

Laura Olson

*Candidate*

Music

*Department*

This thesis is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

*Approved by the Thesis Committee:*

Kristina Jacobsen, Chairperson

Dennis Davies-Wilson

Caleb Richardson

Sarah Townsend

# Building Community Through Learning Traditional Irish Music

by

Laura Olson

Bachelor of Science: Anthropology and Sociology

Bachelor of Science: Music

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Music

Music

The University of New Mexico

Albuquerque, New Mexico

May 2024

# **Building Community through Learning Traditional Irish Music**

**By**

**Laura Olson**

B.S., Anthropology/Sociology, Eastern Oregon University, 2020

B.S., Music, Eastern Oregon University, 2020

M.Mu., Music, University of New Mexico 2024

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis foregrounds traditional Irish music and the role it plays in building community. I demonstrate how the genre is defined and transmitted plays an important role in how inclusive the genre can be and where changes need to be made to be more welcoming to new individuals. Playing or singing in musical groups has been shown to combat loneliness but there has been little focus on specific music genres, especially those that are instrumental in nature. This thesis shows that instrumental music can be another tool to combat loneliness and promote overall health and wellbeing using the vehicle of traditional Irish music.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Sources and Evidence.....	2
Literature Review: History of Traditional Irish Music and its Instruments.....	3
Methodology.....	9
Significance.....	13
Organization of Chapters.....	16
<b>Chapter 1: What is Traditional Irish Music?.....</b>	<b>17</b>
Introduction.....	17
Definitions of Traditional Irish Music.....	19
History of Traditional Irish Music.....	20
What is ‘Traditional’?.....	21
Instrumentation and Venues Common to Traditional Irish Music.....	22
Interviews with TRAD Musicians: Tradition, Community and Social Roles.....	27
Conclusion.....	31
<b>Chapter 2: Transmission Methods Used in Teaching Traditional Irish Music.....</b>	<b>33</b>
Introduction.....	33
Oral Transmission and the Connections to Building Community.....	35
Transcription of Music.....	38
Recordings and How They Shaped How Traditional Irish Music is Transmitted.....	42
Media and the Spread of Traditional Irish Music Around the World.....	47
Conclusion.....	48
<b>Chapter 3: Community Building through Playing Traditional Irish Music.....</b>	<b>50</b>
Introduction.....	50
Social Cohesion, Inclusion and Exclusion.....	54
Tradition versus Purism.....	56
Auto-Ethnographic Experience of Joining an Albuquerque TRAD Group.....	57
Being a Part of Music Communities.....	61
Being a Part of Online Music Communities.....	62
Conclusion.....	65
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>66</b>
The Changes of Traditional Irish Music and How it Shaped Communities.....	67
Concluding Thoughts on the Role of Oral Transmission.....	68
Concluding Thoughts on the Role of Transcriptions.....	69
Concluding Thoughts on the Role of Recordings.....	70
Concluding Thoughts on the Role of Media.....	70
TRAD Groups Outside of Albuquerque.....	71
Final Thoughts.....	73
<b>Appendix 1- List of Tunes.....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>References Cited.....</b>	<b>76</b>

## Introduction

What makes a group of people a community? Perhaps the better question would be, what is community? If we define community as “a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings” (MacQueen 2001), how might music transmission help to create or buttress senses of community? This thesis focuses on how learning traditional Irish music builds communities specifically in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

When I hear the word tradition, my mind goes to holidays and how my family does the same thing year after year. When it comes to traditional Irish music, I think of *sean-nós* (old song) and how traditional Irish music used to be soloistic rather than performed by groups of musicians. As traditions change throughout the years, one wonders, what does tradition mean? “Invented tradition” is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past,” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). To this day, *sean-nós* is still practiced as it was hundreds of years ago but traditional Irish music itself has seen shifts of what music the genre entails. So, what is traditional Irish music? From my own perspective, traditional Irish music is *sean-nós* (old song), singing with no accompaniment and highly ornamented.<sup>1</sup> This music practice includes, “... love songs, laments, drinking songs, humorous songs, lullabies, religious songs, children’s songs, songs of emigration and political sentiment, and imported ballads,” (Henigan 1994). For others,

---

<sup>1</sup> Ornaments in music are added notes that are not needed to carry the line of the melody, but serve to provide added interest and variety, to give the performer an opportunity to add expressiveness to a piece.

traditional Irish music consists of a mixture of drinking songs and sea shanties<sup>2</sup> such as “The Irish Rover,” “Barley Mow,” and “Shoals of Herring,” just to name a few. Jigs<sup>3</sup> and reels<sup>4</sup> are also in the realm of traditional Irish music as instrumental dance music. The question then becomes, what is truly considered “traditional” Irish music and who decides?

## **Sources and Evidence**

The primary sources used for my thesis are interviews, my ethnographic fieldwork, and notes from my private lessons. Interviews are important as they provided me with insights on how musicians feel being a part of a group and whether they have strong connections to Ireland or not. My ethnographic fieldwork also showed how others view traditional Irish music and community and why it is still practiced today. Private lesson notes allowed me to see how I progressed in learning the style of music and why I may play a tune differently from another musician. These notes also allowed me to see what I have learned and what I already knew about traditional Irish music and the violin. Secondary sources include articles, books, blogs, government websites and social media. These sources provided background/historical information, and definitions of traditional Irish music as well as the role the internet has played in promoting traditional Irish music through transmission and community building.

---

<sup>2</sup> Shanties are a genre of traditional folk song that was once commonly sung as a work song to accompany physical labor aboard large sailing vessels (Winick 2021).

<sup>3</sup> A form of folk dance in 3/4 meter that includes the accompanying music. To learn more about different types of jigs and other traditional Irish dance music see Ng 2021.

<sup>4</sup> A form of folk dance in 2/4 or 4/4 meter that includes the accompanying music.

## Literature Review: History of Traditional Irish Music and its Instruments

Themes and foci within the studies of traditional Irish music include shifts in popularity, transmission methods used to teach traditional Irish music and definitions and stylistic characteristics of traditional Irish music. Musical fluency, heritage reclamation, and authenticity are important aspects when looking at music in the context of building communities and revitalizing traditional Irish music. The history of Irish music, its instruments, and singing traditions in a variety of world settings allows for me to understand how traditional Irish music became popular globally, and if the surges of popularity, not only in Ireland, but in the United States as well, helps promote musicians to keep the musical traditions alive (Williams 2010, Thorman 2023 and McCan 2001).

Three musicians gather in a pub located in Cork, Ireland to play traditional Irish music. Audience members crowd around and join in on familiar songs and socialize with the musicians. *Traditional Irish Music Here Tonight (2013)*, covers the musical lives of these three Cork musicians and defines what traditional Irish music is, based on the thoughts of the three musicians. There are a multitude of stylistic characteristics that help define the genre but many of these characteristics have seen shifts in meaning or have stopped being used in recent times. Having multiple insights into what is considered traditional Irish music (McCullough 1977, Súilleabháin 1981, Smith 2001, Spencer 2009) allows me to look into how different TRAD<sup>5</sup> groups form.

---

<sup>5</sup> TRAD stands for traditional and is the emic term used by Irish musicians to refer to themselves as well as the sessions they play in.

Along with music, language and dance has also played a role in community building in Ireland (Catherine Foley 2011). Traditional Irish dance contributes to the concepts of community and identity when individuals participate in *Céili*<sup>6</sup> events. With these traditional dance events, traditional Irish music is played which is where the Gaelic League<sup>7</sup> comes into play as the organization played a key role in revitalizing traditional Irish music and instilling national pride. Moving from a place you considered home can be challenging for anyone. For the Irish, moving meant the loss of music that was familiar, but this did not stop them from longing for traditions used in Irish music or practicing the genre itself in private, familial contexts. While traditional Irish music started off as a solo endeavor, the need and want for a community reminiscent of home in Ireland in a new land led to TRAD groups being formed. In *Who's Irish? Ethnic Identity and Recent Trends in Irish American History (2009)*, Deirdre Moloney talks about the sense of identity Irish-Americans felt due to immigration. Immigrating meant learning new music, language, social concepts, among a plethora of other things needed to adapt to a new land and people. Home and cultural traditions seem so far away, but it did not stop individuals from continuing to speak Gaelic and play traditional Irish music. How do these traditions differ now from when they were first practiced in Ireland? What traditions have stuck with musicians as they continue to play traditional Irish music and what exactly is traditional Irish music?

Traditions fade in and out causing an effect like the game of telephone. Similarly, 'culture' is constantly in flux. It starts off as one thing but turns into another by the end. While questioning what exactly is considered traditional Irish music, it also brings in the question of authenticity. "While groups with differing views about what is authentic may argue substantively about how traditional music is played and performed, these struggles are as much about who has

---

<sup>6</sup> A social event where there is Irish folk music, singing and traditional dancing such as Irish step.

<sup>7</sup> A social and cultural organization which promotes the Irish language in Ireland and worldwide.



the power to define or authenticate a particular cultural form as they are about music itself” (Fleming 2004). Irish musician Steve Coleman (2012) discusses the past and how it influences traditional Irish music and the commodification of it today. It also gives a definition of what traditional Irish music is and what it encompasses. This will be helpful for my research because it gives me an insight into how traditional music is influenced by events that occur, and why it has grown in popularity throughout the years. It will also help me refine my own definition of traditional Irish music which will be helpful when asking individuals about what they think it is, and why they play it.

*The New Grove Dictionary of Instruments* is dedicated to the history, functions and techniques of many instruments. It has detailed information about traditional Irish instruments like the fiddle, concertina and harp. Information about each instrument and its function are explained in detail and provides individuals an understanding of these instruments used in different cultures. Knowing the fundamentals of the instruments and what scales and pitches they can play is important because it determines what songs a group or a musician can play. Having different tunings can also show the evolution of instruments and why certain instruments are no longer played in groups today. The downside of instruments not being used today is that it blurs the line of what is considered traditional Irish music or not and shows how difficult it can be to define traditional Irish music especially when it seems to be constantly changing. “The Bodhrán: The Black Sheep in the Family of Traditional Irish Musical Instruments” looks specifically at the bodhran, but also mentions the roles of other instruments in traditional Irish music and their importance. It also looks at how traditional Irish music has gone through many transformations. It takes a look at what it used to be compared to what it is now in terms of defining it. “Musicians or purists who favour the older traditional instruments contend that the influx of

unskilled bodhrin players is detrimental to the music,”(Such 1985;16). Recognizing when instruments came into play helps identify what individuals consider traditional Irish music in terms of musical instruments used and it may also dictate who is allowed to play in TRAD sessions. “The Social Context of Irish Folk Instruments” focuses on the sociocultural and historical usage of instruments in traditional Irish music and how they have evolved over the years. Knowing not only the traditional instruments but how they have evolved over time is important to know, to better understand why certain groups use specific instruments and what music they play using those instruments for the purposes of feeling connected to a community.

*Music in Ireland* focuses on a multitude of subjects ranging from the history of Irish music to the instruments they used, and competitions held in Ireland today. “The uilleann pipes are native to Ireland and developed in the middle of the eighteenth century,” (Hast and Scott; 74). There are a multitude of instruments used today to play traditional Irish music in different settings. The most popular of these instruments include the fiddle, harp, and tin whistle. Traditional music was often taught and played in the home during social gatherings. This is where many musicians learned to play their instruments or sing traditional Irish music. Pubs became another popular place to go to learn traditional Irish music and to connect with the community. Where traditional Irish music is played is an important factor in how it is passed along and how it creates a community. In a home setting, individuals can learn traditional Irish music on a multitude of instruments from family members and friends. This is the main way that traditional Irish music was transmitted and popularized. As it grew in popularity with younger generations, they started to explore traditional Irish music that was played in pubs. From this location they learned new music styles and techniques within traditional Irish music and gained more knowledge in how to play their instrument. Schools and competitions also helped

individuals learn traditional Irish music and this is where a virtuosity aspect came into play. Many young musicians were often stressed by the competitions, which began to defeat the purpose and appeal of playing traditional Irish music. No longer was it about playing together and creating connections and a sense of community, it was about how well a musician could play their instrument of choice and how much they knew about traditional Irish music. Enjoyable aspects of the competitions were the impromptu TRAD sessions that occurred during breaks in the competition and at the very end. While musicians learned a multitude of things, competitions were not as enjoyable as just playing in a home or pub setting.

“Becoming Irish or Becoming Irish Music? Boundary Construction in Irish Music Communities” is an article that looks at traditional Irish music becoming increasingly popular with groups of people who may not even have an Irish background. “Today Irish music festivals, competitions and sessions are not only held everywhere in Ireland, but they can be found almost anywhere in the world,” (Rapuno 2001: 103). Drawing thousands of people from around the world, competitions increased the popularity of traditional Irish music especially with those who had little to no connection or ancestry to Ireland. The article focuses on a study done with three separate groups located in the Midwestern United States and how they felt a sense of community when playing with these musical groups. “Identity, Nationalism, and Irish Traditional Music in Chicago, 1867-1900” starts off with a story about an Irishman who moved to Chicago and played traditional Irish music to make his transition to the United States easier. The author notes that,

McLaughlin’s dance encapsulates two contending forces in the lives of Irish traditional musicians. One was the desire to transplant the art of traditional music brought from their home country through continued performance in Chicago. A second force was the reality of overwhelming social change (Nicholsen 2009; 111).

Looking at why musicians still continue to play traditional Irish music is important to know because it shows how strong music is when it comes to providing a sense of identity and

community. “The Irish Céilí: A Site for Constructing, Experiencing, and Negotiating a Sense of Community and Identity” focuses on traditional Irish dance, focuses on concepts of the sense of community and identity individuals experience when participating in Ceili events. The article goes into detail about the concept of community and parallels can be drawn between participating in traditional Irish music groups and traditional Irish dancing groups. The Ceili has played an important role in Ireland. In order for Ceili events to work, musicians and dancers must communicate and listen to one another. Different dances are based on the music being played by musicians. While most traditional Irish music is in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time<sup>8</sup> and lively for dancers, there are songs in different time signatures and require different dancing techniques as well as different musical techniques used by musicians. The article also focuses on the Gaelic League, which has played a key role in revitalizing traditional Irish music and instilling national pride.

“All That Is Not Given Is Lost: Irish Traditional Music, Copyright, and Common Property” looks at the commodification of traditional Irish music and the popularity of it. It also looks at how the commodification of the music has changed the social contexts. The author makes a statement about how playing traditional Irish music is a form of gift giving. This article shows how group dynamics can change based on whether individuals are playing for commodification, enjoyment, or building an identity and community.

“Transatlantic Migrations of Irish Music in the Early Recording Age” focuses on traditional Irish music being recorded on records and being sent back to Ireland from America. The author looks at how traditional Irish music became a cross-Atlantic phenomenon with the

---

<sup>8</sup>  $\frac{3}{4}$  time means that there are three beats per measure and the quarter note has a value of one beat.

beginning of the recording age. He also demonstrates how musicians both in the diaspora<sup>9</sup> and in the geographic center of the tradition have engaged in debates on ideas of tradition and authenticity. Irish traditional music in a modern world looks at how traditional music has changed in modern society. It looks at how traditional music means something different to every person who plays it whether they are of Irish descent or not and the reasons why they decided to play this specific genre of music. Like all human expression, the human want and need to preserve history, in this case, traditional Irish music can change in respect to the conditions of the people who play traditional Irish music, discuss it, and transmit it to the next generation in order to reflect those conditions and that way of life (Smith 2001; 111). Having knowledge of how traditional Irish music is changing, especially in modern society will help me better understand why it is changing and how it impacts people differently based on what they grew up listening to.

## **Methodology**

My positionality and interest in the topic of traditional Irish music stems from my great-grandparents emigrating from Ireland as well as being able to present a conference paper in my undergraduate studies at the American Conference of Irish Studies focusing on using music to revitalize language in Ireland. In addition, I am a singer and music practitioner, interested in and passionate about traditional Irish music, more broadly. My first instrument was the violin and my first encounter with Irish music was playing the Irish Washerwoman Jig in my middle school orchestra which sparked my initial interest with the genre.

---

<sup>9</sup> Drawing on Sheffler (2023), I define diaspora as groups of people with the same origin who were voluntarily or forced to move from one place to another but continued to keep their identity and contacts with their birthplace (Sheffer 2023). See Butler 2001 and Gow 2021 for more discussion on diasporas.

Using musical participant-observation and interviews, starting June 2023 I conducted two months of ethnographic fieldwork in Albuquerque, New Mexico for seven hours each week. I documented my observations and interviews by taking handwritten notes<sup>10</sup> as recording sessions were not allowed by the TRAD groups. During this time, I took violin lessons in TRAD music to better understand the genre personally and focus on the social aspect of playing music in the TRAD sessions. Lessons provided me with a better understanding of the music practices used in Albuquerque and the motivations for individuals to learn and teach traditional Irish music in the U.S. Lessons also allowed me to develop relationships with the more experienced TRAD musicians who hold sessions in their homes. During my previous project with TRAD members in Albuquerque I had started to develop relationships with my interlocutors and continued building those relationships through participant-observation of TRAD sessions. On Thursday nights I attended the TRAD sessions that occur at Hops Brewery which typically has five to seven musicians. As the summer progressed, the email listserv for Irish music I signed up for, sent me more events that I could play a part in. When I was not observing or participating in TRAD sessions in Albuquerque, I was conducting interviews<sup>11</sup> with musicians in the area to gather information on why they play traditional Irish music and what it means to them to be a part of the Irish music community. As I am familiar with a handful of the musicians who play traditional Irish music, I asked them if they were interested in being interviewed. They were given a printed copy of my questions for instances where they preferred to physically write down their answers than speak to me.

Interview questions included:

---

<sup>10</sup> By taking handwritten notes, the direct quotes provided in this thesis are from memories recorded in my field notes rather than a word-for-word transcription from a recording.

