

Chapter Nine: Tradition and Transformation in Irish Traditional Music

- Begin class by playing the three listening examples (Illustration #24) on the website (www.mhhe.com/bakan1)
- So what is Irish traditional music?
 - Bakan calls these three examples “traditional, neo-traditional, post-traditional”
 - Irish influence is spread throughout the world: Boston, NYC, Liverpool, London, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Louisiana, the Appalachian mountains, etc.
 - Much of the Irish traditional music of these three classifications falls under the genre of dance music; Irish dance is also very popular throughout Ireland and the Irish diaspora
 - What are your impressions of these three examples? Can you justify Bakan’s classifications?
- Irish Music in Context: A History Lesson (map)
 - The island has been divided into two nations since 1920; the Republic of Ireland is independent, capital Dublin, in the South; Northern Ireland is a province of the UK, capital Belfast
 - Northern Ireland has a troubled past: persecution of the Catholic minority, acts of terrorism, political issues with Britain; most of this was happening in the 1970s-80s, though acts of violence are still reported often (last report 8 November of a grenade launched at police)
 - The Republic of Ireland: predominately Catholic; official languages - English and Irish (Gaelic), Bakan cites that Gaelic is mainly spoken in concentrated areas, but Irish students must take a Gaelic entrance exam in order to attend state universities; much larger in land area than N. Ireland; 26 counties - several of the counties are associated with different musical styles (Donegal, Galway, Sligo, Limerick, Kerry, Clare)
 - RI didn’t become independent until 1949, 1921-49 it was the Irish Free State under the British Commonwealth, before that Irish Catholics were persecuted by British government/Protestants - Irish blamed British for not helping enough during the potato famine (1840s), which led to Irish resistance and eventually the Irish Free State
 - Potato famine led to vast emigration, especially to Boston and NYC - now called the Irish diaspora
 - Irish Free State made attempts to preserve Irish traditional music: Radio Éireann (national radio station) 1926 - helped establish Irish traditional music as a symbol of Irish nationalism; government made efforts to preserve, collect, and distribute Irish music - though it was not very popular during this time period

- 1949: Irish Free State becomes Republic of Ireland; industrialization and urbanization hits; rise in income and fear of the loss of culture led to Irish traditional music revival, 1960s
- Though the government of the Irish Free State was making strides in collecting and recording traditional music, traditional music was in decline in the rural countryside of Ireland - why?
- The Catholic Church had been suppressing music and dance for awhile - (in Helen O'Shea) from a letter by Francis O'Neill c. 1860: "Traditional Irish music could have survived even the disasters of the famine, had not the means for its preservation and perpetuation – the crossroads and farmhouse dances – been capriciously and arbitrarily proscribed and suppressed. 'Twas done in my native parish of Caharagh, West Carberry, in my boyhood days, by a gloomy puritanical pastor..." (O'Neill 161)
- Public Dance Halls Act of 1935: the church finally succeeded; this legislation stated that no person or group could host public music or dancing without a license
 - A Galway fiddler remembers: "We weren't allowed to hold the house-dances anymore, and that was the most awful crime against the Irish music that anyone could do." (O'Shea 33)
- So music declines in a domestic setting; music-making shifts to commercial setting - therefore the music distributed and heard during the next twenty or so years is almost entirely under the control of the Gaelic League, a government-run organization; it should also be noted that these bands tended to play only in unison
- Music becomes less a personal, social, informal experience to a more formal, rehearsed, public band setting and in some ways pushed local traditional music out of the way in favor of a national coherence of the music; separated the closeness of dancers and musicians by creating more of a performers/citizens dichotomy
- In some ways, the bands were good for the musicians - gave them an opportunity to play as "professionals," to get paid, to get exposed to new music; but musicians rarely played solo performances anymore, and the appreciative payment system established in dance halls before 1935 declined because the music was now a business (so if you weren't "pro" you didn't get paid)
- An Introduction to Irish Traditional Music
 - The term itself is broad, Bakan says, "historical documentation of Irish traditional music accounts for just the last two to three centuries of its development, but historians and Irish musicians alike believe that its roots are in antiquity" (Bakan 158)
 - Traditional is a term used to distinguish between older music and contemporary repertory (Hast 16)
 - Sessions: "informal gathering where musicians join together to play Irish tunes"; this happens in pubs and in homes, similar to "jamming"

