in—be it two men, two women, a man and a woman—and the emotion between them is so powerful. I find it so nourishing that I can add into it something, be it ever so small. And even though we might not use the word God, or Buddha, or Krishna, it is the Divine. (ibid.)

Ní Riain's ministerial vision led her to a new venture which has brought together, in a concrete way, all those themes which guide her life; family, Ireland, faith, and song are the foundation of the tourism program she began with her two sons in 2017: Turas d'Anam (Ní Riain 2021). "Here is no tourism jargon", however, Ní Riain is quick to declare (Ní Riain 2020). Through Turas d'Anam, Ní Riain and her sons aim to shepherd those who are interested through an experience of Ireland that "is deeply and

spiritually interfaith and inter-sensual" (ibid.). Though still in its adolescence, this venture has been personally, spiritually, and financially fulfilling, bringing Ní Riain a sense of cohesion in her life.

> Gathering together a small company of like-minded souls, sharing spirituality, song, narrative and prayer in the widest sense, and also in a sense of place, has brought me full circle in my life…Turas d'Anam, journey of your soul, is the realisation of Turas m'Anam, journey of my soul, and it has certainly ignited a great candle of interest and support. (ibid.)

With tourism being largely impossible during the COVID 19 pandemic, Ní Riain and her sons shifted the focus of Turas d'Anam to offer courses online, exploring Irish culture and history, as well as addressing more immediate spiritual needs. Ní Riain has also begun to provide digital spiritual direction and counselling, with much of her clientele seeking more individual services after experiencing her guidance through Turas d'Anam.

> In these COVID-driven times, this thirst [is] all the more crucial and urgent…we have been presenting online courses entitled *Dámh Imeall* – (h)Edge School…on many topics, ranging from the great Celtic festivals of *Samhain*, *Imbolc* and *Bealtaine*, to the universal themes of aging, family, death and dying…we have been creating a family ambience for people to step into and feel that sense of belonging at this harrowing time of separation and isolation. (ibid.)

Conclusion: *Coicead*

> I'm now on what I call the edge. *Imeall* is the word in Irish. It's the cutest little place. You'll come sometime…I can see the monastery and hear the bells from [my home], and it's good to be close, even though my life has taken a step back from it. (Ní Riain 2018)

Ní Riain was the first person to explain to me the term *coicead*. *Coicead* is the old Irish word for province, but it also means fifth. Therefore, *coicead* has come to refer to Ireland's fifth province. On its face, this term is somewhat confusing due to the fact that all historical geographical records show only four Irish provinces: Connacht, Leinster, Munster, Ulster (Kearney, 1977: 4). *Coicead* may once have referred to the physical centre of Ireland, but this exact location is debated. Kearney has suggested that the fifth province is "a second centre of gravity," not geographical or political, free of any particular physical place, and rather "something more like a disposition" (ibid.). For some, like Ní Riain, *coicead* has come to describe "a sacred space that transcends the dualities of life where the ordinary becomes extraordinary" (McCarthy 2010: 8).

There is an old riddle, Ní Riain told me: "Where is *coicead?*" The answer: "right where you are standing" (Ní Riain 2013). *Coicead* is simultaneously a place between dualities and a space within those who wish to find it. To access it requires a precious kind of presence: one discovered in fleeting moments of sincere experience, as in the transience of live musical performance where sound can never truly be captured. A song happens and then is gone, forcing listener and performer to be truly present within the sound—the kind of presence found in *silent theosony*—in that threshold space of dualities where Ní Riain experiences the Divine.

> You know, God is beyond all images, beyond genders. I love that about Christianity…it has the human, the Christ, and it has the Holy Spirit. That force bringing everything together…that thing between the male and the female is like that, too. It's that third part; a third presence that creates a circle, infinity. Magic happens when you have five, two parts of two and another third part. The three of the Trinity and the two for the male and female…music is also genderless; so when you go into a song, *you* are not *aware* of your gender. (Ní Riain 2018)

Cobussen has compared spirituality to a musical interval in which everything is audible; disparate pieces come together to become something new, "belonging neither to this side nor to the other, and at the same time to both" (2008: 157). In other words, like *coicead*, like silent theosony, it is a seeming contradiction, a paradox, polarities that cannot exist without each other (Fons 2013). For Nóirín, *coicead* encapsulates the

coming together of spirit and song. She embodies that coalescence, that presence, living between faiths and cultures, sometimes even genders, creating her own spiritual, musical province wherever she stands.

> I suppose life is a contradiction, an oxymoron in itself. We can just balance it all…I love that in anything! That idea that there's a space between…and that is the real meaning of "silent theosony". It's not the words themselves, but the space between them…it's not the song, it's not the singer, it's not the listener; it's all three. But it's another space: the space between them all and the space that's only in your heart. So it comes back to you in the end. It's where you're standing, the fifth part. It's *coicead*. (Ní Riain 2013)

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A woman and her cello: Ilse de Ziah's approach to Irish traditional music

Kaylie Streit

Abstract

Since the early 2000's, cellist Ilse de Ziah has immersed herself in the aural transmission process essential to acquiring the techniques of Irish traditional music. This knowledge, combined with the fact that cello is not a core instrument in the Irish traditional music scene, has enabled de Ziah to negotiate a particular place for herself as a performer. As a contribution to the widening field of literature and performance data on women musicians in traditional and folk music, this article documents her creative practice and the development of techniques and arrangements for cello within an Irish traditional music sound world.

Keywords: Irish traditional music, cello, creative practice

Ilse de Ziah (b.1968) is a classically trained Australian cellist currently living in Ireland who performs within multiple, often overlapping, genres including popular music, film music, self-composed works, contemporary music, and the folk music of Australia and Ireland. De Ziah uses sound worlds and skill sets characteristic of each genre to create expressive musical phrasing appropriate to the idioms of each style. First introduced to Irish traditional music by her grandparents, de Ziah developed her understanding of the tradition after moving to Ireland in the early 2000's and attending Irish traditional music sessions (de Ziah 2017). Since then, several of her larger creative projects have centered on Irish traditional music. These experiences inspired de Ziah to undertake projects in publishing her arrangements of Irish traditional music for cellists. The cello is not a core Irish traditional music instrument, though a number of cellists now perform within the genre. Natalie Haas (2011, 2013, 2015a, 2015b), Kate Ellis (2008), Sharon Howley (2012, 2015), Alec Brown (2017) and Neil Martin (2004) are among those who have made recent recordings of Irish traditional music. On these recordings they perform a variety of roles, including participation in céilí bands, accompaniment to traditional singers, traditional music duets and solo performance of Irish airs.[1]

Through participation in traditional music sessions, de Ziah continues to explore multiple ways for the cello to fit into the sound of the session group. In most tune sets, she participates by contributing an accompaniment, giving the cello a function similar to that of a guitar or a bouzouki within the traditional music session. While the cello cannot replicate the chordal textures of a guitar or bouzouki, it can provide similar harmonic and rhythmic support through use of the bow and double stops. In other instances, de Ziah plays melody, imitating the fiddle (2017). She consolidates examples of this practice into the tune book *Trad on Cello: Traditional Irish Tunes in Cello Friendly Keys* (2016). Through this publication, de Ziah seeks to make tune melodies and accompaniments more technically accessible to cellists (2016: 1; 2017). The large size of the instrument makes it more difficult for a cellist to play the fast,

traditional dance tune melodies than it would be for a fiddle, flute, or other melody player. Where a fiddle player can stay in a single place on the fingerboard and quickly access all notes, moving across strings to play the notes and rhythms of the melody, a cellist needs to move up and down the fingerboard within the same, short amount of time. In order to mitigate this challenge and make these tunes more accessible for a cellist, de Ziah changed the keys of the tunes to involve fewer large shifts for the left hand, so that they can be played in a single position on the fingerboard (2016: 3-4). This allows the cellist to learn and play the melodies in a shorter amount of time and provides them with more space to think about and develop bowing techniques, ornamentation and phrasing integral to Irish traditional music.

In 2014 de Ziah co-directed a documentary, *Living the Tradition: An Enchanting Journey into Old Irish Airs* (2014). The 92-minute film examined the histories and personal stories associated with ten Irish airs. Segments of interviews with music researchers and performers are followed by de Ziah performing her own arrangements of the airs, in the location they were thought to have originated: "Cape Clear," for example, was performed and filmed on the island of Cape Clear, off the coast of Cork in the south of Ireland for the documentary (2014, 2019a). For de Ziah, the research and performance of the airs in a place meaningful to their creation adds another layer of narrative:

> It's a layer that adds to and informs your music. It informs your expression of yourself. And I think that music is about that. It's that you need to keep developing layers so that you can express what you're trying to express. (2017)

De Ziah is committed to the performance of each of her arrangements from memory, without reference to written notation, so that the musician can engage fully in expressing each phrase as they feel is appropriate in the moment (de Ziah, 2019c). This practice is consistent with some of the core values of Irish traditional music, particularly the continuation of the melodic tradition with an emphasis on personalised expression of those melodies (Breathnach 1971: 92-107; Cowdery 1990: 3-4, 9-14, 26-28; Hast and Scott 2004: 121, 125, 135-136; Mac Mahon 1999: 115-116, 119; Ní Shíocháin 2013: 103; Ó Canainn 1993: 40-48; O'Shea 2008: 36-40; Ó Súilleabháin 1999: 175-179, 197; Sommers-Smith 2001: 112).

Throughout the process of creating both the publication and the documentary, de Ziah immersed herself in listening to a wide range of Irish traditional music performers, including members of the band Altan, fiddler Matt Cranitch, singer Lillis Ó Laoire, fiddler Martin Hayes, piper Seamus Ennis, and singer Seán Keane (de Ziah 2017). She used the phrasing, bowing, ornamentation and melodic variations in their tunes and songs as references for creating variation and expression in her own performances of Irish traditional music. De Ziah borrows phrasing from singers and uses the techniques of fiddle players to inform how she used the bow in tunes and instrumental airs as she arranged and performed them. The bowing, ornamentation and variations published in her arrangements, however, are intended only as suggestions, to help cellists see options that she considers sensitive to the sound and aesthetic of Irish traditional music (2009: 4, 2017). In the introduction to *Irish Airs for Solo Cello*, she encourages cellists to make their own arrangements, experiment, and express what they are feeling and their interpretation of the melody through the music (2009: 4). She also suggests cellists listen to a variety of Irish traditional music performances and use this experience to make informed decisions about personalisation of melodies. Through close listening, she believes, a player can learn the sounds of the music and figure out how to imitate them on a different instrument. In de Ziah's words: "when you can imitate those sounds, you can choose when and where to use them to create effective expressions within the idiom during performance" (2017).

De Ziah has incorporated performance practices from Irish traditional music as a key part of her creative practice (2017, professional website, n.d.). She uses ornamentation, variation, and phrasing suggestions from traditional musicians to inform

her playing and re-create the sounds, tunes, and airs of Irish traditional music in solo cello performance and arrangement. To make this practice more accessible to other cellists, she has published four books; *Irish Airs for Solo Cello* (2009),*Trad on Cello: Traditional Irish Tunes in Cello Friendly Keys* (2016), *Easy Irish Cello: Slow Session Tunes and Traditional Favourites* (2019b) and *Sacred Irish Songs for Solo Cello* (2020). Her bowing, ornamentation, variations, techniques, publications, recordings and live performances reflect the time that she has invested in assimilating the sounds of Irish traditional music into her practice. This body of work illustrates how she has navigated Irish traditional music on cello, and how she incorporates it into her creative practice.

Documenting and examining the performance practice of De Ziah provides a window into the incorporation of Irish traditional music as a key part of her creative practice (2017, professional website, n.d.). As demonstrated, she uses ornamentation, variation, and phrasing from traditional musicians to inform her playing and re-create the sounds, tunes, and airs of Irish traditional music in solo cello performance and arrangement, disseminated through publications (2009, 2016, 2019b, 2020). By documenting one woman's creative practice this article adds to the body of work which seeks to build a field of knowledge in the area of Women and Traditional/Folk Music.

Notes

[1] Further examples of recordings that involve cellists in Irish traditional music performance include groups such as the Chieftains, Dé Danann, Altan, and traditional singers Margaret O'Carroll, Tríona Marshall, and Seoirse Ó Dochartaigh (see Discography for details).

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Commercialisation, Celtic and women in Irish traditional music

Joanne Cusack

Abstract

Recent initiatives concerning gender equality and Irish traditional music have raised questions regarding women's performance and participation. Focusing on the impact of commercialisation and consequent use of the "Celtic music" label from the 1990s, this article examines the impact of the commercial music industry on women in Irish traditional music. Utilising Lieb's (2018) "lifecycle model" as a form of analysis, this research draws on lived experiences of the scene aided by a statistical analysis of a select discography. A subsequent research aim provokes dual understandings pertaining to the impact of *Riverdance* and Michael Flatley's later dance shows on women performers. Although the 1990s can be regarded as transformative for women and music in Ireland with an increased visibility of women performing on the commercial scene, such progress can be understood in terms of "ebb and flow" with gender biases continuing to be experienced.

Keywords: Irish traditional music, commercialisation, Celtic, gender, women studies

Introduction

This article explores and analyses the experiences of women active in the commercial Irish traditional music scene during (and after) the transformative period of the 1990s (Barrington 2017; Connolly 2001; McCarthy 1992). In doing so, it questions how and in what way musical acts differ according to a musician's identified gender (O'Shea 2008a: 66). A second research aim is to explore the impact of *Riverdance* and more specifically, Michael Flatley's Irish dance shows on women performers in Irish traditional music. Although this research primarily focuses on women musicians, given the ensemble nature of these shows, dancers are implicated in much of the analysis.

The analytical framework draws on and modifies Lieb's (2018) "lifecycle model", in which she suggests women in the popular music industry follow a particular lifecycle; they are expected to look "exceptionally gorgeous"; and as they age, are "partially forced to exit the industry" as they are deemed "less attractive by contemporary music industry standards" (110 -11). Although this model focuses on the popular commercial music industry and may present certain hazards in "labelling" musicians, I propose Lieb's model has relevance for an analysis of women in the commercial Irish traditional music (and dance) industry. Here, the "commercial industry" is understood as the various "recording companies, media moguls…agents, promoters and marketing gurus" that functioned to increase the market commodity value of Irish traditional music during the 1990s (Ó hAllmhuráin 2017: 185) whereas the term "scene" is employed as a "collectivity" of spaces (Straw 2015: 477). In doing the above, I discuss the impact of the "Celtic music" label on Irish traditional musicians, a subcategory of "World Music" that is distinctly linked to marketing, sales, and branding (Taylor 1997). The fieldwork for this project comprised statistical analysis of a "select discography" in Irish Folk Music Studies/Éigse Cheol Tíre (Carolan et al. 2001) combined with ethnographic

research in the form of a series of questionnaires and interviews with industry professionals (Barz and Cooley 2008). My analysis of this data is informed by the above feminist frameworks and research from contemporary music studies, and reveals attitudes and experiences which exist(ed) within the Irish traditional music/dance scene.[1]

Women and Irish traditional music

Studies show that from the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 the most acceptable role for many women in Ireland was that of a homemaker/mother/wife (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Fine-Davis 2015; Flanagan 1975; McKiernan and McWilliams 1997). This was due to a multitude of factors including the influence of the Catholic Church and its relationship with the State; social norms or attitudes towards traditional gender binary roles; constitutional interpretations; and fixed symbolic representations of Ireland which enforced a idealised image and role of women for much of the twentieth century (Cullingford 1990). During this time, comparable attitudes towards the position of women in Irish society were likewise visible within the Irish traditional music scene as demonstrated in the work of Slominski (2010; 2020), O'Shea (2008 a/b) and the recent TG4 television series *Mná an Cheoil* (2019). Biggins believes:

> It was a man's world, and the world of Irish traditional music was no exception. Pub sessions–where much of the music was made–were mostly a male domain, and the lion's share of the early and influential recordings of Irish traditional music were made by men…who are still revered and whose styles are emulated even today. However it may seem, women were not excluded nor discouraged from playing music; they just did it more discreetly–in the home. It was very often the mother who taught her children the songs and tunes and how to play them on their instruments. Some of the women who distinguished themselves in the period up to the 1950s were Mrs. Elizabeth Crotty, a concertina player from County Clare; fiddlers Aggie Whyte from East Galway and Julia Clifford from Sliabh Luachra; pianist Eleanor Kane Neary from Chicago; and Sarah Makem (mother of Tommy) from Country Armagh. (1998)

Although Biggins is correct in stating that women musicians mostly performed within the confines of the home, studies have also shown that women were often prohibited and discouraged from performing in public spaces (O'Shea 2008a/b; Slominski 2010; 2020). Domestic responsibilities also restricted women from playing music as frequently as men, and "many married women put aside their instruments altogether, unless they taught their children to play" (O'Shea 2008a: 57). In the TG4 series *Mná an Cheoil* (2019, episode 5), Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh recalls how Nábla, a fiddle player from Gort an Choirce was branded as a sort of "witch" because she kept up her instrument and went against the "unwritten rule" (12:30).

Fine-Davis notes that although changes in attitudes towards the role of women in Ireland came somewhat later than other European countries (predominantly due to the strong influence of the Catholic Church), "the process of change from the mid 1970s was rapid…[due to] Ireland's economic development…women's movements–both internationally and in Ireland itself", the impact of EU membership, and important "administrative and legislative" reforms (2015: 5). Yet despite significant economic growth and positive changes towards the role of women, the 1980s saw the "arrival of a new crisis" as emigration and unemployment reached all-time highs with continuing migration from rural Ireland to urban centres, most often Dublin, in which "female labour force participation remained extremely low" (Ó Riain 2014: 32). Concertina player Mary MacNamara believes these broader changes in Irish society positively impacted the role of women in Irish traditional music. She states that as people started arriving into the bigger cities seeking education or employment, they also played music, "you'd get to know each other. It encouraged people, it happened naturally" (MacNamara 2019). While there was a growing visibility of women performing outside

of the home particularly within urban society, singer Seosaimhín Ní Bheaglaoich recollects that "there were lots of musicians who were never asked to join in a session in Dublin…And 99 per cent of them were women" (Long 2004). She recalls an occasion where "someone suggested to us [women musicians] that we were no more than groupies, following the musicians around" (ibid.). Ní Bheaglaoich's experience of the Irish traditional music scene in the 1980s is reflective of people's conflicting attitudes towards women in Ireland during this time: "in 1986, 46% of people, interviewed about their attitudes to life in Ireland, still thought that a woman's place was in the home and not outside of it" (Fine-Davis (1988:48) as quoted in McCarthy 1992: 38).