<sup>11</sup> I formally interviewed 10 individuals. Not all answers pertained to the questions I asked which is why they are left out of the data provided.

What is traditional Irish music to you?

What do I need to know to participate in a TRAD session? For example, what are things I shouldn't do in a TRAD session?

What makes a TRAD session "good" versus "great" for you?

Why is it important to learn traditional Irish music?

How did you learn of the TRAD session occurring at this location?

How long have you participated in the TRAD session?

How do you define community, and what does it feel like?

Before I fully delved into playing TRAD sessions, I researched the history of traditional Irish music, so I had background information when I conducted interviews. Having background knowledge of the music helped with my ability to join groups during their TRAD sessions and allowed me to connect with individuals. Using the methods above gave me valuable information about traditional Irish music. I also drew on the ethnographic skillsets gained from a project I had completed on TRAD music performed in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Observation helped me see how the members of the group interacted with one another and if there were smaller cliques within the group. With groups containing individuals of varying ages, it was interesting to observe how individuals of different ages interacted. Gender nor race played a role in how group members interacted with one another. Observation also helped me see how different levels of musicians interact with each other and how comfortable players feel while playing in the group, where they may feel out of their element, either socially or musically.

I observed multiple TRAD sessions throughout the two months as well as multiple individuals who participated in the sessions.

Musical participant-observation helped me connect with the group and gain their trust so that they feel comfortable enough to be interviewed. It also helped me understand the sense of community that they feel while playing in the group and the relationships they build with others during the sessions. In *Essential Ethnographic Methods*, Schensul and LeCompte (2013) state that participant-observation “is central to identifying and building relationships important to the future of the research endeavor and it gives the researcher an intuitive as well as an intellectual grasp of the way things are organized and prioritized, how people relate to one another, and the ways social and physical boundaries are defined” (83).

In my case, participant-observation gave me a better understanding of the music the group plays, and what their connection to it is as well. Participant-observation also helped me connect with individuals in the group. I was able to feel the sense of community the TRAD members felt by participating in the TRAD sessions. “Participant observation provides the researcher with cultural experiences that can be discussed with key informants or participants in the study site and treated as data, and it can help legitimize the presence of the researcher in the community” (Shensul and LeCompte 2013: 83-84).

Researching the history of traditional Irish music helped me have a better understanding of the music and why the genre is still popular today both within and outside of Ireland. I was able to better connect with individuals from TRAD groups and gather more information from



them that doesn't revolve around "the basics."<sup>12</sup> Researching beforehand helped me conduct observations, and musical participant-observation as well as interviews I used to gather research for my thesis.

"Ethnography is what you do when you try to understand people by allowing their lives to mold your own as fully and genuinely as possible" (Desmond 2016). Looking at how people interact with the music and with one another in a musical setting is a significant topic because it shows how social humans are and how important connection is in our society and around the world. It also demonstrates how we can communicate and relate to people of different backgrounds, cultures, and histories even if we don't necessarily speak the same language. Anybody can join in, no matter the level of experience they have, making it easier for people of all musical skill levels to join and learn about music and how it fits with culture. Not only can we connect with multitudes of people around the world, but we can also learn about different cultures and history through music. This is not only a learning opportunity for myself but a learning opportunity for those in the community, and it is another way to connect people within the community who share similar interests that they may not be aware of yet. People may gain a better understanding of those around them, and themselves, regarding their cultural backgrounds and history through a creative outlet.

## **Significance**

The significance of doing research specifically on community building through learning traditional Irish music provides ways in which individuals can help revitalize musical practices.

---

<sup>12</sup> I view "the basics" as musical knowledge that beginners learn when they are first introduced to a new topic. In this case "the basics" refers to the instruments used in traditional Irish music, as well as stylistic elements used in the genre.

This can help preserve cultural diversity and build traditional Irish community throughout Ireland and the rest of the world. The importance of traditional Irish music is to preserve heritage, culture, and traditions while building musical communities. “Intangible cultural heritage refers to the practices, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities and groups recognise as part of their cultural heritage. It is passed from generation to generation...” (ireland.ie).

While change is inevitable, traditions, culture, and heritage provide us with human connections. As many have learned from the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in loneliness which is hypothesized to lead to physical and mental health detriments (Ernst et al. 2022). Not much research has been done on how playing music can address loneliness, but according to Kiernan and Davidson (2022) “Music engagement can strengthen social connections and reduce loneliness in some contexts...” (1). In this thesis I will explore the benefits of playing traditional Irish music in an in-person group setting as well as some of the issues that may arise in TRAD communities both in-person and online.

Playing music with a group who share similar interests allows for individuals to have a creative outlet that connects them to their cultural heritage, as well as other individuals, and has the potential benefit to decrease loneliness in populations. While traditional Irish music is the genre I focus on for this thesis, my findings can transfer to other genres of music that fit an individual’s musical tastes.

As I was scrolling through Facebook, I came across an ad that piqued my interest.” Free Violin Lessons” was bolded in all caps. I read the caption and found that the teacher was holding lessons online and was teaching the tune “Mrs. Macleod’s Reel.” This was an opportunity for me

to become an active participant in a community that focused on my interest in traditional Irish music. While advertised towards beginner players, I had never taken violin lessons and thought that it wouldn't hurt to brush up on my skills. I participated in school orchestras and was self-taught the violin but did not have the opportunity to take lessons until I began my fieldwork in June 2023. The first day of lessons gathered ninety-five participants. We learned how to hold the instrument and the bow, as well as the names of the strings. While I found this session to be review and boring, I did learn some things such as rosinning<sup>13</sup> the bow too much is just as bad as not rosinning it enough. Either scenario will produce an unpleasant creaking sound and it will not resonate. The next day's lesson was dedicated to learning the A major scale. With a half hour left of a two-hour lesson, I was losing patience by repeatedly playing the notes that were already familiar to my ears and my fingers. I noticed that less people were logged on to this lesson as well.

The third and final day of the lessons was learning the reel. Mrs. Macleod's Reel can be played in any key, but it is typically played in the A major scale we had learned the previous day. While the players who had stuck it out for the three days were at varying levels of proficiency, it amazed me how we were already playing together as a community. We may not have been able to hear each other, but as I watched, everyone was bowing at the same time and in the same direction—which is difficult to do in sync, even when you can hear your fellow musicians. This is especially remarkable for a beginner-level group who had only been playing together for three days. The repetition of the lessons was the most effective thing despite how redundant it felt to me. Having the repetition allowed players to make mistakes and to fix those mistakes in order to become better players. After these lessons, I decided it was time for me to start playing with a

---

<sup>13</sup> Rosin is a resin from trees used to help your bow grab the instrument strings and produce sounds through friction.

TRAD group located in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The beginner TRAD group I decided to play in was found through a Facebook post made by the session leader of the Thursday night Hops Brewery TRAD group.

Facebook posts made by the group invite anyone to join them on Thursday nights at Hops Brewery, and each week contains a new set of individuals playing together. They also promote other TRAD groups individuals can play with, a radio station people can listen to as well as musicians coming through Albuquerque and surrounding areas that focus on TRAD music. These posts online have helped build a connection between the different TRAD communities in order to promote the continued playing of traditional Irish music as well as promote community building. Travelers from other states such as Arizona, Texas, and Missouri come to play in these weekly TRAD sessions. The original members are welcoming and grateful that people participate in their group when travelers are passing through Albuquerque.

## **Organization of Chapters**

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The introduction provides general information regarding traditional Irish music and its history, a definition of community, the methods and sources used to gather information, and the significance of the thesis topic. Chapter one discusses different definitions of traditional Irish music and argues that there should be a clearer definition of the genre and how it would make the music more inclusive. Chapter two examines different transmission methods and finds that oral transmission is the best method to build community whereas the other methods are more suitable for preserving and teaching traditional Irish music. Chapter three analyzes different communities, the benefits and disadvantages of them, and how the genre can be both inclusionary and exclusionary. The conclusion provides an overview of the

main arguments formed in the thesis and concludes that traditional Irish music does in fact help build community and combat loneliness while preserving, revitalizing, and popularizing the genre.

## **Chapter 1: What is Traditional Irish Music?**

### **Introduction**

My first experience with traditional Irish music was in middle school. I was playing the “Irish Washerwoman’s Jig” on my violin. I would practice the tune for hours as it was more fun to play, in my opinion, than “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.” After learning “Irish Washerwoman’s Jig,” I downloaded other reels and jigs onto my Ipod such as “Cooley’s Reel” and “Swallowtail Jig.” While I had listened to the music for years my deep interest in the genre did not start until my undergraduate professor played *sean-nós*.<sup>14</sup> We were driving to Portland, Oregon for an Irish studies conference and he had pulled out a CD of *sean-nós* music. I don’t remember the name of the CD or who was singing but my spotify playlist is now full of *sean-nós* songs such as “An tIolrach Mór” and “a bhuachaillín mhúinte.” His wife joked about how he must have bored me with the choice in music, but I had become engrossed by the simplistic melodies, ornamentations and the Gaelic I could not understand. *Sean-nós* was made for listening while jigs and reels were made for dancing. Both styles were popular in Ireland and were played or sung based on the occasion and location. These styles also fell into the realm of being considered traditional Irish music but with differing opinions on what the genre details, left

---

<sup>14</sup> *Sean nós* is the Irish word for old style and is sung a capella in Gaelic.

me to question what traditional Irish music was. Was it the jigs and reels I was used to hearing, the *sean-nós* I was newly introduced to, or a combination of both?

In this chapter I discuss the complexities of defining traditional Irish music and how it can affect community building due to the misunderstandings of what the genre details. I argue that a clearer definition should be provided in order to build stronger and more cohesive communities. Ireland's National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2023) gives the most extensive list of what falls under traditional Irish music and while their definition helps define the instrumental dance music that is commonly played, it neglects the singing traditions of Ireland. Mulraney 2019 and Éirann 2007 discuss the difficulty that lies in defining the genre, as people have different experiences with the music and when it started. I draw on these authors to give readers a broad range of definitions and historical context to show why it has been difficult to define. These authors have also helped shape my view of what traditional Irish music is, but like the others, my idea of traditional Irish music differs from the next person. It is not up to me in this thesis to provide a definition of what traditional Irish music is that will be used by TRAD communities. I will leave this discussion with readers to decide with their TRAD community how they should define the genre based on the information I provide about the local groups and the definitions I have found through research and interviews.<sup>15</sup> Through researching and conducting interviews with primary and secondary sources, I provide definitions of traditional Irish music used by the TRAD community as well as the instruments used. Discussion of

---

<sup>15</sup> Musicians I interviewed remain anonymous to protect their identities.

instruments allows readers to understand what musicians participate in TRAD groups and the common instruments used to play the music.<sup>16</sup>

## Definitions of Traditional Irish Music

Definitions of traditional Irish music vary between scholarship and daily lived experience of the musicians I worked with. In my interview process, there was often very little agreement on definitions of this term. I asked each individual what traditional Irish music was to them along with consulting online sources. My own view on the discussion is that traditional Irish music is *sean-nós* singing. The term stands for old song/style, and it is believed to have been sung since the arrival of the Celts in Ireland around 500 BCE. It was referred to as just singing until the Gaelic League coined the term *sean-nós* in 1940. While I find *sean-nós* to be an important aspect of what I consider to be traditional Irish music, this chapter will mainly focus on instrumental music. Ireland's National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage defines traditional Irish music as,

The combination of tunes and tune type generally referred to as traditional Irish music for instrumental performance/practice (and as practiced by lilters<sup>17</sup> and whistlers) involves the following: airs, slow airs, harp music, and all tunes and melodies that have a metre and a regular pulse – including clan marches, reels, double/slip/single jigs, hornpipes, set and barn dances, flings, polkas and other tune types such as slides, schottishes and mazurkas (Ireland's National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage 2023).

From this definition alone, one can see all the different facets that can be included in the definition. This can be a good starting point for readers to determine whether or not these styles should be included in the definition of traditional Irish music. Apart from *sean-nós*, all of the

---

<sup>16</sup> This chapter will not focus on singing traditions as the TRAD groups in Albuquerque focus on instrumental music.

<sup>17</sup> A lilter is a singer who performs traditional repertoire from Gaelic speaking areas of Ireland, Scotland, and Isle of Man. It is similar to scat singing in which vocables are sung.

other music examples listed are community-based practices including playing or singing together, dancing, and talking in between sets of songs.

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is the primary Irish organization dedicated to the promotion of the music, song, dance and the language of Ireland who states,

It can be tricky to pin down an absolute definition for traditional Irish music. Like any art form, it will mean different things to different people. For some, it's a relaxing set of jigs or reels at the end of a long day. For another, it's the background rhythm behind a set or céilí dance. Another person might remember a sean-nós song sung by his grandmother. For others, unfortunately, it's that annoying group of musicians in the corner distracting from the match on the telly! (Éirann 2007).

This quote shows the complexity of defining traditional Irish music and how it can differ from person to person. During the interview process, some of these ideas played into the definitions of traditional Irish music that musicians provided me. This quote shows that it is also hard to determine whether a tune should be considered “traditional” or “authentic” and brings in the question of who gets to decide.

## **History of Traditional Irish Music**

Although it is hard to define “traditional” Irish music, many believe that it started with oral traditions over 2,000 years ago (Mulraney 2019). For traditional music of Ireland to be what it is today, the rural peasantry in Ireland had to pass along their creations orally through playing or singing the tune throughout generations to keep the traditions alive (Such 1985:9). Historically songs that were passed down orally, were being written down by British composers in the 18th century. While music had been written down on paper in the 15th and 16th centuries by places such as England, Austria and Germany, Ireland did not start writing their music down until the 18th century, as the Great Famine required them to adapt new ways of carrying on their



traditions. Traditional Irish music also went through waves of popularity and saw a decline until 1920, when it started to gain popularity in the United States especially in cities such as Chicago and New York. With this rise in popularity came the first recorded Irish song “Tarbolton.” This song was recorded in the United States and was then sent back to Ireland. Since then, Ireland has funded schools and competitions to help revitalize “traditional” Irish music. These events see thousands of individuals from around the world each year and have created professionalism within the genre. What was once an activity to play music in a group for enjoyment became a way to show the musical abilities one possessed over other musicians.

## **What is ‘Traditional’?**

Tradition does not exist without a context (Whisnant 1983, Young 1990, Jacobsen 2017, Nicholson 2008). Defining what “traditional” means is not up to any one person. It is often a community decision. Traditions have been something that have been invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Whisnant 1983). The term “traditional” can be problematic as it can be weaponized and used strategically to control different groups of people. Human Rights Watch has noted: “In countries around the world, Human Rights Watch has documented how discriminatory elements of traditions and customs have impeded, rather than enhanced, people’s social, political, civil, cultural, and economic rights” (Reid 2023). In the context of this thesis, traditional will refer to a genre of music that does not have a finite definition.<sup>18</sup>

The way I use the term traditional in this thesis refers to music that is associated with an earlier way of playing Irish music, including common instruments used such as the fiddle and tin

---

<sup>18</sup> Irish musician Tomas O Canainn among others state that their tradition is a conservative one. A performer’s definition relies heavily on the responsibility to the past and situates their performance within other musicians’ renditions of the music (O Cannain 1978:41).

whistle, language used such as English or Gaelic, and stylistic choices used to give the music its unique sound including embellishments<sup>19</sup> such as slides<sup>20</sup> and trills.<sup>21</sup> Using the term traditional will also help to narrow the genre of music that is being discussed in the thesis. If one were to simply state that they play Irish music, the definition would expand even further and include modern artists such as Sinead O’Conner, Clannad, and Enya. While important artists, their music falls under the realm of pop/folk and does not pertain to the music that one would play in an Irish TRAD group. The distinction between genres such as Irish traditional and pop lies in the use of instruments, stylistic techniques, the story or meaning of the song, and pop/folk music is more likely to be sung than just instrumental music. Traditional Irish music can contain themes of love, love loss, and home while pop/folk music can be more politically charged such as “F\*ck the Queen” by Grace and “Come out Ye Black and Tans” by The Davitts. This does not mean that either genre cannot have similar themes, but they are more likely to lean towards different ones. Both can also build community, but traditional Irish music was built on the tenet of spending time together and creating music in homes or pubs. The building of community is evident in the TRAD groups located in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

## **Instrumentation and Venues Common to Traditional Irish Music**

Most people define traditional Irish music to be a mix of instrumental and vocal music. Vocal traditional music includes *sean-nós* singing, which is sung in Gaelic and typically contains ornamentations as well as songs sung in English. Despite the focus on instrumental music for the

---

<sup>19</sup> Notes used to ‘decorate’ a melody but are not needed to complete the melody.

<sup>20</sup> Slides are embellishments where a player starts at a lower pitch and slides their finger towards the note that is marked on the music.

<sup>21</sup> A trill is an embellishment where a musician rapidly switches between two notes repeatedly.

TRAD groups located in Albuquerque, it is important to note the definition of traditional singing from Ireland's National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2023) to provide a reader with all the definitions related to traditional Irish music:

Traditional singing in English, and *amhránaíocht ar an sean-nós*, had their origins in solo unaccompanied singing: the singer sang a story, communicating with the listeners through their unique interpretation of both the melody and the lyrics. The singer and his/her audience set great store on feeling and expression, demonstrated by the skillful use of ornamentation (Ireland's National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage 2023).

Knowing the names and functions of different instruments used in traditional Irish music allows us to better understand the multiple definitions provided in the next section by online resources and interviewees. While singing is considered one of the older music traditions in Ireland, instruments found a space to shine as well. It can be argued that, today, there are more instrumentalists than there are singers of *sean-nós*. Instruments considered traditional in the genre include the fiddle, uilleann pipes, tin whistle, concertina, bodhrán, and harp.

