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The Musical Enculturation of Irish  
Traditional Musicians:  
An Ethnographic Study of Learning Processes

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Thesis submitted for award of PhD  
National University of Ireland, Cork  
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June 2013

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## Declaration

I, Jessica Cawley, declare that this thesis is my own independent research and writing, except where appropriately acknowledged in references in the text. This is the only publication of this work, and it has not been submitted for any other degree at National University of Ireland, Cork or any other institution.

.....  
Jessica Cawley

.....  
Date:

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## Abbreviations

ASD – Amazing Slow Downer

CCÉ – Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (also referred to as Comhaltas)

CoP – Abbreviation commonly used in the literature to refer to community/communities of practice

GAA – Gaelic Athletics Association

LiveTrad – refers to the website [www.livetrad.com](http://www.livetrad.com)

OED – Oxford English Dictionary

RnaG – *Raidió na Gaeltachta*

SCT (exams) – *Scrúdu Ceol Tíre*

Sessions – Irish traditional music sessions

SEM – Society of Ethnomusicology

SSWC – Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy

thesession – refers to the website [www.thesession.org](http://www.thesession.org)

Traditional music – Irish traditional music

Traditional musicians – people who play Irish traditional music

TradConnect – refers to the website [www.tradconnect.com](http://www.tradconnect.com)

UCC – University College Cork

### *A note on the use of first and surnames names:*

Throughout the thesis, I often refer to my interviewees by their first names (only after it is clear to the reader whom I am referring to). Many of my interviewees have also contributed their own research on various topics within Irish traditional music scholarship. When referring to my interviewees' works as authors, I refer to them in the text by their surnames.

## Abstract

The enculturation of Irish traditional musicians involves informal, non-formal, and sometimes formal learning processes in a number of different settings, including traditional music sessions, workshops, festivals, and classes. Irish traditional musicians also learn directly from family, peers, and mentors and by using various forms of technology. Each experience contributes to the enculturation process in meaningful and complementary ways. The ethnographic research discussed in this dissertation suggests that within Irish traditional music culture, enculturation occurs most effectively when learners experience a multitude of learning practices. A variety of experiences insures that novices receive multiple opportunities for engagement and learning. If a learner finds one learning practice ineffective, there are other avenues of enculturation.

This thesis explores the musical enculturation of Irish traditional musicians. It focuses on the process of becoming a musician by drawing on methodologies and theories from ethnomusicology, education, and Irish traditional music studies. Data was gathered through multiple ethnographic methodologies. Fieldwork based on participant-observation was carried out in a variety of learning contexts, including traditional music sessions, festivals, workshops, and weekly classes. Additionally, interviews with twenty accomplished Irish traditional musicians provide diverse narratives and firsthand insight into musical development and enculturation. These and other methodologies are discussed in Chapter 1.

The three main chapters of the thesis explore various common learning experiences. Chapter 2 explores how Irish traditional musicians learn during social and musical interactions between peers, mentors, and family members, and focuses on live music-making which occurs in private homes, sessions, and concerts. These informal and non-formal learning experiences primarily take place outside of organizations and institutions. The interview data suggests these learning experiences are perhaps the most pervasive and influential in terms of musical enculturation.

Chapter 3 discusses learning experience in more organized settings, such as traditional music classes, workshops, summer schools, and festivals. The role of organizations such as Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and pipers' clubs are

discussed from the point of view of the learner. Many of the learning experiences explored in this chapter are informal, non-formal, and sometimes formal in nature, depending on the philosophy of the organization, institution, and individual teacher. The interview data and field observations indicate that learning in these contexts is common and plays a significant role in enculturation, particularly for traditional musicians who were born during and after the 1970s.

Chapter 4 explores the ways Irish traditional musicians use technology, including written sources, phonography, videography, websites, and emerging technologies, during the enculturation process. Each type of technology presents different educational implications, and traditional musicians use these technologies in diverse ways and some more than others. For this, and other reasons, technology plays a complex role during the process of musical enculturation.

Drawing on themes which emerge during Chapter 2, 3, and 4, the final chapter of this dissertation explores overarching patterns of enculturation within Irish traditional music culture. This ethnographic work suggests that longevity of participation and engagement in multiple learning and performance opportunities foster the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians. Through numerous and prolonged participation in music-making, novices become accustomed to and learn musical, social, and cultural behaviours. The final chapter also explores interconnections between learning experiences and also proposes directions for future research.

## Chapter 1

# Exploring the Enculturation of Irish Traditional Musicians: Introduction, Literature Review, and Methodology

## Introduction

Within Irish traditional music culture, the enculturation process involves a variety of informal, non-formal, and formal learning experiences. Irish traditional musicians learn in numerous settings, including traditional music sessions, workshops, festivals, and weekly classes. They also learn directly from family, peers, and mentors and by using various forms of technology. Typically, traditional musicians develop various musical skills and an understanding of their music culture by participating, over some years, in multiple learning contexts and by interacting with other practitioners. In this thesis, I propose that enculturation occurs most effectively when traditional musicians experience diverse and multiple modes of learning. A multiplicity of learning experiences enriches the learning process by providing a wide range of opportunities for engagement with Irish traditional music. Throughout the dissertation, I outline the specific benefits of particular learning experiences and illustrate how these learning experiences complement one another when used in combination.

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to investigate the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians. Anthropologists and other social scientists have investigated the concept and phenomenon of enculturation from a variety of perspectives. Herskovits, who coined the term in 1948, writes:

The aspects of the learning experience which mark off man from other creatures, and by means of which... he achieves competence in his culture, may be called enculturation. This is in essence a process of conscious or unconscious conditioning (Herskovits 1948:39).

The ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam defines enculturation as ‘the process by which the individual learns his culture, and it must be emphasized that this is a never-ending process continuing throughout the life span of the individual’

(1964:146). While learning repertoire and instrumental skills are significant parts of musical enculturation, they are only part of the process of ‘becoming’ a musician. Musical enculturation involves learning one’s own musical culture, including its social and cultural norms. In this study, I explore issues of socialization, motivation, and identity, as well as repertoire and skill acquisition. Understanding how a traditional musician learns repertoire and develops style is only part of the equation; in this thesis, I also explore the more complete process of becoming a traditional musician.

Throughout the dissertation, I draw on many ethnographic studies that explore the process of becoming a musician. As Wenger states, ‘Because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming’ (1998:215). Neuman’s exploration of becoming a musician in North Indian Classical Music culture (1990) and Green’s similar exploration within popular music (2002, 2005a) are particularly useful models, as I discuss in the literature review below. My research is also influenced by Lave and Wenger theory of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’, which aptly describes the process of becoming a practitioner in any community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991:28-31). From the perspective of legitimate peripheral participation, learning is a process in which newcomers slowly move from the periphery towards the centre of a community of practice. The transition from novice to experienced traditional musician is one of the major focuses of this dissertation. I am interested in the shifting of identities during the enculturation process.

Anthropologists and ethnomusicologists emphasize that in order to understand culture, we must also understand enculturation. Nettl argues that ‘one can hardly comprehend a musical system without knowing how it is taught, learned and transmitted in its own society’ (1992:389).<sup>1</sup> Learning and culture are not separate processes. As Wenger proposes, they are intimately connected and inform each another:

There is not a separate process for the transmission of

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<sup>1</sup> For examples see also (Blacking 1992; Green 2005b; Lave 2011; Mead 1963; Merriam 1964; Nettl 1985, 1992, 2005; Wenger 1998).

practice. Because practice is from the start a social process of negotiation and renegotiation, what makes the transition between generations possible is already in the very nature of practice (1998:290).