In March 1984, Ní Bheaglaoich became a member of the newly-formed women-only band Macalla. Macalla made their debut on International Women's Day that month at the Dublin Folk Festival and released their first album *Mná na hÉireann* in 1985. Ní Bheaglaoich reflects:

> looking back on it now, women accepted their traditional role…we were of a generation who were spreading our wings. We wanted to express our independence through being in Macalla. There was a strength in numbers in a very quiet way...After us, you had the likes of Cherish The Ladies, and Sharon Shannon. Before that, it would have been unheard of that a woman would have that kind of profile in traditional music. (Long 2004)

Testing this further, an analysis of 104 Irish traditional music recordings released between 1985 and 2000, taken from a "select discography" in *Irish Folk Music Studies/Éigse Cheol Tíre* (Carolan et al. 2001), reveals just nine bands featuring women musicians were released between 1985 and 1990, which increased to forty-six released from 1990 to 2000.

These figures combined with Ní Bheaglaoich's response indicate an increased visibility of women musicians performing in the scene from the 1990s, thus demonstrating the impact of groups such as Macalla, as they provided a role model for women musicians who wanted to perform. The increased visibility and commercial success of women performers might also indicate a change in attitude towards the role of women in Irish traditional music. This was certainly the case for banjoist Mary Shannon, who recalled the 1990s as a "fantastic" time where she performed frequently in the Galway music scene and never noticed any gender imbalance (Shannon 2019). MacNamara says that although some people may have had bad experiences performing within the scene, her experience was only positive and she never experienced any form of gender injustice (MacNamara 2019). Accounts of positive experiences in the Irish traditional music scene reflect concurrent changes within Irish society with the appointment of Ireland's first woman president in 1990, the election of twenty women to Dáil Éireann, the national parliament, in 1992 (an increase of 4.2% from 1989) and a number of constitutional changes including the introduction of divorce in 1996. A final key factor in the commercialisation of Irish traditional music from the 1990s was the expanded usage and popularisation of the "Celtic music" label within an expanding World Music market. Irish traditional music broadened from a folk niche into the wider category of "Celtic music" creating additional performance platforms for musicians and an increased potential to earn a more profitable income from the art (Taylor 1997: 209-30; Thornton 1998: 264).

The "commercial, bankable formula"

A critical question arises as to what extent transformative changes in Irish society and growing commercial opportunities impacted women musicians in the Irish traditional music scene from the 1990s. In many successful Irish traditional music bands that toured the national and international commercial circuit during (and after) the 1990s, women featured most often as singers, usually fronting a band consisting of men (see: O'Brien Bernini 2016: 240 - 243). Dolphin's thesis further underpins this in

which she maintains that women singers often became the “visual centrepiece of the band, regardless of whether their personality would naturally lead them to take these roles or not” (2013: 12). Testing this hypothesis further, the analysis of Irish traditional music recordings released between 1985-2000, referred to earlier, revealed just 9% of recordings were of a women-only band, in comparison to 47% consisting of men-only. In mixed gendered acts, 30% of recordings contained one woman in the band, whilst only 14% of recordings had two women or more. Furthermore, 76% of guest musicians listed were men and just 24% were women, meaning that guest musicians were three times more likely to be men. Focusing on the occupation of band members, 44% of women musicians had vocals listed within their occupations in comparison to 22% of men.

A detailed analysis of bands consisting of a multiple number of men and one woman reveals key patterns (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

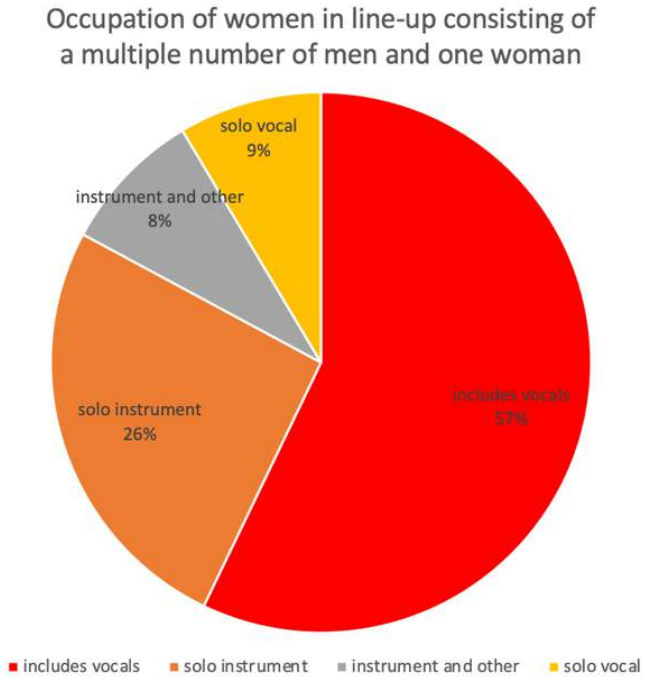

Figure 1: Occupation of women in band consisting of a multiple number of men and one woman.

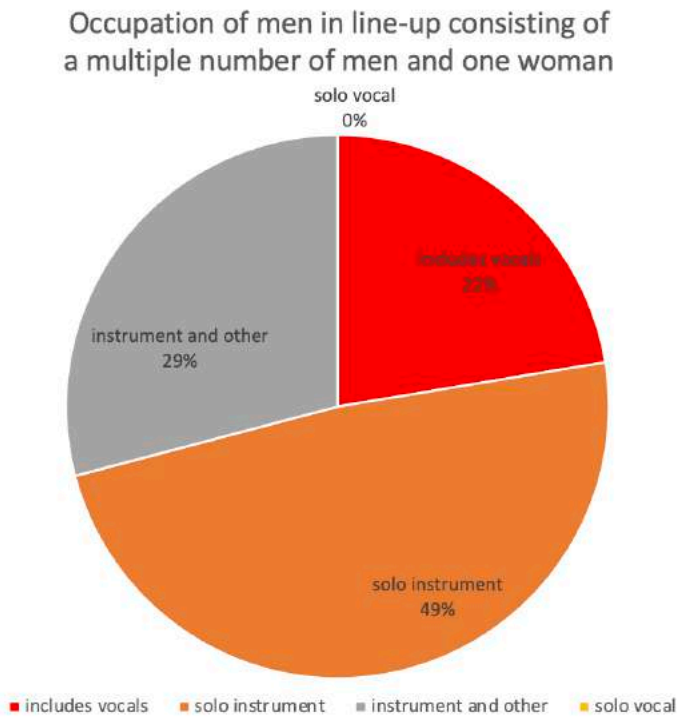

Figure 2: Occupation of men in band consisting of a multiple number of men and one woman.

For the purpose of this analysis on bands consisting of a multiple number of men and one woman, "solo" is understood as only one instrument listed or solo vocal; "includes vocals" designates any type of vocal unless specified; and "multiple instruments" indicates more than one instrument listed (not vocal). Data confirms that women were more likely to be singers in bands than men. Moreover, the overall findings from the discographical analysis demonstrate that the music industry still predominantly consisted of men in comparison to women, despite the increased visibility of women performing on the traditional music scene and significant societal change in relation to gender inequality from the 1990s. At the Rising Tides event (hosted by FairPlé in 2018), traditional musician Muireann Nic Amhlaoibh spoke about her experience as a lead singer, stating that "if you are front and centre in photographs…it doesn't necessarily mean you're front and centre musically or in terms of equality" (Muireann Nic Amhlaoibh Rising Tides 2019: 0.33):

> A lot of people said to me: "I don't know why you're involved with FairPlé, sure you used to swan out there, everyone was looking at you". That's not always a great thing. I didn't always want them to be looking at me. (ibid.: 0.44)

In a subsequent response to a questionnaire conducted as part of this research in 2019, Nic Amhlaoibh maintained her role as lead singer was "insisted upon by her agent" because the role of a woman as lead singer is a "commercial, bankable formula" and "it sells". This response demonstrates the presence of the "male gaze" within the Irish traditional music scene, thus further exemplifying the men-dominated music industry (Frazier 2015; Hunter and Cuenca 2017; Mulvey 1975). Nic Amhlaoibh observed that:

> looks became quite important as the scene had become quite commercial, *Riverdance* and other dance shows contributed to this…The role of the "girl" in the band was clearly defined that she be front and centre, smiling and amenable. The men didn't seem to have to convey a personality from the stage if they didn't wish to. (Nic Amhlaoibh 2019)

Nic Amhlaoibh's experience evokes two understandings of the commercial scene. Firstly, reminiscent of Butler's (1990) hypothesis in which gender is a repetition of acts, Nic Amhlaoibh was expected to pursue a role that was most suited to her gender when performing with the band Danú for over a decade: which consisted of Nic Amhlaoibh and five men. This in turn suggests that men musicians had more choice and control over both their image and role in comparison to women. Secondly, Nic Amhlaoibh's response demonstrates the impact of the commercial industry on the image and role of women musicians in Irish traditional music as her role in the band was insisted upon by her agent for the purpose of consumer consumption. Evidently, an increased presence of women musicians performing on the scene should not necessarily be interpreted as women musicians having autonomy or equality.

Lieb argues that women in the popular music scene follow a similar lifecycle and her fieldwork with industry professionals found that all interviewees "reported, to varying extents, that the music industry treats women differently than men" (2018: 111). Lieb bases her lifecycle model on several recurring themes, such as the expectation that women must: "be exceptionally gorgeous"; "leverage their core product or asset–their bodies and perceived sexual availability–into as many other entertainment arenas…to maximize short-term financial success"; and "must play a vastly different career game than their male counterparts" (ibid.: 110). Although Lieb focuses on the popular commercial music industry, the model has relevance for an analysis of women in the commercial Irish traditional music scene, especially when considering the impact of the Celtic music label on Irish traditional musicians with its considerable ties to mainstream popular music, world music, and consumable culture.

Similar to Lieb's findings, many of the responses collected for this research spoke about comparable expectations in relation to conforming to constructed ideals of gendered beauty. Traditional musician Niamh Ní Charra stated that she often "felt required to pay more attention to her clothes and to wear makeup in a concert setting" (Ní Charra 2019). Another musician explained how she often felt that her "look" was important to the men that hired her and recalled how she would often hear them saying: "she looks great and she can sing too!" (Anonymous 2019).

"Celtic" image

Reflecting on the late 1990s, Nic Amhlaoibh also believes that "Americans especially loved the idea of the ingenue, the Celtic fairy" (Nic Amhlaoibh 2019). This reference to both the "Celtic" image and American spectators exemplifies several key developments: the increased use of the Celtic music label from the 1990s; the impact of *Riverdance* and Michael Flatley's Irish dance shows on the image and sound of Irish traditional music; and the expansion of the numerous worldwide Celtic music stages for Irish artists from this time, demonstrating the presence of what Melhuish describes as the "Celtic tide" (Melhuish as quoted in Campos Calvo-Sotelo 2017: 372; Nicholsen 2016).

Considering this "Celtic fairy" perception further, along with the obvious "Celtic" connotations, the image is romanticised as one of beauty and innocence or purity. With this thought in mind, perhaps the Celtic music label placed women [back] within the confines of a stereotypical idealised image and role that is reflective of historical personifications of Ireland as feminine whilst also encapsulating traits of romantic cultural nationalism (a significant characteristic of postcolonial identity) and even "magic nationalism" (Slominski 2020: 35, 137; Cullingford 1990; Kearns 2004). Stevens et al. argue such "romantic cultural nationalist narrative that persists in representations of Ireland and Irishness…persists in categorizing and oppressing…Irish women" (2000: 419). Therefore, what has come to be understood as Irishness under the umbrella of the Celtic music category "may encapsulate or expunge the female, denying or seeking to define and legitimize what the 'Irish woman' may be" (Graham 2001: 102). This is in

contrast to the significant positive changes which occurred in relation to the role of women in Irish society during the so-called "transformative" period of the 1990s. This "Celtic fairy" persona also resonates with the first phase of Lieb's lifecycle model, the "good girl" phase which implies that the pop star "must adhere to set cultural templates of femininity" (2018: 117). This "good girl" phase is also reflective of O'Shea's informant, fiddle player Anna's experience. Reminiscent of Butler's theory of gender performance (1990), Anna believed that she must perform an "acceptable feminine role" in order to avoid sexual harassment whilst performing in her local session (O'Shea 2008a: 61).

As noted previously, many women who perform in the commercial Irish traditional music scene are singers and are often fronting an all-man band. Examples of this can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Imagery of well-known Irish traditional music bands (Right – Left: Clannad, Dervish, Danú, and Altan).[2]

Lieb's work suggests that as a woman singer "hits a certain point" in their life or particular age, they are no longer marketable and therefore the "stars and their handlers pursue other strategies for remaining desirable, popular, and relevant. Increasingly, this takes the form of emphasizing one's physical appearance, sexual availability, and overall accessibility…this means entering the realm of the temptress" (2018: 123). Interpreting Lieb's temptress phase in the context of the commercial Irish traditional music scene, it may be argued that lead women singers in bands–whether they even think of themselves in this way–find themselves positioned in this later phase. Although their clothing choice perhaps resonates more with the romantic, feminine characteristics of the "Celtic fairy" persona than that of a "temptress", it is clear that each woman is placed front and centre, as a visual focal point: "as

musicians, women have traditionally been viewed as singers, positioned in front of a band, the focus of audience attention not simply for what they sing, but for how they look" (Whiteley 2000: 52). This was certainly the case for singer and fiddle player Niamh Dunne, who referred to herself as the '"token female"' in the all-man band, Beoga and believed "that her wardrobe selection is more significant and symbolic than her male band mates" (O'Brien Bernini 2016: 241). Similarly, Lieb argues that "audiences have come to expect a beautiful face, body, and voice to travel together in one person as a perfect packaged good" (2018: 176).

Yet, irrespective of whether a woman's image or role reflects characteristics of a "Celtic fairy", "good girl" or "temptress", the difficulty arises if women performers feel they have no choice or feel pressured/required to look and perform a certain way according to their perceived gender in order to meet the commercial industry's desires. This becomes particularly problematic when their men equivalents are not faced with the same expectations. As O'Flynn points out, "one observable pattern in the marketing of some female 'Celtic' musicians…is how they can come to be collectively represented as a gendered category, in a manner that would be rarely, if ever, be applied to male musicians" (2014: 253).

Riverdance and Michael Flatley's Irish dance shows

An additional catalyst which impacted the Irish traditional music scene from the 1990s was the creation of *Riverdance* and the success of Michael Flatley's subsequent Irish dance shows, *Lord of the Dance* (1996), *Feet of Flames* (1998) and *Celtic Tiger* (2005). From 1995, *Riverdance* tours provided a new world-wide platform for Irish traditional music and dance, ultimately aiding commercial music industry expansion and consumer consumption of Irish culture (O'Flynn 2009: 2). Bearing in mind the significance in the number of platforms provided by these shows for both musicians and dancers, the implications for women performers and the roles available to them is significant.

The romanticised, feminine Celtic fairy image is visible throughout *Riverdance* and Flatley's shows, displayed in the dancers' costumes, stage props (Carby 2001: 338) and wigs (O'Flynn 2014: 253). However, not only are women expected to portray characteristics of the "Celtic fairy", costumes are often provocative, emphasising the female form. Although there are some instances where this sexualised image can be seen in the various Riverdance productions, Flatley's shows placed *significant* emphasis on sex appeal with provocative costumes and performances visible throughout (see Figure 4).

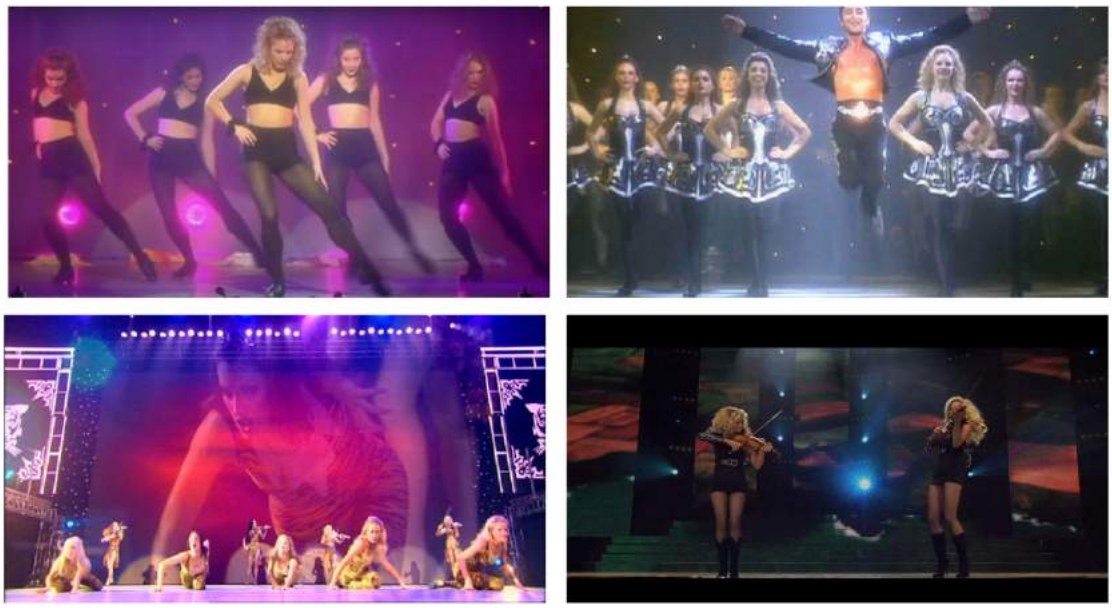

Figure 4: Imagery from Michael Flatley *Lord of the Dance* and *Celtic Tiger* productions.[3]

Focusing on the musicians' wardrobes for the various Riverdance productions, Ní Charra explained that the musicians' outfits were understated in comparison to the dancers and they were often not given any particular character or role to play, the emphasis being on the music rather than the musicians' image (Ní Charra 2020). In the case of Flatley's later productions, Máire Egan (a fiddle player who performed in *Riverdance* and Michael Flatley's *Lord of the Dance* and *Celtic Tiger* productions) explained that as "the costumes evolved and got shinier and glitzier…so did the dancing, so did the music, and so did the people playing the music" (Egan 2019). Yet in saying this, Egan maintained that an individual's comfort level was always taken into account (ibid.). Another musician, who performed frequently in Flatley's shows, explained that she had limited choice in what she wore, and as subsequent shows became more sexualised, many of the dancers wore more provocative clothing (Anonymous 2018). This more sexualised image of both dancers and musicians in Flatley's productions is reflective of Lieb's "temptress" phase of the lifecycle, in which "an artist transitions from being presented as a good girl to…a temptress" (2018: 124).[4] In doing this, the artist "wears more form-fitting, body-revealing clothing…begins an active seduction of her audience…and becomes more publicly accessible" (ibid.). Although it has been claimed that these commercial shows brought to the forefront sexual undertones that were already present in the Irish dancing scene (Brennan 1999: 155; Wulff 2007: 117) one must question whether the same can be said in relation to the Irish traditional music scene. Prior to the advent of commercial dance shows and when compared to the dance scene, traditional music spaces were less likely to contain such sexual undertones as women were so often excluded from public performance spaces to begin with and/or had to be willing to perform an "acceptable feminine role" (O'Shea 2008a: 61). However, with the increased commercialisation of Irish traditional music as a result of these dance shows, this also contributed to an increased sexualisation of the industry. Citron considers similar trends within the classical music scene, stating:

> In art music one doesn't have to go far to see beauty culture on display. Female sexuality and feminine allure are front and center in leading female performers. Do I go too far in saying "flaunting"?...So what does this mean? Is sex necessary for women to succeed in classical music? (2004: 49)

With this thought in mind, Flatley's shows can be critiqued for the objectification of women performers for the purpose of consumption. Similar concerns were expressed by one musician who believed that in the spin-off shows of varying quality based on the *Riverdance* formula, both the "musicians and dancers were commercially taken advantage of" (Anonymous 2019). However, to Egan, wearing a "teeny sparkly thing" was "art or performance art", and she surmised "if you want to be successful, you have to pull out all the stops":

> Every [show] was bigger and better. It maintained the same basic core because it's Irish dancing…I don't think it was over-sexualised…I think they're just the times we live in too… [it's] just a representation of the time. We were just seeing it in Irish music maybe for the first time…Like I said, you go to see the Broadway production *Cabaret* or *Cirque du Soleil*, you're going to see the same type of thing. It's going to be appealing to somebody, and it's going to be offensive to somebody else. Pick your poison, I think it's all good. I just see it all as art and performance art. (Egan 2019)

Egan is not alone in stating that these shows were a reflection of the time as according to Adagh, there was "a kind of sexual revolution" in Ireland from the 1990s (quoted in Ferriter 2009: 535). Furthermore, during this time women-only bands such as The Spice Girls built their success with messages of "girl power" and ownership of sexuality, further popularising "an avalanche of material that elides empowerment, sexuality and clothing in the figure of the 'sexy', 'cute' and 'hot' girl" (Jackson et al. 2012: 146).