The instruments below are the most common instruments used in traditional Irish music and are played throughout the world in varying TRAD groups. In the context of the TRAD groups in Albuquerque, I observed that the fiddle, tin whistle, and bodhrán were the common instruments used. "Tunes are melody and we play them for the most part on fiddles, flutes, whistles, accordions, banjos, concertinas, uilleann pipes, etc." (Session Manners 2023). These instruments are discussed below to provide the reader with an understanding of how tunes are played in Albuquerque TRAD groups.

The fiddle, also known as a violin, is the most popular instrument in TRAD groups and I have yet to encounter a session where there are no violins. It is played during music sessions,

dances, performances, competitions and is one of the more popular instruments individuals will learn to play. The body is usually made from spruce or maple wood and the strings are made from gut, metal, or nylon. The bows are made of wood and horsehair or synthetic hair. In Ireland, most learn to play the fiddle by watching family members or by picking up tunes and teaching themselves how to play. How an instrumentalist will play the fiddle may also depend on where they are regionally in Ireland, as each region has a distinct sound and style of playing. The fiddle became a popular instrument used for dancing due to the fact that it can play all semitones and even some microtones over a four-octave range. This makes it one of the most diverse instruments in terms of how many notes and octaves it can play. It can also be used as a drone so other instruments can play the melody above it (Sadie 1997: 765-804).

The tin whistle is another popular instrument in Ireland and is still used for competitions. This instrument is usually given to children as it is considered quite simple to play. It was originally made from willow but is now made of metal and contains only six holes. The tin whistle is believed to have originated in the twelfth century, but it is mentioned in the Brehon Laws which date back to the third century. This instrument is similar to the recorder and the Native American flute (Anraí 2019). The tin whistle can be played solo, or it can be accompanied by other instruments like the bodhrán.

The bodhrán is a style of drum that is not used as often as other instruments. It is made of goatskin stretched over a wooden body. The instrument is to be played quietly and outline the form of a song. Due to the reason of having to play quietly in the background, many beginners are discouraged from playing with other instrumentalists, especially those who are more experienced session musicians. There are also many factors to consider while playing the bodhrán like using the tipper (drum stick equivalent), hitting the skin and the rim of the drum,

how the drum is held, and how much pressure you put on the skin. All of these playing techniques will give a different sound from the bodhrán based on the style of music you are playing (Such 1985: 15).

Another instrument that will play rhythmically within sessions is the concertina. Unlike the bodhrán, the concertina can also play melodic lines alongside keeping a rhythm. The concertina is a free reed instrument which means that the reed vibrates against the air to create a sound. The Anglo concertina is most commonly used in Ireland as one button can play two notes unlike the concertina we would find in the United States. The English concertina played in the United States differs from the Anglo concertina by the notes that are played and what key the instrument plays in. The English concertina plays the same notes whether you are pushing or pulling and is typically played in the key of C. It is similar to the piano accordion. The Anglo concertina can play separate notes based on the pushing or pulling of the instrument and will typically be played in the keys of C or G but has the range to play in A, D and so forth. This also gives the instrument a larger chromatic range (McNeela 2022). Both the English and Anglo concertina have been used to play traditional Irish music, but you are more likely to see and hear the Anglo concertina. It is commonly used in parlors or in home settings. It is on the quieter side of instruments and is best for a small audience. To keep the concertina dry, they are often located next to a fireplace and a family member will pull it down to play to calm children or to have a relaxing evening with a few guests (Williams 2010: 1). While the concertina is used for quiet family nights, the uilleann pipes are used to create a dance atmosphere for those who like a night out on the town.

The uilleann pipes are associated with traditional Irish music and are used for many dances. They are made out of a leather bag and have a double-reed. They are similar to the

Scottish bagpipes but the uilleann pipes have a two-octave range, have a feature known as regulators, have a softer and more harmonic sound, the sound comes from the bellows and were used for religious and small party occasions. The Scottish bagpipes only have a one-octave range, are louder, sound comes from the musician blowing into the instrument and were used for different occasions such as war and honoring royalty. (Steen 2023). Occasions for playing the instruments today differ from those of the past and the instruments are typically played to keep the music and instruments thriving. The feature of regulators on the uilleann pipes are rows of stopped, keyed pipes that are played with the heel and wrist of the right hand. They are used to sustain rhythmic harmonic accompaniment underneath the melody being played by the chanter (the body of the instrument). Many techniques can be utilized to provide different sounds and rhythms throughout a song being played (Williams 2010: 3).

The harp has been documented since the fifteenth century. Along with it being a musical instrument, it is also the national symbol of Ireland. Strings can be made from steel, brass, nylon, or gut while the body is made from wood. There are anywhere from 24-30 strings connected to a flat soundboard and a rounded-back resonator. The harp is strung to the left of the neck, and it is tuned from the right of the neck which is rare when stringing and tuning instruments. Levers were added later to shorten the strings by a semitone to make it easier for beginners to learn. The technique for plucking the strings involved having long, jagged fingernails to get a specific tone. This technique died out in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when it started to become popular to play with the pads of your fingers in England. The left hand plays the melody while the right hand plays the bass notes for a song. Played alongside the harp in many groups is the tin whistle (Sadie 1997: 138-139).

Spaces also determine whether a session is considered traditional. Traditional Irish music was originally sung and played in homes before shifting to pubs. Irish concertina player Mary MacNamara is a musician who experienced the shift in venues in Ireland. While these shifts provide opportunities for musicians to build larger communities with individuals outside of their family and friend groups, it changed how traditional Irish music was learned, and how it was defined. Mary MacNamara remembers going to the houses of musicians as a little girl with her father and learning traditional music from elders. “Although she learned music from her father... Mary remembers these local house parties as the places she really absorbed the musical tradition,” (Hast and Scott 2004: 44). In Albuquerque, house parties do occur but are a rarity compared to venues such as a pub or community center. The playing venues are more diverse than what you would find in Ireland, but they have the same goal of fostering community and inviting people to join in playing the music.

### **Interviews with TRAD Musicians: Tradition, Community and Social Roles**

Many groups with an interest in Irish culture and those who have Irish ancestry in the United States started TRAD groups to help keep the musical traditions alive and connect to one another as well as connect to Ireland. In Albuquerque, where I carried out my ethnographic fieldwork for two months, I interacted with two out of the three known TRAD sessions that happen around Albuquerque. The first TRAD session I interacted with plays at Hops Brewery every Thursday from 6:00-9:00 pm. The second group I interacted with plays every Tuesday at the Manzano Multigenerational Cultural Center from 6:30-8:30 pm. The third group plays on Wednesday nights at the Singing Arrow Community Center.<sup>22</sup> The groups I refer to do not have

---

<sup>22</sup> My fieldwork had concluded at the time I had learned about the Singing Arrow TRAD sessions and so they are not included in my findings.

specific names associated with them and individuals distinguish them by calling one group the “beginner TRAD” session<sup>23</sup> and the others are referred to by the establishments in which they play such as the Hops Brewery TRAD session and The Singing Arrow TRAD session. These groups do not perform in any other capacity than that of having a TRAD session. The goal is not to perform but to play music with a group of people who enjoy the genre. The number of musicians who come to TRAD sessions depends on the week but typically ranged from four players to fifteen when I attended. Only one musician I met from all the groups I interacted with has cultural ties to Ireland. He moved to New Mexico and had the goal to increase participation in the TRAD sessions occurring in Albuquerque. The other musicians within the session groups in Albuquerque have an interest in playing the music to be a part of a community and to pass on the music, stories, and traditions that come along with playing traditional Irish music. The TRAD group located in Albuquerque, typically plays instrumental dance music such as the “Inisheer Waltz,” “Cooley’s Reel,” and “Irish Washerwoman.” On occasion, groups will sing sea shanties such as “Bully in the Alley” but the setlist each week with the beginner TRAD session does not have much variation. Each member of the group can recommend songs and the more advanced musicians have a larger repertoire than those who are new to the scene. Between each song, members stop to chat about life and the game playing on the flatscreen TV, drink a beer, eat food, and joke around with one another as if it had been ages since they had seen each other despite the weekly occurrence of the group playing.

In Albuquerque, TRAD groups play at a pub, two different community centers, and smaller groups will host home sessions, park sessions, or play at smaller restaurants. Home sessions that occur between close groups of individuals are not as popular as they once were and

---

<sup>23</sup> The beginner TRAD sessions occurred on Tuesday nights.



tend to have a different group dynamic and goal than sessions that occur in pubs, which have become the more common norm. With the diversity of spaces who host TRAD sessions comes diverse musicians gathering together with goals to promote traditional Irish music, pass on their knowledge to new musicians, and to provide a welcoming community. These goals can be seen in the responses provided by the interviews I conducted.

To explore the way traditional Irish music is defined and how it helps to build community, I attended Tuesday and Thursday TRAD sessions during the months of June and July. With my interlocutors, discussion pivoted around what traditional Irish music is and why it is important for the members who play the music. Knowing what songs fit into the genre of traditional Irish music can also help determine your role in the group. The more tunes you know, the more you get to play and have a higher social standing than someone who is just learning. The more tunes you know within the genre also marks one individual as the session leader, who operates how the group functions. As was described in the *Session Manners* book, “There’s usually a session leader who tries to keep the session lively and musically strong, while hopefully creating a welcoming, good vibe environment,” (Session Manners 2023).

I walked into Hops Brewery in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and found the closest table sitting next to the musicians of the TRAD group who play Thursday nights. The night I went had six players: two violinists, two flutists, one accordion player, and one guitarist. While many were seated at tables around the musicians, there was little audience participation occurring. Jokes between the musicians were shared, pints of beer were drunk, and tunes continued to be called out by musicians of the TRAD session. Asking one member what they thought traditional Irish music was, led to an hour-long conversation about different aspects of the music and what the

purpose of playing the music was. “Traditional Irish music is playing old Irish tunes on instruments and enjoying the company that comes along with playing these older tunes” (Claire<sup>24</sup>, personal correspondence 2023). With the observation of telling jokes and interacting with one another like old friends, the community that was built by these musicians was evident and the joy and skill of playing together showed.

Jacob, another musician in the group, agreed to share his knowledge about traditional Irish music with me and we met at a coffee shop. Despite me not knowing what he looked like, he was recognizable by his tweed cap and holding a book about the Irish tin whistle when he walked through the doors. His view of the music was that “Traditional Irish music is jigs and reels that we play together” (Jacob<sup>25</sup>, personal correspondence 2023). While jigs and reels were considered old Irish tunes by Claire, Jacob was more specific about the style of music than she was. The theme of playing together, however, showed up again.

Mackenzie was part of another TRAD group, and we had met when going to a beginner TRAD session in Albuquerque. He was newer to the group but already had an idea about what the music was to him. “Traditional Irish music, I mainly think of drinking songs, shanties, or fiddle music” (Mackenzie<sup>26</sup>, personal correspondence 2023). In Mackenzie’s response, we also get more specific styles of old Irish tunes, two of which include singing, and one that includes the use of violins, which are one of the most popular instruments to play in Albuquerque TRAD sessions based on my observations. While the theme of playing together may not be as evident in

---

<sup>24</sup> Claire is a pseudonym to protect the identity of the musician.

<sup>25</sup> Jacob is a pseudonym.

<sup>26</sup> Mackenzie is a pseudonym.

Mackenzie's answer, one can draw conclusions that it is more fun to sing shanties and drinking songs when part of a group rather than alone.

When I asked my interlocutors what traditional Irish music was to them, everyone had a slightly different definition. It is important to note this, as it gives a perspective of just how difficult it is to accurately define traditional Irish music. Jacob's response alludes to the idea that the music is instrumental but could include any tunes deemed "old" by the individual. Claire's answer relates to the definitions I have gone over from online sources and fits in with the more popular definition of traditional Irish music of jigs and reels. Mackenzie's idea of traditional Irish music includes different styles within the genre and the only definition that includes vocal music outside of the fiddle music mentioned. Each definition is nuanced and explains the difficulties in defining traditional Irish music and what it can encompass.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed definitions of traditional Irish music, common instruments used to play the genre, venues where traditional Irish music is played and heard, how the genre connects to aspects of community building, and I analyze interviews of TRAD musicians to provide readers a starting point in discussing how traditional Irish music should be defined to make the genre less confusing to beginning musicians. The TRAD groups I have interacted with in Albuquerque are friendly and welcoming. They achieve one of their goals by aiding in the development of the TRAD community. Being a part of a community helps individuals to feel less lonely and feel more connected in areas that are unfamiliar. According to Kiernan and Davidson (2022) "Music engagement can strengthen social connections and reduce loneliness in some contexts"(1). While there are struggles with building a community, the TRAD groups in

Albuquerque have formed strong connections with group members that have them returning week after week to play traditional Irish music together. From my own personal experience, I felt that I was welcomed into the TRAD community with respect and understanding as I learned the tunes but felt disconnected from the group as my ideas of traditional Irish music slightly differed from the ideas of other musicians in the group leaving me wondering what tunes were acceptable or well-known to other group members to play or potentially sing.

How the genre is defined leads to the discussion of how it was transmitted and why it became popular not only in Ireland but around the world, specifically in the United States. My next chapter focuses on transmission methods used to show readers how traditional Irish moved around the world, became popular, and how multiple communities started forming with surges of popularity.

## Chapter 2: Transmission Methods Used in Teaching Traditional Irish Music

### Introduction

I first learned traditional Irish music using transcriptions and found it challenging to adapt to learning through oral transmission and recordings. These transmission methods, however, were the ones that helped improve my instrument playing within the group. I had to become a better listener before I became a better player. With my background in classical violin and piano, tearing my eyes away from the sheet music written in front of me was not easy. I had learned to trust what I saw rather than what I heard. I listened to recordings and played along with them, noticing I did not play like the Irish musicians I was listening to. This also occurred when playing with the beginner TRAD group in Albuquerque for the first time. I had practiced the music but the musicians were playing differently than what was written down. I stopped playing and listened to the differences, hoping I would pick them up in the next round. If I was going to connect to the music and the musicians playing it, I had to learn to trust my ear.

Building on my own experiences of learning to trust my ear, this chapter discusses transmission methods used to teach traditional Irish music in order to keep tradition and community building alive. I argue that oral transmission is the most beneficial way of building in-person communities through learning music. Through my own research I see transcriptions, recordings, and the media as transmission methods that are an important factor in popularizing traditional Irish music but still provide ways to help build community not only in Ireland but throughout the world. Traditional Irish music can be transmitted orally, through transcripts,<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Transcriptions are written interpretations of what composers heard when attending TRAD sessions to preserve the music.

recordings,<sup>28</sup> or through the media.<sup>29</sup> Oral transmission can be defined as the communication from person to person through speech or song. It depends on the telling of stories as well as audibly dictating/playing what is to be produced musically on your instrument of choice. As Patterson notes, “Typically, oral transmission refers to the basic action of passing information, in this case music, through oral and aural means” (Patterson 2015: 36). In this chapter, I will specifically focus on transmission of tunes through songs via media related to the internet.<sup>30</sup> Oral transmission, transcriptions, recordings, and media show not only how traditional Irish music became popular globally but also the changes groups of musicians went through in order to learn the music and play together. As Irish poet and novelist Ciaran Carson notes, “It is possible, of course, to ‘learn’ a tune from the page, from what is there in black and white... It requires you to know that what is written is a mere mnemonic, not an actual performance (it is impossible to transcribe an actual performance)...” (Carson 1996: 11). As Carson notes, it was possible for me to learn the tunes through sheet music, but I struggled with the pulse of the music until I met with the beginner TRAD group on Tuesday nights. To learn traditional Irish music within the TRAD community I had to listen to the musical cues and interpretations of other musicians who had more instrumental experience in the genre than I did. I had to be able to pick up on the social and cultural cues in order to dictate what and when I should play in order to keep the session running smoothly. By listening to the musicians and learning how to play the music aurally, I built

---

<sup>28</sup> Recordings are records of audio that are stored on electronic devices and used for reproduction and broadcasting purposes. The process of recording audio made music more accessible before the development of media platforms such as YouTube.

<sup>29</sup> Media is a communication tool used to store and deliver information through print, news, publishing, digital, cinema, or photography.

<sup>30</sup> I focus specifically on media related to the Internet as it is a widely used and popular method of transmission that allows for accessibility beyond what recordings and transcriptions can provide individuals. The internet also provides many opportunities for individuals to form communities and connect with one another.

relationships of respect and trust. As a newcomer to the TRAD group, I had to respect the decisions of the leader and respect the musicians' time and efforts to play cohesively. I had to trust that what was being played was the way that I was supposed to mimic until I felt comfortable enough to add in my own ornamentations that wouldn't distract from the tune. If I were to play out of tune, tempo or both I would disrupt the flow of playing the group had created through orally teaching each other the tunes and knowledge each person possessed.

To prepare myself to play with the group each week, I relied on recordings to get a basic understanding of what the tune would sound like. However, while recordings and YouTube videos helped me understand the music better, I was missing the social aspect of playing in a group. Going to weekly sessions helped me to better connect with the larger area of Albuquerque and gave me a sense of purpose and enjoyment.

Below I will provide information of each method used in transmitting traditional Irish music and how they affect building community. Knowing how traditional Irish music has been and is being transmitted allows insights into how the music has changed over the years as well as how TRAD communities developed, why members play the music as well as play in a group, and the rules established to keep the community running.

## **Oral Transmission and the Connections to Building Community**

In Ireland in 1845 there was The Great Famine. A disease wiped out Ireland's potato crop which was heavily depended on to feed individuals. The end of the Great Famine was in 1852, but it did not mark an end to the troubles many Irish were facing. It is estimated that one million individuals died and another million decided to emigrate. Two million was a quarter of Ireland's population that was lost during this time (Mulhall 2018, Sky 1997: 15, Kissane 1995: 172).