Within the Irish traditional music literature, some scholars employ anthropological theories of culture, learning, and transmission processes. However, to date, no major study has focused solely on the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians. This dissertation aims to fill that gap in the literature, and is the first major study to systematically investigate learning and enculturation processes from the perspective of the Irish traditional musician. This approach leads to new perspectives on learning processes and aspects of Irish traditional music culture.

At its core, enculturation involves various conscious and unconscious learning practices. For this reason, this dissertation focuses on learning rather than teaching. Although I discuss the influential role of teachers and mentors, this is done from the point of view of the learner and learning processes. I agree with Jean Lave's assertion that 'learning – not teaching was the phenomenon to follow in order to open up questions about learning' (2011:88).<sup>2</sup> Scholars using theories of situated learning and communities of practice often research learning processes from this perspective. Etienne Wenger, a leading scholar of communities of practice, states, 'Learning and teaching are not inherently linked. Much learning takes place without teaching, and indeed much teaching takes place without learning' (1998:266). Traditional musicians often learn in teaching situations, and in this study, I investigate these learning experiences which occur in the context of teaching. My focus, however, remains on the learners' experiences, rather than on how teachers transmit musical and cultural information.

Throughout the dissertation I draw on a series of interviews with twenty Irish traditional musicians between the ages of eighteen and eighty. Their narratives provide insight in to common music learning experiences and illustrate patterns of enculturation within Irish traditional music culture. These narratives

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<sup>2</sup> Lave (2011) discusses her past fieldwork in tailor shops in Liberia where she observed the apprenticeship of young tailors. From her field experience, she concluded that learning was the process to observe, rather than teaching, in such informal learning situations.



feature prominently throughout the thesis. The long, open-ended interviews provide considerable insight into the process of becoming a traditional musician. Interviewees described in detail how they were introduced to Irish traditional music, and how they developed as musicians. All of my interviewees are semi-professional or professional musicians, and have reached a high level of skill, musical expression, and ability.<sup>3</sup> Accomplished musicians were chosen because I consider them models of successful enculturation. Many of the interviewees are also traditional music teachers, or have experience teaching music workshops, lessons, or classes. I primarily questioned the traditional musicians about their own learning experiences, rather than their teaching methods. However, when discussing their opinions about the effectiveness of particular learning practices and approaches, many of my interviewees discussed their teaching experiences. Although the thesis focuses on learning practices, learning and teaching are interconnected processes. As explored throughout the thesis, many interviewees discussed how they were taught (if at all), and how they currently teach music to their pupils.

Children in Ireland can be enculturated into classical, popular, traditional music, folk music, or any combination of these musical cultures. Musical enculturation generally depends on multiple factors including family interest, local traditions, and personal preferences. More research is needed to explore bi-musicality and enculturation into multiple musical cultures within Ireland. The focus here is on learning Irish traditional music, specifically the instrumental tradition. Although traditional singing, dance, and music-making are intimately related practices – a ‘constellation of practices’ (Wenger 1998:127) – and the enculturation process may be similar for all three activities, each deserves its own investigation. Furthermore, while many education studies focus solely on children’s developmental processes, I investigate the learning practices of children, adolescents, and adult traditional musicians, because musical enculturation is an ongoing and lifelong process. Waldron states that while music education researchers have investigated informal learning amongst adolescences,

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<sup>3</sup> Most interviewees are full-time or part-time professional traditional music performers and teachers. Some interviewees have careers in other fields, most commonly in building and engineering. See Appendix B for background information about the interviewees.

‘few have explored informal instrumental music learning with adults’ (Waldron 2009a:55), and Swanwick points out:

Comparatively few writers seem concerned to study human development beyond the early years. It is, admittedly, more difficult than the study of very young children, since social and environmental variables become more obviously powerful as we grow up and it becomes very awkward to untangle (1988:70).<sup>4</sup>

While this approach adds layers of complexity to the research, the inclusion of adult traditional musicians’ learning and enculturation processes is revealing, because adults can give their opinions about past learning experiences as well as describe their current learning practices and habits.

This dissertation provides a snapshot of relatively recent and current learning practices within Irish traditional music. Modern learning practices are not compared to past transmission practices. In her influential study, which I frequently draw on in this thesis, Kari Veblen explores Irish traditional music teachers’ perception of change and stability of transmission practices (1991). Additionally, I focus on the actual learning practices themselves, rather than issues of bureaucracy, politics, nationalism, and history involved in learning music in Ireland. Marie McCarthy’s research provides insight into these areas (1990, 1999). Veblen and McCarthy provide imperative background information and a research model for music education research and Irish traditional music. This thesis intends to add to this body of literature from a different, but complementary perspective.

Although the traditional musicians I interviewed describe a diversity of learning experiences and opinions, some significant patterns of enculturation emerged. First, there are clear trends depending on generation. For instance, interviewees born after 1970 had considerably more structured learning experiences at summer schools and weekly tuition than musicians born before 1970. Other patterns were more universal, cutting across all ages, gender,

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<sup>4</sup> Since 1988, there have been numerous ethnomusicological and educational studies into the development and enculturation of adult musicians (Berliner 1994; Cope 2005; Green 2002; Waldron 2006a, 2006b, 2009a, 2011; Waldron and Veblen 2009). However, developmental studies still tend to focus on music learning processes and experiences during childhood.

instrument choice, and birthplace. A primary example is the central role of aural learning, which takes place in both unstructured and structured learning environments and with and without the use of technology. Musical and social enjoyment also plays an important role in the enculturation process. Enjoyment encourages long-term participation in Irish traditional music, and when learners experience longevity of participation, they are more likely to consider the activity a part of their daily lives. My research suggests that long-term participation is crucial to the lifelong process of enculturation. Finally, a significant pattern of enculturation is the tendency for traditional musicians to engage with multiple and diverse learning experiences. In this regard, a variety of educational and performance opportunities plays a significant role during the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians.

Seth Chaiklin suggests that ‘research that attempts to understand human practices with attention to the societal context in which this practice is carried out is likely to develop descriptions that would be directly useful in that practice’ (1993:394). Many issues and questions raised in this thesis may interest other scholars and teachers of Irish traditional music. Although teaching is not a primary concern, exploring learning processes has numerous implications for teachers of Irish traditional music. Details of successful learning strategies can also help learners understand and reevaluate their own learning and progression. Although this is not a ‘how-to-learn’ guide, novice musicians may find this thesis useful and practitioners of all skill levels may be interested to discover how accomplished traditional musicians learn and develop. However, this thesis is a description of, not a prescription for learning Irish traditional music. It is an ethnographic description of the learning process, and explores the educational implications of this process by drawing on a number of anthropological and educational theories.

### Structure of Thesis

Throughout this chapter, I review germane literature, discuss my research methodology, and conclude with a proposal that the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians involves a multiplicity of learning experiences. In Chapter

2, I analyse musical enculturation by exploring how traditional musicians learn from their peers, mentors, and family members in private homes, traditional music sessions, and other live music-making contexts. By talking to other practitioners, listening, absorbing, imitating, and playing music with others, musicians learn repertoire, style, techniques, and aspects of Irish traditional music culture. I refer to the learning processes described in Chapter 2 as ‘unstructured learning experiences’ because they occur while learners and musicians interact with one another during informal music-making and socializing. These unstructured learning experiences primarily take place outside of organizations, institutions, and teaching contexts. Many interviewees consider these experiences central to their musical development and enculturation, which is perhaps not surprising since traditional music is primarily transmitted outside of school settings.