Egan's description of Flatley's shows as "performance art", a view shared by MacNamara (2019), is also valid. Flatley's shows are highly theatrical in nature with storylines and dramatic staging which require performers to not only dance or play music, but also to act, especially if they play an important character within the storyline. An example of this can be seen in the *Lord of the Dance* stage production, where Flatley (depicted as the only lead character) must save Ireland from a dark lord, whilst two dancers–Saoirse (Irish cáilín) and Morrighan (gypsy temptress)–duel for Flatley's attention. The "Celtic fairy"/ "good girl" and sexy "temptress" characters are visible in this storyline, further displaying the commercial qualities of these shows and the presence of gendered categories/performances.

According to Egan "certain roles were designed for certain people":

> There was the female singer, and she was a goddess. Only a woman could play that role…If there were two girl fiddlers, [then] that was the dynamic…Sometimes, you can go to the show and you can see there are just some roles that are better suited to [certain people]. If you're a piper, you can't stand up and run around the stage, and play energetically and flip your hair around the place. (Egan 2019)

While Egan's response signifies that the instrument is a crucial factor in relation to these performances, she also illustrates the limited and limiting nature of these commercial shows as performers not only had to conform to an idealised image of beauty whilst wearing sexy clothing but also had to perform roles that are gendered. Gender performances demonstrated in these shows amplify "pre-existing societal gender norms through highly feminized performances of gender… [and] may look a bit more like grand actions performed in theatrical settings" (Lieb 2018: 183-184). These "gender performances", sexualised costumes and beautified images pertain to the commercial industry and while they can be conceptualised as performance characteristics of Flatley's shows, they also highlight the impact of the commercial industry on gender expectations, performance style and freedom of choice.[5] Ní Charra (a fiddle player with *Riverdance* for eight years) recalled one experience in doing emergency cover for a "copy-cat show" in which she was given specific choreography which involved kicking legs, bum wiggles and more: "it couldn't have been more removed from my work on *Riverdance*" (Ní Charra 2019). Clearly this shift towards emphasising temptress characteristics was not appealing to Ní Charra, who

subsequently asserted that she had been hired for her musical ability, refused to do such moves and turned down further work with the production.

Contemporary reflections and critiques of Flatley's dance shows informed by recent feminist and musicological scholarship should not undermine the positive impact of these productions on performers' lives. Lead dancer Bernadette Flynn described performing in Flatley's *Lord of the Dance* as an "incredible time" (Parkes 2007). Similarly, Máire Egan recalled only positive experiences when performing with Michael Flatley's *Lord of the Dance* and *Celtic Tiger* productions. She explained how she had little confidence and "no idea of movement on stage" or experience of performing whilst standing up, prior to performing in these productions:

> I've great respect for Michael Flatley and what he did for all of us in Irish music and Irish dancing. For me, my experience in that show was only wonderful…It did great things for me. If you want to talk about femininity and comfort level, I was the biggest hippie and bohemian chick, you ever met in your whole life…I never wore anything tight or figure-hugging or revealing because it wasn't who I was…It's funny, joining *Lord of the Dance* allowed me to develop a side of myself that I would never have looked into or felt comfortable in…In a way because I had to do it, you had to step up…it did me a lot of good because it helped me in many areas of my life. (Egan 2019)

Although the need to wear such costumes further illustrates the aesthetics of these performance platforms and even if Egan had limited choice in what she wore or how she performed, she chose to embrace the requirements of performing in these shows. As a result of performing in Flatley's *Lord of The Dance* and *Celtic Tiger* productions, Egan's confidence increased, which in turn positively influenced other areas of her life.

Conclusion

This research suggests that the dominant themes which recur in Lieb's work (2018) are also prominent within Irish traditional music, reaffirming the impact of the commercial industry on women performers in this field. Despite the 1990s appearing to be a "transformative period" for women and music in Ireland, with a significant increase in the number of women performing on the scene, it is clear that this did not necessarily mean that women had equality or autonomy.

As a result of marketing Irish traditional music acts under the commercial category of "Celtic music", some women musicians were expected and/or felt pressured to conform to the commercial music industry's expectations and standards of what they deemed as appealing for their audiences. In addition, women were also often expected to pursue a role or occupation that was deemed most "natural" for their gender in comparison to their men performer equivalents–a fact that is particularly visible in the context of a band consisting of a multiple number of men and one woman (Mayhew 2005: 150). The "Celtic music" label also placed women musicians [back] within the confines of a stereotypical idealised image and role, a gendered category more reflective of historical romantic personifications of Ireland rather than the changing role of women in Irish society from the 1990s.

This research also opens up dual understandings on the subject of Irish dance shows. On the one hand, dance shows are acknowledged for introducing more performance opportunities for women in Irish traditional music and dance, and positively impacting performers' careers and lives. However, with this increase in performance opportunities, women have also become more susceptible to the pressures of the commercial industry. Flatley's shows in particular could be described in some instances as sexually objectifying performers where women feel they have no choice or feel pressured/required to look and perform a certain way in order to meet the commercial industry's desires. This becomes particularly problematic when their men performer equivalents are not faced with the same expectations. Although these shows present requirements that portray aspects of gender performance (Butler 1990), this does not necessarily denote that the experience of women who performed in these

highly theatrical shows is the same as the experience shared by women who fronted bands. In Flatley's shows there is a written and visible storyline which shapes performances of gender in what Lieb describes as "grand actions" (2018: 184). For women who perform in bands consisting of a multiple number of men and one woman, they are still expected to pursue a role that is reflective of their assumed gender, even though there are no such storylines governing this. They are perhaps different versions of the same larger problem.

While recognising that there are often limited choices in relation to performance platforms, women still face different expectations than men in order to be commercially successful. Thus, the lived experiences shown in this research demonstrate that the role of women in the commercial Irish music scene can be understood "in terms of ebb and flow rather than just this clear story of constant moving on and progress" (RTÉ 2020 *Herstory*: 22.55).

Notes

[1] For the purposes of this paper, I refer to "woman" rather than female, and "man" rather than "male" (other than that used in quotations) throughout, whilst also allowing for non-binary and non-essentialist understandings of gender.

[2] *Clannad* <https://images.app.goo.gl/MfJX4nYw9o9T8oRCA>. Last accessed: 28 October 2019.
Dervish <https://images.app.goo.gl/PHNYs3pohm4xYqTx6>. Last accessed: 28 October 2019.
Danú <https://images.app.goo.gl/37PTywdkYpzxM11a6>. Last accessed: 28 October 2019.
Altan <https://images.app.goo.gl/CdFsk5ZrEib6kz9S8>. Last accessed: 28 October 2019.

[3] "Breakout" scene *Lord of the Dance* 1996 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEjclME_BM4>; *Lord of the Dance* 1996 <https://images.app.goo.gl/Fh56NSo6i4Caya6f8>; "Celtic Kittens" scene in *Celtic Tiger* 2005 <https://images.app.goo.gl/rpwFmhMjPwZCXV9J6>; "Strings of Fire" scene in *Lord of the Dance 2011* <https://images.app.goo.gl/HUKjXLcTJm9WibVV7>.

[4] The temptress image can be seen in Flatley's *Lord of the Dance* production where Irish Cailín Saoirse rips open her dress to unveil sexier clothing underneath, competing with temptress Morrighan to gain the Lord of the Dance's affection. *Lord of the Dance*–Breakout HD. TheEgyptMau. 12 January 2011. www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEjclME_BM4 Last accessed: 20 July 2020. See: 1.51.

[5] In saying this, it is also necessary to acknowledge the time period in which these shows emerged as one that rarely featured non-binary characters in Irish dance shows (except perhaps in the case of the "little spirit"character from Flatley's *Lord of the Dance*).

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Mother music: Socially embedded creative practice and the marketisation of Irish traditional music

Tríona Ní Shíocháin

Abstract

This paper considers the creative practices of female musicians and singers before the widespread growth of the professional sphere and the subsequent commodification of Irish traditional music. In particular, the key role of performance in domestic music-making settings is considered, and the aesthetic, cultural and creative practices associated with pre-revival music-making in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century contexts is explored. This is contrasted with the subsequent relative marginalisation of women performers in professional contexts, and the erosion of key tenets of traditional music practices since the revival. It is argued that women's traditions, understood here as subjugated knowledges (Foucault 1980), represent a radical alternative to professionalism and the culture of the market in high modernity. Through a renewed exploration of creative practices associated with two iconic female performers, Elizabeth (Bess) Cronin from County Cork and Mrs Elizabeth Crotty from County Clare, it is proposed that the concept of "mother music", denoting socially embedded performance practices and immersive modes of musical learning, aids our appreciation of the sophisticated arts practices that these women mastered and fostered. In addition it is argued that mother music offers an alternative model of cultural practices that can counterbalance the market-oriented values of the professional sphere.

Keywords women, oral tradition, 'mother music', embodied knowledge, creative practice, subjugated knowledges

Introduction: Theorising mother music

Historically, traditional performers sustained, fostered and exemplified a sophisticated culture of oral, aural and embodied creative practice, albeit one which existed primarily independently of the market. The particular performance and transmission contexts associated with pre-revivalist music-making in Ireland, for example country house dances and *scoraíocht*ing,[1] as well as everyday domestic music-making, meant that creative practices were socially embedded, rooted in listening, doing and participating at community level. This kind of experiential music transmission and training, which was seamlessly woven through the fabric of ordinary working and domestic lives, is perhaps comparable to the acquisition of one's mother tongue because of the overwhelmingly immersive context in which it thrived, and is therefore here conceptualised as mother music. Mother music is a term I use to denote sophisticated processes of immersive musical learning and transmission that occur in a domestic and/or community setting, as illustrated by vernacular traditional practices of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Ireland. Mother music is a play on the equivalent concept of the mother tongue in language acquisition while performatively acknowledging the sophisticated learning and creative practices that were mastered and transmitted by women. Therefore the use of the term "mother" is not meant to imply essentialism of any kind nor to imply a romanticised image of the mother.

Instead, mother music is meant to conceptualise immersive learning and transmission that existed independent of governmentalised academy or classroom settings by drawing comparison with equivalent oral/aural processes in language development. Mother music therefore implies the development of creative mastery that is embedded in the "doing" of traditional artistic practices interwoven with everyday social life and customs.

The oral-aural-embodied practices transmitted and developed within this context constituted a meta-language of creative practice (Deschênes and Eguchi 2018: 67) which enabled women to develop proficiency and mastery in performance. However, like one's mother tongue, mother music, though often acquired through a seemingly subliminal or invisible process, implies a mastery that is extremely hard to replicate in formalised contexts that we associate with contemporary educational and professional norms (Smith 1996; Sheridan et al. 2011). Mother music is both a social process and a creative process; it is a system of musical thought underpinned by an extensive oral repertoire of songs and tunes. Closely connected to domestic work practices, it fostered key discursive and aesthetic spaces in ordinary life that were interwoven with other aspects of daily existence, for example milking, churning, spinning, sewing, and all kinds of domestic or farm labour.

Mother music relied on near saturation in musical practices, melodic motifs, rhythmic structures, and soundscapes, and existed independently of abstract "music theory" such as that associated with formal music education in today's society. Similar to language acquisition, this learning was developed through a "world filled with sound" (Saffran and Sahni 2012: 43). Where acquiring one's mother tongue(s) is made possible due to sustained exposure to "rich linguistic input that contains multiple cues to structure", patterns and key musical ideas were similarly absorbed due to sustained "rich musical input" from an early age (ibid.: 49). Therefore, much like how our own mothers didn't need to read a grammar book to us in our cradles in order for us to acquire mastery of our mother tongue, formal tuition as we know it today wasn't necessary for musical mastery in this immersive context: socially embedded music practices encapsulated all key ideas and components of the music in non-textual, oral, aural or even embodied forms (Ní Shíocháin 2018, 2013, 2009). Mother music therefore constituted entire organic systems of musical and rhythmic thought that lived and were perpetuated in performance practices. Not only did the "theory" live in the creative practices of the music (Deschênes and Eguchi 2018: 59), but the associated vernacular techniques and musical ideas were fluid, creative and alive: here the performer was not just a "mere transmitter" but a re-composer of sorts (Ní Shíocháin 2018: 26-41; 2009). In mother music, learning implied a distinctly re-creative impulse that was key to the development of individual style (Deschênes and Eguchi 2018: 70). These music practices were inherently linked to the social life and customs of their times, and in some ways it is impossible to extract the art forms themselves from their social context without losing key formative elements of the larger creative processes involved.[2] Mother music therefore constitutes a foundational and formative body of knowledge-forming practices that might properly be understood as "disqualified knowledge" in the Foucauldian sense (1980: 82). Mother music epitomises another way of fostering highly developed musical skills and aesthetic mastery that counterbalances more mainstream approaches to musical learning in modernity. Crucially, we find that women in Irish traditional music were key actors in this domestic history of creative practice, albeit within a realm that is arguably relegated as inferior in our own times to the culture of the public stage.

Though musicians who learn at home are still held in high regard in Irish traditional music circles, status and acclaim for traditional musicians has become increasingly associated with professional success, album releases, and stage performances. Furthermore, the professional music sector is one in which women performers are still significantly marginalised (Pollak 2020). In re-engaging with the hidden legacy of

women practitioners of Irish traditional music, it is crucial that any conflation between oral traditional immersive training and "untrained" musical knowledge be avoided. Instead, the multifaceted, complex, immersive training experienced and practiced by women outside of official/formal culture resulted in advanced and highly sophisticated musical knowledge and skill. There is an "aspiration to power" inherent in the claim of professionalism in Irish traditional music (Foucault 1997: 10) within a sector that remains male dominated. Professionalism, with its connotations of advancement and prestige, constitutes a discourse that arguably has caused, as Foucault might put it, the "minorization" of women's traditions and experiences (ibid.). Therefore, the exploration of hidden histories of women's creative practices is about the insurrection of hidden knowledges and practices that contest the "power- and knowledge- effects" of gender-laden discourses of professional music-making (ibid.: 9). Not only do these subjugated histories of creative practice undermine contemporary discourses and practices that marginalise women within professional and semi-professional spheres of Irish traditional music, they also challenge us to re-visit ways of musical thought that live and thrive beyond official mainstream education and attainment.

Mother music: Oral traditional culture and mastery in the lives of two Elizabeths

This paper considers two iconic female practitioners of the traditional arts: Mrs Elizabeth Crotty (1885-1960) from Kilrush, County Clare, and Elizabeth (Bess) Cronin (1879-1956) from Muskerry in County Cork, who exemplify the sophisticated vernacular tradition of mother music. Both were considered masters, though their creative practices were primarily situated within domestic, family and local social networks. This is perhaps a rather obvious point, but one worth making since entering the labour force is generally considered as emancipatory for women in our own times. Counterbalancing this, however, the tale of these two Elizabeths offers a case study in how women created space for performance practices in their daily lives, showing how mastery was not dependent on the professional sphere of music. In an era where musical accomplishment is strongly associated with professionalism, the lives and practices of these women tell us a story worth re-telling: a story of women's tradition that was not marginal but central to the creative processes that were subsequently canonised during the traditional music revival of later years. This paradox of the seemingly higher status of traditional arts due to professionalisation, and the parallel marginalisation (or even silencing) of women practitioners, is worth considering as we address the many challenges that face women performers in contemporary Irish society (O'Shea 2008). Indeed, following the work of Polanyi, increased professionalisation in Irish traditional music can be understood as a process of disembedding from community life, transforming vernacular performance practices into "fictitious commodities" of the self-regulating market economy (1944: 76). This transition has arguably had profound implications for gender, aesthetics and values in Irish traditional music culture.

The socially embedded creative practices of mother music resonate with Polanyi's concept of embedded economies which were subordinate to society, as opposed to the supposed self-regulating market economy of our own times to which society must submit (1944).[3] Mother music was socially embedded, accessible, and sustainable. Even for communities who were disadvantaged economically, the non-monetary gift-exchange of mother music sustained and fostered creative arts independent of the market economy, thus counterbalancing the excesses and vagaries of modern capitalism. This embeddedness was therefore crucial for both creativity and societal wellbeing. The stories of these two expert female practitioners therefore challenge received ideas of musical mastery in modernity by problematising the assumption that professionalisation and commodification are inseparable from artistic excellence (Papageorgi et al. 2010). This legacy of socially-embedded creative practice, in which

women played a central role, has arguably been supressed in contemporary society, misunderstood as “mere amateurism” and relegated as inferior to the professional music culture of the stage and recording studio. A re-engagement with tales of mother music, however, potentially unsettles the power of that discourse, and tells of alternative ways of being and doing that can challenge the hegemony of market forces and commercialisation.