Poverty, lack of employment opportunities, famine, and war led many individuals in Ireland to flee their country, but this did not stop them from sharing their tunes. “The Great Famine dramatically changed Irish life. Although there were no more blights, continuing poverty, evictions, and a lack of industrialization made emigration a necessity” (Hast and Scott 2004: 36). Many individuals emigrated to Scotland, Great Britain, and overseas to places such as New York and Boston. Living in these foreign places, individuals in the Irish diaspora had to adapt to fit in amongst the locals. In the fields where they worked and in the privacy of their new homes, they were then allowed to practice their cultural traditions. To keep the memory of Ireland alive in their minds, many continued to play and sing traditional Irish songs whenever they could. Music became important, as it gave members of the Irish diaspora a sense of identity and pride. Individuals during this time used oral transmission to pass along stories and music to teach younger generations about life and about the home that had to be left behind due to emigration.

Oral transmission is the oldest method of transmission in traditional Irish music, and many musicians learned the traditions by going to houses of elders and listening to how they played or remember their mothers humming tunes when they were younger. “It was learned mostly orally, passed down through generations, performed mainly by non-professional musicians who had no theoretical background, and often accompanied community activities (Nettl 1990: 14, cited in Sky 1997:1). The purpose of using oral transmission is to allow musicians to pass on stories that the songs tell. While many of the tunes I talk about in chapter one do not contain lyrics, a TRAD session does not occur without conversations about daily life, and the tunes being played. Each musician has a personal experience with the tunes they play and, in this way, the tunes without lyrics still manage to tell a story.



The difficulty of oral transmission lies in the variations that occur from person to person.<sup>31</sup> For example, a mother sings a lullaby that tells a story that was learned from her mother. As you get older, you sing the same tune. However, you meet someone who heard the lullaby differently and an argument may ensue about what the lyrics actually are or how the tune goes. Neither person is incorrect in singing the variations but sometimes one version is deemed as ‘traditional’ or ‘authentic’ when these labels should not exist. Variations in traditional Irish music occur because they are community written songs that were not claimed by a single person until transcriptions and each variation should be accepted as a way to play the tune rather than having a focus of sounding “correct.” Variations in traditional Irish music also stem from different regions. A TRAD group playing “Cooley’s Reel” in Belfast, Ireland is going to sound different from the “Cooley’s Reel” played in Cork, Ireland, and those versions are going to sound different compared to “Cooley’s Reel” played in Albuquerque, New Mexico, or Boston, Massachusetts.

When you listen to many of the tunes, you will hear similarities between them despite the variations that occur. This leads to the tunes being referred to as cousins or other familial relatives. The same tune may also go by many names. An example includes “Rolling in the Rye-grass” which can also go by “Maureen Playboy,” “Old Molly Ahern,” “The Piper’s Lass,” “The Rathkaeale Hunt,” “The Shannon Breeze,” among other names (Carson 1996: 8). With all the possibilities of names and sounds one tune can lead to disagreements in a group about what should be considered ‘traditional’ Irish music. While I did not witness any arguments on the name of songs in my fieldwork, it is possible that some of the tunes requested were not

---

<sup>31</sup> For more discussion on variation see Carson 1996, Campbell 1989, Kleeman 1985, and Dutton 2013.

recognized due to being called by a name unfamiliar to the majority of group members. This<sup>32</sup> is why it is important for individuals to discuss with their TRAD groups how the group will define the genre to make it easier for old and new musicians alike to play in a similar fashion. With preserving the music in mind, oral transmission became a less popular method for learning traditional Irish music. The next section delves into transcribing music and the benefits and disadvantages of this method to learn traditional Irish music.

## **Transcription of Music**

Transcriptions of traditional Irish music were not written until the eighteenth century (churchmusic.ie 2023, Gainza 2006: 2, Sky 1997: 1, O Canainn 1978: 10) despite other European cultures already writing their music down (Arkenberg 2002) in the genre known as Western Art Music.<sup>33</sup> Individuals started transcribing music as a result of the Great Famine, due to concerns that the music would be lost. “The Famine of the mid-nineteenth century stimulated a good deal of collection and notation, particularly of traditional song, on the assumption that much of Ireland's rich musical heritage was being lost to the effects of that great calamity” (Smith 2001).

Transcription allowed for the music to be preserved, but also altered the way the music was played due to limitations of western musical notation.<sup>34</sup> Limitations of western musical notation involve rigidity in rhythm and pitch. “Nuances of pitch and rhythm are not notated,

---

<sup>32</sup> For more on the cultural politics of tradition, please see Chapter 1.

<sup>33</sup> The fifteenth century is the first instance of music being printed (Dell 2023).

<sup>34</sup> The term “Western musical notation” refers to written symbols that are used to communicate musical sounds and originated with Western Art Music, specifically. It is one of many different systems that is utilized in western European countries such as Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

performers -- guided by their ears -- intuitively play them. In sum, performers execute many rhythms and pitches that are never notated in our Western system of notation” (Robertson-Wilson 2009). The music that was being written down by composers did not accurately represent the music that had been passed down orally. “...some incidence inspired the composer to map out dots on the stave for posterity, and who are we to ignore this?” This question posed in the book *Last Night's Fun* is answered by Carson in the next quote; “For tunes are not dots on a stave...” (1996: 8). This idea ties into Robertson-Wilson’s (2009) discussion about how not all rhythms and pitches musicians play are notated. The statement Carson makes also ties into how Irish music is felt.<sup>35</sup> The problem with writing the music in western notation is the fact that the embellishments and personalization of what makes the music traditional Irish is lost and versions have been created that are hybrids of what the music once was.<sup>36</sup> Carson discusses the idea of ‘correctness’ in musical notation by stating,

You also have to contemplate the possibility that a tune’s notation may be written ‘wrongly’- ‘wrong’, here, meaning out of character or sympathy with the genre. For while there is no ultimate correctness in traditional music, there is wrong... They take the tune as read whilst a traditional musician plays the tune as heard (Carson 1996: 11).

I interpret that Carson’s discussion about notation being out of character or sympathy within the genre can relate to different aspects of traditional Irish music. For example, certain tempos are associated with the genre, and transcriptions can be in the ‘wrong’ tempo. Embellishments can be written down, but the tune then loses the personalization of the musician playing it and leaves only one interpretation of the song. This leads to the lack of variation that

---

<sup>35</sup> ‘Feeling’ in this sense refers to not only the rhythm but musicians being in the moment of playing rather than worrying about what is written on their music. See Sparshott 1994, Hodges & Wilkins 2015, and Keil 1966 for more discussion on feeling and emotions in music.

<sup>36</sup> For discussion on the difficulties of using western notation see Broude 2021, Cromleigh 1977, and Killick 2020.

can occur when a musician decides to read the music rather than play by ear. If one reads off the page, they may be able to play the melody but what makes the tune Irish sounding may be missing. The genre is more about feeling the music rather than playing the correct notes written on the page. If one doesn't connect with the music, it can make the musician sound mechanical (robotic), making it harder for the musician to improvise and produce rhythms typical to the genre they are playing.

Another important factor is that when traditional Irish music is written, it is not analyzed in the context of Irish culture but in the lens of European culture with a classical music background. As ethnomusicologist George List stated in the early 1960s, "...to possess musical significance a transcription must be made and analyzed in the context of the culture of which the music it symbolizes is a part" (List 1963: 193). Without interpreting traditional Irish music in the context of Ireland, many musicians may not be able to feel or connect to the music in order to give the music its distinct sound from other musical genres. Not feeling or connecting to the music itself can also lead musicians to feel frustrated and turn away from learning the genre as well as separate themselves from the group they are playing with. For example, I played in a Honky Tonk group not knowing much about country music and not having a particular liking to the way it sounded. Since I could not connect to the music, I found myself struggling with rhythms, struggling to play without sheet music, and felt isolated from the group when they talked about their favorite songs or artists, and I had no idea who these artists were or their songs. While I still learned from participating in the group, it did not make me enjoy country music any more than I had before I joined the group. When joining the TRAD group, not only did I feel as though I fit better into the group, but I was also starting to feel the music and picking up rhythms without the sheet music after listening two or three times. Feeling connected to the

music also led to me being able to explore different variations of the music without being stuck on the idea that I needed to follow the sheet music without any deviations.

As musicologists, linguists, novelists, and instrumentalists have demonstrated, there is more than one way to play traditional Irish music (Carson 1996, Smith 2001 and Robertson-Wilson 2009). However, when music started being written down in the eighteenth century, composers started claiming traditional Irish music as their own creations and deemed them as the ‘correct’ and only way to play the music. “The Last Rose of Summer” is considered a slow Irish air with lyrics written by Thomas Moore and composed by John Andrew Stevenson. “The Groves of Blarney” is also considered an Irish air with lyrics written by Richard Alfred Millikin in Southern Ireland. The tune takes the same melody, but the lyrics and lilt make it sound distinctly more Irish than its counterpart. While there is nothing ‘wrong’ with the way Moore and Stevenson wrote “The Last Rose of Summer” it is only one version of the air from Eastern Ireland. What has happened with these tunes is that “The Last Rose of Summer” is more widely recognized within Europe and the United States while “The Groves of Blarney” requires more research on the internet to find. These two tunes sharing the same melody show that composers should not be relied upon to write ‘correct’ or the ‘only’ versions of the tune.

Composers writing the tunes led individuals who are not as familiar with traditional Irish music to rely on the composer’s renditions in order to play the tune. The versions written by composers are conceived to be the way one ‘should’ play the music, and create the expectation that there should be no deviations. Carson believes that the variation in tunes is an aspect of what makes the genre traditional Irish music, and a fixed melody is not typical of the genre. One issue with transcription is that people tend to assume the transcribed version is the ‘best’ and ‘most accurate’ version of the tune which makes it a fixed melody rather than a tune free to have

variation. As Carson notes: “Persons referring Irish music to ‘composers’ insist very strongly on having what they call correct versions. But such a condition of things was absolutely unknown to Irish or to any folk music. ...no two stanzas of any Irish song have exactly the same music” (Carson 1996: 10). One problem with transcription is that people tend to assume the transcribed version is the correct version of the tune. Carson’s quote shows how important variation is to traditional Irish music and without variation, a musician may not be considered a good player of the genre. Smith (2001) has a similar viewpoint to Carson on the “correctness” of playing tunes. “It is a necessary development in the traditional process of transmission, in which the feel of the music, the "setting" of a tune is at least as important as the succession of notes played by the musicians. There can, by these standards, be no one "correct" form of the tune” (Smith 2001: 112). The issue lies not in the fact that the music is being written down, but that the composers writing the music have claimed it as their “own” and having musicians believe that the version they have learned from the composer is the correct and only way to play traditional Irish music. While transcribing the music has come with many critiques from experienced TRAD musicians, without these transcriptions we would not have as much access to the large repertoire of music that comes with writing it down. Along with writing the music down to preserve it for generations to come, many decided to start recording their stylings of the music to be another record of traditional Irish music.

## **Recordings and How They Shaped How Traditional Irish Music is Transmitted**

Records, tapes, and CDs carry out the main function of recordings which is to store and play audio files. These devices made it easier to listen to music and don’t require individuals to

learn the music by transcriptions. The popularity of these devices led to traditional Irish music being transmitted faster and reached more areas outside of Ireland. Smith discusses the popularity of traditional Irish music and how it stems from recordings being distributed worldwide. “Recordings of traditional Irish music, and their wide dissemination, are both a causal factor and a result of its worldwide popularity” (Smith 2001: 116). For example, “Tarbolton,” “Longford Collector,” and “Sailor’s Bonnet” are the first recorded traditional Irish tunes by fiddler Michael Coleman.<sup>37</sup> These were recorded in 1920 in New York and sent back to Ireland where individuals heard their music in recordings for the first time. These recordings changed how individuals from Ireland heard their music as well as changed how the music was transmitted.<sup>38</sup> As Smith states,

This heralds a shift away from the importance of music as it is played, and toward music as it is recorded and replayed. This shift in emphasis has generated three trends in the making, learning, and enjoyment of Irish traditional music: it has fostered an increasing professionalism among its most accomplished practitioners; it has altered the process of learning the music for most players and enthusiasts; and it has created an aesthetic that values unison playing in groups over solo performances--despite the fact that solo performance had until recently, been central to Irish traditional music (Smith 2001: 116).

Breaking down Smith’s (2001) quote, musicians listening to recordings and replaying these recordings shaped how they learned the music. While tunes are repeated at least twice in a set, being able to infinitely replay them gives musicians more time to practice as well as pick up any nuances of the genre. Replaying the recording also gives ample time for musicians to practice a specific section over and over until they feel confident enough to play it on their own. This also

---

<sup>37</sup> The first records heard on the gramophone so impressed musicians in Ireland that they immediately set out to copy Coleman’s playing on the disc, rather than relying on their immediate peers for musical inspiration,” (Sky 1997: 24).

<sup>38</sup> Many musicians cited the arrival of commercial recordings from America throughout the 1920s and 1930s as the beginning of the end for specific regional styles (Sky 1997: 23).

ties into the altered process of learning the music as you are not learning from individuals in a live setting and have less social pressure to play the tune with a group at their own tempo. This can be beneficial for individuals who are unsure of their playing abilities and are less familiar with the music. Recordings can also lead to an increase in professionalism. This idea leans towards musicians and how they record the music. When you go to a recording studio, the room and instruments are set up, there may be a producer and a sound engineer to make your recordings sound polished and they make a professional record of you playing the music. With a shift in focus from playing the music with a group in a pub setting, you are interacting with individuals considered highly skilled in their field and would not interact with them in the same way. Having increased professionalism in traditional Irish music also led to the ability to market records and CDs that the public could buy rather than having to go to the pub to hear a TRAD session. Smith (2001) also describes how recordings created an aesthetic of unison playing in groups instead of solo performances. This is due to the fact that music was no longer a private, familial practice but a worldwide phenomenon to connect to Ireland and its musical traditions.

Despite the fact that solo performance was central to traditional Irish music, I find the social aspect of playing in a group enjoyable and a positive outcome of the first recordings of the music. Playing with a group gave me an opportunity to explore the larger community of Albuquerque and allowed me to make connections with individuals I would have never met otherwise. The TRAD groups made moving to Albuquerque an easier adjustment as I knew there were individuals who shared similar interests to me that I could connect with. Without recordings of the music, traditional Irish music would not be as widespread as it is today and would predominantly be heard only in Ireland where there may have been a possibility of the music



continuing to be soloistic rather than a group effort. Lack of recordings would also mean that musicians would not hear the variations that can occur.

While learning to play “Irish Washerwoman,” I followed the sheet music at first. I instantly picked up that the recording of the musician differed from the music. I faced the dilemma of who to follow. Did I follow the traditions of listening and hope that the recording was true to what the group would play, or should I follow my classical musician instincts and play what was directly on my sheet music? I decided to go with the recording. While transcriptions are a helpful tool in learning traditional Irish music, I would not be able to pick up on all of the nuances of rhythm, pitch, and ornamentation, and I would be too focused on playing the notes on the page rather than having fun making music.

If you learn the music through recordings, you are going to produce sounds similar to the musician you are listening to, which may be different from how a group of TRAD musicians will play a tune. Differences also lie in what region in Ireland you choose to listen to in recordings.

As Ireland’s National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage states,

The influence of key local musicians – and their recordings plays an important role in influencing regional style and repertoire... For example East Galway is associated with a more lyrical, slower paced reel playing than the brisk South Sligo style (Ireland’s National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage 2023).

TRAD musicians may play with a different recording or include their own stylistic changes which can contribute to how you play the tune versus how the TRAD group will play a tune. Even with listening to the same recordings, I experienced hearing them differently than what musicians in the TRAD group were playing which led to my difficulty in playing along with the group. Recordings are also less personalized compared to going to someone’s home, listening to them play, and learning from the individual. Recordings, however, have the luxury of time,

meaning you can find a recording and play along with it anytime, whereas TRAD sessions may occur during times that you cannot attend.

Learning tunes through recordings is beneficial to learn the melody, but it is up to the musician to learn how to play the tune with a feeling of ‘Irishness.’ This usually includes learning to play the right tempo<sup>39</sup> and what ornamentations to add and when. While playing the melody might be simplistic, it does not define that you know the tune. When beginning a TRAD session, if musicians are unfamiliar with the tune, they listen to the tune two or three times before jumping in themselves. Players during this time will quietly finger the notes and see if they can keep tempo with the rest of the group.

While individuality is important when playing a tune, it is also important to know when to play and how to play when holding sessions with a variety of individuals differing in age, gender, and musical ability. It is important for musicians to develop their own style of playing that fits within the genre such as adding trills, ornamentations, and pauses that enhance the music differently than on the recordings they have heard. This was exemplified when I took group lessons and the teacher decided to teach “Mrs. Macleod’s Reel.” The song itself is simplistic but the addition of ornaments, trills and slides allowed for a different musicality to come through when the music was being played than what we heard on the recording. The teacher also encouraged students to add in or remove any stylistic changes to make the song more enjoyable and potentially easier to play for those who were beginners. Based on my observations, the slides were the most popular to play in this specific reel. This was not evident in the recordings of “Mrs. Macleod’s Reel.” However, without the recordings of “Mrs. Macleod’s Reel” we would not be able to practice outside of the class time allotted for learning the tune. Even if musicians

---

<sup>39</sup> Tempo is the speed or pace of music.

did not practice with the recordings, hearing what the tune sounded like gave musicians a better idea of how to play the song. Ease of access, and time allow recordings to be considered one of the most popular ways for traditional Irish music to be transmitted globally. Media is another method of transmitting traditional Irish music globally and has become more widely used than physical recordings today.

## **Media and the Spread of Traditional Irish Music Around the World**

The media has become heavily relied upon to learn traditional musical styles. You can view the Chieftains on Jimmy Fallon or Saturday Night Live playing with traditional instruments such as the bodhrán, penny whistle, and harp while singing in Gaelic. Popular sites such as YouTube provide videos showing how to play a specific song on an instrument, techniques to help improve the quality of your playing, or help with concepts of rhythm and theory. The radio and record industry formed a relationship that influenced traditional Irish music by promoting different styles and repertory in an approved setlist.