In Chapter 3, I discuss learning experiences which occur during formal schooling and events organized by traditional music organizations including weekly tuition, summer schools, festivals, and competitions. Many of these learning experiences are more recent additions to the range of learning experiences available to learners of Irish traditional music. These contexts emerged during the revival period of Irish traditional music, which occurred roughly from the late 1950s onwards. Traditional musicians born around and before the 1950s often attend festivals or events organized by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann or pipers’ clubs as adults.<sup>5</sup> Musicians born in and after the 1960s commonly learn in these settings during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. According to my field research and interview data, activities organized by teachers, organizations, or institutions provide a spectrum of informal, non-formal, and sometimes formal learning experiences. In many cases, because these activities are organized and led by teachers, the learning process is more formal in nature. However, as I discuss in Chapter 3, not all activities in organized settings are formal. For this reason, when necessary, I use the term ‘structured learning experiences’, rather than ‘formal learning experiences’, when

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<sup>5</sup> Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ) is the largest and most influential organization promoting Irish traditional music. In everyday discourse, and throughout this dissertation, CCÉ is often simply referred to as Comhaltas.

discussing learning practices which occur in institutions and organizations.

While Chapters 2 and 3 explore face-to-face learning processes, in Chapter 4 I discuss the various ways Irish traditional musicians use technology and how this affects learning and enculturation. Some forms of technology, such as written sources and commercial recordings, have affected the transmission of Irish traditional music for generations and are discussed in detail within the Irish traditional music literature. My research indicates that traditional musicians use written and aural sources in different ways and frequencies. For this reason, the effect of technology on the enculturation process is complex, and often needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis. Over the past decade or so, a variety of new technologies have emerged, with numerous implications for the learning of Irish traditional music. In Chapter 4, I explore the role of the internet and smartphone apps in the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians, but more research is needed. Considering the frequency of change in technology sectors, ongoing research is needed to explore how using technology effects culture and learning processes. Due to the pervasiveness of technology in modern culture, I suggest it plays a role in the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians.

While I categorize common learning practices into separate chapters for purposes of organizing the dissertation, in reality, these learning experiences are not discrete. They are interconnected and closely related parts of the whole enculturation process. While describing how they learned repertoire, technique, or style, my interviewees often cited multiple sources and influences, often in the same sentence. For instance, Ciara Ní Fhearghail discusses how she prefers to learn new tunes:

If I didn't know a tune [in a session], I'd grab my phone and record the tune and learn it the next day or a few days later. You know, for the next session that I'd go to... (Ní Fhearghail, interview).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ciara Ní Fhearghail (b.1990) is a whistle and button accordion player from An Rinn, Waterford. I met Ciara at the Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, and was introduced to her by her brother, Caoimhín Ó Fhearghail, who I met playing sessions in Cork City. (Throughout the dissertation, when I reference or quote an interviewee for the first time, I provide a brief statement about each musician. Additional background information about each interviewee is also available in Appendix B).

While playing in sessions (discussed in Chapter 2), Ciara often records unknown tunes on her mobile phone (discussed in Chapter 4). Later, in private, she aurally learns the melody using her phone's digital recordings capabilities. Such interconnections between practices illustrate the multiplicity of learning practices involved during the enculturation process.

In Chapter 5, I explore some overarching patterns of enculturation within Irish traditional music culture. I argue that longevity of participation and engagement in multiple learning and performance opportunities foster the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians. The learning and enculturation processes described throughout this thesis are complex in nature. Therefore, in the concluding chapter I also suggest areas which require more research and investigation.

## Literature Review

The literature discussed in this section has significantly shaped my research approach and influenced this study. This review is succinct since pertinent research is discussed in more depth throughout the thesis. Many of the germane theories and studies discussed below are interdisciplinary in nature. I am particularly influenced by ethnomusicological research into learning processes and educational investigations into cultural processes. An interdisciplinary approach allows me to explore, in a holistic way, complicated creative, musical, cultural, and educational processes within Irish traditional music. As Deliège and Wiggins argue, 'There is no hope of understanding creative behaviour by looking at it from one discipline, using a single methodological approach even within a given scientific field' (2006:5). Because enculturation involves the social, cultural, physical, emotional, psychological, and cognitive self, it is investigated by scholars from a variety of fields, including anthropology, sociology, education, cognitive psychology, and neuroscience.<sup>7</sup> While my dissertation focuses primarily on socio-cultural issues, perspectives of the enculturation process from

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<sup>7</sup> Reviewing the literature on enculturation from all these fields is not necessary here. For a comprehensive literature review, see (Morrison, Demorest, and Stambaugh 2008).

other disciplines provide a broader understanding of how traditional musicians are enculturated into the musical culture. Myers suggests that ethnographies require ‘an interdisciplinary search during which the student can compile a full bibliography – from ethnomusicology, anthropology, history, religion, politics and other fields including fiction’ (1992:29). Throughout the dissertation, I make reference to a number of general sources, covering a range of related topics, such as Irish history and culture. Like most ethnographies, this study required exploration of a variety of sources to gain a wider understanding of cultural and learning processes.

In the following section I discuss germane research and theories from the fields of ethnomusicology, education, and Irish traditional music.<sup>8</sup> Theories from each field guide and inform my research in specific ways. Ethnomusicology provides useful research methods and cultural perspectives on learning. Educational and developmental theories enable me to interpret my fieldwork from an educationalists’ point of view. In the education section, I outline my educational philosophy, which influences my approach to conducting, gathering, and interpreting my field research. Irish traditional music studies – particularly investigations into transmission, learning, and education – provide a historical and cultural context and important background information.

### Ethnomusicology

Ethnomusicological literature has significantly influenced my approach and investigation of enculturation within Irish traditional music culture. My methodology is largely based on ethnomusicological theory and practice, and this field of study influences my perspective of learning processes. To an ethnomusicologist, learning is a socio-cultural phenomenon, not merely a function of the brain, as assumed by cognitive researchers in the past. As discussed below, several ethnographies provide valuable insights into the enculturation process and function as theoretical models for my own research.

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<sup>8</sup> Some interdisciplinary studies are difficult to categorize and do not fall neatly into these three categories. Influential contributions from musicology, anthropology, and cognitive studies are discussed throughout the dissertation.

Ethnomusicologists have become increasingly interested in learning processes, as Nettl suggests:

One way ethnomusicology has changed since the 1950s involves the vastly increased importance of learning and teaching...ethnomusicologists have become increasingly interested in the ways in which societies teach their musical systems, that is, in the way music is transmitted (1992:388-9).

Many ethnomusicologists have contributed a significant amount of research on learning and enculturation processes found across the diverse musical cultures of the world. Rice (2003) details how ethnomusicologists have explored issues of learning and teaching over the past few decades by reviewing 85 book-length musical ethnographies. Rice found that 43 of the ethnographies make 'at least a modest mention of the topic and thus provide useful data for cross-cultural surveys such as this one. Ten of the 85 devote significant attention (a chapter or more) to the topic. An additional five of the 85 make music learning or teaching the central point of the monograph' (Rice 2003:67). From this Rice concludes 'that a significant amount of attention to music learning and teaching has occurred in the field of ethnomusicology, though the survey confirms that it is only one of many themes attracting the attention of ethnomusicologists and one that can be and has been ignored in about half the book-length studies in this sample' (2003:67).

Ethnomusicologists and education researchers have much to learn from one another. Scholars from both fields argue that interdisciplinary co-operation between music education and ethnomusicology is advantageous.<sup>9</sup> Johnson states that 'the concepts and perspectives that are derived from ethnomusicologists' studies of the world's music can have a positive effect on music education' (1985:53). Rice also suggests ethnomusicology provides specific contributions to the field of music education (1985, 2003). Ethnomusicologists can, he argues:

...report on music education and transmission in other

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<sup>9</sup> For examples and a full discussion see (Baily and Driver 1992; Bjørkvold 1990; Blacking 1985; Campbell 1991, 2000, 2003; Deschênes 1998; Garfias 1985; Green 2002; Grimmer 2011; Johnson 1985; McAllester 1985; Nettl 1982, 1985, 2005; Rice 1985; Robertson 1985; Sloboda 1985, 1990; Stock 2003; Veblen 1991; Waterman 1990).



cultures. Second, we can confront the underlying assumptions of music education with the underlying assumptions of ethnomusicology. Third, we can provide music educators with materials directly relevant to their classroom needs. Fourth, we can help to test cross-culturally the validity of claims made about the nature of music perception and learning (Rice 1985:115).