Singing saturation: Oral traditional mastery and immersive song experiences in the life of Elizabeth (Bess) Cronin

Women featured prominently in the oral traditional environment which formed Bess Cronin as a singer, including her own mother, Maighréad Ní Thuama, who was an important source of songs. Bess Cronin acquired most of her songs in a period of her life when she went to help out at her uncle Tomás Ó hIarlaithe’s nearby farm at Ráth. As Bess Cronin recounted in an interview with Alan Lomax, various servant girls who came and went at her uncle’s nearby farm also made a lasting impression on the young singer during her formative years:

> Well, I learned a lot of them from my mother, and then I learned more of them from … We had … Well, we used to have lots of servants, you know. There’d be servants at the time. You’d have one now for, say, five or six months, and so on, and maybe that one would leave and another one would come. There’d be some new person always coming or going. Or a girl, cousins and friends, coming along like that and all, you know anyway? (Ó Cróinín 2000: 22)

None of these women were professional performers, however performing was woven into their everyday working and social lives. They were clearly expert performers and together created an incredibly rich and vibrant traditional arts culture within a domestic labour context. These singing women formed the soundscape of Bess Cronin’s formative years. One of these servant girls, Nóra Ní Laoghaire, is depicted as “always singing songs”, indicating that the context in which Bess Cronin developed as a singer was one of extensive immersion (Ó Cróinín 2000: 23). Furthermore, this same woman, Nóra Ní Laoghaire, was a brilliant lilter (referred to as “puss music”), often lilting for dancers:

> Once of the servant girls that her uncle’s family had at Ráth was a young woman called Nóra Ní Laoghaire, who was always singing songs, and who was particularly good at ”puss music” (*poirtíní béil*), and she could keep groups of dancers going forever with this kind of hummed music (*choinneóch sí rínceoirí ar siúl go brách*). It was from her too that Bess learned the milking-song called *Raghad-sa ó thuaidh leat, a bhó.* (Ó Cróinín 2000: 23)

Bess Cronin’s lilting skills, such as those demonstrated in “Cuckanandy” (Ó Cróinín 2000: CD1 Track 1), for example, were not formally learned, but rather acquired through immersion; it is highly probable that these vocal musical skills were assimilated on a cognitive level similar to that associated with the acquisition of language. Indeed, Bess Cronin and Nora Ní Laoghaire are not the only female singers well known for their lilting prowess; the famous Róise Rua na nAmhrán and her mother, Maighréad, at the other end of Ireland, in Donegal, were also acknowledged master lilters (Ua Cnáimhsí 2009: 144). Indeed, in the collecting work of Seán Ó hEochaidh among native speakers of Irish in Donegal, the sheer vibrancy of women’s singing culture in domestic contexts resonates very strongly with Bess Cronin’s own accounts of singing women in Cork. That song lore was central to how women discussed a wide range of topics further indicates the intellectual and conceptual importance of songs in their lives more generally. In addition, this culture included long singing sessions in their own homes, at which women were central (Ó Laoire 2019: 167).

It is worth considering how extensive the repertoire of these women was; Bess Cronin herself had hundreds of songs, and others like her, such as the famous Nóra Ní

Chonaill, or Róise Rua and her mother, were similar in that respect. When learning songs, the singer immersed herself in the soundworld of song, assimilating melodies, motifs and patterns, vocal techniques, a wide array of themes as well as poetic formulas, not to mention numerous traditional vocables, such as those which underpinned lilting vocal technique. These were socially-embedded and extensive immersive practices. A particularly telling example of singing as a pervasive practice among women while working is found in Bess Cronin's story of how she learned the song "*Mo Mhuirnín Bán*" ("My Fair Darling"). Awoken by a strange noise in the middle of the night, she was at first terrified that it was the sound of ghosts. After a while, however, she realised that it was the women below in the kitchen churning butter and singing. It was from an elderly female neighbour who was visiting the house to partake in churning and sewing, who was "singing songs all the time", that Bess Cronin duly learned "*Ní sa Chnoc is Aoirde a Bhíonn mo Bhuíon-sa*" ("It is Not on the Highest Hill That My Company Resides"). At this one sitting she learned numerous songs from this woman (Ó Cróinín 2000: 23).

These accounts are incredibly valuable in piecing together the environment of sound that enabled the development of great singers. Furthermore, the immersive song world implied in such accounts is not dissimilar to Lord's depiction of the young *Singer of Tales*, for whom immersion was key to the development of key compositional practices (1960). From this we might infer that technical accomplishment and a highly developed aesthetic understanding were possible through immersion alone. The context indicated in Bess Cronin's own story is echoed in many other accounts of other oral traditional practitioners. The famous poet-composer, Pádraig Ó Crualaoi (1861-1949) from Ballyvourney, indicates a similarly vibrant soundworld among tradesmen and "boccaughs", showing that these immersive singing practices were also key to the working lives of men. Therefore, though women excelled in these creative practices, the tradition was one which was also thriving among male practitioners and in a similarly expansive way, was the basis of vast oral networks of song:

> *Na bacaig a bheireadh na véarsaí leo tímpal, agus na hamhráin. Bhí seó dosna bacaig ann an uair sin agus iad ag imeacht ó áit go háit. An rud a déarfadh file anso bheadh sé ag an gcéad bhacach a thiocfadh agus bhéarfadh sé leis é 'na cheann: gach aon bhlúire dhe. Bheadh sé mar scéal nó aige sa chéad tig eile, nú sa chéad ph'róiste eile. Agus ansan, do bhí suím ag gach éinne ins na véarsaí agus sa bhfilíocht, agus do bhí an ceann acu chun í thúirt leo agus í mheabhrú–ní hineann is anois.*
>
> *Ansan do bhí táilliúirí agus siúinéirí agus gach aon saghas ceárdaí a' dul ó thig go tig ag obair, agus do bhíodh an fhilíocht acu san, leis. Agus do bhí an Ghaoluinn acu go léir agus do thuigidís an chrua-chaint.*
>
> ("The boccaughs and the tradesmen used to bring verses with them, and the songs. There were a load of those boccaughs one time and they travelling from place to place. That which the song poet would say here, the next boccaugh would have it and bring it with him in his head: every bit of it. It would be a new story of his in the next house, or in the next parish. And then, everyone was interested in the verses and in the poetry, and they had the head to take it with them and to remember it–unlike today.
>
> Then there were tailors, and carpenters, and every sort of tradesman going from house to house working, and they used to have the poetry too. And they all had the Irish and they used to understand the hard talk".[4])
>
> (Ó Crualaoi cited in Ó Cróinín 1982: 162, translation by author).

Ó Ciosáin (2012) explains how these *bacaigh* represented a particular nomadic demographic, and it is clear from Ó Crualaoi's account that they were a community synonymous with song transmission. It is particularly interesting that Bess Cronin knew sixty of these nomadic *bacaigh* by name, and said of one of them, Nóra Phádraig, who she described as "*seana-bhean siúil*" (an old traveller woman) "*bhí sí go seoidh chun na n-amhrán*" (she was brilliant for songs). Bess Cronin's immersion in song was extremely rich within an immediate domestic labour context, while also being connected to vast oral networks of song practitioners.

Though the song tradition is one shared between genders in traditional Irish culture, we see that women were active and central in practically all facets of singing culture. The status of women in the song tradition was very high in Irish-speaking Ireland more generally. We can see an indication of the high status of women as traditional artists, for example, in Freeman's choice of singers when collecting in Muskerry (1913-4), which amounted to four in total, only one of whom was a man: Conchubhar Ó Cochláin (Doire na Sagart). The others were all women: Máirín Ní Shuibhne (Cúil Aodha), Peig Ní Dhonnchadha (Baile Mhic Íre), and Gobnait Ní Bharóid (Doire na Sagart) (Freeman 1920: xix). This high status of women singers was also reflected elsewhere in Ireland, such as in the song collections of Seán Ó hEochaidh in Donegal (Ó Laoire 2019: 162). We see the same reverence in representations of women singers in Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An tOileánach*, particularly in the scenes with the women of Muintir Dhálaigh na hInise, ("The Daly family of Inisicileáin"), singing in the pub in Dingle town (2002: 133). Furthermore, in the thriving culture of singing in local homes in nineteenth-century West Kerry, we also hear from Tomás Mac Síthigh not only how the region was saturated with song, but also how women were particularly revered:

> *Bhíodh tigh áirithe ar an mbaile a mbítí ag bailiú isteach ann istoíche, agus bhíodh amhráin ar siúl go tiubh ann. Bhíodh na mná ag amhrán chomh maith leis na fir. Deirtí gurbh fhearr iad ná na fir. Bhíodh na hamhráin ar siúl, leis, i dtigh na scéalaíochta. Théadh cuid de na daoine tamall ó bhaile ag triall ar an amhránaíocht. Théidís go dtí paróistí eile ag triall ar na hamhráin*.
>
> ("There was a particular house in the locality in which people used to gather at night, and there were loads of songs there. The women used be as good as the men. It was said that they were better than the men. Songs used be happening, as well, in the storytelling house. Some of the people used to travel a good way from home looking for singing. They used go to other parishes looking for songs.")
>
> (Mac Síthigh 1984: 120-1, translation by author).

This was therefore an immersive singing experience, in which the female singer's artistry was enabled through mother music of oral tradition, and in which women had a reasonable expectation of respect and esteem as traditional artists. Bess Cronin's repertoire consisted of hundreds of songs in Irish and English, and her acquisition of songs was sophisticated and highly developed, while at the same time being embedded in her everyday working and domestic life and role. She achieved complete mastery independent of professionalisation, and independent of the highly structured music education opportunities that are available today. However, it is due to the interest in her singing generated by field recordings for radio that she came to prominence as a twentieth-century icon of traditional song. Therefore, though Bess Cronin owed nothing to the professional music world in the development of her unquestionable mastery of traditional singing, the contemporary world owes a great deal to public radio, a sector synonymous with professionalisation, for documenting the traditional song practices of Bess Cronin. It is notable that Bess Cronin's artistic mastery owes everything to women such as those churning and sewing and singing in her kitchen as a girl. In this sense, the songs of Bess Cronin represent the practices of multitudes of female practitioners, most of whom were not aired on the radio, and most of whom are undocumented. In modernity women arguably are marginalised in professional traditional music circles (O'Shea 2008; Slominski 2019); in traditional society mastery and professionalism were not inextricably linked, and the evidence strongly suggests that women frequently came to the fore as performers of note. Bess Cronin, whose singing was captured for radio, is an exception; most of these women were not documented, and as a result we are in danger of being under the illusion they never existed at all (Ní Shíocháin, 2018: 3-10; Slominski 2019: 264-65).

Mrs Elizabeth Crotty: Socially embedded creative practices, vernacular concertina technique and female legacy.

Born in 1885 in Gower, Cooraclare in West Clare, Elizabeth (Lizzie) Crotty (Markham before she married) became an icon of Irish traditional music during her lifetime. She was particularly influenced by her mother's fiddle-playing and was essentially self-taught on the concertina, picking out tunes on her older sister's instrument. Micheal Tubridy asserts that Mrs Crotty "had no formal musical training, being entirely self-taught, learning most of her music aurally from her mother, older members of her family, and neighbours" (Crotty 1999: 8). What is striking here is the female lineage of musicians in the Markham household. Indeed, as we know from the work of Ó hAllmhuráin, the concertina was integral to women's culture in County Clare from the end of the nineteenth century, with a great deal of local women buying inexpensive concertinas with their "egg and butter money" (2016: 83). It was in the context of this female tradition of concertina-playing that Lizzie Markham took to the instrument. Tubridy also asserts that she played and danced at house dances in her own locality, where she was considered a very fine musician as well as dancer (Crotty 1999: 1; see also *The Irish Times* 18 August 1998).

Mrs Crotty's style of concertina playing, in the context of widespread pioneering female concertina practitioners in the region, is of particular interest. Firstly its rhythmic articulation was defined by the local dance tradition, typical of a time when there existed a symbiotic relationship between dance and dance music. As Mrs Crotty was also a dancer of repute, the embodied musical knowledge in her feet also informed her playing (the same can be said of many other West Clare musicians of that period, such as Micho Russell, for example). Indeed, dancing in this context can be considered to constitute an embodied "music theory", encapsulating key rhythmic ideas and principles. The importance of embodiment in our understanding of oral traditional arts, more broadly, has been highlighted by Deschênes and Eguchi, who argue that mimesis and embodiment are key tenets of non-verbal learning in Japanese traditional arts (2018: 62). Within this framework, orality extends far beyond the verbal in the acquisition of traditional artistic knowledges:

> The acting, moving, learning, feeling and knowledgeable body play crucial roles beyond what is being transmitted. In fact, a large part of such knowledge cannot be simply put into words. It can be that the master possibly does not want to put it into words or that it is better learned without any verbalization, forms of theory, explanation, or rationalization. (ibid.: 59)

This is of significant relevance to Irish traditional arts defined by immersive practice-based learning, independent of written notation (apart from some limited mnemonic aids). Where there is an absence of abstract written music theory in Irish traditional music, perhaps we can instead consider the existence of a practice-based embodied theoretical knowledge. It is possible that this knowledge transmitted through the body can constitute the primary mode of learning, with verbalisation having a much more peripheral role (ibid.). Therefore we might reasonably suppose that the *ceol sna cosa,*[5] or embodied musicality in Mrs Crotty's expert dancing feet, fed directly into her performance practices on the concertina, underpinning key aspects of her musicianship, and that this was reciprocated from concertina to feet as well. The "moving, learning, feeling and knowledgeable body" arguably transferred key rhythmic ideas from dance to melodic articulation and back again (ibid.: 59). This complex meta-language of creative practice, encompassing immersion, mimesis, and embodied orality (ibid.), allowed for the development of advanced musicianship independent of formal teaching as we know it today. Furthermore, as the concertina was an innovation among traditional instruments, the practices that emerged in Mrs Crotty's Clare represented a truly vernacular musical tradition in which performers generated their own regional and individual ornamentation and techniques as they embraced this new instrument into an already established dance music tradition. These pioneering

concertina players found ways of manipulating the instrument that excited their audiences while resonating with established aesthetic values of the local musical culture, drawing undoubtedly from a store of orally and aurally acquired tunes, and adapting ornamentation on the instrument accordingly. Therefore, when we listen to recordings of Mrs Crotty, we are listening to playing techniques and aesthetic values developed by these concertina women themselves alongside male practitioners as they adapted this new instrument to a much older oral tradition. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that the local repertoire of lilted tunes was the basis of what was to become concertina repertoire as the instrument transitioned into the local musical scene.[6] These concertina women were experts in invention while masters of tradition. In this sense, this burgeoning community of concertina-players was pioneering, and generated concertina techniques and ornamentation that quickly become established and seemingly timeless. Though these concertina styles are perceived as embodying a distinctly traditional aesthetic, the innovative impulse underpinning that aesthetic was highly significant also.

Mrs Crotty remains an icon of traditional Irish concertina and her legacy and influence are significant. The renowned accordion and melodeon player from Clare, Bobby Gardiner, mentions “The Wind that Shakes the Barley” as a tune he will always associate with Mrs Crotty (Gardiner 2019). Indeed when listening to the recording of Mrs Crotty playing the tune, one is struck by her driving rhythmic articulation, her use of triplets, octaves and repeated notes (Crotty 2019: Track 1). Mrs Crotty’s style has an infectious and exhilarating quality, pared back and expertly punctuated. When compared with a performance of the same tune by another iconic Clare concertina player from a younger generation, Noel Hill, the legacy of Mrs Crotty’s style of ornamentation and articulation is clear (RTÉ 1988). One might argue that the use of triplets and octaves, though incorporated thoroughly into Hill’s own distinctive style, still echo strongly of the creative practices of Mrs Crotty before him. Therefore, Mrs Crotty can be seen to have had an enduring legacy historically on the subsequent development of concertina style and practices in Clare. Her playing represents a vernacular grass-roots technique, developed by a community consisting of a great many female practitioners who kept a concertina in a cupboard by the fireplace (Ó hAllmhuráin 2016: 83-4). Mrs Crotty was a particularly famous exponent, however, there were a great many others of whom there is little official record, or who have not been as well documented. We are very fortunate that Mrs Crotty’s music was captured for radio, and this contributed significantly to her acclaim (Ó hAllmhuráin 2016: 177). Bess Cronin, from whom a significant number of songs were collected for radio broadcast, was similar in this respect of course. What is also noteworthy about the country house dance period, is that, due to the mix of genders, many renowned male musicians were influenced by key female players in their own home or locality. Bobby Gardiner, aforementioned and also from West Clare, is one such example, whose own mother was a concertina-player. Indeed it was on his mother’s old German concertina that Bobby Gardiner first played music:

> I can remember my mother Dillie sitting by the open fire at night playing a German two-row concertina. I had a certain degree of curiosity about this many-sided instrument, and it seemed only natural at the time to have a go at playing a tune. With my mother’s help and encouragement, I learned the fling that goes ”What the d, and what the d, and what the devil ails you”? (Gardiner 2018: 7)

We also see the musical influence of his maternal grandmother, Katie Doolan of Ballinahoun, Lisdoonvarna, of whom he remarks: “Katie was a jolly, big-hearted lady who hummed tunes to herself as she worked around the kitchen” (ibid.: 9). A neighbour of these same grandparents, an elderly concertina-player called Margie Flanagan, also made a great impression on young Bobby Gardiner: “She had a great hearty style, and she often hopped the concertina off her knee when she played her favourite tune ‘The New Mown Meadows’. She lived with her husband Pat in a small thatched house with a

smoking chimney and few days passed without a tune or two, as she loved her native music" (ibid.: 10). Bobby Gardiner also mentions the impression her long notes in the turn of "The New Mown Meadows" made on him in his CD *Melodeon Mad!* (2018). And so we see that women were very much central in the sound world of traditional music, and their mastery acknowledged by men too. In the case of Bobby Gardiner a mother-grandmother musical lineage is clear, and it is worth noting too that Noel Hill's own mother, and his grandmother were both concertina players. Similar to the likes of singers and lilters such as Bess Cronin, Nóra Ní Laoghaire, Róise Rua and others, their everyday social and domestic lives embodied and embraced creative practices of various sorts–from ubiquitous lilting, to the domestic dance practices by the fireside, theirs was a soundscape of practice-based musical knowledges and competencies. This immersive oral, aural and embodied experience of mother music ensured that Mrs Crotty, and the many other concertina-playing women in her community, developed a sophisticated and dynamic musicianship that forged innovative yet traditional playing techniques.