The media has promoted the popularity of traditional Irish music and has helped individuals not only find groups to be a part of, but can also facilitate lessons and gatherings. Playing for Change is a great example of how people can use the media to connect with one another through music. Media, specifically that of online social sites such as Facebook helped me to connect with the Irish community in Albuquerque. The Irish community Facebook page provided me with the information about the TRAD groups in Albuquerque, how I could join, and how I could show support to other musicians in the genre. While I had learned of the TRAD group who plays at Hops Brewery in Albuquerque through word of mouth, I would not have known information about the other TRAD sessions that occur as well without the group

Facebook page dedicated to Irish TRAD sessions in Albuquerque. The Facebook group encourages individuals to attend multiple TRAD sessions as well as concerts and promotes musicians in the community. Without the support of the TRAD community, many musicians would not be playing at various venues around New Mexico and recording their own versions of traditional Irish music.

## **Conclusion**

Oral transmission paved the way for musicians learning traditional Irish music and taught them not only the music, but the social and cultural intuition needed to play with experienced musicians. Transcriptions, recordings, and media outlets allowed the rapid transmission of traditional Irish music to promote and preserve but they drastically changed how the music was taught and played. These methods also changed how individuals interacted with one another as accessing the music to learn and play became easier without the need to be taught by another individual in an in-person setting. While these methods can still promote community building, I conclude that oral transmission in a face-to-face setting feels more effective in building community as it involves learning from individuals in the room and picking up on the characteristics of traditional Irish music. These characteristics not only include ornamentations you can play and the tempo that the tune should be played, but the social cues of when to switch tunes and what tunes to switch to within a set.<sup>40</sup> While the other transmission methods have value in preserving and teaching traditional Irish music, they do not foster the same sense of community that playing together in the same room does.

---

<sup>40</sup> A set is a grouping of two or three tunes that are played in succession of each other.

Playing “Mrs. Macleod’s Reel” was an enjoyable experience when my internet wasn’t lagging, and I could hear the instructor playing along with the rest of us. But I didn’t feel a connection to anybody in the Zoom meeting. While I got to play with individuals from around the world in places such as Australia, Canada, and other parts of the United States, the online lessons were the only place I would ever interact with these individuals. When I started playing with the beginner TRAD group in Albuquerque, I was seeing these individuals on a weekly basis. We shared conversations about school, life, and music, knowing facial expressions were exchanged when the group played a tune too fast. We knew that it did not sound good but were determined to finish playing the tune anyway, and knowledge about Ireland and traditional Irish music was passed along. My experiences in these two settings showed how important it is to have a social component to playing the music, and learning orally not only helped facilitate the social need but also helped me to become a better Irish TRAD musician.

In this chapter, I have discussed transmission methods that are popularly used in teaching and playing traditional Irish music and how they have shaped the genre. I have also shown how these methods can help facilitate community building and a sense of belonging. The next chapter discusses community building in-depth through the vehicle of learning traditional Irish music and the difficulties and rewards of both in-person and online communities.

## Chapter 3: Community Building through Playing Traditional Irish Music

### Introduction

How does one define community and why is it important to be a part of one? According to Jane South, a community engagement and public health professor, “‘Community’ as a term is used as shorthand for the relationships, bonds, identities and interests that join people together or give them a shared stake in a place, service, culture or activity” (South 2015: 7). The shared activity in the context of this chapter is playing traditional Irish music which forms a musical community where friendships based on the genre and playing music together are built.

Playing or singing music in a community has been shown to help individuals build connections with one another through a shared interest. For example, Hetty explores choir singing as a leisure activity and the themes that emerge from their qualitative data "...the choir generally functioned as a platform where they felt safe and connected to others" (Hetty et. al 2011). In my own fieldwork, participants in Irish TRAD sessions would not show up to participate if they did not feel safe<sup>41</sup> and connected to other individuals and the music they play. Each week the same players returned and if they had to miss a week, others in the group questioned their absence and hoped the individual(s) would return the following week to play. Past studies on building communities through music have shown that forming music groups can improve mental health,<sup>42</sup> assist families to heal from trauma, give hope to individuals facing

---

<sup>41</sup> Safety in this sense means a person feels safe to express themselves, has confidence and is excited to take on challenges (National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning).

<sup>42</sup> Social isolation and loneliness is a major public health issue, associated with higher risks of mortality and morbidity. But people can ‘recover’ from loneliness, meaning that there is scope for interventions to improve social connections (South 2015: 9).

myriads of problems and discourage violence in prison settings<sup>43</sup> (Bailey and Davidson 2003; Clift 2008; Gossine and Travasso 2018; Ruud 1997; Weston and Lenette 2016). One group of individuals that has been studied on the benefits of music communities are cancer patients. Music therapists Unkefer (1968), Biller, Olson, and Breen (1974) discuss their findings on how cancer patients feel when participating in musical activities outside of just listening to music. They note, “It is not fully understood why music is so beneficial to patients, although it is probably in part due to the effects that music has on physiological processes (Unkefer, 1968) and on the reduction of anxiety” (Biller, Olson, & Breen, 1974, cited in Bailey 1983: 17-18). Musical therapist Michael Cassity states that “Participation in musical activities has been found to enhance social interaction” (Cassity, 1976, cited in Bailey 1983: 18). I found this to be true as I participated with the beginner TRAD group in Albuquerque. Each week, I found joy going to these sessions and looked forward to speaking with others who shared my interest in traditional Irish music. Studies have shown that participating in musical activities can help individuals improve their quality of life. “Qualitative and quantitative studies have demonstrated that being engaged in music activities, particularly singing in groups, can improve quality of life” (Bailey and Davidson, 2003; Clift et al., 2008, 2010, 2016; Livesey et al., 2012; Hetty, Kinébanian and Josephsson, 2008). While I attended TRAD sessions whether it be as an observer or participant, I felt instant joy as I recognized tunes, and was able to hold conversations with the more experienced players. Based on my observations of individuals joking with one another, laughing, and smiling constantly I would suggest that they also felt joy coming to these sessions weekly.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> As Weston and Lenette note, “[...] the concept of ‘community’ is a complex and multifaceted one... it became clear that music-making in a detention centre created a ‘community within a community’ through the formation of a cultural and performative space” (Weston and Lenette 2016: 123).

<sup>44</sup> While I cannot state definitively that quality of life has improved for everyone who participates with the TRAD groups in Albuquerque, I noticed that I was happier and more

Each TRAD group I have interacted with through my fieldwork has been open and welcoming to new members. Within their session manners manual I received, they state what the purpose of having the sessions are but acknowledge that issues and tension can arise between players and between TRAD groups. I felt this tension as the experienced TRAD group was mentioned in the beginning-level group and ideas of legitimacy<sup>45</sup> were brought up through the usage or non-usage of sheet music, and physical cues of switching tunes. There are groups who focus on playing traditional Irish music in the way they consider it should be played, while others play simply for the enjoyment of playing the tunes and don't follow set rules on how the music should be played. "However, people who are really involved in Irish traditional music have definite ideas and feelings about how a session should work. There are sometimes hurt feelings and bad vibes when newcomers or know-it-alls fail to understand the scene... a lack of 'cop-on'"<sup>46</sup> ("Session Manners" 2023). In her thesis, Sky (1997) also discusses musicians who have definite ideas and feelings about how sessions should work as well and shares a conversation she had with a Dublin fiddler regarding the genre:

The well known Dublin-born fiddler and performer James Kelly, offered an analogy which summarized the complex nature of change within traditional music. He likened the process of change within a generation of musicians, or even over a century of music, to raking a large pile of fallen leaves from one side of the garden to the other. The first pile of leaves represents the past, their destination—the other side of the garden—the future, and engagement in the act of raking, the present. Some leaves may escape through the tines of the rake, but if one stopped to pick up every last one, one might forget about the larger task at hand. Therefore, in moving a tradition toward the future, the loss of some parts of the tradition is inevitable as it develops and changes from year to year and decade to decade (Sky 1997: 4).

---

content with my living situation. So, I am speculating that this may also have been true for some of my fellow musicians/research participants.

<sup>45</sup> See chapter 1 for discussion on tradition and how legitimacy can play a role.

<sup>46</sup> 'Cop on' is a general Irish term for having common sense or intelligence in a situation. The English equivalent would be that of 'reading the room.'



With the goal of the TRAD groups located in Albuquerque being that of preserving the genre and stories for future generations, one should question what iteration of traditions are they passing along and do they help the genre move forward in order to be a welcoming community? Another question that comes to mind is if there is room for vocal music within these TRAD communities, as research has shown benefits of vocal music as well as instrumental.

Again, referencing choral singing as one form of community music making, Bailey and Davidson write: "emotional health benefits appear to flow directly from the musical component of the choral experience, however, the interviews also indicate that social interaction through the performance medium contributes to positive outcomes for the participants" (Bailey and Davidson 2003: 24). Playing in a group rather than as a soloist gave me the opportunity and excitement to want to play my violin as well as interact with other individuals outside of my social circle.

Interviews with TRAD musicians in the city of Albuquerque provide insights into how communities are built and why it is important for these musicians to play together. Building community through TRAD music sessions combats isolation/fights loneliness and passes on Irish cultural traditions.

In this chapter, I use data gathered from my observations, musical participant-observation and interviews with fellow musicians to discuss social inclusion and exclusion, the benefits and difficulties of in-person communities and the benefits and difficulties of online communities.<sup>47</sup> Incorporating ethnographic vignettes throughout the chapter, I build on my own research gained through scholarly articles, blogs, emails, social media sites, and my own

---

<sup>47</sup> Diverging from chapter two, I discuss the internet through the lens of community building rather than a transmission method.

musical participant-observation through attending weekly beginner TRAD sessions on Tuesday as well as observing weekly TRAD sessions geared towards beginner-level musicians and more experienced players on Thursday nights. Using the lenses of ‘flourishing’ and ‘thriving’ communities to discuss my findings (Card 2019, Booth et. al 2020), I argue that in-person TRAD communities foster more interaction between members than online communities.

## **Social Cohesion, Inclusion and Exclusion**

Throughout my fieldwork, I witnessed individuals who created relationships and formed social bonds with one another in the various TRAD groups by sharing their knowledge and passion for the genre. Nearly everyone wants to feel like they belong to a community. Being excluded can be a reason for many individuals to not pursue their interests. Music in particular can be a vulnerable experience especially for those new to playing an instrument or singing (MacGregor 2022, Wiggins 2011, Richerme 2016). Thus, amateur groups have been one way that individuals are able to explore their interests and meet others who enjoy the same activity, providing a low-stakes space for beginners to experiment and be vulnerable. Music has the ability to promote bonds between individuals through inclusion and cohesion. Music was shown to support the feeling of belonging and creating a shared experience that led to friendships among a diverse population (Pitts 2005, cited in Rofe et. al 2017: 148).

For example, without inclusion of new and existing members and the cohesion of playing traditional Irish music, many of the TRAD groups I interacted with throughout my fieldwork would not be able to meet weekly to play tunes with one another and continue to build a music community. Social cohesion comes from listening and watching other members of the group to

pick up on one another's social cues and body language. As poet and novelist Ciaran Carson notes:

Such is the bent of Irish traditional music that tunes repeat: they are played at least twice... then the players generally change to another tune. Getting 'the change' is a skill; it has to be watched for, and listened for, even if the number of repeats has been determined in advance (some players can't count). If the repeats have not been predetermined the players will use body language to communicate the change- eyes, shoulders, elbows, knees, feet and hands may be deployed (Carson 1996).

But how does social cohesion help build community? You have to be in-sync with one another socially and musically to be aware of the changes that occur. As ethnomusicologists have indicated in other field settings, body language used to indicate a change in the tune among other things allows for individuals to watch and listen to each other creating group cohesiveness (Macchiarella 2012, Lortat-Jacob 2011). While picking up on body language can be intimidating to new players, it is important to pick up on the cues as it shows you are a willing participant in playing traditional Irish music with the TRAD group and can give you a sense of being a valuable member. As Stephanie Pitts mentions,

Membership of a performing society requires each individual to work within a complex social structure; shaping, responding to or challenging agreed conventions and behaviours, and balancing the desire for personal fulfillment with a broader responsibility to the group. Finding a valued role within a musical society can fulfill the diverse needs of members from a variety of different social circumstances (Pitts 2005: 54).

Putting this quote into the context of an Irish TRAD session, each person has a role that they play whether it is as group leader or as a participating musician. While there is typically one group leader who starts the session and provides information for members, each musician has a chance to lead multiple tunes throughout the session, making them temporary leaders. There is

no deviation from these roles. Another way to think about this is through the lens of group cohesion and what social scientists refer to as thriving.

Thriving in this context refers to the number of people who return to sessions each week as well as the number of newcomers the groups get (Agenor et. al 2017). The Irish Session Rule book states the behaviors and conventions that one must follow in order to play with the group and not disrupt the flow of things. This includes listening more than playing, and creating space for others to also participate and learn. Personal fulfillment when participating in these groups is evident by the returning members and how they interact with one another through shared stories and jokes.

## **Tradition versus Purism**

Purism is the belief that features of foreign origin contaminate the purity of the native elements (Trask 1999, Weston 2017, and Sallabank 2018). Purism does not allow any deviation from the traditional practices and can be an exclusionary factor when joining a community. In the context of traditional Irish music, purism would be individuals only singing *sean nós* and not deviating from the soloistic component of the style (Quinn 2006). In other musical contexts, purism may look like a jazz musician refusing to play avant garde or an individual who only listens to records because music should only be listened to in this way rather than on a CD or iPod. An example of what some may consider purism was experienced in Albuquerque when I was participating and observing sessions, there was a noticeable tension when someone mentioned a more advanced TRAD group. It was believed that if you couldn't play the tunes without sheet music or pick up on the cues such as when to switch, the more advanced group

would look down upon you. This could be considered purism in the sense that little to no deviation was allowed to occur.

While tradition can also be rigid like purism, I have seen flexibility in things considered traditional. In the context of the TRAD groups I have interacted with, there was flexibility in what instruments were played<sup>48</sup> and the tempo of tunes, meaning that it adhered to tradition in some sense but wasn't tied to it. Women and children also attended and played at sessions which deviates from the genre being heavily male dominated. Suggestions of tunes were allowed but could leave a musician in a vulnerable position of playing by themselves or having to skip their turn as discussed in Chapter 1. Without this flexibility in traditional practices, playing instrumental music in a group would not be prominent in TRAD communities and this style of music may have not been considered traditional Irish music if one were to define the genre.

### **Auto-Ethnographic Experience of Joining an Albuquerque TRAD Group**

I started my fieldwork at the Manzano Multigenerational Cultural Center in July 2023. It was a hot summer day in Albuquerque, and the air conditioned classroom provided relief from the heat. Chairs were placed in a circle, and behind them were tables where players placed their instrument cases. This would be my first insight into how TRAD sessions for beginner musicians were conducted, and what tunes the group would play based on how traditional Irish music was defined by the group leader. I had reached out to the session leader asking for the current tune book for the group, as I was interested in joining their weekly sessions. I wanted to learn how to play the tunes before joining in with the other musicians. They emailed me a packet of songs along with a set of rules that I should follow before and while attending TRAD sessions. These

---

<sup>48</sup> Instruments that were used during TRAD sessions included the cello, guitar and bagpipe chanter which are not considered traditional Irish instruments.

rules included: be respectful of other players, listen to the group before joining, and don't play a song unless I feel comfortable. The rules encouraged players to take caution before actively joining into the session: "...if you want to play and haven't been to this kind of thing before, please read the rest of this page and consider visiting once or twice before bringing an instrument" ("Session Manners" 2023). While I had listened to Thursday's advanced TRAD group, I held off on playing with them. Although the group was welcoming and I was offered a violin to play when I mentioned I had an interest in the music, I did not feel confident enough with my experience compared to the other players at the session. As the session manners manual had mentioned, I proceeded with caution and visited multiple sessions before bringing my own violin. However, since musical participant-observation is a key tenet of doing ethnomusicological fieldwork, I eventually decided to begin my musical participant-observation by bringing my violin to sessions.

When I finally decided to play with the beginner TRAD group on Tuesdays instead of just observing, I found it nerve-wracking. Despite my fear of having inadequate experience in playing instrumental traditional Irish music, I was determined to gain empathy for beginning musicians in the genre.<sup>49</sup> I hoped I had practiced enough to be able to lead a tune.<sup>50</sup> While there was an option to pass your turn, by default, each musician had an opportunity to lead a tune. While I felt comfortable enough to call out a tune, I did not feel comfortable enough to lead the tune rhythmically. "The Book"<sup>51</sup> I received through email was extremely helpful in knowing

---

<sup>49</sup> Gaining empathy for beginning musicians allowed me to observe why individuals may or may not play in TRAD groups or join music communities due to fears of inadequacy, and rejection/exclusion. For more discussion on amateur musicians see *Fado Resounding* (Gray 2013).

<sup>50</sup> A tune is a melody that is easy to remember.

<sup>51</sup> "The Book" is a collection of Irish tunes that can be played together in a set. Appendix 1 contains a list of the tunes that were available for individuals to choose from.

what the group was working on, and what tunes I should be working on as well to mesh with the group. Though we had all received instructions, there was still some room for spontaneity. Individuals could call out tunes not listed in the book but risked the other members not knowing how to play the tune. This left the group in a position where playing would stop, and an awkward silence would ensue while an individual played by themselves, or they would flip through the book to find another tune they would like to play. Thus, new songs bring a certain kind of social risk with them.