- *Ceili* (KAY-lee): a similar kind of gathering in public but the music generally accompanies dancing; this is the kind of gathering that was government regulated after the Public Dance Halls Act
- Five main categories:
 - *Sean nós* singing: usually unaccompanied, Irish Gaelic <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JE6QDQdwo9E>; the “heart” of Irish traditional, distinct ornamentation, expressive; highly influential on the rest of Irish traditional; subject matter - nature, love, religion
 - Airs: free rhythm, slow and instrumental (play “Mna na hEireann” - The Chieftains, you might recognize this from the recent Robin Hood film)
 - Songs sung in English: play “Whiskey You’re the Devil” - The Clancy Brothers
 - Irish harp (national symbol - Guinness label): play “Carrickfergus” - The Chieftains (also an air)
 - Instrumental dance tunes: most popular genre of Irish traditional, both to be used to accompany dance and on its own as an instrumental genre
- Traditional Irish Dance Tunes and Medleys: Two Examples
 - Dance tunes and medleys are common in *ceili* and sessions; sessions tend to be more common, groups of instrumentalists playing an undesignated variety of instruments
 - Sessions are social events
 - *Craic*: conversation
 - Michael Moloney talks about sessions: “I have participated in more sessions than I can count... images come to mind of sessions in small pubs in Ireland with musicians pressed tightly together in a corner in the familiar semicircle that Irish traditional musicians always form...” (Bakan 160); he also talks about audiences - sometimes they stop and listen, sometimes it’s just background music to the pub noise
 - Medleys: putting two or more tunes of the same rhythm together (for example: a set of reels, jigs, or hornpipes - show music book); could last as long as the dancers could dance or the musicians could keep thinking of tunes
 - History lesson: pre-1935, Irish traditional music was more common in dance halls - “there was no real separation between the dance tune performance and the dancing itself, which were viewed as integral to one another...” (Bakan 161)
 - Instruments:
 - Tin whistle/penny whistle: end blown flute, six finger holes; Bakan claims that “virtually anyone can get a decent sound out of a tin whistle” (Bakan 163) to which I disagree - I certainly can’t, and sat in an entire class of American music students who couldn’t; its size makes it manageable for children; usually tuned in D or C (mostly D); Seamus Ennis; (The Trip to Sligo - The Chieftains)
 - Uilleann (YOO-lee-yin) pipes: Irish bagpipes (uniquely so); can produce several lines; softer dynamic, three drone pipes, one chanter (melody),

three regulators (chords); played seated - air is not blown but pumped through the bellows and then squeezed out by the player; chanter has finger holes; regulators have 4-5 keys that produce different pitch when pressed, may be used as chords under the melody or rhythmic pulse; both regulators and drones may be turned on or off during performance; Seamus Ennis; (Carolan's Concerto - Chieftains)

- Fiddle: melodic instrument
- Wooden flute: six primary finger holes, fingering similar to penny whistle; softer, darker timbre than metal flute; usually tuned in D
- Harp: played most often in solo settings, but sometimes in ensembles as well
- Bodhrán: frame drum. goat skin head, held in lap; Ó Riada also featured the bodhrán which before had only been used in ceremonial gatherings - now the main rhythmic accompaniment of Irish traditional music; Before the resurgence of Irish traditional music, the bodhrán was generally used as rhythmic accompaniment to ceremonial gatherings; Peadar Mercier, member of the Chieftains, popularized the bodhrán in concert settings and recordings; mostly used in reels and jigs, tends to be used to change the speed or rhythm in between tunes in a set (if they happen to be different) (John Kelly's Slide - The Chieftains)
- Concertina: small hexagonal button accordion; originated in Germany in the 19th-century; popular dance hall instrument because the early versions tended to be quite loud; similar in range to violin - melodic instrument; associated as an instrument for women in the late 19th-century and early 20th-century, supposedly because it was cheap and easy to play (An Ghaioth Anea - Chieftains)
- Bouzouki, guitar, banjo, mandolin: harmonic accompaniment
- Form: most common form is AABB, 8 2-beat measure per section; one instrument may introduce a piece, then the rest come in and begin the AABB form; another way to say this is AA'BB'; the entire piece is usually repeated and sometimes the A section is added as a coda - AA'BB'AA'BB'A; although this form is not set in stone - it is usually up to the musicians and improvisation
- Dance rhythms: reel - DAH da da da; hornpipe - DAH __ da (both of these dances are quick tempo)
- Irish traditional is not meant to sound polished like Western art music; "these irregularities give it an attractive feeling of raw spontaneity... they are at the core of a traditional-style musical art that emphasizes creating music in in the moment of performance and never playing a tune or part of a tune exactly the same way twice" (Bakan 167)
- The Life and Legacy of Seamus Ennis (1919-1982)
 - Important in the "preservation, cultivation, and dissemination of Irish traditional" (Bakan 168)