Conclusion

Going by present-day norms, it might well be concluded that women have always been playing catch-up with men in Irish traditional music, and thus frame women's inclusion in contemporary traditional music culture as modern emancipation which we owe to progressive modern politics alone. O'Shea's work on gender in Irish traditional music sessions demonstrates that women are often marginalised, with women musicians who excel being considered exceptions to the rule or even "honorary men" (2008: 110-112). This suggests the move from the domestic convivial space to the marketplace of the public tavern has not always been inclusive of women: unfortunately, the "masculine space" of the pub session is one where women have often been severely side-lined or even subject to harassment (ibid.: 112-114; Slominski 2019: 260). Furthermore, the professional sphere in Irish traditional music culture remains male-dominated, notwithstanding a marked increase of participation by women as professional performers in Irish traditional music in recent years. Full inclusivity and parity of esteem would indeed be emancipatory in this context.

However, the case of the two Elizabeths as discussed above unsettles the narrative that women have always fulfilled a role of lesser importance in traditional music culture historically. The female concertina players of Clare and the female singers and lilters of Irish-speaking Ireland have another story to tell and this under-represented history of female creative practitioners constitutes a gender trouble all of its own for the professional establishment (Butler 1990). Their story is one of unquestionable mastery, albeit a mastery that developed independently of the market or professional spheres proper. The creative practices of Bess Cronin and Elizabeth Crotty were embedded in society and in domestic and working lives. Their musical economy was one of gift-exchange (Mauss 2000), their creative practices rooted in sophisticated musical systems of thought that were seamlessly woven into the everyday life of the community. Their history is one of effectively integrating and embedding creative spaces into their own lives. The renowned stylistic flair in the singing of Bess Cronin and in the concertina-playing of Mrs Crotty was enabled by the socially embedded creative practices of mother music, which fostered expert negotiation of melodic contours and rhythmic articulation, and highly developed re-compositional processes of traditional variation. This was musical excellence that did not depend on professionalism; this was a complex system of acquisition, transmission, and performance in which women played a key role. Though Bess Cronin and Mrs Crotty were particularly famous exponents, there were plenty more like them who remain undocumented. Therefore these two performers give us a glimpse of what were likely vast networks of undocumented female music-making.

The great richness of artistic practices found in mother music has been invisibilised, particularly since the middle of the twentieth century onwards, as more structured and formalised approaches to learning come to the fore in traditional music culture. The elevation of men and marginalisation of women that occurred in tandem with the growth of the professional sphere in Irish traditional music could possibly be considered as part of "the vast scope of the interlocking changes involved in the establishment of the new order" (Polanyi 1944: 141). Rather than the status of men in Irish traditional music being inevitably higher than that of women, it would seem that the masculinisation of vernacular music making was a profound change that was inherent in the economic transformation of Irish traditional music practices. Therefore, when music was disembedded from the community, and the "fictitious commodity" of music performance took on a new role and meaning in the liberal economy, women found their creative spaces incrementally vanishing, and their status diminished. The subsequent hierarchy of professional/amateur, which has such great meaning in our own society, in many ways was meaningless in traditional music cultures where one's status as a performer was not pre-configured by one's participation in the marketplace. Perhaps then, the genius of the professional performer (implicitly male) is a compelling fiction, a performative accomplishment, which we have come to perform "in the mode of belief" (Butler 1988: 520). The transcendent (male) professional artist is a construction that conceals its genesis (ibid.: 522). Its genesis, it would seem, is in the re-ordering implicit in the economic transformation of vernacular music-making in the market economy, in which masculine authority would become central to the new "liberal creed" (Polanyi 1944: 141).

The creative practices of Bess Cronin and Mrs Crotty unearth a near-forgotten history that, in contradistinction to the professional realm, exemplified accessibility, sustainability and inclusion, as well as artistic brilliance and stylistic flair. It is therefore important that we acknowledge the profound contribution of women who wove artistic processes into their everyday lives, without insisting on the disciplining or commercial categories of "professional". Telling these histories is to reclaim "genealogical fragments", in Foucault's sense, that unsettle the performative power of professional knowledge and discourse (1997: 11). As we ponder the challenges that face women traditional-music performers in contemporary society, this alternative history of socially embedded creative practices can potentially renew and regenerate the artistic and human values at the centre and fringes of traditional music culture in modern Ireland.

Notes

[1] Country house dances, sometimes also referred to as "ball nights", were nights of music and dance that took place in rural Ireland from the nineteenth century until the practice declined significantly due to the Public Dance Halls Act of 1935, which essentially outlawed dancing outside of licenced dance halls. *Scoraíocht* is a term in Irish that refers to the custom of visiting neighbouring houses in the evenings for singing or storytelling or music and dance, or any combination of these activities, as was a widespread practice in rural communities up until the early twentieth century in Ireland. The Irish term was commonly adapted by speakers of English to the verb scoraíochting in County Cork as a consequence of language shift in the region.

[2] Though I focus mainly on performers born in the late nineteenth century in this article, the immersive processes of music learning to which I refer persist in modern Ireland, although not as pervasively as they once did.

[3] This idea has been further elaborated by Callon (1998) who argues that commercial markets are socially constituted or constructed rather than emerging naturalistically from society. The concept of socially embedded creative practice in this article pays homage to Polanyi's original theorisation in an effort to highlight the social and human value of embedded rather than

disembedded markets. I do this in order to unsettle the taken-for-granted association of status with commercialisation in traditional music.

[4] See also de Cléir (2019: 28) regarding the working lives of tailors and associated practices of singing and dancing in local houses.

[5] *Ceol sna cosa* translates to English as “music in the feet/legs”, it is used to denote dancing ability in Irish, and can also be used to complement the abilities of a particularly good dancer.

[6] Jack Talty learned from family members how previous generations in his own locality in West Clare had an extensive repertoire of tunes for lilting, but no instruments, prior to the proliferation of concertina playing in the area (2018). Lilting is often underrepresented in historical and ethnomusicological scholarship, however its importance not only as an art-form in its own right, but as a key element of traditional musicianship in the development of vernacular instrumental technique, should not be underestimated. The case of esteemed singer, Ciot Ní Mhianáin from Tory, for example, who lilted alongside a whistle-player in her own home as documented by Seán Ó hEochaidh, would suggest that women had a significant store of instrumental tunes as part of their vocal repertoire also (Ó Laoire 2019: 170). It is highly likely that the women of Clare were similar in this respect.

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The (non-)gendered practice of Irish traditional lullabies

Ciara Thompson

Abstract

Throughout history, gender has directed roles and actions in life. Lullabies and femininity come together through the biological role of child-bearer, and the societal role of caregiver to the extent that femininity and motherhood are often embedded into and implicit within lullaby singing. These attributes strongly support the assumption that lullabies are traditionally a form of feminine practice and narrative discourse. This article acknowledges the woman's voice within lullabies as well as the flexibility of the narrator's identity. Through textual analysis of several Irish traditional lullabies, more diverse and ambiguous narrator identities are considered, broadening perceptions of the caregiver and helping to move the lullaby beyond strict associations with single-gender and maternal caregiving.

Keywords: lullaby, gender, tradition, song, story, perspective

Introduction

The lullaby has been defined as "originally, a vocal piece designed to lull a child to sleep with repeated formulae; less commonly, it can be used to soothe a fractious or sick child" (Porter 2001). With the sense of familiarity created by their rhythms and tempo, melodic lines and modality, and textual construction, these songs are effective in creating a soporific atmosphere. They are also wellsprings of cultural knowledge and heritage. The cultural importance of the lullaby in the Irish context is described in *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music,* with Heymann noting their mythological placement as one of the three noble strains of music–*na geantraí, na goltraí* and *na suantraithe*–the enchanted music of joy, sorrow and sleep–played by the *Dagda,* a god of the Tuatha de Dannan (Gregory 2015: 52; McLaughlin 2018; Heymann 1999: 294). The lullaby has continued to be an underrepresented aspect of ethnomusicological and Irish traditional music and song studies, with minimal previous scholarship. Those studies that do focus on this genre are invaluable for deepening understanding and acknowledgment for this genre of song (Daiken 1959; Lomax Hawes 1974; Nic Lochlainn 2017; Ó Madagáin 1989; Pettit 2014; Warner 2011; Watt 2012).

Informed by these studies, this article stems from a larger doctoral thesis which considers how story and relationship contribute to the continued importance of Irish traditional lullabies. Gender is one aspect of these stories and relationships, which has historically directed one's role and responsibilities in life, informing behaviour and determining one's opportunities for growth and advancement. This extended into lullaby practice determining who sang these songs (Nic Lochlainn 2017; Watt 2012). Through societally-maintained gender norms surrounding caregiving, as well as the biological role of women in childbirth, lullaby singing is associated with feminine practice. This article aims to address the language and practice of lullaby singing by analysing several English and Irish language lullabies from the broader corpus of Irish

traditional lullabies that both support and question themes of gender roles, the feminine and femininity. These selections include "Raven-Locks", "*Hó-bha-ín",* "*Do Chuirfinn-si Féin mo Leanabh a Chodhladh"* ("I Would Put My Own Child to Sleep")*,* "*Suantraighe Ghráinne Do Dhiarmuid"* ("Gráinne's Lullaby for Diarmuid")*,* "Rocking the Cradle that Nobody Owns", and "*Seoithín Seo-hó"*. Through these analyses, a more diverse and ambiguous identity of the narrator and caregiver is considered. This is salient in moving lullabies beyond strict associations with single-gender and maternal caregiving. The methodology of this article is a mixed approach of textual analysis and ethnographic inquiry. The interviews conducted informed the historical norms and narratives that have emerged in the lullabies analysed. This mode of investigation is bolstered by historical documentation of lullabies and lullaby singing, as well as literature focusing on historical Irish family life and community (Arensberg and Kimball 2001; Heaney 1964; Henry 1990; Ní Shíocháin 2018; Nic Lochlainn 2017; Petrie 1855; O'Sullivan 1960; Synge 1906; Watt 2012). While excerpts of lyrics are incorporated throughout this article, the full texts for these lullabies are provided in the appendix.

Historical roles

While gender as an accepted concept has evolved considerably throughout history and culture (Harriet 2013; James and Dillon 2012), associated binaries of male and female societal norms persist to this day. Gender roles and expectations in Ireland have long been evidenced and reinforced through songs, stories and traditions (Bunting 1796; Carregal Romero 2013; Crofton Croker 2008; O'Curry 1873; Fine-Davis 2015; Joyce 1873; Ó Madagáin 1985; Petrie 1855). Gender was an aspect of ritualistic roles, such as the keening women or the wren boys and was inferred through various occupational songs, such as ploughmen whistles, to coax livestock, or women's spinning-wheel songs (Ó Madagáin 1985: 204-209; Petrie 1855: 28, 29, 86, 132; Shields 1993).

Stereotypical gender roles were occasionally controverted, as women were known to participate in strenuous agricultural tasks, and sometimes pursued occupations outside the home. Similarly, men were sometimes depicted engaging in domestic duties and taking on nurturing identities, as explored in the lullaby "Rocking the Cradle that Nobody Owns". The man as the nurturer is also evidenced occasionally in paintings, such as in John Lewis Krimmel's *The Blind Fiddler* (1812) and Erskine Nicol's *Bliss* (1863). Singing fathers were also acknowledged within interviews for this research, showing a continuity of male engagement with traditional lullabies and nurturing roles through time (Casey 2017; Cormican 2018; Nic Amhlaoibh 2016, 2018; Ní Ghallóglaigh 2018). However, within historical contexts, with men mainly working outside of the home—removed from caregiving and household duties—child-rearing and lulling generally were the provenance of women (Arensberg and Kimball 2001; Barclay 2013; Bhreathnach 2018; Nic Amhlaoibh 2016; Porter 2001; Synge 1906; Watt 2012).

Indeed, the terms "mother" and "father" become loaded when one considers the roles and the expectations of each caregiver. Though it is not considered a lullaby, the following quatrain from a traditional song on emigration, "Thousands are Sailing to America", aptly articulates these parental roles in historic Ireland.

> It is God help the mother that rears up the child
> It is now for the father he labours and toils,
> He tries to support them, he works night and day,
> And when they are reared up sure they will go away.
>
> (Moulden 1994: 4).

Moulden dates this song to approximately 1865, when "roughly equal numbers of young men and women…left the country almost as a matter of habit" (ibid.: 5). This song clearly distinguishes between the traditional responsibilities of mothers and

fathers in Ireland, especially in the historical context of mass emigration following the Great Famine (ibid.; Barclay 2013; Brantlinger 2004).

Importance of the mother

Insight into the historical Irish mother's life is observable through traditional lullabies. An understanding of a mother's love for her children, fear for their wellbeing, frustration with their wailing, longing for absent loved ones and occasional resentment for her homebound circumstances is evident. This ethos, or "phenomenology of motherhood" (Ó Lionáird 2018), is embedded throughout lullabies. Therefore, the acceptable, as well as the taboo, can be safely expressible in the confines of a child's bedtime (Lomax Hawes 1974; Ní Riain 2016, 2018; Daiken 1959; Pettit 2014; Warner 2011; Watt 2012). Though the expression of wellbeing is not restricted to a specific gender, the deep resonance between lullabies and self-expression of the mother is worth noting (Bokhorst et al. 2003; Ruttle et al. 2011). Irish sean-nós singer Iarla Ó Lionáird expresses his interest in songs that focus on the mother-child relationship. He speaks of the potency of this relationship, of lullabies, femininity and of the sacrifice encompassing these songs when connecting aspects of the lullaby "*Bog Braon"* ("Warm Drop"), to the famous lament "*Caoineadh na dTrí Mhuire"* ("Lament of the Three Marys"):

> I often think of my mother when I'm singing…her facility as a mom…even as a man, I'm trying to understand what it is to be a mother. By singing something like that, [*Bog Braon*] [I am] trying to appreciate the sacrifice, the phenomenology of motherhood if you like, which, of course, no man can really understand, needless to say. But nevertheless, the song gives us access into the shared feelings between the child and the mother… What really appealed to me, and powered the song [*Caoineadh*…], is the bond between the mother and the child…the phenomenology of motherhood and the mother-son relationship is very strong in that song also, and it's something that I'm very attracted to because it unleashes and releases all these emotions that the song can explore, and can deploy, and use… I also have a very good relationship with my father…but the mother-child relationship is of perennial interest, I think, to artists. (Ó Lionáird 2018)

Ó Lionáird's thoughts convey a sense of awe and respect regarding the expression of motherhood through song. Many facets of motherhood are observable throughout lullabies, including terms of endearment that signal affection or frustration—such as "*mo stóirín"* ("my small jewel") or "*m'ualach"* ("my burden") (Heaney 1982; Ní Uallacháin 1994)—as well as expressive narratives and stories. Examples of such narratives are the vivid descriptions portrayed in "*Seoithín Seo-hó"* (Heaney 1982) or "*Do Chuirfinn-si Féin mo Leanabh a Chodhladh"* (Petrie 1855: 144). The situations depicted in these songs, as well as the act of lullaby singing in itself, support the vital emotional bonding that occurs when these songs are sung (Ní Riain 2016, 2018; Daiken 1959; Nic Lochlainn 2017; Watt 2012), creating deep-rooted family ties. In interviews conducted for this research, thoughts often turned to fond recollections of one's mother, whether or not those memories were of her singing (Bhreathnach 2018; Dennehy 2016; Dunne 2017; McElligott 2017; Ní Ghallóglaigh 2018; Ní Riain 2018; Ó Lionáird 2018). Such ethnographic discussions further affirm lullaby singing as an assumed feminine practice, as well as a secure outlet for self-expression.

Despite this construction of femininity surrounding the genre, many traditional lullabies examined for this research often did not explicitly articulate the narrator's gender. Indeed, many lullabies that are assumed to have derived from a woman's singing interact with male characters through first-person dialogue, third-person narration, or through reference to the mother in connection with the narrator. Examples include "*Hó-bha-ín"* (Ní Ghuairim and Uí Ógáin 2002: 62) or "*Do Chuirfinn-si Féin mo Leanabh a Chodhladh"* (Petrie 1855: 144). A definite female as the narrator is found in "*Suantraighe Ghráinne Do Dhiarmuid"* (Gramore 2006), but only through the listener having previous knowledge of the myth of Gráinne and Diarmuid.[1] Indeed, direct

identification of the narrator as the child's mother does not seem to be as common within the genre as might be presumed.

For example, the mother in "*Hó-bha-ín"* is referenced in the third-person through the phrase "*d'imigh do Mhama le Filipe Dall, agus níl fhios agam beo cé hé!"* ("your mother has gone off with blind Philip, and for the life of me I do not know who he is!"), but the singer's identity remains unknown (Ní Ghuairim and Uí Ógáin 2002: 62). "*Do Chuirfinn-si Féin mo Leanabh a Chodhladh"* is in first-person narration, only to be identified in the last phrase of the song through the reflexive exclamation, "*nár ba bean gan mac do mháthair*" ("may your mother not be a sonless woman") (Petrie 1855: 144). "*Suantraighe Ghráinne Do Dhiarmuid"* (Gramore 2006) shows no identification of the narrator's gender through its lyrics. It is mostly descriptive of the world surrounding Diarmuid, with subtle reflections on the narrator's love for him. The first verse of this lullaby is one of the more reflexive and identifying out of its fifteen stanzas:

Codail begán begán beg	("Sleep a little, little, little
úair ní hegail duit a bheg	For thou needst not fear the least
a ghille dia ttardus seirc	Lad to whom I have given love
a mhic Í Dhuibhne a Dhiarmaid	Son of Ó Duibhne, Diarmaid"

(Gramore 2006).

While this verse is reflecting on the narrator's love for Diarmuid, the only way that the listener can assuredly perceive the narrator as female is to have had prior knowledge of the story of Gráinne and Diarmuid (Gregory 2015; Murphy 1933), therefore knowing that Gráinne—while not a mother, a woman—is singing this lullaby.

In "Raven-Locks" (Henry 1990: 8), a more evident expression of the mother is depicted. Though there is no explicit identification of the narrator's gender, there are strong signs that the narrator is the child's mother, through frequent references to the father working upon the sea. A longing for the return of her husband is articulated through phrases such as "soon may we see his face; hasten it, God of grace," or "his step's [*sic.*] at the door: our sorrows are o'er". It could be inferred that the narrator is a more distant relation, such as a grandmother or aunt. However, in claiming shared relation through the word "our", rather than "your", in the phrase "bring our dear daddy safe over the foam" (ibid.), there is a sense of an immediate family unit. One could further argue that the narrator is a sibling. However, the intimate nature of her affections suggests that she is the mother, such as referring to the child's father as her own "sweet love", and the child as the father's "dove"; or even the very poetic line "Lovely thy cheek to me as is the apple tree, Bud of my bosom…". This allusion conveys a sense of growth from oneself, purity, and incorporates imagery of breastfeeding, narrowing the narrator down to a female caregiver, if not specifically the mother. One can also consider the *banfhilí* and *buime*—foster mothers and nurses—that were hired by noble families in Gaelic poetry (Nic Lochlainn 2013), which further supports the caregiver as female, but also adds ambiguity to her relation to the child.