Another issue that arose was how to define traditional Irish music. Not having a clear definition as a group of what the genre of traditional Irish music entails leads to individuals being singled out to play the tune, or the individual skipping their turn, which defeats the purpose of playing in a group. I had to learn to shift my own definition<sup>52</sup> of traditional Irish music as a vocalist to an instrumentalist in the genre in order to ground myself in the experiences of TRAD musicians in Albuquerque. This would allow me to connect with individuals in the group who solely focused on instrumental Irish music. As is stated in the Session guidelines, “The hardest thing to accept, especially for people who are good musicians, is the sad fact that you have to learn and be able to play from memory a large number of complex melodies in order to take part in a good session” (Session Manners 2023). This does not mean that musicians cannot bring sheet music but it is encouraged that they eventually learn the tunes without it. Needing to learn the musical aurally is one example of how individuals could be excluded in a TRAD session suited for advanced players. The TRAD groups are welcoming to all who want to join in, as the group’s goal is to play music and develop relationships. “What's an Irish music session all about? It's actually not that complicated... it's all about the music, mainly "the tunes", as we call them,

---

<sup>52</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, my definition of traditional Irish music is *sean-nós* singing whereas other musicians and scholars may include instrumental music in their own definitions.

plus songs, companionable talk, etc... but it's mainly the tunes" ("Session Manners" 2023). While in this quote there is mention of companionable talk, the repeated notion of the sessions being about the music is evident in this group. In interviews with members, while they had no cultural or heritage ties to Ireland, they play traditional Irish music to meet weekly with others who share similar interests, and feel the need to preserve<sup>53</sup> the music and pass along the stories.

Sitting in a circle at the beginner TRAD group, there were fifteen musicians. We finished playing "Cooley's Reel" and it was time for the next person to call a tune. Someone suggested "Mrs. Macleod's Reel"<sup>54</sup> and the session leader asked if anyone knew of it. It was a collective "no " and a silence ensued. Typically, the musician would call out another tune, but if one is unfamiliar with the tunes it may be uncomfortable for them to lead a tune that is unknown in their repertoire. The musician decided to skip their turn and pass it on to the next person.

The second musician suggested playing "The Sky Boat Song." It was more well-known, but nobody knew how to play it except for the group member who called it out. At this time, they were still learning their instrument. The member's embarrassment was evident as he struggled his way through the tune while everyone watched. While there was encouragement from some musicians, this player seemed to be discouraged by being singled out. He slumped in his chair to appear smaller and the smile from his face disappeared. The musician left two songs later with an hour still to go despite being someone who would typically stay the full duration of the

---

<sup>53</sup> While I was not privy to why musicians felt the need to preserve music despite having no cultural or heritage background to Ireland, I would posit the theory that they preserve the music in order to keep building community, and have spaces to practice music in a relaxed, low-stakes space. Relaxed space in this sense means not performing in front of an audience.

<sup>54</sup> Tunes can go by a multitude of names, so while "Mrs. Macleod's Reel" was not recognizable by members, if the player were to call it by another name, there is a possibility of it becoming well-known by other musicians in the group.



session. While the players in the session knew many tunes, these two examples show how being left out can not only be embarrassing but can also potentially lead to a player sensing a lack of inclusion in the community. One-on-one discussions with musicians led to the answer that they saw themselves as “outsiders” in those moments. This is not the fault of the group or of any one person. Knowing how group members define “traditional” Irish music allows for group cohesiveness and the feeling of belonging, to make the transition from “outsider” to long-time community member easier.

## **Being a Part of Music Communities**

What does it mean to be a part of a community? I see it as a way to build connections with individuals who share similar interests. It is an opportunity to be social, meet new people, develop your own skills, and to feel like you belong. As cited in “How Can Music Build Community? Insight from Theories and Practice of Community Music Therapy” by music therapist Megan Steele (2016), the author quotes from other therapists that “Theorists in community music therapy discourse argue that music is an active social phenomenon that can be used to help create flourishing communities in which the diversity of individual difference is celebrated, and support is shared” (Stige, Ansdell, Elefant, & Pavlicevic, 2010 as cited in Steele 2016). While the TRAD groups may not gain members at a rapid rate, they do continue to receive new members on a consistent basis and could be considered a flourishing community.<sup>55</sup> Jane South comments on how the government health reports show the need for these diverse communities: “Increasingly, government health reports refer to the need to build flourishing communities where individuals can feel a sense of belonging as an essential component of health” (South, 2015). From my own observations and experiences doing fieldwork, the only

---

<sup>55</sup> See Shultz, Rahtz, and Sirgy 2017 for more on flourishing communities.

diversity I experienced interacting with the TRAD groups in Albuquerque stemmed from the range of ages as well as gender identities. Support for musicians can be seen through the promotion of TRAD groups and Celtic artists performing in and around Albuquerque on the Irish Community Facebook page as well as encouragement from more experienced players to those who are just learning.<sup>56</sup>

## **Being a Part of Online Music Communities**

Thus far in this chapter, I have defined community in the context of individuals meeting in-person and in real-time. How does this definition change when the internet comes into play?<sup>57</sup> The definition of community changed as the internet emerged in the 1990s as a global phenomenon. Due to the surge in internet usage, scholars have started researching how online affinity groups can function as a community, including groups focused on a variety of music genres (Waldron 2021). While the TRAD communities focus on in-person sessions, there is a possibility that they could create a thriving community online as well as in-person to gain more interest in the genre of traditional Irish music, and foster a sense of belonging to more individuals than the immediate Albuquerque community. Making weekly posts about who is playing and where they are playing helps to build in-person community and support, but how

---

<sup>56</sup> An example of encouragement is discussed earlier in chapter 3 when the player new to his instrument attempted to play the “Skye Boat Song.” Encouragement from experienced players to those less experienced was also witnessed on the Irish Community Facebook page where a member of the Thursday night Hops Brewery TRAD group congratulated a beginner TRAD group on their “wonderful” performance.

<sup>57</sup>Rheingold (1993: 5) - who coined the term "virtual communities" sees them as groups of individuals online who share their thoughts on a subject with others and create relationships based on the shared interest. (Rheingold in Addeo 2020: 11). Addeo sees virtual communities as individuals of varying backgrounds sharing similar interests and feelings on a topic and therefore creates communities of practice (Addeo 2020: 11).

might TRAD groups expand their presence to gain an online community following? Studies have shown that people appreciate online communities and may find them as beneficial as meeting in-person. "For online community members, belonging to such a group can play as significant a role in their lives as physical place-based community" (Waldron 2021: 3). While the Albuquerque TRAD groups do not play together in an online setting, many musicians can still receive encouragement and promotion of their music. For example, I signed up for a monthly newsletter that tells readers about the TRAD group sessions occurring in Albuquerque as well as around the state of New Mexico, where solo or duet acts will perform and when they perform, and encourages readers to listen to two radio stations available that play traditional Irish music. The online communities can help supplement social requirements needed by individuals when playing in person is not an option or if the weekly TRAD sessions are not enough social interaction.

Sociologists, methodologists,<sup>58</sup> and collective consumption marketers discuss how the internet has shaped communities and the widespread outreach they have to recruit new members.

Social life has been deeply penetrated by the Internet (Beneito-Montagut 2011); the use of online spaces to build communities and social relationships with people independently from their geographical location is widely spreading. These virtual spaces take the form of small-scale communities without established parameters but held together through shared emotions, styles of life, new moral beliefs, and senses of injustice and consumption practices (Cova 1997 as cited in Addeo et. al 2020: 11).

A quick scroll through social media platforms shows that there is a variety of groups ranging from cooking interests, movie interests, and music among other topics. When you first make a profile for Pinterest, it asks you what your interests are to better cater to what you want to see. On Facebook you can add in your likes such as favorite movies, books, and music/artists that

---

<sup>58</sup> Someone who studies methods used for doing, teaching, or studying a thing.

allows you to follow them. When a post pops up on your screen, you can see who has liked it whether they are your friends or a stranger half-way across the world. The internet has provided connections for individuals that weren't available before its inception. Joining groups who share similar interests on the internet allows for accessibility for individuals who may not be able to leave their home every week to participate in group activities, and it was a great tool for people to get together during the Covid-19 pandemic. The TRAD community in Albuquerque uses Facebook and email as a primary way to encourage individuals to come to weekly TRAD sessions and support musicians who play the genre. Without the usage of the internet, I would not have known about the online lessons teaching “Mrs. Macleod’s Reel” or the multitude of TRAD sessions that occur not only in Albuquerque but in other areas around New Mexico such as Taos and Santa Fe.

However, online communities also present challenges of their own. Sociologist LJ Krivo states that “We live in a multimedia global era where social isolation is an increasingly common experience for people of all ages” (Krivo et al., 2013: 197). The question then becomes, does the internet help combat experiences of social isolation?<sup>59</sup> It can be harder to play music together due to the limits of technology such as poor Wi-Fi connections, latency issues, sounds being muffled or cut out, and the accessibility of the group you are wanting to join. “... playing together in real-time is particularly difficult given the current technology available includes delays in processing and transmission, termed latency...” (Macdonald et al., 2021). When I took online lessons, latency was the hardest issue to combat. The teacher would cut in and out, and I could only hear minimal violin sounds as she tried to demonstrate different playing techniques. While Zoom contains features to enhance music being played in the background, it does not

---

<sup>59</sup> Through my own searching I found that there has not been enough research to deduce whether the internet has played a positive or negative role in combating social isolation.

always have the best quality. Another challenge I faced was that of feeling connected to the individuals I was learning with. Zoom provided a great platform for individuals around the world to join, but there wasn't much interaction outside of the first introductory chat that included where we were from and how long we had been playing violin.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter delved into the aspects of community building through in-person and online interactions and how music plays a beneficial role in reducing loneliness and hopelessness by providing support to individuals going through a variety of experiences such as homelessness, prison, depression, and family-related trauma. While any music genre can help build community, the focus on traditional Irish music provides a unique opportunity for individuals to not only be a part of a music community but to promote the music and the stories it tells.<sup>60</sup> Without the TRAD groups I interacted with throughout my fieldwork, I would have never felt like I was a part of a community and while I cannot speak for others, my sentiments may be shared throughout the TRAD communities created in Albuquerque. Music therapist Ray Travasso and Jane Gossine discuss the experiences shared by individuals who were a part of a hospice choir:

The choir was conceived as a vehicle for people to connect through music in order to facilitate the formation of meaningful friendships that will be crucial in their lives ahead. It is a place where socializing is more than just the tea and cakes after choir practice but a way of providing a social network beyond the hospice itself (Gossine and Travasso 2018).

While in a different musical setting, one can see how beneficial music can be in promoting community and building relationships that last outside of the initial starting group. TRAD sessions in Albuquerque have given me the opportunity to interact with a diverse population,

---

<sup>60</sup> In other words, the music is preserved for posterity rather than individuals having cultural or heritage ties to Ireland and traditional Irish music.

build relationships, and become more confident in my own personal playing and these skills can transfer to new group settings as I continue my musical and social journey.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis focused on the effects that different definitions of traditional Irish music and transmission methods used to circulate the genre have on community building. It also discussed what community is and how it can include in-person and online spaces. In doing my fieldwork for this thesis, I learned many things. Among them, I found that not having a consensus on the definition can make it intimidating for new members to join and could potentially discourage new members from joining based on how intimidated they feel about having a different definition from the group in which they are wanting to participate. I also learned that relying on sheet music, while not a bad thing to do, hinders the ability of the musician to connect with other members in the group and the cohesiveness of group playing, and that online spaces can be just as beneficial as in-person spaces based on an individual's needs. If one cannot leave the house, online communities provide opportunities to still interact with individuals who share similar interests but there can also be a disconnect between members depending on the size of the online group and how often they meet.<sup>61</sup> From research conducted and my fieldwork, one can see the

---

<sup>61</sup> The things that I have learned have been based on my own ethnographic and auto-ethnographic experiences such as having a differing definition of traditional Irish music from the rest of the group, the reliance on sheet music and the shift to becoming orally taught, and the ease and difficulties of being in an online community of musicians.

benefits that traditional Irish music can provide to a community<sup>62</sup> as well as the obstacles<sup>63</sup> groups and individuals can face when joining a TRAD session.

As we learned, the definition of traditional Irish music changes based on the context and the group of people playing. However, a discussion between musicians and their TRAD groups should pinpoint how the group defines traditional Irish music as to avoid confusion and exclusion of interested individuals or new members. As I have learned through my research, the main goal is to preserve the stories the music tells as well as the music itself. While this goal doesn't explicitly state that it wants to build community, the music and stories it tells would not be able to be passed on without forming a community. Older and more experienced musicians want to pass along the traditions to younger members and to teach them to respect the music and stories that come along with traditional Irish music. The gathering of individuals with similar interests has to occur in order for the music to be passed along from generation to generation.

## **The Changes of Traditional Irish Music and How it Shaped Communities**

When famines and war broke out in Ireland, individuals emigrated to new places like Scotland, and the United States.<sup>64</sup> Families were split up and individuals turned to their music to remind them of their homeland they would never see again. One example is County Clare, on the west coast of Ireland. Individuals built music and dance into their daily community practices

---

<sup>62</sup> Other genres of music can be used to help build community but for the purposes of this thesis I stick to traditional Irish music. For more about community musicking see Small 1998.

<sup>63</sup> Obstacles for groups can include not getting enough members and finding spaces to play while obstacles for individuals can be finding the 'right' group for them to join, the proving of musical ability to experienced group members, and how they define a genre of music.

<sup>64</sup> See chapter 2 for discussion about emigration and how it affected traditional Irish music.

such as planting, harvesting, religious and wedding ceremonies as well as other community events (Sky 1997). Despite the hardships Ireland faced, music helped communities thrive and overcome the obstacles of emigration, famine, and death. Without the practice of sharing tunes and stories told in and through songs, writing transcriptions, recording and the use of the media, traditional Irish music would sound different as well as be considered an endangered music practice.<sup>65</sup> While communities of traditional practices may feel as though they are losing what the music is and what it means, change is necessary to preserve the music for generations to come (Sky 1997, Inglehart and Baker 2000, Chaney 2002, Varnum and Grossmann 2017). As the years pass, the traditions may change but the name of the genre does not change and does not make it any less valuable to building communities. Without the change of traditions, traditional Irish music may have stuck with being a soloistic endeavor rather than a group practice.

### **Concluding Thoughts on the Role of Oral Transmission**

Oral transmission has been used to pass on music, stories, and traditions from one generation to the next. Without its role in promoting traditional Irish music across Ireland through famine and emigration, many would be left without the music and a community that brought them joy and memories of home. While many of my interlocutors had no cultural or familial tie to Ireland, the goal of preserving the music and the stories that come along with it was a driving factor of why they decided to play traditional Irish music. I also found that learning the music orally made me a better musician focused on listening to others rather than playing the notes on a page. Focused on listening to others, I learned to pick up on different social and musical cues that the group used to communicate and was able to integrate myself into the group

---

<sup>65</sup> Irish music faced many declines but has seen multiple revivals throughout the years through government programs and organizations dedicated to promoting traditional Irish music.



faster to be a part of the community rather than an outsider. This is why I believe that oral transmission plays a vital role in learning traditional Irish music over transcriptions, recordings, and the media despite the positive outcomes these transmission methods have: face-to-face musical transmission has a social aspect and power that remote methods most often do not. Oral transmission is still used today but it is not the only way to learn traditional Irish music and many individuals have turned to sheet music to learn the tunes as well as preserve the music.

### **Concluding Thoughts on the Role of Transcriptions**

Transcriptions in the form of Western music notation arrived to the scene later in Ireland than surrounding areas but was used as a method to preserve the genre as famine and emigration continued to devastate Ireland's population. Sheet music is a great tool for preserving and teaching the tunes in traditional Irish music. Transcriptions may be most effective when written similarly to jazz lead sheets where a melody is written out with chords written above that other musicians can play. However, transcripts can restrict a player from learning how to be an active participant in the TRAD community.

When I first started learning traditional Irish music, I read the notes and rhythms off the page but questioned why it didn't quite sound like the recordings and live sessions I had heard. I was missing the feel and too focused on the sheet music to listen to fellow musicians and had to unlearn a skill that seemed important to know in the classical world of violin that I grew up with. As discussed in chapter two, transcriptions were not always a reliable way to play traditional Irish music due to regional stylistic differences, as well as composers not correctly writing down what they were hearing when going to live sessions themselves. Participating in the beginner TRAD group gave me and other musicians an opportunity to have a safe space to make the

transition from sheet music to oral learning. One goal of the group was to make everybody feel comfortable enough to play the tunes off the music and to rely on one another rather than the paper in front of them.

## **Concluding Thoughts on the Role of Recordings**

The 1920s was a time that musicians decided to start recording traditional Irish music. This was done in New York and the recordings traveled to Ireland where individuals were hearing their music recorded for the first time. Musicians started to copy what they were hearing over the recordings rather than relying on oral transmission. This shaped how the music could be accessed throughout Ireland and the world as well as helped popularize and revitalize the music. Recordings can be a way to familiarize oneself with traditional Irish music but it should not be expected that the TRAD group you join will play in the same style as the musician you are used to hearing. While recordings can be a great method for learning, individuals should focus on what other group members are playing and match their style to drive group cohesion and less confusion when playing tunes. With physical recordings such as records and CDs fading from usage, the media took advantage and found updated ways of sharing the music through platforms such as YouTube and Spotify.

## **Concluding Thoughts on the Role of Media**

Media helped the popularity of Irish culture grow in the United States. It was popularized through shows like Riverdance, and through national holidays like St. Patrick's Day. In most recent years, to be Irish was highly sought after in the United States, and Irish culture was commodified. Worry about what was to come of the genre and the music community was echoed

through musicians and scholars alike. With the rise of prominent musicians being praised in the media, questions of community building through music arose. Was traditional Irish music still part of a culture, pure entertainment, or a mixture of both? (Crosbhealach an Cheoil Program 1996 cited in Sky 1997). While traditional Irish music may have a different meaning and definition to when it first started, all of the changes it has gone through to still be celebrated today has shown that the media and other transmission methods have not devalued the meaning of community and the role traditional Irish music can play.