Ethnomusicological studies illustrate how musicians in cultures throughout the world learn, which offers a unique perspective on music learning and development. John Blacking, for example, describes the easy and effective music learning processes which are found in many African societies:

Many African societies provide models for learning music easily and with great commitment. Deep involvement of the body and the constant relationship of music to dance enabled children to master techniques quickly (1985:50).

Using this information, researchers and educators can reevaluate their own cultures' learning systems. Music teachers may be inspired to experiment with different learning methods from around the world. One of the aims of my research is to shed light on effective learning activities within Irish traditional music culture.

In terms of shaping my educational philosophy and research approach, a number of ethnographies that focus on music learning processes are particularly influential. The ethnographies discussed below all explore the processes of becoming a musician and issues of identity within different musical cultures. My work is particularly influenced by ethnographer and educationalist, Lucy Green (1997, 2002, 2003, 2005a, 2008, 2011), who provides useful and enlightening theories on the different types of learning processes. Green's perspectives on informal learning and peer-directed learning shape my conceptualization and educational philosophy. In her study of popular musicians' learning practices, Green suggests that informal and formal learning can be conceived 'as extremes existing at the two ends of a single pole. In some countries and some musics, formal and informal music education sit side by side in the nature of an apprenticeship training' (2002:5). Green considers informal and formal learning as a spectrum of experiences, a philosophy which underlies many of my

descriptions of traditional musicians' learning experiences. For example, learning processes which occurs in pub sessions are quite informal, sometimes even unconscious in nature. Sessions hosted in a pipers' club or CCÉ branch may be more formal in comparison, but fall into the 'non-formal' category, which is 'somewhere between the formal and the informal' (Green 2011:7). Green suggests that many popular musicians in the United Kingdom now learn non-formally, and these experiences commonly involve musicians engaging within 'community music networks and many other organizations' (Green 2008:5). While popular musicians are increasingly participating in formal and non-formal learning activities, these experiences 'still mainly act as supplements or extensions to popular musicians' informal practices' (Green 2008:5). My research suggests that a similar scenario is currently occurring within Irish traditional music culture.

Like Green (2002), David Neuman highlights the process of 'becoming' a musician in his ethnography of North Indian classical music (Neuman 1990). With a set of distinct roles, procedures, and etiquette, 'becoming' a North Indian classical musician involves specific processes. For instance, Neuman describes the complex relationship between *guru* and *shishya* (teacher/master and student/pupil) and highlights how this relationship is crucial to the enculturation process; in order to become a musician a 'period of intense training with a guru is considered mandatory' (Neuman 1990:50). Neuman explores this process of musical enculturation extensively, and his ethnography is a valuable model for ethnomusicologists and music education scholars.

Learning and enculturation are also at the heart of Paul Berliner's comprehensive ethnography of jazz (1994). In painstaking detail, Berliner explores the creative process, and details jazz musicians' activities illustrating how they develop improvisational skills and creativity. Although Berliner's ethnography 'is not a practical manual, its documentation of traditional learning practices contains advice useful to young musicians' (Berliner 1994:15). By examining the stages and process of musical development, Berliner aimed to reveal skills valuable to jazz musicians and how they judged others' musical performances (1994:12). Inspired by Berliner's approach, I hope my description

of learning practices will aid learners of Irish traditional music, as well as provide cultural and educational information to other researchers and academics. In this dissertation, I also make reference to several other ethnographies which also investigate music learning and enculturation (Baily 1988a; Bennett 1980; Blacking 1967, 1973, 1985; Kingsbury 1988; Nettl 1989; Rice 1994; Snosniack 1990).

Ethnographies mentioned above focus on and explore the process of enculturation, and each scholar treats learning as a holistic process in which the self is integrated into a musical community. Learning involves a change to the self. This involves not only changes to one's knowledge, but also one's identity. Each of these ethnographies describes distinct learning experiences, and highlights the fact that each music culture has its own unique way of introducing music to newcomers. During the early stages of my research, these ethnographies helped to expand my awareness of different learning practices around the world. These models influence my philosophy, and therefore, many of my own research questions and purposes are focused on the process of becoming a traditional musician, not merely on how one learns repertoire and style. While it is relatively easy to learn a few traditional tunes, developing the ability to play with creativity and expression involves a significant development of the musical and social 'self'. In all cultures, becoming a musician involves learning, enculturation, and identity formation.

## Education

This section briefly reviews educational theories, research, and perspectives which significantly guide my research approach, analysis, and interpretation. I discuss the importance of an interdisciplinary perspective on learning processes. Although my study specifically investigates learning from a socio-cultural viewpoint, reviewing education research from a wide range of disciplines provides crucial information about learning and developmental processes. Learning is - and needs to be - investigated from many different perspectives, exemplified in studies within the fields of cognition, psychology, biology, anthropology, sociology, and human development. Ignoring these perspectives

could lead to an incomplete representation or weak conceptualization of the learning process. Below, I also explore two concepts central to this thesis: situated learning and communities of practice.

The educational philosophy underlying this thesis is influenced considerably by research into developmental processes. Developmental researchers characteristically view learning as a lifelong process, since music development is considered to start at birth and continue until death.<sup>10</sup> This philosophy directly influenced my decision to consider the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians as a long-term process. In line with this, I interviewed adult traditional musicians about their past and present learning practices. Additionally, developmental researchers emphasize the importance of early childhood experiences in music, singing, and movement to musical development.<sup>11</sup> Rogers argues:

...musical experience in early childhood will result in greater musical development. This premise draws its support from evidence of increased musical development in those children who have received considerable musical experience in early childhood (1990:3).

During my discussion of family influences in Chapter 2, I make numerous references to the importance of early childhood experiences in terms of musical development.

Literature on the biology of music-making also contributes to a more complete understanding of the learning process. Educationalists emphasize that kinesthetic experiences play a significant role in music learning and developmental processes, and many suggest that movement activities nurture children's musical development.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, several ethnomusicologists also emphasize that music is learned with and throughout the body, in addition to

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<sup>10</sup> Many also argue that music development begins prenatally (Ostwald 1990:12, Shetler 1990:44; Valerio et al 1998).

<sup>11</sup> For examples see (Bluestine 2000; Dewey 1980, 1997; Elliot 1995; Gardner 1990; Gordon 1997, 1999; Piaget 1962, 1972; Swanwick 1988, 1992, 1994; D.B. Taylor 1990; Valerio et al 1998).

<sup>12</sup> For further discussion, see (Camp 1990; Campbell 1991; Dewey 1980; Gordon 1997; Honigsfeld and Dunn 2003; Jaques-Dalcroze 1921, 1930; Laban 1971; Metz 1989; Polanyi 1966; Shehan 1990; D. Taylor 1990; J. Taylor 1990; Valerio et al 1998; Wade 1990).

being learned by ear.<sup>13</sup> For instance, Baily and Driver suggest that:

...musical patterns are remembered and executed not solely as aural patterns but as sequences of movements, and that the music is therefore represented cognitively in terms of movement patterns which have visual, kinaesthetic, tactile, as well as auditory repercussions (1992:62).