Such narratives take part in affirming caregiving and lullaby singing as traditionally feminine. Furthermore, in singing lullabies—rich with cultural knowledge and heritage—mothers have played an important, though perhaps unacknowledged role in cultural transmission (Watt 2012; Daiken 1959; Nic Lochlainn 2017). Identities of fatherhood, grandparenthood, siblinghood, and more, have also been expressed throughout this research. It is important to acknowledge these caregivers within Irish traditional lullabies, as it is evident that lulling is not only practised by the mother.

The historical presence of the father figure

As lullaby singing is deeply associated with motherhood, it begs the question of how the father and male caregiver interact with this practice. The traditional lullabies that are possibly set in the male perspective are mostly ambiguously narrated, but are recorded as having been sung or composed by men, such as Aodh Ó Domhnaill's "*Suantraí Hiúdaí"* ("*Hiúdaí*'s Lullaby") (Ní Dhomhnaill 2018; Ní Fhiach 2003: 12). Some lullabies portray a dialogue between male and female characters, such as "*Peigín agus Peadar"* ("Peggy and Peter") (Heaney 1983), or a male narrator observing a woman lulling and reflecting upon her situation, as in "*An Leanbh Aimhréidh"* (The Fretful Baby") (O'Sullivan 1960: 16). The only example of a lullaby thus encountered in this research in which a man sings directly to a child is "Rocking the Cradle that Nobody Owns". This song was recorded by various bands and singers, such as Paddy Tunney (Clancy 1956), The Ian Campbell Folk Group (1963), and Joe Heaney (1964). In this lullaby, an old man is begrudgingly rocking a child to sleep and reflecting with resentment on his wife's faithlessness (Heaney 1964). Though the variations of this song differ slightly in lyric and melody, the general character of the song and story is consistent. These differences in the text do not change the storyline; one of hopelessness, even anger, over being cuckolded. This lullaby reveals the wife's infidelity and negligence, serving as a warning to young men. Digging deeper into Joe Heaney's variation, he introduces the song with a humorous account for its motivations:

> Of course, I'm sure that there's many men wheeling a pram, too, that maybe doesn't own what's inside the pram, you know. … And it's something like the old man with no faloorum.[2] He knew there was somebody else taking a bit out of his cake! (Heaney 1964: web source).

Within its lyrics, the narrator's gender is given, outright, with the declaration "I am an old man". He states that he is alone, occupied with lulling a child that he believes is not his. The father's absence is solidified in the chorus, in which the old man states "perhaps your own daddy you never will know" (ibid.). The narrator goes on to detail his wife's financial motivations for marrying him, and her infidelity, "My wife is a flirt who married for money, she stays out all night until the cock crows" (ibid.). Finally, through the phrase "Take warning, dear Harry, if you ever marry, be sure that the cradle you rock is your own" (ibid.), he somewhat pessimistically urges the child to be careful and to consider a woman's faithfulness when choosing a wife in future.

It is interesting to consider the difference in emotional outlook between this song and "Raven-Locks*",* in which the mother is adoringly lulling her child, and longing for her husband's return. In contrast, the man in "Rocking the Cradle that Nobody Owns" sings of his woes and griefs, without much affection for the child. However, given the differences between these two examples are quite striking, one should not infer from this comparison that male-centric lullabies are generally despairing or egotistic when compared to female-centric lullabies, as feelings of frustration and resentment from feminine voices have also been evidenced in this research (Ní Riain 2018; Ní Shúilleabháin 2018). Such examples include the last verse of *"Bog Braon"*, which expresses affection for the child—"Nach deas é" (is he not lovely)—as well as frustration through the phrase "'s nach fada go gcodlaíonn sé" (and isn't he taking a long time to go to sleep) (Ní Shúilleabháin 2018).

Such scarcity (and emotional distance, in "Rocking the Cradle that Nobody Owns") of the father figure being directly acknowledged as the narrator in traditional lullabies concurs with the overarching assumption questioned in this article: that lullabies are a feminine practice. However, a significant proportion of narrator gender and identity in this repertoire is unclear. This ambiguity reaffirms maternal caregiving within lullabies but also draws out the possibility of other singing caregivers.

Ambiguity of narrator

While femininity is implied in lullaby singing, and there have been examples of both female and male narrators considered previously, much of the narrator identity in this genre is unclear. This flexibility opens the door for a wide range of caregivers to be represented and for a full range of emotions to be expressed. For example, the first-person narration of "*Seoithín Seo-hó"* considers the singer's state of mind and actions through phrases such as "*goirim tú, a chroidhe! ní bhfuigh' siad do mhealladh"* ("I call thee, my heart! they shall not entice you") or *"tá mise led' thaoibh ag guidhe ort na mbeannacht"* ("I am by your side praying for you, blessings"). The only reference to gender is a reflexive third-person line "*le taoibh do mhaime' seadh fhanfair go fóill"* ("beside your mamma you still will abide") (Mhic Choisdealbha 1923: 66). While the narrator's identity is not explicitly stated, she is inferred to be the child's mother through the continuity of location between the narrator and the mother; in that, the child is to stay with the narrator and simultaneously beside the mother.

"Seoithín Seo-hó" has further connections with different gendered narrators through the folk beliefs surrounding its manifestation. In the early 1900s, informants told collector Eibhlín Bean Mhic Choisdealbha that this song is what mothers of Connemara would sing to lull their children and that it was what the Virgin Mary used to lull the baby Jesus (ibid.). This is strengthened by the fact that Henry collected a version of this song called "Irish Lullaby for the Christ-Child". This English-language example is an evident transliteration of "*Seoithín Seo-hó",* with a mirrored melody and backstory relating to the Virgin Mary (Henry 1990: 7). The backstory that Joe Heaney disseminated was that it was the father, Saint Joseph, not Mary, who sang this to Christ (Heaney 2000: 18; Ní Riain 2016). Heaney learned this lullaby from his grandmother's singing as a young child (Heaney 1982).

In "*Hó-bha-ín*", the ambiguity of narrator identity is seen through the narrator specifying the location of caregivers, but not identifying themselves. Like "Raven-Locks" the narrator informs the child of the father's absence, working on the sea. The mother is also featured external to the lulling context, having left with *Filipe Dall* (Blind Philip) (Ní Fhiach 2003; Ní Ghuairim and Uí Ógáin 2002; Ní Ghuairim 1957). In a different variation, possible abandonment morphs into mortality as the mother goes off, not with another character, but with the "*tilleadh trá*" ("winding tide") (Gramore 2006; Ní Riain 2018). As the remainder of "*Hó-bha-ín"* consists of non-lexical vocables, and possessive endearments, such as "*mo ghrá"* ("my love")*,* "*mo roghain"* ("my dearest one")*,* or "*mo leanbh"* ("my child") (Elsafty 2007)*,* the narrator remains undefined, being neither of the child's parents, as they are depicted as absent to the lulling context.

The verses of "*Hó-bha-ín"* are quite fragmented and are undoubtably the result of generations of community collaboration and extempore composition. Several interviewees for this research noted that, historically, with closer living arrangements and larger family units, the mother would likely have been occupied with other children, domestic duties, or even helping her husband in his work (Bhreathnach 2018; Dennehy 2016). Therefore, other caregivers—grandmothers, aunts or even neighbours—would have also participated in lullaby singing (Daiken 1959; Watt 2012). A lullaby that is explicitly narrated by the child's sibling is "*An Leanbh Nua*" ("The New Baby"). In this song the narrator reiterates that their mother has brought home the most beautiful baby in Ireland (Ní Uallacháin 1994). We do not, however, learn of the sibling's gender. Sorcha Ní Ghuairim, a major disseminator of "*Hó-bha-ín"*, reflected on these points, noting that "everyone had their own version of this lullaby long ago. Like the lament, everyone put their own words with it, as it suited them. But they all had "*Hó-bha-ín mo leanbh is gabh amach a bhobogha"* ("*Hó-bha-ín* my child and out go the bogeyman") as they rocked the child" (Ní Ghuairim and Uí Ógáin, translated by Uí Ógáin 2002: 62). The extempore nature of creation was commonplace in laments as well as lullabies, as these pieces are often a direct expression of the singer's thoughts and feelings. Singers bring together fragments of remembered verse and build upon previous

variations in the moment (Constantine and Porter 2003; Lysaght, 1997; McLaughlin 2017; Ní Ghuairim and Uí Ógáin 2002: 62; Ní Riain 2016; Ó Madagáin 1985).

This article does not begin to consider hired staff, nurses or maids singing lullabies and crooning songs (Joyce 1873; Daiken 1959; Nic Lochlainn 2013, 2017; Petrie 1882: 42). While lyrical evidence of the narrator's identity in Irish traditional lullabies is often ambiguous, the innate female network surrounding these songs and their practice continue to strongly emphasise the feminine. This ambiguity creates flexibility and inclusion, as practitioners can celebrate this empowerment of female narratives often overlooked in society, art and scholarship (Ní Ghallóglaigh 2018; Ní Riain 2018; Warner 2011), as well as foster the inclusivity and expression of the male caregiver.

Reflections

Through discussing the gender dynamics in Irish traditional lullabies, this article acknowledges the importance and presence of the mother in lullaby singing but also considers the participation of other caregivers and genders, such as father figures, extended family and community members. Traditionally understood as a gendered practice stemming from the biological role of childbearing and the societal role of child-rearing, lullabies bear assumed femininity (Daiken 1959; Nic Lochlainn 2017; Warner 2011; Watt 2012). However, this practice was not exclusive to mothers in Irish society. The appearance of the father figure within this genre has, therefore, also been explored through this article. Furthermore, this research highlights the ambiguous language within many of these songs, which leaves the gender and identity of the narrator up for interpretation to include a wide range of caregivers. Though they are grounded in an anonymous feminine singing tradition (Warner 2011) and are deeply connected to motherhood and child pacification, lullabies have always had engrained potential as a method of familial bonding, inclusive self-reflexivity and continual cultural transmission.

Song Appendix

1: Raven-Locks

Horo, mo leanibh dhu, horo mo leanibh dhu.
Ringlets as dark as the raven are thine,
Lovely thy cheek to me as is the apple tree
Bud of my bosom, be love ever thine,
Sleep, little love, daddy's own dove.

Where the wild waves run free, daddy for you and for me
Toils in the tempest to keep our bright home
Soon may we see his face; hasten it, God of grace,
Bring our dear daddy safe over the foam,
Home to his dove, home to sweet love.

Shines the bright sun today, daddy is on the way,
Yonder his sail like the seagull's white wing,
Dance to your daddy, dear, dance now without a fear,
Dance to the blue waves where herring is king;
His step's at the door: our sorrows are o'er.

(Henry 1990: 8).

2: Rocking the Cradle that Nobody Owns

I am an old man, I'm rocking the cradle
Rocking the cradle that nobody owns.
I'm here all alone, I'm rocking the cradle,
Rocking the baby that's never my own.

Oh, hush, hush, hushaby baby
Perhaps your own daddy you never will know!
I'm here all alone, I'm rocking the cradle
Rocking the cradle that nobody owns.

My wife is a flirt who married for money,
She stays out all night until the cock crows.
Take warning, dear Harry, if you ever marry,
Be sure that the cradle you rock is your own.

Hushaby lu, hushaby baby,
Perhaps your own daddy you never will know.
I'm here all alone, rocking the cradle,
Rocking the baby that's never me own.

(Heaney 1964-65).

3: Seoithín Seo-hó

Seoithín seothó, mo stóir é mo leanabh,
Mo sheod gan chealg, mo chuid d'en tsaoghal mór,
Seothín seothó, nach mór é an taithneamh,
Mo stoirín 'n-a leabaidh 'n-a chodladh gan bhrón!

Seoithín seothó, my child is my treasure,
My jewel without guile, my share of the world,
Seoithín seothó, how great is the delight,
My little treasure in his bed, asleep without sorrow

A leanabh, mo chléibh, go n-éiríghidh do chodladh leat,
Séan agus sonas a choídhche 'do chomhair!
Seo beannacht Mhic Dé agus téagair a bhuime leat,
Téirígh a chodladh gan bíodhgadh go ló.

Child of my bosom, may they sleep thrive with you,
Happiness and luck be even in store for you!
May the blessing of God's Son and the love of His nurse be with you,
Go to sleep without start until day.

Ar Mhullach an tSidhe tá sídheoga geala
Fá chaoin-ré an earraigh ag imirt a spóirt,
'S seo iad aniar chun glaoidh ar mo leanbh
Le mian é tharraingt isteach san lios mór.
Goirim tú, a chroidhe! ní bhfuigh' siad do mhealladh
Le brígh a gcleas ná le binneas a gceoil,
Tá mise led' thaoibh ag guidhe ort na mbeannacht,
Seothín, a leanbh, ní imtheo' tú leo

On the Hill of the Sidhe are fairies shining
Under the fair moon of spring playing their games,
And here they come eastward to call to my child
Wishing to lure him into the great fort.
I call thee, my heart! they shall not entice you
By dint of their tricks, or the sweetness of their music,
I am by your side praying for you blessings,
Seoithín, my child, you will not go with them.

Os comhair mo laoigh, go míochair cean' mhail
Tá díl-ruisg aingeal ag faire 'n-a threo,
Le mór-ghrádh dian 'ghá iarraidh chun bealaigh,

Before my darling, sweet and gentle
Kind angel eyes are gazing upon him,
With great strong love inviting him away,

Mar b'aoibhne flaithis dá rachadh sé leo.
A stórin mo chroidhe, luigh siar in do leabaidh,
Le taoibh do mhaime 'seadh fhanfair go fóill,
Ní mór dham le Dia mo shiamsa 'gus m'aiteas,
Mo Ríoghacht ar talamh i dteannta mo bhróid.

For Heaven would be more delightful were he to go with them.
Treasure of my heart! lie down in your bed,
Beside your mamma you still will abide,
God does not grudge me my play and my pleasure,
My Heaven on earth along with my darling.

(Uí Choisdealbha 1923: 66).

4: Hó-bha-ín

Hó-bha-ín, Hó-bha-ín
Hó-bha-ín, mo ghrá.
Hó-bha-ín, mo leanbh,
Agus codail go lá.

Hó-bha-ín, Hó-bha-ín
Hó-bha-ín, my love.
Hó-bha-ín, my child,
And sleep until day.

Hó-bha-ín, mo leanbh,
Is hó-bha-ín, mo roghain.
Hó-bha-ín, mo leanbh,
Is gabh amach a bhobhogha.

Hó-bha-ín, my child,
Hó-bha-ín, my dearest one.
Hó-bha-ín, my child,
And go away, you evil spirit.

Agus d'imigh do Mhama le Filipe Dall,
Agus níl fhios agam beo cé hé!

And your mother went off with blind Philip,
And for the life of me, I don't know who he is!

Hó-Bha-ín…

Hó-Bha-ín…

Ó is tá capall an tsagairt,
I ngarraí Sheáin Ghabha.
Mura gcuirgidh tú as í, óra,
déanfaidh sí foghail.

The priests horse is in
The garden of Sean the Blacksmith.
If you don't put her out,
She'll trash it.

(Ní Ghuairim and Uí Ógáin 2002: 62-63; Translations: Elsafty, 2007).

6: Do Chuirfinn-si Féin mo Leanabh a Chodhladh ("I Would Put My Own Child to Sleep").

Do chuirfinn-si féin mo leanabh a chodhladh,
'Sní mar do chuirfeadh mná na m-bodach,
Fá shúisín bhuidhe ná a m-bratlín bhorraig,
Acht a g-cliabhán óir is an ghaoth dhá bhoghadh.

I would put my own child to sleep,
And not the same way as the wives of the clowns do,
Under a yellow blanket and a sheet of tow,
But in a cradle of gold, rocked by the wind.

Seó h-ín seó, h-uil leó leó,
Seó h-ín seó, as tú mo leanabh;
Seó h-ín seó, h-uil leó leó,
Seó h-ín seó,'sas tú mo leanabh.

Sho-heen sho, hoo lo lo,
Sho-heen sho, you are my child;
Sho-heen sho, hoo lo lo,
Sho-heen sho, and you are my child.

Do chuirfinn-si féin mo leanabh a chodhladh,
La breágh gréine idir dhá nodhluig,
A g-cliabhán óir ar úrlár shocair,
Faoi bharra na g-craobh is an ghaoth dhá bhoghadh.

I would put my own child to sleep,
On a fine sunny day between two Christmases,
In a cradle of gold on a level floor,
Under the tops of the boughs, and rocked by the wind.

Seó h-ín seó, h-uil leó leó, etc.

Sho-heen sho, hoo lo lo, etc.

Codail a leinibh 'sgur ba codhladh slán dhuit,

Sleep, my child, and be it the same of safety,

Is ar do chodhladh go d-tugain do shláinte. Nár bhuailidh treighid ná greim an bháis tú, Galar na leanabh ná'n bholgach ghránna.	And out of your sleep may you rise in health; May neither cholic nor death-stitch strike you, The infant's disease, or the ugly small-pox.
Seó h-ín seó, h-uil leó leó, etc.	Sho-heen sho, hoo lo lo, etc.
Codail a leanbh 'sgur ba codhladh slán dhuit, Is ar do chodhladh go d-tugain do shláinte. As do smaointe do chroidhe nár chráidhtear Is nár ba bean gan mac do mháthair.	Sleep, my child, and be it the sleep of safety, And out of your sleep may you rise in heath; From painful dreams may your heart be free, And may your mother not be a sonless woman.
Seó h-ín seó, h-uil leó leó, etc.	Seo-heen sho, hoo lo lo, etc. (Petrie, 1855: 144).