## **TRAD Groups Outside of Albuquerque**

Traditional Irish music groups started to form as a way to connect with others who were similar. Not all groups were inclusive, but with the need to belong in a niche, individuals would do whatever it took to become a part of the group. Although this was the case for many cities like Chicago, there were other groups that were all-inclusive like the TRAD group located in La Grande, Oregon that I have studied<sup>66</sup> as well as the groups in Albuquerque. From observations made, the TRAD groups I interacted with contained as little as three people, to as many as six or more people playing. Each person had their own stories and why they decided to play traditional Irish music but they echoed the sentiment of wanting to preserve the music to which they had been introduced.

According to sociologist Deborah Rapuano (2001), TRAD groups in the Midwestern United States often exclude players of different ethnicities, however they put all individuals through many trials to prove that they are loyal and skilled players of traditional Irish music. Going through these trials, however, did not stop musicians from joining to find a community

---

<sup>66</sup> The TRAD group in Oregon consisted of individuals that I interviewed and played with in 2019 before Covid-19.

and identity that they belonged to within the larger Midwest community in which they already lived. One example is Chicago, where the TRAD groups tend to be larger, even though they are more exclusive. There is still a social aspect involved with playing with these groups, but they are more focused on virtuosity than on creating a safe atmosphere to connect with one another by playing traditional Irish music. Rapuano's (2001) discussion of representations of "self" shows that individuals who participate in TRAD groups along the Midwest still find a sense of belonging from participating in these more exclusive groups. Despite the trials one may face when trying to join a TRAD group, the sense of belonging and being a part of a community outweighed the trials. This does not mean that TRAD groups do not play a role in discouraging new members from joining, but it shows that individuals are resilient and willing to do many things to be a part of a community.

I found that the TRAD group located in Cork, Ireland is most similar to Albuquerque's TRAD group. Daithí Kearney's TRAD group contained three individuals who would travel to Cork to play traditional Irish music together. Individuals in the bar would often stop watching the television and would walk over to hear what the group was playing. Once they recognized the song, drunken verses were sung and social interactions provided a sense of community and belonging.<sup>67</sup> With many pubs generally losing money, this kind of interaction is getting harder and harder to come by and many are fighting to keep the traditions of Ireland alive. What started off as a small group get-together transformed into a space where musicians and listeners alike could gather around and enjoy music. The friendships and bonds formed through the group in Albuquerque as well as elsewhere around the world shows how influential music is in building a

---

<sup>67</sup> Based on my research, this is a phenomenon unique to Ireland. Interacting with the TRAD groups in Albuquerque, no audience member joined in. Instead, audience members listened to the music while they continued with their conversations.

community of people and how beneficial it can be to those who feel like they haven't found their niche within a larger community setting.

## **Final Thoughts**

The combination of observation, musical participant-observation, interviews and research shows that playing traditional Irish music does indeed build a sense of community in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Within these TRAD groups there is a social hierarchy as well as tension between amateur and more experienced musicians, but there has also been support between musicians encouraging individuals to join and going to each other's sessions to help reach the goal of passing the music traditions and stories down to younger generations. Each new member is graciously welcomed. Before I started my own musical participation, one member heard that I played violin and instantly stopped playing to hand me his instrument. He was so excited for me to join, he didn't think twice about thrusting his violin towards me. While I declined the invitation to play at this moment, I felt an instant connection to the TRAD group who was willing to let me play with them before they knew my musical abilities. Participating in a TRAD group can make one feel included and less lonely as has been my experience along with my interlocutors. While every community will have their difficulties, one should not shy away from the opportunity to play music with individuals who share similar interests and encourage individuals to play despite their musical ability. This differs from other TRAD communities outside of Albuquerque, New Mexico who have had instances of exclusion from TRAD groups based on whether or not you are of Irish descent, what instrument you play, the definition of traditional Irish music you or a TRAD group uses and how big the city is where the group is located. Individuals I have interacted with through my fieldwork in both La Grande, Oregon and

Albuquerque, New Mexico, have a positive experience in playing with TRAD groups and return each week to play and socialize. These groups give musicians a social outlet to meet and connect with new individuals from varying places and backgrounds who share a similar interest, which in turn, builds communities based on playing traditional Irish music.

# Appendix 1- List of Tunes

## ABQ Slow Session Collection October 2022

### Sets:

<b>Ashplant + Silver Spear</b> (Reels)
<b>Ballydesmond Polka #1 + Ballydesmond Polka #2 + Peg Ryan's [Egan's, Kerry]</b> (Polkas)
<b>Banish Misfortune + Garrett Barry's</b> (Jigs)
<b>Blackthorn Stick + Irish Washerwoman</b> (Jigs)
<b>Blarney Pilgrim + Merrily Kiss the Quaker</b> (Jigs)
<b>Boys of Bluehill + Cork Hornpipe [Harvest Home] + Cronin's Hornpipe</b> (Hornpipes)
<b>Boys of Malin + Gravel Walks</b> (Reels)
<b>Britches Full of Stitches + Armagh Polka [John Ryan's] + Ballydesmond Polka #3</b> (Polkas)
<b>Brosna [Lonesome Road to Dingle] + O'Keefe's + Denis Murphy's</b> (Slides)
<b>Bucks of Oranmore</b> (Reel)
<b>Coleraine + Tenpenny Bit + Tobin's</b> (Jigs)
<b>Concertina Reel + Earl's Chair</b> (Reels)
<b>Congress Reel + Pigeon on the Gate</b> (Reels)
<b>Cooley's + Wise Maid</b> (Reels)
<b>Cup of Tea + Musical Priest</b> (Reels)
<b>Drops of Brandy + Hardiman the Fiddler</b> (Slip Jigs)
<b>Dusty Windowsills + Cliffs of Moher + Rose in the Heather</b> (Jigs)
<b>Fanny Power + Si Beag Si Mor</b> (Waltzes)
<b>Farewell to Ireland + Foxhunters Reel</b> (Reels)
<b>Father Kelly's + Reconciliation + Mountain Road</b> (Reels)
<b>Fisherman's Island + Hunter's House</b> (Reels)
<b>Foxhunters + Butterfly</b> (Slip Jigs)
<b>Home Ruler + Kitty's Wedding</b> (Hornpipes)

<b>Humours of Ballyloughlin</b> (Jig)
<b>Jig of Slurs</b> (Jig)
<b>Julia Delaney + Morning Dew</b> (Reels)
<b>Kerfunten</b> (Jig)
<b>Kesh + Swallowtail + Morrison's</b> (Jigs)
<b>Kid on the Mountain</b> (Slip Jig)
<b>Lark in the Morning</b> (Jig)
<b>Lilting Banshee + Calliope House + Out on the Ocean</b> (Jigs)
<b>Maid Behind the Bar + Toss the Feathers</b> (Reels)
<b>Mason's Apron + Tam Lin</b> (Reels)
<b>Merry Blacksmith + Sally Gardens</b> (Reels)
<b>Monaghan Jig</b> (Jig)
<b>Rights of Man + King of the Fairies</b> (Hornpipes)
<b>Rights of Man + Off to California</b> (Hornpipes)
<b>Road to Lisdoonvarna + Drowsy Maggie + Wind That Shakes the Barley</b> (Mixed)
<b>Salamanca + Sailor's Bonnet + Banshee</b> (Reels)
<b>Smash the Windows + Coleraine + Haste to the Wedding</b> (Jigs)
<b>Sonny's Mazurka + Shoe the Donkey</b> (Mazurkas)
<b>South Wind + Inisheer</b> (Waltzes)
<b>Star Above the Garter + Dingle Regatta</b> (Slides)
<b>Star of Munster</b> (Reel)
<b>Tar Road to Sligo + Behind the Haystack</b> (Jigs)
<b>Tarbolton + Longford Collector + Sailor's Bonnet</b> (Reels)
<b>Teetotaller [a/k/a Temperance] + St. Anne's</b> (Reels)
<b>Tripping Up the Stairs + Rambling Pitchfork</b> (Jigs)

### Individual Tunes:

<b>Armagh [John Ryan's] Britches Full of Stitches</b>
<b>Ashplant Ashplant</b>
<b>Ballydesmond #1 Ballydesmond</b>
<b>Ballydesmond #2 Ballydesmond</b>
<b>Ballydesmond #3 Britches Full of Stitches</b>
<b>Banish Misfortune Banish Misfortune</b>
<b>Banshee Salamanca</b>
<b>Behind the Haystack Tar Road to Sligo</b>
<b>Blackthorn Stick Blackthorn Stick</b>
<b>Blarney Pilgrim Blarney Pilgrim</b>
<b>Boys of Bluehill Boys of Bluehill</b>
<b>Boys of Malin Boys of Malin</b>
<b>Britches Full of Stitches Britches Full of Stitches</b>
<b>Brosna [Lonesome Road to Dingle] Brosna</b>
<b>Bucks of Oranmore Bucks</b>
<b>Butterfly Foxhunters</b>
<b>Calliope House Lilting Banshee</b>
<b>Cliffs of Moher Dusty Windowsills</b>
<b>Coleraine Coleraine, Smash the Windows</b>
<b>Concertina Reel Concertina</b>
<b>Congress Reel Congress</b>
<b>Cooley's Cooley's,</b>
<b>Cork Hornpipe [Harvest Home] Boys of Bluehill</b>
<b>Cronin's Boys of Bluehill</b>
<b>Cup of Tea Cup of Tea</b>
<b>Denis Murphy's Brosna</b>
<b>Dingle Regatta Star Above the Garter</b>
<b>Drops of Brandy Drops of Brandy</b>
<b>Drowsy Maggie Road to Lisdoonvarna</b>
<b>Dusty Windowsills Dusty Windowsills</b>
<b>Earl's Chair Concertina</b>
<b>Fanny Power Fanny Power</b>

<b>Farewell to Ireland Farewell to Ireland</b>
<b>Father Kelly's Father Kelly's</b>
<b>Fisherman's Island Fisherman's Island</b>
<b>Foxhunters Slip Jig Foxhunters</b>
<b>Foxhunters Reel Farewell to Ireland</b>
<b>Garrett Barry's Banish Misfortune</b>
<b>Gravel Walks Boys of Malin</b>
<b>Hardiman the Fiddler Drops of Brandy</b>
<b>Haste to the Wedding Smash the Windows</b>
<b>Home Ruler Home Ruler</b>
<b>Humours of Ballyloughlin Humours</b>
<b>Hunter's House Fisherman's Island</b>
<b>Inisheer South Wind</b>
<b>Irish Washerwoman Blackthorn Stick</b>
<b>Jig of Slurs Jig of Slurs</b>
<b>Julia Delaney Julia Delaney</b>
<b>Kerfunten Kerfunten</b>
<b>Kesh Kesh</b>
<b>Kid on the Mountain Kid</b>
<b>King of the Fairies Rights of Man/King</b>
<b>Kitty's Wedding Home Ruler</b>
<b>Lark in the Morning Lark</b>
<b>Lilting Banshee Lilting Banshee</b>
<b>Longford Collector Tarbolton</b>
<b>Maid Behind the Bar Maid Behind the Bar</b>
<b>Mason's Apron Mason's Apron</b>
<b>Merrily Kiss the Quaker Blarney Pilgrim</b>
<b>Merry Blacksmith Merry Blacksmith</b>
<b>Monaghan Jig Monaghan</b>
<b>Morning Dew Julia Delaney</b>
<b>Morrison's Kesh</b>
<b>Mountain Road Father Kelly's</b>
<b>Musical Priest Cup of Tea/Musical</b>
<b>O'Keefe's Brosna</b>
<b>Off to California Rights of Man/Off</b>

<b>Out on the Ocean Lilting Banshee</b>
<b>Peg Ryan's [Egan's, Kerry] Ballydesmond</b>
<b>Pigeon on the Gate Congress</b>
<b>Rambling Pitchfork Tripping Up the Stairs</b>
<b>Reconciliation Father Kelly's</b>
<b>Rights of Man Rights of Man/King, Rights of Man/Off to California</b>
<b>Road to Lisdoonvarna Road to Lisdoonvarna</b>
<b>Rose in the Heather Dusty Windowsills</b>
<b>Sailor's Bonnet Salamanca, Tarbolton</b>
<b>Saint Anne's Teetotaller</b>
<b>Salamanca Salamanca</b>
<b>Sally Gardens Merry Blacksmith</b>
<b>Shoe the Donkey Sonny's</b>
<b>Si Beag si Mor Fanny Power</b>
<b>Silver Spear Ashplant</b>
<b>Smash the Windows Smash the Windows</b>
<b>Sonny's Mazurka Sonny's</b>
<b>South Wind South Wind</b>
<b>Star Above the Garter Star Above the Garter</b>
<b>Star of Munster Star of Munster</b>
<b>Swallowtail Kesh</b>
<b>Tam Lin Mason's Apron</b>
<b>Tar Road to Sligo Tar Road to Sligo</b>
<b>Tarbolton Tarbolton</b>
<b>Teetotaller [Temperance] Teetotaller</b>
<b>Tenpenny Bit Coleraine</b>
<b>Tobin's Coleraine</b>
<b>Toss the Feathers Maid Behind the Bar</b>
<b>Tripping Up the Stairs Tripping Up the Stairs</b>
<b>Wind That Shakes the Barley Road to Lisdoonvarna</b>
<b>Wise Maid Cooley's</b>

## References Cited

- Addeo, Felice, Angela Delli Paoli, Maria Esposito, and Maria Ylenia Bolcato. "Doing Social Research on Online Communities: The Benefits of Netnography." *ATHENS JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES* 7, no. 1 (2019): 9–38. <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajss.7-1-1>.
- Agenor, Christine, Norma Conner, and Karen Aroian. "Flourishing: An Evolutionary Concept Analysis." *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 38, no. 11 (2017): 915-923.
- Anraí, Róisín. 2019. "The Traditional Irish Tin Whistle," In *Your Irish Culture*. Accessed September 21, 2023. <https://www.yourirish.com/culture/music/tin-whistle>.
- Arensberg, Conrad M, and Solon Toothaker Kimball. 2001. *Family and Community in Ireland* 3rd ed. Ennis, County Clare, Ireland: Clasp Press.
- Arkenberg, Authors: Rebecca. n.d. "Music in the Renaissance | Essay | The Metropolitan Museum of Art | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History." The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. Accessed October 26, 2023. [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/renm/hd\\_renm.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/renm/hd_renm.htm).
- Bailey, Betty, and Jane W. Davidson. "Amateur Group Singing as a Therapeutic Instrument." *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy* 12, no.1(2003): 18–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08098130309478070>.
- Bailey, L. M. "The Effects of Live Music versus Tape-Recorded Music on Hospitalized Cancer Patients." *Music Therapy* 3, no. 1 (1983): 17–28. <https://doi.org/10.1093/mt/3.1.17>.
- Bartleet, Brydie-Leigh, Lee Higgins, and Janice Waldron. 2021. "Chapter 6: Online Music Communities and Social Media." Essay. In *The Oxford Handbook of Community Music*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Beneito-Montagut, Roser. "Ethnography goes Online: Towards a User-Centred Methodology to Research Interpersonal Communication on the Internet." *Qualitative Research* 11, no. 6 (2011): 716-735.
- Biller, Jack D., Peggy J. Olson, and Thomas Breen. "The Effect of 'Happy' versus 'Sad' Music and Participation on Anxiety." *Journal of Music Therapy* 11, no. 2 (1974): 68-73.
- Booth, Alison Stevens, and Fiona Mary Cameron. "Family Event Participation: Building Flourishing Communities." *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* 11, no. 2 (2020): 223-238.



- Boswell, Matthew A. "Music for a Lifetime: How Are We Doing? A Review of Literature on Adult Participation in Large Community Music Ensembles." *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education* 40, no. 2 (2022): 56–65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/87551233211040735>.
- Broude, Ronald. "Music's Textual Dilemma: Mistrusting Musical Texts." *Textual Cultures* 14, no. 2 (2021): 94–114. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48641125>.
- Butler, Kim D. "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 189–219. <https://doi.org/10.3138/diaspora.10.2.189>.
- Campbell, Patricia Shehan. "Orality, Literacy and Music's Creative Potential: A Comparative Approach." *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* (1989): 30-40.
- Card, Alan J. "Flourishing as a Definition of Health." *JAMA* 322, no. 10 (2019): 981.
- Carson, Ciaran. 1998. *Last Night's Fun: In and Out of Time with Irish Music*. New York: North Point Press.
- Cassity, M. D. The Influence of a Music Therapy Activity upon Peer Acceptance, Group Cohesiveness, and Interpersonal Relationships of Adult Psychiatric Patients. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 13, no. 2 (1976): 66–76. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jmt/13.2.66>.
- Chaney, David. 2002. "Cultural Change and Everyday Life." New York: Palgrave Macmillian.
- Christian Franklin, J., M. Mainelli, and R. Pay. "Measuring the Value of Online Communities", *Journal of Business Strategy*, Vol. 35 no. 1 (2014): 29-42. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBS-04-2013-0027>
- Clift, Stephen, and Paul Marc Camic, eds. 2016. *Oxford Textbook of Creative Arts, Health, and Wellbeing: International Perspectives on Practice, Policy and Research*. Oxford University Press.
- Clift, Stephen, and Grenville Hancox. "The Significance of Choral Singing for Sustaining Psychological Wellbeing: Findings from a Survey of Choristers in England, Australia and Germany." *Music Performance Research* 3 (2010): 79-96.
- Clift, S. 2008. "Choral Singing, Wellbeing and Health: Summary of Findings from a Cross-national Survey." Kent, England: Canterbury Christ Church University.
- Coleman, Steve. 2012. "'Nonsynchronism,' Traditional Music, and Memory in Ireland." In *Memory Ireland: Diaspora and Memory Practices, Volume 2*, edited by Frawley Oona, 161-70. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press. [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1j1nv2c.19](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1j1nv2c.19).