Furthermore, Berliner states of jazz musicians:

Many other self-educated performers also initially learned music by ear, as well as by hand and by instrument: memorizing the sounds of phrases together with their corresponding finger patterns and positions on an instrument (1994:28).

Similarly, Irish traditional musicians learn common melodic patterns as physical, spatial movements on their instruments. When musicians start to associate common melodic patterns with physical patterns on an instrument, they can 'pick up' new tunes quickly.

A review of music education literature reveals numerous viewpoints, illustrating the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions of the learning process. However, these are not separate aspects of the learning process; they are connected in meaningful ways. Blacking comments on the relationship between culture, biology and musical development:

...we shall learn more about music and human musicality if we look for basic rules of musical behavior which are biologically, as well as culturally, conditioned and species-specific. It seems to me that what is ultimately of most importance in music cannot be learned like other cultural skills: it is there in the body, waiting to be brought out and developed (1973:100).

In Blacking's view, musical knowledge develops simultaneously through biological and cultural processes. While I do not focus on ergonomics, psychomotor, spatio-motor, or kinaesthetic learning, various biological perspectives broaden my conceptions of the learning process. Such theories have many

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<sup>13</sup> John Baily and John Blacking, in particular, have contributed much research in this area. For a full discussion see (Alerby and Ferm 2005; Baily 1977, 1990, 1995; Berliner 1994; Blacking 1973, 1977a, 1990, 1992; Rice 1985).

educational implications, and necessitate further investigation in studies of Irish traditional music.

A number of theoretical frameworks are available to researchers investigating music learning, development, and education. For instance, the musical enculturation process could be investigated using Bourdieu's theories of habitus and embodiment (Bourdieu 1984, 1990). In short, habitus is a set of embodied dispositions which are unconsciously acquired. As theoretical frameworks, communities of practice and the concepts of habitus and embodiment share similar themes, including issues of identity, practice and embodied knowledge. Lave and Wenger (1991) and Bourdieu's theories similarly situate learning within a social context, and both communities of practice and habitus can be used by researchers as an alternative to the concept of culture. However, habitus is criticized by some for being vague and for often overlooking the process of change (Mutch 2003:391-3). Because my study primarily focuses on how novices gradually develop into experienced practitioners, change is at the heart of my investigation. Therefore, Lave and Wenger's concept of peripheral legitimate participation is a more attractive theoretical framework than habitus.<sup>14</sup> Future researchers may use Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and embodiment to explore learning within the Irish traditional music community from an alternative, yet related perspective. Other scholars also suggest that using communities of practice alongside Bourdieu's theories may be a useful strategy to investigate learning phenomena (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2004; Mutch 2003:391-3). Due to the complexity of musical enculturation, I decided to use one main theoretical construct: communities of practice.

### **Situated Learning and Communities of Practice**

Lave and Wenger coined the terms situated learning and communities of practice in their 1991 book, and ever since, scholars from a wide variety of disciplines

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<sup>14</sup> Additionally, researchers using communities of practice as a concept often directly discuss learning processes or education. Bourdieu's work on the other hand is not focused directly on learning, although many scholars, particularly from the field of educational sociology, have explored the educational implications of his theory of practice (for a discussion, see Reay 2004).

have used and expanded the concepts to investigate learning processes.<sup>15</sup> For example, Keller and Keller (1993) use the concept of communities of practice to explore how metalworkers learn to mould iron in creative ways. Hutchins (1993) uses the theory to explore how sailors learn to navigate, and Lave (2011) uses it to describe how West African boys learn and slowly move from the status of apprentice to master tailor. The flexibility of Lave and Wenger's learning theories benefit scholars with many interests and focuses. These theories are not just used by educational researchers; Lave and Wenger's theories are as influential in business studies as they are in social sciences, for example. In this section, I discuss how theories of situated learning and communities of practice significantly inform my educational philosophy and research approach. A community of practice may be defined as a group of people who are bound together by 'joint enterprise, mutual engagement, shared repertoire' (Wenger 1998:73). It is the practice itself – rather than ethnic, social, economic, or political identities – which binds people together, although these identities also play a role within many communities of practice. Situated learning occurs during participation within communities of practice, and is 'in part a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used' (Pitri 2004:6). Lave and Wenger present 'a theory of social practice in which learning is viewed as an aspect of all activity', and 'shift away from a theory of situated activity in which learning is reified as one kind of activity' (1991:37-8).

Theories of situated learning - occasionally referred to as 'social practice theory' - directly inform my research approach and philosophy. Lave and Wenger understand learning to be a social process, always situated within everyday life and practice. Their view of learning as a socially situated phenomenon emphasizes that 'learning is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991:31), and 'learning is so fundamental to the social order we live by that theorizing about one is tantamount to theorizing about the other' (Wenger 1998:15). Lave also explains that:

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<sup>15</sup> For examples see (Alerby and Ferm 2005; Chaiklin 1993; Chaiklin and Lave 1993; Engeström 1993; Evenbeck and Kahn 2001; Fuhrer 1993; Haneda 2006; Hutchins 1993; Keller and Keller 1993; Kruse 2012; Kvale 1993; Lave 1993, 2011; Lave and Wenger 1991; Levine 1993; McDermott 1993; Säljö and Wyndhamn 1993; Squire and Johnson 2000; Waldron 2009b 2011; Wenger 1998; Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002).

...social practice theory belongs to a family of relational Marxist theories that begin with a concept of praxis, the idea that human beings make their lives together, in a complexly structured, historically and materially changing world (2011:161).

Scholars of situated learning emphasize the importance of investigating learning within the context of a particular practice or activity. Such research commonly discusses informal and social learning processes, which are some of my research interests here. For this reason, education researchers in particular have much to gain by utilizing Lave and Wenger's theories. As Waldron suggests, 'As music educators, we have much to learn by examining successful music communities of practice that lie outside of our "regular" scope of school music and school music genres' (2011:53).<sup>16</sup>

When learning is investigated as a socially situated phenomenon, researchers explore the complex issues in a holistic manner. McDermott argues that this holistic perspective is beneficial since 'All parts of the system define all the other parts of the system' (1993:275). Fuhrer also supports this holistic perspective:

...situated learning is the joint product of processing cognitive, social, emotional, and environmental goals. Neither cognitive, nor social, nor emotional, nor ecobehavioral models per se would adequately explain situated learning. Instead, situated learning must be viewed as the coordination of multiple actions or goals (1993:207).

This challenges psychological investigations which focus only on cognition and 'rarely on the structures and dynamics of the setting in which learning takes part' (Fuhrer 1993:186). Fuhrer suggests that through the lens of situated learning, researchers can take both cognitive and environmental dimensions into account and explore the role emotion plays in learning processes.

My holistic approach to researching learning processes is partially influenced by theories of situated learning. Many of the traditional musicians I

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<sup>16</sup> Several educators and music education scholars have recently used Lave and Wenger's theories to explore various learning and teaching phenomena (Countryman 2009; Evenbeck and Kahn 2001; Haneda 2006; Herbert 2009; Hewitt 2009; Salavuo 2008; Squire and Johnson 2000; Waldron 2009b, 2011).



interviewed discussed the emotions that they felt during the learning process, and issues of motivation, encouragement, and enjoyment emerge within the interview data. In Chapter 2 for instance, I discuss how interacting with peers motivates some of my interviewees to attend sessions and to play traditional music consistently throughout their adulthoods. In other chapters, I also explore how social issues are often directly related to the reasons why learners continue participating in traditional music-making. I suggest that exploring issues of emotion, motivation, and enjoyment can shed light on long-term participation and how traditional musicians are enculturated.

Communities of practice is another concept that influences my research and conceptions of learning. Communities of practice are described as:

...groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002:4).