7. *Suantraighe Ghráinne Do Dhiarmuid*
(Gráinne's Lullaby for Diarmuid)

Codail begán begán beg úair ní hegail duit a bheg a ghille dia ttardus seirc a mhic Í Dhuibhne a Dhiarmaid	Sleep a little, little, little For thou needst not fear the least Lad to whom I have given love Son of Ó Duibhne, Diarmaid
Codail-si sunn go sáimh a Í Dhuibhne a Dhiarmaid áin do dhen-sa t'foraire dhe a mheic Í dhealbhdha Dhuibhne	Sleep thou soundly here, Offspring of Duibhne, noble Diarmaid: I will watch over thee the while, Son of shapely Ó Duibhne
Codail begán beannocht fort os uisge tobráin trenghort a úanáin uachtoir locha do bhrú tíre trénsrotha	Sleep a little, a blessing on thee! Above the water of the spring of Trénghart, Little lamb of the land above the lake, From the womb of the country of strong torrents.
Rob ionann is codhladh thes Dediduigh na n-aird-éiges da ttug ingen Mhorainn bhúain tar cenn Conoill ón Craobhrúaidh	Be it even as the sleep in the south Of Dedidach of the high poets, When he took the daughter of ancient Morann In spite of Conall from the Red Branch.
Rob ionann is chodhladh thúaidh Finnchaibh fincháoimh Eassa Rúaidh da ttug Sláine ségha rinn tar cenn Fhailbhe chodat-chinn	Be it even as the sleep in the north Of fair comely Finnchadh of Assaroe, When he took stately Sláine In spite of Failbhe Hardhead.
Rob ionann is chodhladh thíar Áine inghine Gáilían fecht do luidh ceim fo trilis la Dubhthach ó Dhoirinis	Be it even as the sleep in the west Of Áine daughter of Gailian, What time she fared by torchlight With Dubhthach from Doirinis.
Rob ionann is chodhladh thoir Dhegadh dhána dhiumaraigh da ttuc Coinchenn inghean Bhinn tair cenn Dechill déin Dubhrinn	Be it even as the sleep in the east Of Degha gallant and proud, When he took Coinchenn daughter of Binn In spite of fierce Dechill of Duibhreann.
A chró goile ierthair Ghrég anana go t'forchomhéad moighfidh mo chrodheisi acht ruaill monad faicthear ré henúair	O fold of valour of the world west of Greece, Over whom I stay watching, My heart will well-nigh burst If I see thee not at any time
Ar sgaradh ar ndís male is sgaradh leinb áonbhaile	The parting of us twain Is the parting of children of one home,

is sgaradh cuirp re hanmain a laoích locha fionn-Charmain	Is the parting of body with soul, Hero of bright Loch Carmain.
Leigfidhear Caoinche ar do lorg rith Caoilti ní ba hanord nach ad táin bás na brocudh noch ad léig a siorchodhladh	Caoinche will be loosed on thy track: Caoilte's running will not be amiss: Never may death or dishonour reach thee, Never leave thee in lasting sleep.
Ní codail in damh so soir ní sguirionn do bhúirfedhaighú cía bheith um dhoiribh na lon ni fuil na meanmhuin codladh	The stag eastward sleepeth not, Ceaseth not from bellowing: Though he be in the groves of the blackbirds, It is not in his mind to sleep.
Ní codail in eilit mháol ag buirfedhaigh fo brecláoch do ghní rith tar barraibh tor ní dhén na hadbhaidh codal	The hornless doe sleepeth not, Bellowing for her spotted calf: She runs over the tops of bushes, She does not sleep in her lair.
Ní codail in chaoíncheb hras os barraibh na ccrand ccaomhchas is glórac atathor ann gidhbe an smólach ní chodhlann	The lively linnet sleepeth not In the tops of the fair-curved trees: It is a noisy time there, Even the thrush does not sleep.
Ní codail in lach lán maith a lathor re degh-snámh ni dhéin súan no sáimhe ann ina hadbhaidh ní chodhlann	The duck of numerous brood sleepeth not, She is well prepared for good swimming: She maketh neither rest nor slumber there, In her lair she does not sleep.
Anocht ní chodail in gerg os fráochaibh anfaidh imaird binn foghar a gotha gloin eidir srothaibh ní chodail	Tonight the grouse sleepeth not Up in the stormy heaths of the height: Sweet is the sound of her clear cry: Between the streamlets she does not sleep.

(Gramore 2006).

Notes

[1] The story of Diarmuid agus Gráinne was famously disseminated by Augusta Gregory (Gregory 2015). In this story, Gráinne—betrothed to Fionn Mac Cumhaill—falls in love with one of his *Fianna* warriors, Diarmuid. They run away together, chased by the *Fianna* and the vexed Fionn. One night, to ensure Diarmuid's restful sleep, and to protect him against their pursuers, Gráinne sings this lullaby (Gregory 2015; Gramore 2006; Murphy 1993).

[2] A reference to Roud 210, "Maids When Youdugusta Gregory (Gregory 2015). In this story, Gráinne—betrothed to Fionn Mac Cumhaill—falls in love with one of his *Fianna* warriors, Diarmuid. They run away together, chased by the *Fianna* and the vexed Fionn. One night, to ensure Diarmuid's restful sleep, and to protect him against their pursuers, Gráinne

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Unheard[1]

Paula Ryan

In the song "Unheard", I question why so few women receive true recognition as composers or songwriters in traditional and folk music. I ask what prevents women from being acclaimed primarily as writers as distinct from singers, instrumentalists or performers. The song suggests that the failure across the music industry, of broadcasters and media of all kinds, to properly recognise women composers and songwriters, and the consequential limited exposure, knowledge, performance and crediting of their works, has resulted in a regrettable narrowing of perspective and a dearth of female role models across the repertoire. The narrow perception of women in the traditional and folk song repertoire arising from the hands of overwhelmingly male writers is in stark contrast to the potential for their representation in traditional and folk songs written by women. Such songs could genuinely exemplify, record and celebrate the accomplishments of women as proactive initiative-takers, rather than passive objects viewed from the perspective of men.

Unheard
Undiscovered Unheard Unremembered Unknown
Unsung her lyrics unplayed her tones
Unrecognised for far far too long
The world rarely hears her music her songs

For years and years and years all she's had is neglect
From this moment on we demand her respect
Let's have more options let's have more choice
Let's have more of the female songwriter's voice

Undiscovered Unheard Unremembered Unknown
Unsung her lyrics unplayed her tones
Unrecognised for far far too long
The world rarely hears her music her songs

Her perspective is different she has so much to add
A font of fresh insights are there to be had
She deserves equal airing she deserves equal pay
On TV and radio and all the airwaves

Undiscovered Unheard Unremembered Unknown
Unsung her lyrics unplayed her tones
Unrecognised for far far too long
The world rarely hears her music her songs

Recognition for her is so hard to find
Needle in a haystack so seldom brought to mind
Women are writing brilliant songs by the score
So in gigs awards and festivals we must have many more

Undiscovered Unheard Unremembered Unknown
Unsung her lyrics unplayed her tones
Unrecognised for far far too long
The world rarely hears her music her songs

Performance Link

Ryan, Paula 2020 *Unheard* https://youtu.be/IYI-3V78Czo Accessed 19 October 2020.

Notes

[1] This song was originally performed by Paula Ryan as part of a joint presentation with Ali Bullivent at the symposium on Women and Traditional | Folk Music held at NUI Galway in February 2019.

Truth is the daughter of time

Truth is the daughter of time
The springs of justice rose up to rhyme
Let's take the road less travelled through this stormy weather
Let's rise up and stand together
Sister, I am here for you.

(Casey 2019a)

Karan Casey

Abstract

The performance of social justice and my role as a female traditional and folk singer are discussed in this article. What is of particular importance to me is how these ideas and experiences are interpreted and channelled through my singing. I draw on the writings of Angela Davis and Tríona Ní Shíocháin, among others, and crucially as a singer I explore the intersection of performance and activism through the lens of my own experience. Also important to this discussion is FairPlé, a feminist movement I co-founded in early 2018 which advocated for equality for women performers within the traditional Irish music community. In many ways FairPlé grew out of the combination of performance and activism.

Keywords: female, singer, social justice, FairPlé

Introduction

In this article I wish to discuss ideas around my role as a female traditional and folk singer and as a social activist. In May 2016, I commenced an arts practice PhD (Casey 2019b). Much of my thinking during this research focused on the performance of social justice: how my singing addresses issues of human rights and equality. What is of particular importance to me is how these ideas and experiences are interpreted and channelled through my singing. My own social activism is defined by advocating through song for issues as diverse as equality for women, an end to colonialism and for the equal distribution of wealth. Social justice and social activism often overlap with my feminist activism and this was explored artistically in a performance piece called *I Walked into My Head.* This was an important juncture artistically and academically as it was the culmination of my performance arts practice PhD.

The key questions I keep coming back to are: does singing create a potent political experience? Can the singing of social justice songs be a political act and effectively create political agency within the community or is activism for social change necessary too? In responding to these questions, I discuss FairPlé in the second half of this article.

My worldview through song

I have been a professional singer for over twenty-five years with an extensive recording and touring career. A sense of social responsibility towards the truth of the world as I see it has always been integral and inherent to my performances. In many ways, I believe I carry on the legacy of many Irish folk singers who as provocateurs use songs as a political motivator (Moylan 2000; Moloney 2016; Shields 1993). My performances are subjective but they also can be viewed politically and culturally through a wide angle lens. Chang sees "culture as a product of interactions between self and others in a community of practice," where "self is the starting point for cultural acquisition and transmission" (2008: 23). I have been trying to carve out a space for myself where I can cultivate my own style of "speaking out" or being an activist.

I sing and view today's folk songs as being the modern political inheritors of older narrative ballads in Ireland. As an Irish female folk singer, I stand proudly in the time-honoured Irish tradition of singing out against oppression. Many of the songs are from the point of view of a voiceless and vulnerable people and reflect the woes of an oppressed nation and the people's ability or desire to transcend and resist this (Moloney 2016). There are songs relating to many different aspects of politics in Ireland, but the issue of colonialism dominates the political song repertoire in one way or another. Songs such as "Shamrock Shore", "The Wind that Shakes the Barley", "Revenge for Skibbereen", "Sailing off to Yankee Land" and "The Croppy Boy", are just a few examples. Frank Harte said that "Those in power write the history, while those who suffer write the songs" (1998) and to paraphrase one of Frank's regular statements, we have an awful lot of songs. Traditional songs carry, I believe, a particular narrative of Ireland as they are the voices of ordinary people.

In many ways when I look back on my activism, I note how my song choices were often determined by the campaigning I was engaged in during different periods of my life. This auto-ethnographic extract from my PhD demonstrates how activism dominated my life in the late 1980s:

> It was during this time that I began to develop a stronger political outlook on the world. A feminist, with the war raging in the North, I was at every cockfight in the country. Volunteering became a big part of my life. I began teaching an older man how to read and write. I taught Traveller children reading and writing and I began campaigning in college for women's right to choose, disseminating information on abortion. I attended various political discussions on campus, out demonstrating against the governmental attack on student grants, (financial assistance to students, known as the "grant" system). My grand aunts saw me on the 6 o'clock RTÉ news, breaking through a police barricade and they were absolutely horrified. They rang my mother up and asked if I was a socialist and said it would have to stop! My poor parents, two people who hadn't had the privilege of a college education. My father insisting that he had afforded me these notions. How right he was. Still I was having a ball, totally invigorated and so busy changing the world. Living with radicals and sharing my life with people who were and still are deeply committed to social change. I began to see how songs were shaping and changing my world and I began to perform at many radical benefits and concerts. I was listening more and more to the likes of Christy Moore and Nina Simone. I started learning songs like "Irish Ways and Irish Laws", and "Mississippi Goddam". I was hell-bent on changing the world through demonstrating, protesting and singing these kinds of songs. (Casey (2019b: 20)

Singing and songs play a big part in Irish nationalist and republican heritage, there is a practical element to foregrounding the songs and often singing is used to propel discussion and urge or encourage action (Moloney 2016; Ní Shíocháin 2018; Zimmerman 2002). I have long argued that I inhabit the voice of the powerless and in doing so I sing out against oppression. I also recognise the power of the imagination at play here. Honouring the heroes of the past has been for me a way of speaking out against colonialism, poverty and racism today. I see this as the long and time-honoured convention of traditional and folk singers. I was struck while teaching a class on Irish

history through song in University College Cork by the lack of women characters in these songs. I began to wonder as I sang older traditional songs that venerate Irish male heroes, where is the place for women? Where does this leave me as a woman and as a feminist?

Eavan Boland's intensely evocative and poetic prose memoir *Object Lessons* (1996) is a meditation on how there can often be a contradiction in being a woman and a poet in Ireland. An acute sense of her poetic self broadens outwards to illuminate the cultural values that are upheld in Ireland, and often this excludes the voice of a woman. Boland explores with great clarity, moral fortitude and courage her main theme of how the traditionally silent woman within poetry can claim ownership and authorship of her poetic life in modern Ireland. She writes, "What is this thing–a nation–that is so powerful it can make songs, attract sacrifice and is so exclusive it drives into hiding the complex and sceptical ideas which would serve it best?" (1996: 69). When I read this book, it had a profound effect on me. I began to question myself and my own role within the tradition. I superimposed many of her ideas about poetry onto my singing.

In January 2018, despite a lifetime of various political campaigns through song, I found myself in Liberty Hall in Dublin at a gig and I was the lone woman on a stage among sixteen male performers. I spoke out that night asking simply that we have more women at gigs. It was an impassioned call to the audience drawing on my experiential wisdom of orchestrating a potent political atmosphere. I then wrote a Facebook post asking for change for women performers and in particular asking the Irish traditional and folk music community to question how we treat women and urge that we use our creative energies and begin to imagine the world differently and start being more respectful towards women. I didn't expect the response to be so life changing. So began the whirlwind of FairPlé which I discuss towards the end of this article. But first I would like to reflect on how my PhD research fed into my thinking around the performance of social justice issues.

Singing, social justice and activism

Through the writings of Davis (1998) and Ní Shíocháin (2018) I began to interrogate whether my performances constituted an act of social protest, drawing attention to matters of social justice, or whether they were an effort in consciousness raising (or both), and if a connection was made in performance with audiences on these matters. Davis's work on the songs, singing and performativity of Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday resonated deeply with me. Discussing the protest of social justice within the arts, Davis states that:

> in order for protest to acquire an explicitly political character, there must be an organised political structure capable of functioning as a channel for transforming individual complaint into effective collective protest. At the same time social protest can never be made the exclusive or limiting function of art. Art may encourage a critical attitude and urge its audience to challenge social conditions, but it cannot establish the terrain of protest by itself. In the absence of a popular mass movement, it can only encourage a critical attitude. When the blues "name" the problems the community wants to overcome, they help create the emotional conditions for protest, but do not and could not, of themselves, constitute social protest. (1998: 113)

Unlike Davis, I do believe that singing songs constitutes political activism. I live in a society where for me songs are an integral, interwoven interaction within the community, in which politics and protest are not completely separate entities, but function more like an ecosystem where each component contributes to the overall struggle. Reacting to Davis's arguments as a singer I feel that singing songs does stimulate social consciousness and raises awareness around issues and is in and of itself the performance of social protest.

Ní Shíocháin in her book *Singing Ideas: Ideas: Performance, Politics and Oral Poetry* (2018) explores how the nineteenth century woman poet Máire Bhuí Ní Laoire not only promoted political and social change but through the performances of her political Irish language songs created a potent political experience. I concur with her contention that

> Song symbolizes and actualizes as [an] in-between liminal experience, a period of symbolic antistructure, in which society can be challenged and the social hierarchy temporarily suspended, in which the unspeakable can become singable and the unthinkable thinkable. (2018: 23)

In agreeing with Davis that sometimes "there must be an organised political structure capable of functioning as a channel for transforming individual complaint into effective collective protest" (1998: 113), I began to rethink my own performances, particularly in light of her descriptions of earlier singers such as Billy Holiday or Ma Rainey. Living or working creatively in male dominated arenas has proven exceptionally difficult for many female performers and this is what urged me on politically to become one of the founding members of FairPlé. I felt more needed to be done to enact real social change for women performers.

"Down in the Glen"[1]

"Down in the Glen" is a song I wrote for the centenary commemorations of the 1916 Easter Rising. For this occasion, I wanted to write women back into the narrative, echoing Boland's thinking. The poet and critic Theo Dorgan and I discussed at length how to include women more. When Dorgan said "I wonder what Julia was feeling as Elizabeth, the love of her life, left the GPO", everything fell into place (Dorgan 2016).[2] Many of my creative strands folded into the making of this song: the traditional song structure; my knowledge and love of Irish history; my need to include women in storytelling and to find a place for women within the narrative of traditional song; and my strong need to write and find a creative place for myself. Importantly, I perform this song to honour the women of 1916 and also to remind us that the work of 1916 is unfinished and that women still seek equality in Ireland. I attempt to wrangle "contemporary political meaning" out of the old to forge the new whilst also hopefully provoking a contemporary audience into some sort of action: "this moment of potentiality was of significance not just for the song-composer…Máire Bhuí, who wrought contemporary political meaning out of the traditional play-sphere of song, but also the listener and the singer, who courted new ways of thinking and feeling through song" (Ní Shíocháin 2018: 3).

Feminism and song

There is an African proverb that says "If you educate a woman you educate a family or a nation" (Kwegyir-Aggrey 1999) and one of the key methods of educating people or passing on subversive information has been singing songs that express the longing and desires of the oppressed group. My ideas on feminism have been expressed through many of the songs I have sung in the past. For example, in singing "The King's Shilling" by performatively imagining the plight of the poor woman, I am identifying with this woman by singing out her voice, her woes, her reality in the song and in that expression giving her life experience credence and value. Davis states that "in the works of Gertrude Rainey and Bessie Smith, blues song represents the collective woes of a community, along with the determination to conquer them...But, at the same time it acquires a specifically female meaning, furnishing women with one of the rare vehicles through which their agonies, joys, and aspirations may be expressed" (1998: 135). Songs in a performance can sanction women's voices which are often ignored or undervalued in our societies: "…the songs of Máire Bhuí tell a different story, one of an illiterate woman who, through the mastery of song composition, would become a

central idea maker in the politics of her own society" (Ní Shíocháin 2018: 19). Davis makes the case for the importance of song for working-class women: "I want to suggest that women's blues provides a cultural space for community-building among working-class black women, and that it was a space in which the coercions of bourgeois notions of sexual purity and 'true womanhood' were absent" (1998: 44). Traditional singing is deeply embedded in the community and "at times, provide[s] an alternative form of discourse…a framework for discussing and dealing with the tensions and dilemmas of everyday existence" (Ó Laoire 2005: xii). The songs have power because the singing is part of the community. Davis states that "The blues in performance creates space for spontaneous audience response in a manner that is similar to religious testifying" (1998: 55). It is interesting to note that both authors, Davis and Ní Shíocháin, trace the line of female defiance historically and trace these attributes through the singing of songs, a long line of female defiance that in my view has yet to be broken.

Echoing Bartleet's brilliant auto-ethnographic account of her life as a conductor where she reminds us that role modelling is crucial to making life decisions, many women have to overcome what they learn as girls and what society demands of them in order to dream a new life for themselves often against tremendous odds.

> Since childhood I had seen conductors as school teachers who frightened the hell out of their students by making them perform solos in front of the whole school band. Of course, they were nice, fun-loving men when they were cooking hamburgers at school functions, but when they stepped up to the podium they could strike the fear of God in their wide-eyed students…It is no wonder the thought of becoming a conductor had never ever crossed my mind. (2009: 714)

Even though it didn't feel like it at the time, when attending performances by various women singers, I was learning. I was engaged in experiential research that I could later utilise to formulate my own way of singing, speaking out and being an activist. In many ways my experiential research has deepened my understanding of class issues: "It is important, I think, to understand women's blues as a working-class form that anticipates the politicalisation of the 'personal' through the dynamic of 'consciousness-raising', a phenomenon associated with the women's movement of the last three decades" (Davis 1998: 42). Through listening to songs and reading about the lives of others I broadened the context of my understanding. Listening to the blues I began to form ideas about the lives of the African-American community in America, which were counter to the narrative told in the history books and news-stories. Likewise, many of our own traditional and folk songs are full of stories about the hardship of poverty and emigration and these songs brought the realities and extreme deprivation of poverty home to me, not just in a statistical way but also importantly in an emotional, caring and compassionate manner. Songs can be much deeper than our politics or histories.