- Cova, B. "Community and Consumption: Towards a Definition of the Linking Value of Products or Services." *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 31, no 3 (1997b): 297-316.
- Cromleigh, Ralph Grier. "Neumes, Notes, and Numbers: The Many Methods of Music Notation." *Music Educators Journal* 64, no. 4 (1977): 30–39.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3395373>.
- Dell, Becky. 2023. "Western Classical Music." *Becky Dell Music Academy* (blog). Accessed November 2, 2023.  
<https://www.beckydellmusicacademy.co.uk/western-classical-music/>.
- Desmond, Matthew. 2016. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. New York City: Crown Publishing Group.
- Dutton, Denis. 2013. "Aesthetic Universals." In *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, pp. 267-277. London: Routledge.
- Ernst M, D. Niederer, AM Werner, SJ Czaja, C. Mikton, AD Ong, T. Rosen, E. Brähler, ME Beutel. "Loneliness before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review with Meta-Analysis." *American Psychology*: 77, no. 5 (2022): 660-677. doi: 10.1037/amp0001005.
- Fanning, Charles. "Eleanor Kane Neary and the Piano in Irish Traditional Music." *American Music* 30, no. 4 (2012): 453-67.  
doi:10.5406/americanmusic.30.4.0453.
- Fleming, Rachel C. "Resisting Cultural Standardization: Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann and the Revitalization of Traditional Music in Ireland." *Journal of Folklore Research* 4 (2004): 227- 247. Gale Literature Resource Center.
- Foley, Catherine E. "The Irish Céilí: A Site for Constructing, Experiencing, and Negotiating a Sense of Community and Identity." *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 29, no. 1 (2011): 43-60.  
[www.jstor.org/stable/41428389](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41428389).
- Gainza, Mikel. 2006. *Music Transcription within Irish Traditional Music*. Doctoral Thesis, Technological University Dublin. doi:10.21427/D7T03S.
- Gosine, J., & R. Travasso. "Building Community through Song: The Therapeutic Hospice Choir." *British Journal of Music Therapy*, 32, no. 1 (2018): 18-26.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1359457518759960>.
- Grant, Catherine. 2014. *Music Endangerment: How Language Maintenance Can Help*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Gray, Lila Ellen. 2013. *Fado Resounding Affective Politics and Urban Life*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Guimaraes Jr., E. 2005. "Online/Offline Community." In C. Hine (Ed.), *Virtual Methods: Issues in Social Research on the Internet*, p. 142-151. New York: Berg.
- Hast, Dorothea E., and Stan (Stanley Arnold) Scott. 2004. *Music in Ireland: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. Global Music Series. New York: Oxford University Press. <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0615/2003065467-t.html>.
- Henigan, Julie. 1994. "Master Thesis: Sean-Nós in America: A Study of Two Singers." [https://www.academia.edu/9771403/Masters\\_Thesis\\_Sean\\_N%C3%B3s\\_in\\_America\\_A\\_Study\\_of\\_Two\\_Singers](https://www.academia.edu/9771403/Masters_Thesis_Sean_N%C3%B3s_in_America_A_Study_of_Two_Singers).
- Henigan, Julie. 2001. "Sean-Nós in Donegal." <http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/sean-nos.htm>.
- Hetty I.M. Tonneijck , Astrid Kinébanian & Staffan Josephsson. An Exploration of Choir Singing: Achieving Wholeness through Challenge, *Journal of Occupational Science* 15, no 3 (2008): 173-180, DOI: [10.1080/14427591.2008.9686627](https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2008.9686627).
- Hodges, Donald A., and Robin W. Wilkins. "How and Why Does Music Move Us? Answers from psychology and neuroscience." *Music Educators Journal* 101, no. 4 (2015): 41-47.
- Hosbawm, Eric, and Terrence Ranger. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Inglehart, Ronald, and Wayne E. Baker. "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values." *American sociological review* (2000): 19-51.
- Jacobsen, Kristina M. 2017. *The Sound of Navajo Country: Music, Language, and Diné Belonging*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2006b). "Fans, Gamers, and Bloggers: Exploring Participatory Culture." New York: New York University Press.
- Johnston, Thomas F. "The Social Context of Irish Folk Instruments." *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 26, no. 1 (1995): 35-59. doi:10.2307/836964.
- Keil, Charles M. H. "Motion and Feeling through Music." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24, no. 3 (1966): 337-49. <https://doi.org/10.2307/427969>.
- Kiernan, Frederic, and Jane W Davidson. 2022. "How can Music Engagement Address Loneliness? A Qualitative Study and Thematic Framework in the Context of Australia's COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdowns." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, U.S. National Library of Medicine.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9819799/#:~:text=Social%20isolation%20and%20loneliness%20are,time%20and%20space%20is%20relevant.>

- Killick, Andrew. "Global Notation as a Tool for Cross-Cultural and Comparative Music Analysis." *Analytical Approaches to World Music* 8, no. 2 (2020): 235-279.
- Kleeman, Janice E. "The Parameters of Musical Transmission." *The Journal of Musicology* 4, no. 1 (1985): 1-22.
- Krivo, Lauren J., Heather M. Washington, Ruth D. Peterson, Christopher R. Browning, Catherine A. Calder, and Mei-Po Kwan. "Social Isolation of Disadvantage and Advantage: The Reproduction of Inequality in Urban Space." *Social Forces*, Vol. 92, no. 1 (2013): 141–164, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sot043>.
- Lenette, Caroline, Donna Weston, Patricia Wise, Naomi Sunderland, and Helen Bristed. "Where Words Fail, Music Speaks: The impact of Participatory Music on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Asylum Seekers." *Arts & Health* 8, no. 2 (2016): 125-139.
- List, George. "The Musical Significance of Transcription (Comments on Hood, 'Musical Significance')." *Ethnomusicology* 7, no. 3 (1963): 193–97. <https://doi.org/10.2307/924577>.
- Livesey, Laetitia, Ian Morrison, Stephen Clift, and Paul Camic. "Benefits of Choral Singing for Social and Mental Wellbeing: Qualitative Findings from a Cross-National Survey of Choir Members." *Journal of Public Mental Health* 11, no. 1 (2012): 10-26.
- Lortat-Jacob, Bernard. 2011. "Singing in Company." Ardian Ahmedaja (ed.) *European Voices II. Cultural Listening and Local Discourse in Multipart Singing Traditions in Europe*. Vienna: Böhlau.
- Macchiarella, Ignazio. 2012. "Current Creativities in Multipart Singing Practice." In *TRANS-Revista Transcultural de Música/Transcultural Music Review*.
- MacDonald, Raymond, Robert Burke, Tia De Nora, Maria Sappho Donohue, and Ross Birrell. "Our Virtual Tribe: Sustaining and Enhancing Community via Online Music Improvisation." *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2021). <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.623640>.
- MacGregor, Elizabeth H. "Conceptualizing Musical Vulnerability." *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 30, no. 1 (2022): 24-43.
- MacQueen KM, McLellan E, Metzger DS, Kegeles S, Strauss RP, Scotti R, Blanchard L, Trotter RT 2nd. 2001. "What is Community? An Evidence-Based Definition for Participatory Public Health." *Am J Public Health*. 91, no. 12 (1929-38). doi: 10.2105/ajph.91.12.1929.

- McCann, Anthony. "All That Is Not Given Is Lost: Irish Traditional Music, Copyright, and Common Property." *Ethnomusicology* 45, no. 1 (2001): 89-106. doi:10.2307/852635.
- McCullough, Lawrence E. "Style in Traditional Irish Music." *Ethnomusicology* 21, no. 1(1977): 85-97. doi:10.2307/850853.
- McNeela, Paraic. 2020. "Concertina FAQ - The Difference Between The English, Duet And Anglo Concertina." <https://blog.mcneelamusic.com/the-concertina-explained-anglo-concertina-english-concertina-duet-concertina/>.
- Moloney, Deirdre. "Who's Irish? Ethnic Identity and Recent Trends in Irish American History." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28, no. 4 (2009): 100-09. [www.jstor.org/stable/40543475](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40543475).
- Mulroney, Frances. 2019. "The History and Origins of Traditional Irish Music." IrishCentral.com, <https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/history-origins-traditional-irish-music>.
- Ng, Alan. 2021. "Frequently Asked Question:" irishtune.info Rhythm Definitions - Irish Traditional Music Tune Index. <https://www.irishtune.info/rhythm/>.
- Nicholson, Helen. Ideals of Community, Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance 13, no. 3 (2008): 271-273, DOI: [10.1080/13569780802410624](https://doi.org/10.1080/13569780802410624).
- Ó Canainn Tomás. 1978. *Traditional Music in Ireland*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Ó Súilleabháin, Mícheál. "Irish Music Defined." *The Crane Bag* 5, no. 2 (1981): 83–87. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30060639>.
- Patterson, Emma E. "Oral Transmission: A Marriage of Music, Language, Tradition, and Culture," *Musical Offerings* 6, no. 1 (2015): doi: 10.15385/jmo.2015.6.1.2.
- Pitts, Stephanie. 2005. *Valuing Musical Participation*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Poets, Academy of American. n.d. "Thomas Moore." Text. Poets.Org. Accessed October 26, 2023. <https://poets.org/poet/thomas-moore>.
- Quinn, Toner. 2006. "Purists All." *The Journal of Music | News, Reviews and Opinion*. <https://journalofmusic.com/focus/purists-all>.
- Rapuano, Deborah L. "Becoming Irish or Becoming Irish Music? Boundary Construction in Irish Music Communities." *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures* 24 (2001): 103-113.

- Reid, Graeme. 2023. "The Trouble with Tradition." *World Policy* (blog).  
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/01/11/trouble-tradition#:~:text=Culture%20does%20change%20with%20time,these%20shifts%2C%20it%20fossilizes%20society>
- Rheingold, Howard. "A Slice of Life in my Virtual Community." *Global Networks: Computers and International Communication* (1993): 57-80.
- Richerme, Lauren Kapalka. "Vulnerable Experiences in Music Education: Possibilities and Problems for Growth and Connectivity." *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 209 (2016): 27-42.
- Robertson-Wilson, Marian. n.d. The Challenges of Notating Music in General and Coptic Music in Particular: Observations of a Professional 'Cellist, Composer, and Linguist. Web. <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihac.200156229/>.
- Rofe M, Murray S, and Parker W. "Online Orchestra: Connecting Remote Communities through Music." *Journal of Music, Technology and Education* 10, no. 2-3 (2017): 147–65. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jmte.10.2-3.147\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jmte.10.2-3.147_1).
- Ruud, Even. "Music and the Quality of Life." *Nordic journal of music therapy* 6, no. 2 (1997): 86-97.
- Sadie, Stanley. 1997. *The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Sallabank, J. "Purism, Variation, Change and 'Authenticity': Ideological Challenges to Language Revitalisation." *European Review* 26, no. 1 (2018): 164–178. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798717000400>
- Schensul, Jean, J., and Margaret Diane, LeCompte. 2013. *Essential Ethnographic Methods*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Maryland: AltaMira Press.
- Sheffer. 2023. "Diaspora." *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Self-Determination*. <https://pesd.princeton.edu/node/256>.
- Shultz, C.J., Rahtz, D.R., Sirgy, M.J. (2017). Distinguishing Flourishing from Distressed Communities: Vulnerability, Resilience and a Systemic Framework to Facilitate Well-Being. In: Phillips, R., Wong, C. (eds) *Handbook of Community Well-Being Research*. International Handbooks of Quality-of-Life. Springer, Dordrecht. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-0878-2\\_21](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-0878-2_21).
- Sky, Cathy. 1997. "I'd Barter Them All : Elements of Change in the Traditional Music of County Clare, Ireland." Dissertation. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- Small, Christopher. 1998. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Hanover: University Press of New England.

- Smith, Sally K. Sommers. "Traditional Music: Ceol Traidisiúnta: Irish Traditional Music in a Modern World." *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* 5, no. 2 (2001): 111–25.
- South, Jane. 2015. "A Guide to Community-Centred Approaches for Health and Wellbeing." London: Public Health England.
- Sparshott, Francis. "Music and Feeling." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52, no. 1 (1994): 23–35. <https://doi.org/10.2307/431582>.
- Spencer, Scott. 2010. "Transatlantic Migrations of Irish Music in the Early Recording Age." In *The Irish in the Atlantic World*, edited by Gleeson David T., 53-75. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press. [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv6wgjgw.7](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv6wgjgw.7).
- Steele, Megan Ellen. "How can Music Build Community? Insight from Theories and Practice of Community Music Therapy." *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy* 16, no. 2 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.15845/voices.v16i2.876>.
- Steen, Alecia. 2023. "Irish Bagpipes vs. Scottish Bagpipes - What's The Difference?" *PrimeSound.Org* (blog). Accessed August 10, 2023. <https://primesound.org/irish-and-scottish-bagpipes/>.
- Stige, B., Ansdell, G., Elefant, C., & Pavlicevic, M. 2010. *Where Music Helps: Community Music Therapy in Action and Reflection*. Farnham, England; Burlington, USA: Ashgate.
- Such, David G. "The Bodhrán: The Black Sheep in the Family of Traditional Irish Musical Instruments." *The Galpin Society Journal* 38 (1985): 9-19. doi:10.2307/841276.
- Thorman, Marc. 2023. "Traditional Music and Folk Music of Ireland." *Music in Global America*, University of Southern California, <https://scalar.usc.edu/works/music-in-global-america/traditional-music-and-folk-music-of-ireland>.
- Trask, R.L. 1999. *Key Concepts in Language and Linguistics*. London: Routledge.
- Unkefer, Robert F. "Music Therapy for Adults with Behavior Disorders." *Music in Therapy* (1968): 231-237.
- Varnum, Michael EW, and Igor Grossmann. "Cultural Change: The How and the Why." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 12, no. 6 (2017): 956-972.
- Waldron, Janice. 2017. Online Music Communities and Social Media. 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190219505.013.34.

- Wenger, Etienne. "Communities of Practice: Learning as a Social System." *Systems Thinker* 9, no. 5 (1998): 2-3.
- Weston, D. A(nother) Day in the Life of a Purist: Anglicisms in the Speech of Norwegian University Students. *Scandinavian Studies* 89 no. 1 (2017): 87–114.  
<https://doi.org/10.5406/scanstud.89.1.0087>
- Whisnant, David E. 1980. "All That is Native and Fine." University of North Carolina Press.
- Wiggins, Jackie. "Vulnerability and Agency in Being and Becoming a Musician." *Music Education Research* 13, no. 4 (2011): 355-367.
- Williams, Sean. 2010. *Focus: Irish Traditional Music*, Edited by Bakan., Michael B. 1-213. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.
- Winick, Stephen. 2021. "A Deep Dive into Sea Shanties: Folklife Today." The Library of Congress. <https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2021/01/a-deep-dive-into-sea-shanties/>.
- Young, I.M. 1990 . The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference . In *Feminism/postmodernism* L.J. Nicholson, 300 – 23. London : Routledge .
2023. Claire. Personal Correspondence.
2023. Jacob. Personal Correspondence.
2023. Mackenzie. Personal Correspondence.
2023. "Session Manners."
2022. "Covid-19 Pandemic Led to Increase in Loneliness around the World." *American Psychological Association*, American Psychological Association.  
<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2022/05/covid-19-increase-loneliness>.
2013. "'Traditional Irish Music Here Tonight': Exploring the Session Space." In *Spacing Ireland: Place, Society and Culture in a Post-boom Era*, edited by Crowley Caroline and Linehan Denis, 171-82. Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press. [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvnb7pjk.19](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvnb7pjk.19).
2012. "Ornaments." In *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, edited by Kennedy, Joyce, Michael Kennedy, and Tim Rutherford-Johnson. : Oxford University Press, <https://www-oxfordreference-com.libproxy.unm.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780199578108.001.0001/acref-9780199578108-e-6717>.
2007. "Blog: Irish Music: Definitions." Comhaltas . Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.  
[https://comhaltas.ie/blog/post/irish\\_music\\_definitions/](https://comhaltas.ie/blog/post/irish_music_definitions/).
- "Intangible Cultural Heritage." Ireland.ie. Accessed February 1, 2024.  
<https://www.ireland.ie/en/oecd-unesco/paris/ireland-and-unesco/intangible-cultural-heritage/>.



- “Irish Traditional Music.” n.d. *Ireland’s National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (blog). Accessed July 5, 2023.  
<https://nationalinventoryich.chg.gov.ie/irish-traditional-music/>.
- “Traditional Irish Music and Instruments – History and Origins.” n.d. Accessed August 24, 2023.  
<https://www.churchmusic.ie/traditional-irish-music-and-instruments-history-and-origins/>.
- “Black ’47 Ireland’s Great Famine and Its After-Effects - Department of Foreign Affairs.” n.d. Accessed October 13, 2023.  
<https://www.dfa.ie/irish-embassy/usa/about-us/ambassador/ambassadors-blog/black47irelandsgreatfamineanditsafter-effects/>.
- “Comhaltas: Amhranaíocht Ar an Sean-Nos.” n.d. Accessed August 7, 2023.  
[https://comhaltas.ie/music/treoir/detail/amhranaiocht\\_ar\\_an\\_sean\\_nos/](https://comhaltas.ie/music/treoir/detail/amhranaiocht_ar_an_sean_nos/).
- “Emotional Safety.” Accessed February 9, 2024.  
<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/safety/emotional-safety>.
- “Media Definition & Meaning | Dictionary.Com.” n.d. Accessed October 26, 2023.  
<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/media>.
- “Oireachtas Na Samhna || An tOireachtas.” n.d. Accessed November 30, 2022.  
<https://www.antoireachtas.ie/oireachtas-na-samhna/>.
- “Richard Alfred Millikin - Irish Biography.” n.d. Accessed October 26, 2023.  
<https://www.libraryireland.com/biography/RichardAlfredMillikin.php>.