Communities of practice differ from ‘culture’ in that, ‘Practice is much more enterprise-specific and thus community-specific than is culture’ (Wenger 1998:291). While Irish traditional music is a music culture, it is also helpful to view it as a community of practice. The Irish traditional music community is an international group of people bound together in their participation and enjoyment of traditional music, dance, and song. It is the practice, the music-making itself (including instrumental playing, singing, dancing, and listening), which connects practitioners of traditional music.<sup>17</sup> While national and cultural identity and ethnicity plays a significant role within this community, these identities do not strictly or automatically restrict or determine membership within the community of practice. Of course, not all Irish people belong to the Irish traditional music community, and active ‘traditional musicians’ come from various national and ethnic backgrounds.<sup>18</sup>

Theories of situated learning and communities of practice are particularly

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<sup>17</sup> Throughout the dissertation, ‘practitioners of traditional music’ refers to singers, dancers, instrumentalists, and enthusiasts.

<sup>18</sup> While much can be said about ethnicity and nationality within the Irish traditional music community of practice, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to comment on this in any detail.

relevant to my research because of the many connections to enculturation. One example is Lave and Wenger's conception of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (1991:28-31). As mentioned earlier, from this perspective, learning is a process in which newcomers slowly move from the periphery towards a more central role within the community of practice. As novices learn skills, social norms, information, and the practice itself, they are able to participate further. In essence, they begin on the periphery as non-members, but as they gain experience, they start to become central members within the community of practice. Novices on the periphery are still considered legitimate members of the community of practice, and this legitimacy allows them to learn and participate in the practice. Lave and Wenger state that peripheral participating is 'a way of learning – of both absorbing and being absorbed in – the "culture of practice."' An extended period of legitimate peripherality provides learners with opportunities to make the culture of practice theirs' (1991:95). This process of 'absorbing' is one of the central themes in this dissertation.

Because this thesis is influenced by research on situated learning and communities of practice, I employ the term 'community' rather than 'musical scene' or 'circle'. Throughout the dissertation, I use the phrase 'Irish traditional music community' as an abbreviation of the long-winded 'Irish traditional music as a community of practice'. Community in this context does not imply a romanticized notion that Irish traditional music is a utopian collective of musicians. As Wenger argues, although there are positive connotations of togetherness and unity, social interactions within communities of practice are much more complex in nature:

Because the term "community" is usually a very positive one, I cannot emphasize enough that these interrelations arise out of engagement in practice and not out of an idealized view of what a community should be like... Most situations that involved sustained interpersonal engagement generate their fair share of tensions and conflicts... Disagreement, challenges, and competition can all be forms of participation... A shared practice thus connects participants to each other in ways that are diverse and complex (Wenger 1998:77).

Newcomers to a community of practice negotiate meaning by interacting with

other practitioners. This can include open discussion, listening, debate, agreement, and disagreement about the direction of the practice. A particularly relevant example of this within the Irish traditional music community was the often heated debate which occurred during the 1990s about the relative merits of innovation and tradition.<sup>19</sup> A community does not require conformity. On the contrary, Wenger suggests debate often promotes a vibrant community of practice.

### Irish Traditional Music

In this section, I briefly review Irish traditional music literature which significantly informs this dissertation. This is not an extensive review, as I also discuss particular studies in other chapters. For instance, in Chapter 2, I discuss specific literature on Irish traditional music sessions in more depth. Herndon and McLeod urge ethnographers to review research about the locality in question before entering the field (1983:25). In this regard, I found past ethnographies useful during my preparation and fieldwork, especially research conducted in the Cork area (Barry 2000; Cranitch 2006; Fairbairn 1993; Hamilton 1978; Kearney 2009; Ó Cruaí 2009; Rixon 2009). Throughout the dissertation, I also draw on a rich collection of written material, including books, memoirs, biographies, and CD liner notes.

Within the Irish traditional music literature, studies that most influence my research are those which investigate educational issues. The two most influential researchers in this regard are McCarthy (1990, 1999a, 1999b) and Veblen (1991, 1996), as their studies provide a theoretical foundation for this present study. McCarthy's research provides a comprehensive view of the history of music education and transmission practices in Ireland. Her analysis, which explores issues of culture, identity, politics, and authority in the formal education system, includes other musical cultures, and is not limited to traditional music.

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<sup>19</sup> 'Throughout the 1990s, there has been much debate about continuity and change, purism and innovation in Irish traditional music. The subject of conferences and various media exchanges' (Ó hAllmhuráin 2008:177). See also (Hamilton 1996; Hannan 1999; Keegan 1992; Mac Aoidh 1994; Mac Mahon 1999; McCullough 1977; Moloney 1999; Munnally 1999; Ó Súilleabháin 1999; Sommers Smith 1998; Veblen 1991).

Veblen interviews traditional music teachers in her exploration of perceptions of change and stability of transmission practices. While she discusses informal learning in her thesis (1991), Veblen's observations primarily took place in structured lessons and school settings, and her research is written primarily from the teachers' point of view. Both McCarthy and Veblen offer insight into music learning and education in Ireland and Irish traditional music.<sup>20</sup> Although their research primarily focuses on formal aspects of schooling, education, or teaching, Veblen and McCarthy also discuss informal learning. Both recognize that informal learning has played a significant role in the transmission of Irish traditional music:

In my historical study of Irish music education in a cultural context, I found that the strength of music education in Ireland has traditionally been located outside the formal education system (McCarthy 1999b:41).

A common assertion is that music learning took place informally in the family or in the community... Likewise, many contemporary musicians say that their first exposure to music was from their father or mother (Veblen 1991:11).

McCarthy's and Veblen's studies are valuable models for researchers interested in Irish traditional music and music education. This dissertation aims to contribute to this existing body of literature by exploring informal, non-formal, and formal learning and enculturation processes from the point of view of the learner.

Stock suggests that ethnomusicologists commonly describe teaching, learning, and transmission 'alongside studying other kinds of processes in a society that are driving on or inhibiting musical change' (2003:139). Significantly, Stock argues that these perspectives could highly benefit music education research. Within Irish traditional music literature, the learning process is commonly discussed alongside various other related topics. For instance, Cranitch's thesis focuses on the life and music of Pádraig O'Keeffe and the Sliabh Luachra fiddle tradition. O'Keeffe was a well-respected teacher and Cranitch

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<sup>20</sup> In addition to PhD research, there are also notable M.A. theses which focus on the learning of traditional music within formal school settings (Cullen 2002; Finnerty 2008).

writes a thought-provoking chapter on the transmission of Irish music in the area (2006:179-237). Additionally, Foy (1999), Fairbairn (1993), and Hamilton (1978), explore the learning process during their discussions of traditional music sessions. Ethnographers, including Keegan (1992), Mac Aoidh (1999), and O'Shea (2005, 2008), also provide useful perspectives on transmission and learning during the course of their explorations of cultural and musical phenomena. Kaul also offers a unique perspective of the learning process from the context of investigating mass tourism and cultural change in County Clare (Kaul 2009).

While the focus in this dissertation is on current learning practices, a historical understanding of Irish traditional music is imperative in order to contextualize the fieldwork and research results. Many sources provide such essential background information. Breathnach (1996), Cowdery (1990), Ó Canainn (1993, 1996) and Ó Riada (1982) contribute detailed accounts of important aspects of traditional music, such as tune types, instrumentation, and stylistic features. These sources, along with others by Hast and Scott (2004), Kaul (2009) Ó hAllmhuráin (2008), O'Shea (2005, 2008), Vallely (2008), and Williams (2010), also provide historical and socio-cultural information about musical behaviours and practices within Irish traditional music. Finally, McNamee (1992) and Vallely et al (1999) also provide valuable perspectives on related questions of innovation, change, and authorship in Irish traditional music.