Is singing enough? The evolution of FairPlé

Upon reflection and through research I began to articulate feelings which helped me to reassess my experience as a performer and reframe my own work environment. The cultural environment in Ireland, the stories of the Irish Repeal the 8th campaign and the #MeToo movement in America had a profound effect on my own thinking.[3] In January 2018, I spoke up about male-dominated line-ups at a concert after which the singer Síle Denvir explained to me how important it was for her as a woman to be sitting in the audience that night; how she really admired my courage in asking for change and that she felt vindicated herself (Denvir 2018). FairPlé, the movement I co-founded in 2018 grew out of such conversations, with women speaking to one another backstage, reconfirming often what had not been said out loud before. FairPlé advocates for equality for women performers within the traditional Irish music community. A report on FairPlé's activities can be viewed at www.fairple.com/report (Casey and Cawley 2020).

The twin weapons of the patriarchy, silence and shame, were confronted, but there was resistance to the campaign that followed. The issue of sexual harassment became a dominant theme during the FairPlé campaign. People started contacting us with stories that changed the focus from a discussion on gender balance and quotas to sexual assault. Much like the songs there is always a back story. Personally, the most difficult part of the campaign was hearing the stories of hurt pouring into my ear from the phone, in conversations, reading the text messages, the emails, the Facebook messages and WhatsApp groups. It gave me the courage to reassess my own life and my life as a singer where foolishly and somewhat in denial I had told myself things had changed, and it gave me reason to pause as I found it exceptionally difficult to absorb the fact that young, talented, brilliant women of five, ten, fifteen, twenty and now thirty years my junior were being subjected to the same horrors all over again. The results of the FairPlé campaign and my PhD research had a powerful effect on me and were channelled into performance. FairPlé blossomed into a movement of protest and gained momentum quickly. The solidarity expressed gave me great courage and hope and I believe we argued our point in a very respectful manner.[4]

So, what have I learned?

There is an idea in Ireland, and perhaps elsewhere, that political songs are merely a commentary on current or historical events. I believe that they can also be a vehicle to influence and "go beyond the often narrow trappings of text and reimagine…song as a living liminal moment of sheer potentiality" (Ní Shíocháin 2018: 3). I argue that the singing of such songs can be a political act that creates potent political agency within the community. I also argue that the channelling of this creative force into activism helps to forge a better world for everyone.

I hope that the stories, truths, robust research and statistics gathered from the many events that FairPlé organised will be used in the future as people see fit to expand on their own social justice campaigns. I also hope that female performers gain some benefit from the campaign and get more work. There is ample evidence to suggest that the line-ups of many festivals have changed now to include more women, at all levels. Crucially though, this campaign has helped to bring the conversation about women to the fore. The recent #misefosta campaign on Instagram against sexual assault in the Irish traditional music scene is perhaps evidence of a new willingness to discuss more openly and honestly the difficulties facing women performers. The great gift of the FairPlé campaign has been that so many women feel their stories or voices are being aired and acknowledged. The gift of expressing the hurt that women endure helps in the healing process.

Like a bird on the wing, I always fly home to the songs. After the FairPlé campaign and PhD research I have now reframed how I perform feminist songs and approach this repertoire with a renewed vigour and intent. Songs have always minded me; I use them as protection, much like Aengus the god of love whose kisses turn into birds and fly around with him, songs are a balm and a comfort. Many of the stories I have told through song give credence to women's lives. But they cannot replace friendship, solidarity and the sisterhood: we need each other. It is vital that women view their own story as important, that we (and I) define ourselves as being of value. It is so difficult to unravel a lifetime of acquiescing and "fitting in" but it is worth it. Stay strong women, there is a long road ahead. We are the story!

Notes

[1] For performance video of "Down in the Glen" visit youtu.be/qwwwZn9X7d0
[2] Julia Grennan was the nurse who stayed behind with the injured James Connolly in the GPO as Elizabeth O'Farrell surrendered the flag with Pádraig Pearse outside the GPO. Neither woman is as well-known as the male heroes.
[3] Repeal the 8th refers to the campaign to repeal the ban on abortion contained in the 8th amendment to the Irish constitution. The #MeToo movement was a campaign initiated in the US to highlight sexual abuse and harassment of women in the entertainment industry.
[4] It is beyond the scope of this article to cover all of FairPlé's activities. For a history of some of the events that the campaign organised and for more in-depth coverage of what we have achieved please visit the webpage and social media sites:
www.fairple.com; www.facebook.com/FairPleMusic; https://twitter.com/FairPle

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Review: *Music as Creative Practice*

Nicholas Cook
Oxford University Press, 2018
ISBN: 9780199347803

Music as Creative Practice is a survey work of new trends in creativity theory, which have emerged over the past decade. It is the fifth book in a series from AHRC's Research Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice, which explores creativity in live music performance. *Music as Creative Practice* was originally intended to "push the understanding of musical creativity firmly in the directions of performance and collaboration" (8). However, because of a ten-year delay in the series' realisation and a concurrent "shift towards collaborative and performative approaches to creativity in music" in the field (ibid.), these aspects became Cook's basic premise for exploration instead. Notably, from this vantage point, the author challenges pre-conceptions prevalent in Western art music, a site where numerous creativity myths have manifested themselves particularly strongly. Developing an overarching framework that brings together "the distinct creativities of performance and composition" (ibid.), Cook provides a new understanding of composition as inherently collaborative. The author's argument is densely yet concisely structured throughout his investigation of creativity in compositional and performance practice from the 16th century to the present day. He employs a multi-disciplinary prism, drawing on creative theory, musicology, anthropology, psychology, sociology, neuroscience, popular music studies, ethnomusicology, history, law and further disciplines. Incorporated examples stem from a wide range of musical genres, including Western art music, jazz, pop, rock, hip hop, American country, North Indian classical, Chinese traditional and Middle Eastern musics, contemporary art and experimental musics and cross-genre collaborations. Cook employs comparisons with other creative practices to show parallels regarding processes of creative imagination. Furthermore, he looks at a number of contexts for the transmission of creative practice across social settings and in educational institutions. Last but not least, the author critically assesses copyright legislation and its sometimes stifling effect on music as creative practice. Crucially, situating "creativity … in social interaction" and placing "musical creativity … at the centre of everyday life" the author aims to contribute to the academic field of creativity theory at large (8).

There are three chapters, each divided into seven subsections. Throughout the first chapter, Cook focuses on the exploration of creative collaboration in performance and associated distributed creative outputs/authorship. In drawing on case studies, including string quartet rehearsals, songwriting and popular music recording sessions, as well as collaborations in contemporary art music contexts, he gets to the nooks and crannies of social relations between people involved in music-making.

Demonstrating how every act of performance is a creative act, he re-evaluates the performer's place with respect to creative input. He draws extensively on Keith Sawyer's model of distributed creativity in the context of group improvisation in jazz performance and interprets the latter's conceptualisation of "unpredictable emergent" (unpredictable outcomes) as "the motor behind creative collaboration" (45). Cook expands on Sawyer's model by including non-musical agents such as instruments, DAWs and scores: these material agents "talk back" just as human agents do, hence giving rise to unexpected musical material. He concludes that collaboration is integral to music-making and indeed to compositional practice, historically and contemporary.

This understanding of compositional processes as collaborative is at the heart of Chapter 2. Highlighting the embeddedness of composers in social structures, Cook

investigates changing compositional practice since the 16th century. Building on Jessie Ann Owens' research (1984, 1997), he demonstrates an additive approach to composition and indeed "a culture of radically distributed creativity" (85) throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Drawing on his own writing (1989), Cook illustrates a gradual work process of multimodal imagination in Beethoven's compositional practice, thus tackling the very origin of the myth of effortlessly preconceived and fully-formed compositions. Cook establishes parallels with other creative practices such as architecture and perfumery. Here, he highlights unpredictable emergence at work in order to develop "new ways of thinking about this kind of creative imagination" (11). The author returns to the idea of non-human agents, this time as the composer's works which are talking back: compositions are a form of assemblage (heterogenous networks) and the compositional process becomes a collaborative back and forth between composer, instrument and score. Throughout, he takes the reader on a fascinating, a-chronological journey of compositional practice, referring to a multitude of composers along the way. Cook shows how imagined mental sound requires a process of translation into physical sound, sensing "that compositional outcomes are qualitatively different from what could ever have been envisaged" (130), again "an example of emergence in action" (ibid.).

The final chapter addresses the importance of sociocultural "contexts of creative practice" (11). The author critiques the child prodigy phenomenon, starting his exploration with its archetype, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and looking at his latter-day's recent pop music pendant, Michael Jackson. Crucially, Cook points to the importance of nurture through social support systems and a high-level of family engagement. Investigating the creative ecology, which was vital to Sir Edward Elgar's compositional output–and referring to that of several other composers in less detail– Cook teases out boundaries between "creative collaboration and intimate personal relationship" (11). In an extensive section on creative development in educational settings, Cook explores a spectrum of transmission processes of creative music practice ranging from tacit knowledge acquisition in *partimento* instruction in Baroque Italy to explicit knowledge based and research driven approaches in UK conservatories. Finally, Cook discusses developments in copyright law, which emphasised individual authorship, often with restrictive results on creative music practice. However, he points out, that more recently a number of law cases have bestowed authorial rights to performers, hence supporting a re-evaluation of the creative dimension of performance and the performer's role.

Part of a series of *Studies in Musical Performance as Creative Practice,* Cook's *Music as creative practice* provides highly informative insights into current trends in creative theory, away from the understanding of creativity as a lone activity to creativity as collaborative and deeply embedded in social culture. A dense and thought-provoking book, it dismantles long-established creativity myths in the context of music practice and also successfully advances thinking on compositional practice.

Anna Falkenau

Review: *The Bodhrán: Experimentation, Innovation, and the Traditional Irish Frame Drum*

Colin F. Harte
Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2020
ISBN: 9781621905554 (paperback); 9781621905561 (Adobe pdf)[1]

Building upon his earlier work in *Bodhráns, Lambegs, & Musical Craftsmanship in Northern Ireland* (Harte 2019), Harte's most recent publication proposes to serve as "the definitive reference for understanding and navigating the developments in the bodhrán's history, organology, performance practices, and repertory" (2). Further, it aims to be an ethnographic exploration of the instrument offering "multiple perspectives regarding the bodhrán" (ibid.). Over a seven-year period, Harte conducted extensive interviews with a variety of participants primarily located in Europe and North America. I was interviewed for the book in my capacity as a bodhrán practitioner and my work is featured and referred to within the text. Participants include both professional and amateur bodhrán players, bodhrán makers, historians, educators and bodhrán enthusiasts. Several photographs are included and these assist the reader in visualising the innovations being discussed.

In many ways, this is a timely work in a field that suffers from a dearth of research. With that in mind, undertaking to write such a book constituted a mammoth task for Harte. No other document to date attempts to synthesise so many elements associated with the bodhrán in great depth. To write "the definitive reference" (2) in the context of an instrument with such a rich and nuanced history is nothing if not ambitious. Harte attempts to track the progress of the bodhrán in terms of its history, performance practices and organological developments while simultaneously navigating its nuanced social positioning within Irish traditional music culture. The result is by no means an exclusively academic text. It is written in a way that will appeal to academics, bodhrán players, professional performers and anyone with an interest in the instrument. The book successfully depicts the emergent nature of the instrument by illuminating the multiplicity of paths that have enabled the bodhrán to advance "beyond the boundaries of Irish traditional music into the unchartered depths of musics of the world through participation, performance, and instrument making" (108).

The book is divided into four chapters, the first of which deals with the instrument's history. Here, the author contextualises the rapid developments in the drum's design, performance practices and pedagogical approaches. For the non-specialist reader, Harte describes the perceived hierarchical structures within Irish traditional music culture which, he claims, have afforded the bodhrán a "secondary status" (5). He offers humorous insights into session etiquette for bodhrán players and he gives an account of the various bodhrán players and bodhrán makers who have played their part in paving the way for current innovations in instrument construction and performance practices. Possible origins of the bodhrán are teased out. The bodhrán's origins in the context of ritual procession are explored, with detailed accounts of the customs and practices associated with the wren boys, illustrating the social importance of the bodhrán in Ireland. Harte attempts to track the emergence of the bodhrán in Irish traditional music groups before he repositions it in terms of globalisation and cosmopolitanism "from its accompaniment role in Irish traditional music to a percussion instrument capable of performing in a variety of nontraditional musical contexts" (31).

Chapter two investigates organological experimentation and innovation at length, often involving the fascinating symbiotic relationship between bodhrán practitioner and instrument maker. It offers an insight into the plethora of experiments that have served

to significantly alter the drum's construction and sonic capabilities. Harte discusses the organological evolution of the instrument through interviews with several prominent bodhrán makers. Insights from both bodhrán practitioners and bodhrán makers involved in the creation of custom bodhráns, designed specifically for those practitioners, illuminate multiple perspectives in these collaborative engagements.

Chapter three explores the changing musical role of the bodhrán performer over time. The influence of professionalisation in Irish traditional music is investigated as a catalyst for rapid changes in playing styles, and Harte concludes that "professional bodhrán performers are shedding older restrictive musical roles and reenvisioning the musical usage of the drum" (75). The birth of the extended bodhrán solo in performance is explored. Chapter four consists of an annotated list of "academic publications, scores, instructional materials, film and television episodes, literary fiction, online resources, and seminal recordings that feature the bodhrán" (83). Although non-exhaustive, it does provide an invaluable resource, useful for anyone with an interest in bodhrán performance.

The subjects of each of the first three chapters, although interconnected, could have served as complete works in themselves. By attempting to deal with so many expansive areas, it can become difficult to achieve the necessary depth for such a rich, nuanced tradition and practice. At times, therefore, this work seems to present an oversimplified and occasionally inaccurate version of the pivotal historical events that have led to contemporary performance practices. With access to so many practitioners, bodhrán makers and academics throughout the interview process, it somehow feels that this work is less than the sum of its parts. Some notable voices, texts, performances and events do not feature. A simple narrative is favoured and while this does create an accessible resource, it results in a work that regrettably falls short of its own ambition. Reading this book, one might also conclude that a male dominance exists within bodhrán performance practices. The contribution of key female players, such as Aimee Farrell Courtney and Cathy Jordan, and the emerging popularity of the bodhrán amongst female players is not discussed. More gender-balance in the account would have resulted in a more accurate snapshot of contemporary bodhrán culture.

Although the depth, detail and rigour that "the definitive resource" (2) would require is perhaps not fully achieved, this book does offer multiple perspectives regarding the bodhrán. Harte has created an accessible, informative and entertaining addition to bodhrán discourse, though much more work is needed in this burgeoning field of study.

Cormac Byrne

Notes

[1] Adobe PDF page numbers cited in this review.

References

Harte, Colin (2019) 'Bodhráns, Lambegs, & Musical Craftsmanship in Northern Ireland', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 28(2): 200-216.

REVIEW: *The Housekeepers: Irish Music Played on Fiddle and Concertina*

Doireann Glackin and Sarah Flynn
Independent release (2019)

The canary-yellow cover of *The Housekeepers: Irish Music Played on Fiddle and Concertina* features a 1950s, almost kitschy line drawing of two ostensibly demure women holding their instruments against a domestic backdrop of steaming iron and gramophone. It playfully signals the underlying ethos of the recording project; to showcase the tunes and styles of underappreciated female traditional musicians of a particular era. These include Ella Mae O'Dwyer and Nora Hurley, first cousins originally from the Athea region in Co. Limerick; Ellen Galvin from Lack West in West Clare; Molly Myers Murphy from Farranfore, Co Kerry; and Aggie Whyte from Ballinakill, Co Galway. The CD is the culmination of an Arts Council-funded project led by Dublin duo Doireann Glackin on fiddle and Sarah Flynn on concertina who, from the outset, place attention on the music of these women and not on themselves.

The CD opens with a single reel, a version of Mrs Crotty's "Spike Island" in Ab, featuring unaccompanied concertina and fiddle, which sets the tone for the whole album. Glackin and Flynn are, from the outset, melodically aligned but not slavishly so; each musician freely executes her own idiomatic ornamentations and variations. The track is recorded with a dull foot tapping in the background, making it feel intimate and, most probably intentionally, quite domestic in setting. The paired reel, "Pride of Rathmore" by Mollie Myers Murphy has a more contemporary feel, in part achieved by the addition of guitar accompaniment and the Fmin key. The duo return to Myers Murphy's for inspiration in tracks 5 and 10, the latter a setting of "The Butcher's March". Myers Murphy is also featured in the album's title track (track 8).

Nora Hurley's music is profiled twice and includes the gem "Sonny's Delight" which she composed when she was 97. That jig set is one of four out of thirteen tracks featuring jigs. Six others focus on reels, with the remaining three tracks made up of a fling and two hornpipes, including Ellen Galvin's two-part setting of "The Ace and Deuce of Piping", which is technically a set dance. Track 9, "Graces' Favourite" draws from a recording of Aggie Whyte in 1951 by ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax, while Whyte is also referenced in the final set in "Aggie Whyte's Favourite". The latter part of the CD also includes the music of concertina player Ella Mae O'Dywer, featuring a set of reels originally recorded in 1977 (track 11) and a fling entitled "Behind the ditch in Parkanna" (track 12). Accompanying track notes as well as biographical notes provide historical, motivational, and personal contextualisation, while solo tracks showcase the skill sets and values of the featured musicians.

In the era of *Fair Plé* and *Sounding the Feminist*, a CD entitled *The Housekeepers* might have been read initially as a sardonically playful promise of a feminist manifesto for Irish music. What it actually achieves is subtler as this CD also pays homage to the duo's rich, Dublin-based musical heritage and formative experiences with generational musicians (urban and rural) across the gender divide. As such, these 'housekeepers' are indeed keeping the tradition in good order, dusting off old tunes, and rearranging and curating items in ways that keep them fresh, relevant and aesthetically pleasing, all the while effortlessly concealing the obvious labour that has gone into this project. But a spark has been kindled and the promise of more to come by the duo–in the form of Eleanor Kane, Kitty Hayes, Lucy Farr and others–makes this reviewer hope that a follow-up CD tackles exclusively the music composed, set by, and featuring women, along with a larger booklet to present the research these two young women are capable of executing and musically embodying with flair, sensitivity and grace.

Aileen Dillane