- Born in Jamestown, near Dublin; son of a pipes player and famous member of the Fingal Trio, an important figure in the growth of Irish traditional popularity
- Master of the pipes by age 21 without any formal lessons, just instruction from dear old dad; also learned to read and write music (not a common thing in the Irish traditional world at the time)
- Music literacy was a major boost in getting a career as a folk music collector; his musical abilities and knowledge of Gaelic helped
- Then got a job touring the country and recording musicians for Radio Éireann; raised awareness of the music tradition in Ireland to the general public; later worked for BBC doing the same thing; returned to Ireland to do freelance work for the radio and TV, traveled, played music, etc.
- New-Traditional Irish Music and the Irish Music Revival
 - Industrialization led to urbanization and a shift in the economy from agriculture to manufacturing; Ireland becomes a prosperous country
 - Fears of culture loss and interest in traditional Irish culture led to Irish traditional music revival beginning in the 60s - helped by recordings, competitions
 - p. 170-171 history of Irish music in dance halls and sessions (Bakan's text lacks in the details)
 - Sean Ó'Riada (1931-1971) and the transformation of Irish Traditional Music
 - Ó'Riada played an important role in the transformation and modernization of Irish traditional music
 - Organized an ensemble comprised of prominent musicians called Ceoltóirí Cualann; combined solo instrumental tradition with an ensemble-based sound, expert at arranging music; the ensemble was made up of a core set of instruments (pipes, two fiddles, penny whistle, accordion, bodhrán); essential were the pipes because they had lost popularity even with the efforts of Ennis, Ó'Riada featured the pipes in his music so they gained recognition; Ó'Riada also featured the bodhrán which before had only been used in ceremonial gatherings - now the main rhythmic accompaniment of Irish traditional music
 - His compositions and arrangements are now played throughout Ireland as a legitimate realization of traditional music
 - He also taught at University College Cork, lending Irish traditional to the academic world (it is now a "major"); by exploring the connections between Irish traditional and Western ears, the music became popular again not only in Ireland but internationally; The Chieftains formed out of Ó'Riada's ensemble (Mel Mercier, bodhrán professor at UCC and whose father was the first pro bodhrán player and first player for the Chieftains: "The Chieftains have recorded with everyone but God.")
- The Chieftains
 - Emerged out of Ceoltóirí Cualann; according to Bakan - "arguably the most widely influential and internationally renowned Irish traditional music group ever" (Bakan 171)

- Heavy influence on later famous Irish traditional groups such as Clannad, Planxty, The Bothy Band, De Danaan, Altan, Lúnasa
- The 1970s: Second generation of the Irish music revival
 - Planxty pipes player (Liam O’Flynn) was friends with and influenced by Ennis
 - Irish groups at this time were influenced by their cultural context - both the rock, jazz, and classical that they had grown up with and the “already-modernized styles of Ceoltóirí Cualann and The Chieftains” (Bakan 174); Irish music constantly changing
- The modern ensemble sound of Irish traditional dance music
 - Separating the “old” style from the “new”; heard throughout Ireland and the Irish diaspora, accompanying Irish dance performance, etc.
 - Group performance: have both melodic and chordal or rhythmic lines and instruments
 - Variation of styles and textures in dance tunes: using different combinations of instruments - pretty much if you have an instrument and you can play, then you’re in; two or more different textures might feature in a performance
 - Unison ornamented melody
 - Varied versions of a single melody (ornamentation can be different, more improvisational)
 - Division of melodic line; by phrase or by section
 - Jazz/rock influences: improved solos based in jazz or rock rather than Irish traditional, a sort of fusion
 - Chords: incorporation of guitar and bouzouki, sometimes a bass; accompanimental line is based on chord progressions and rhythmic ornamentation (for example: using Spanish flamenco rhythm); aid in modulations
 - Percussion: bodhrán, drum set, conga drums
 - For listening, not for dancing (although this went out of style before Ennis gained prominence)
- The Post-Traditional World of Irish Music: Crossing Bridges with Eileen Ivers
 - Music in the Irish diaspora is also important in the world of Irish traditional music; Irish music was vital to those removed from their homeland (where it was going out of style) because it was a connection, both through playing and listening to recordings (American companies recorded some Irish music); helped in the Irish traditional revival because it had not lost prominence with those in the Irish diaspora
 - The Music and Life of Eileen Ivers
 - Irish-American; grew up in the Bronx, parents were Irish immigrants
 - Blends many different styles: neo-traditional, rock, Latin, African; “For Ivers, musical borders and boundaries are there to be broken” (Bakan 179); Irish traditional is the basis for all of her music though

- Childhood environment possibly influenced her multiple style fusions with Irish music
- Won All-Ireland Fiddle Championship nine times, took lessons in Ireland, performed with many groups including the Chieftains and the London Symphony
- Began touring in the 1980s as both a soloist and a bandleader; starred as the fiddler in Riverdance; co-found all-female group Cherish the Ladies

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