## Methodology

In this section, I discuss my research methodology, which is primarily informed by ethnomusicological models. Ethnomusicological methodology is characterized by flexibility and use of multiple methods of data collection.<sup>21</sup> My research methodology is designed to address my specific research purpose and goals. Below, I explore the advantages of employing ethnographic methods to investigate learning processes. Following this, I discuss my primary methods of

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<sup>21</sup> See (Berliner 1994:3; Boilès 1982:53; Herndon and McLeod 1983:15; Merriam 1982:176; Myers 1992:13; Nettl 1992:392).

data collection, including fieldwork, participant-observation, and interviewing. I also outline how I use performance as a research tool, and document my learning experiences on the flute and fiddle. I conclude with a discussion of issues of interpretation, analysis, and ethics.

This socio-cultural study of learning and enculturation processes is well served by ethnographic methods. Ethnographies investigate phenomena ‘holistically’ and ‘in context’ (Veblen 1991:43-4), and exploring the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians from this perspective contributes to a more complete picture of the phenomenon. Ethnographic methods allowed me to explore learning and enculturation processes in a holistic fashion. Because culture and learning are intimately linked, ethnographic work tends to examine these two processes side-by-side. Nettl states:

...all the domains of a culture are interrelated, and so when you are in the “field” doing the “ethnography” part of your task, you are hopefully working within this broad perspective (2005:233).

A holistic approach is possible through the use of multiple methodologies and through conducting fieldwork in a variety of contexts. Merriam argues for the ‘validity of a variety of techniques and applications in the field of ethnomusicology’ stating:

If we are to learn as much as possible, in the most economical way, about music taken as a socio-cultural phenomenon, then we cannot cut ourselves off from any reasonable approach (1982:187).

Since learning involves biological, social, cultural, psychological, and cognitive issues, Gardner also urges education researchers to use multiple methods of inquiry (1990:38). Influenced by these viewpoints, I employed and engaged in fieldwork observations and open-ended interviews. I also learned traditional music on the flute and fiddle, documenting my own learning experiences. As I discuss later on in more detail, I also conducted fieldwork observations in a variety of learning contexts. By employing multiple methods and through diverse fieldwork experiences, I have gained a more holistic perspective of the enculturation process with the Irish traditional music community.

Ethnography is also often lauded for its ‘natural’ approach since behaviours and actions are observed in actual social contexts, rather than artificial contexts, like laboratories.<sup>22</sup> Veblen outlines the benefits of observing learning in context:

An ethnographic orientation seems especially relevant to educational research since it attempts to consider both observed characteristics and personal interpretations – a view of social interaction occurring within a natural setting (1991:44).

Fieldwork is a defining ethnomusicological methodology, and during my own fieldwork, I observed learning processes in various social contexts. This contributed towards an understanding of learning processes in a cultural and social context.

Ethnographies are often qualitative rather than quantitative in nature. Stock argues, ‘quantitative approaches are often rejected unless grounded in the value system and categories of the people themselves’ (2003:136). Questionnaires, although quite common in education research, are atypical in ethnomusicological studies. In this regard, my research is based primarily on ethnomusicological methodology and approaches; it is qualitative and relies on long, open-ended interviews, rather than questionnaires. Rapuano used questionnaires in traditional music sessions to gather socio-cultural opinions and perceptions, but she claims that this method provided ‘unsatisfactory results’ (2005:25). I determined that a questionnaire would not appropriately address my research goals or purpose. If my study aimed to uncover the frequency of each learning practice, a larger sample size and questionnaires would have been a useful approach. However, because I am interested in the experience of becoming a traditional musician, in-depth interviews with a smaller number of participants is more suitable and effective. Open-ended interviews allow each participant to discuss memories at length which they consider to be influential in terms of their musical development. During this process, narratives of the enculturation process

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<sup>22</sup> For a full discussion of the benefits of observing learning processes in a social and cultural context see (Bjørkvold 1990; Clarke 2003:116; Deschênes 1998; Gardner 1990; Kippen1988; Sloboda 1985:8, 1990; Taylor, J. 1990; Veblen 1991:44; Wade 1990; Waterman 1990).

are allowed to emerge through detailed discussions of influential musical, social, and educational memories.

## Fieldwork

Fieldwork, or field research, is so germane to ethnomusicology that it nearly defines the discipline. It is described as the ‘hallmark’ (Nettl 2005:137) and ‘the most important aspect of ethnomusicology’ (Herndon and McLeod 1983:1).<sup>23</sup> Fieldwork is characterized by elongated periods of observation of musical and social life, in order to gain an understanding of local conceptualization (Cook 2003:211). O’Flynn argues that fieldwork is significant because it causes academic discussions to become ‘grounded in everyday musical practices and beliefs’ (2009:19). Ethnomusicology provides the theoretical and practical models for the preparation and conduction of my own fieldwork, and field research is central to ethnography and my own research approach.

Cooley describes fieldwork as ‘the observational and experiential portion of the ethnographic process during which the ethnomusicologists engages living individuals in order to learn about music-culture’ (1997:4). As a methodology, fieldwork was crucial in order for me to observe multiple learning contexts firsthand. My fieldwork sites include sessions, festivals, workshops, classes, and internet websites.<sup>24</sup> In past research, I gained a general understanding of Irish traditional music culture and began to recognize which learning practices and contexts were worth exploring in more depth (Cawley 2008). Previous fieldwork experiences helped me to formulate the research and interview questions which feature in this present study. From April 2009 until December 2011, I conducted field research primarily in County Cork. I also participated in numerous musical, social, and educational activities at festivals, summer schools, and sessions in Clare, Cavan, and Galway.

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<sup>23</sup> See also (Barz and Cooley 1997; Herndon and McLeod 1983; Post 2003).

<sup>24</sup> For additional background information see Table 1 and Appendix C.



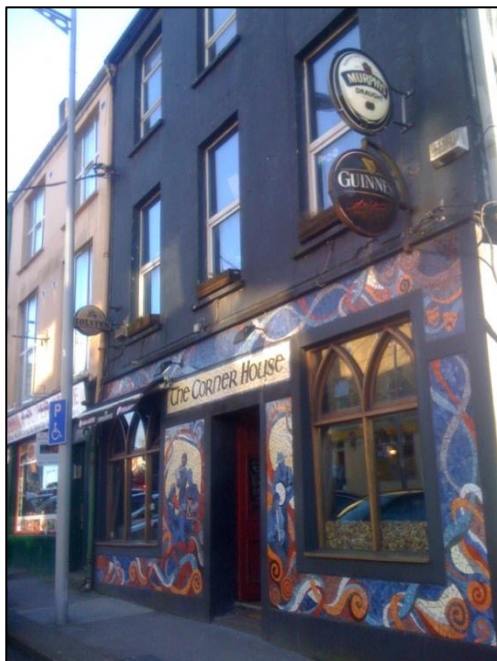
**Table 1: Fieldwork Sites**

Fieldwork Sites:	
Sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Sin É</i>: Cork City pub with regular weekly sessions on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Friday nights (Apr. 2009- Dec. 2011).</li> <li>○ The Corner House: Cork City pub with regular weekly sessions on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and the first Friday of month (Apr. 2009- Dec. 2011).</li> <li>○ Informal observations at various sessions in Cork and throughout Ireland.</li> </ul>
Summer School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Willie Clancy Summer School: Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare (July 2010).</li> </ul>
Festivals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Cruinniú na bhFlúit</i> (The Flute Meeting): Ballyvourney, Co. Cork (Apr. 2010).</li> <li>○ Ennis Trad Festival: Ennis, Co. Clare (Nov. 2010).</li> <li>○ Munster Fleadh: Ballincollig, Co. Cork (July 2011).</li> <li>○ Fleadh Cheoil na Éireann, Co. Cavan (Aug. 2011).</li> <li>○ Informal observations at the Cork Folk Festival, Baltimore Fiddle Fair, Ballincollig Winter Festival, and Galway Arts Festival (June 2009 – Dec. 2011).</li> </ul>
Weekly Classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann: Douglas Branch, Co. Cork (Mar. – Dec. 2011).</li> </ul>
Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="http://www.thesession.org">www.thesession.org</a> (Apr. 2009 – July 2012).</li> <li>○ <a href="http://www.tradconnect.com">www.tradconnect.com</a>. (Oct. 2011 – July 2012).</li> <li>○ Informal observations on: Facebook, YouTube, <a href="http://www.livetrad.com">www.livetrad.com</a>, <a href="http://www.oaim.ie">www.oaim.ie</a>, <a href="http://www.comhaltas.ie">www.comhaltas.ie</a>, <a href="http://www.chiffandfipple.com">www.chiffandfipple.com</a>, and <a href="http://www.mudcat.org">www.mudcat.org</a>.</li> </ul>

I observed and played in traditional music sessions held at pubs, houses, festivals, and organizations, such as the Douglas Comhaltas Branch. Attending a variety of sessions was essential because social and musical interactions can differ significantly depending on the particular session context. Most of my participant-observation in pub session settings took place in two pubs in Cork City, The Corner House (see Image 1) and Sin É (see Image 2). These sessions differ slightly in terms of repertoire and demographics of patrons and musicians.

During these sessions, I had excellent opportunities to observe, document, analyse, and experience informal learning and social interactions. I also attended, participated in, and observed other sessions in Cork, including pub sessions in Spailpín Fánach, An Réalt Derg, An Bróg, the Gables, Charlie's, and the LV. I also engaged in informal participant-observation in numerous other sessions throughout Ireland.

**Image 1: The Corner House**



**Image 2: Sin É**



**Photographs by author**

The numerous annual traditional music festivals and summer schools offer diverse experiences and have distinct aims. My research suggests summer schools and festivals play significant and diverse roles during the enculturation process. I engaged in participant-observation in a variety of summer schools and traditional music festivals in order to explore the diversity of educational and musical experiences provided by these events. Summer schools and some festivals, such as the *Cruinniú na bhFliúit*, have educational aims and host workshops, master classes, and lectures. In addition to these structured learning settings, informal music-making at festivals and summer schools also plays a significant role in learning and enculturation processes. CCÉ's fleadhanna at the

local, provincial, and national levels also host informal music-making and social events, such as sessions, concerts, and dancing, but aim to promote high performance standards through an organized competition structure. Other traditional music festivals focus primarily on providing performance opportunities in the form of sessions and concerts. Festivalgoers at the popular Ennis Trad Festival, for instance, attend concerts and listen, socialize, and participate in sessions.

Since its establishment in 1951, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann has been the largest, most popular and influential organization which promotes Irish traditional music, song, and dance. Over the years, thousands of musicians have attended CCÉ's classes and participated in competitions and informal music-making. Musical, social, and learning activities in CCÉ's branches and fleadhanna play a significant and complex role in the enculturation process. In light of this educational influence, from March to December 2011, I participated and observed in weekly classes and sessions at the Douglas CCÉ Branch. During my experiences at the branch, I observed a variety of informal, non-formal, and formal learning processes.

Ethnographers now use the internet as a research tool and a 'virtual' fieldwork location.<sup>25</sup> As part of my research, I engaged in online fieldwork on numerous websites. Some, such as TradConnect and LiveTrad, are specific to the Irish traditional music community, while other websites, such as YouTube and Facebook, are used by traditional musicians in interesting ways. I conducted my online research primarily on the websites [www.thesession.org](http://www.thesession.org) ([thesession](http://www.thesession.org)) and [www.tradconnect.com](http://www.tradconnect.com) (TradConnect).<sup>26</sup> On these websites, I communicated with other members on discussion boards and explored the websites as a learner. Members of [thesession](http://www.thesession.org) can search or browse repertoire on the tune database or discuss various aspects of Irish traditional music and culture on discussion

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<sup>25</sup> For further discussion of ethnographic internet field research see (Jaffurs 2011; Lysloff 2003; Nettl 2005; Reily 2003; Waldron 2009b, 2011; Waldron and Veblen 2008; Wilson and Peterson 2002). Lysloff (2003) in particular wrote an insightful article about internet fieldwork, which provides a theoretical basis for my fieldwork.

<sup>26</sup> As a member of [thesession](http://www.thesession.org) since 2006, I am very familiar with its interface and general characteristics. I have been a member of TradConnect since its launch in 2011. See Appendixes C for further background information about my internet field research.

boards. Within the Irish traditional music literature, although some scholars discuss internet communities (Kearns and Taylor 2003; Rapuano 2005; Sommers Smith 2001; Vallely 2008), internet fieldwork is not yet a common methodology. However, fieldwork on the internet is becoming more common, as evident in Janice Waldron's recent research (2009b, 2011).<sup>27</sup> While internet communities are not the focus of this study, exploring this area was crucial due to some significant educational implications. Websites can be convenient and relatively inexpensive educational resources. Users of social networking sites, such as TradConnect, are able to connect with other practitioner, either online or in live contexts. The internet provides new and unique opportunities for communication, social interaction, and learning, the implications of which are explored in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

Fieldwork in school settings was beyond the scope of this research and was not necessary in order to address my research questions. Investigating the transmission of Irish traditional music in schools settings involves numerous complex teaching and learning processes, such as issues of teaching methods, curricula, authority, assessments, and identity, to name but a few. And as Lave and Wenger argue, schools are 'very specific contexts' in which to explore learning processes (1991:40). For these reasons, I argue that the complexities of music learning processes in school contexts require and deserve their own investigation. Furthermore, my interviewees placed a greater emphasis on learning in other contexts, such as sessions, CCÉ activities, summer schools, and learning from peers, family, and mentors. Taking this folk view into consideration, I focused my fieldwork observations within these contexts. A small number of interviewees had significant learning experiences in school, and while I explore this in Chapter 3, more research exploring the role schools play in the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians is needed in the future.

### **Participant-observation**

Both ethnomusicologists and educationalists commonly rely on observations of

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<sup>27</sup> Waldron plays and researches Irish traditional music, but her internet fieldwork also includes explorations into Old-Time, Bluegrass, and Celtic music.

musical and social behaviour as a key research method (Stock 2003:140; Swanwick 1992:141). However, ethnomusicologists tend to use participant-observation more frequently than education researchers. Some educationalists prefer to observe from afar, since they postulate their presence as adults may alter children's behaviours. McLaughlin also suggests that music therapists tend to take a 'neutral' stance during their observations and 'interfere with the normal everyday activities of the family as little as possible' (2009:189). However, McLaughlin also discusses a recent shift in practices, as music therapists now incorporate participant-observation in their research and practice (2009:189). Anthropologists commonly engage in participant-observation by:

...living with the people being studied, watching them work and play, thinking carefully about what is seen, interpreting it and talking to the actors to check the emerging interpretations. The term 'participant' observation does not usually mean real participation: researchers do not usually catch fish, teach classes or dig coal, rather they watch these things being done, and 'help' occasionally.... So 'participant' does not mean doing what those being observed do, but interaction with them while *they* do it (Delamont 2004:218).

Ethnomusicologists, on the other hand, do commonly participate in a range of activities alongside 'the people being studied' during their observations of social, cultural, and musical phenomena.

My field research observations were primarily conducted using a participant-observation model, although observations from afar were also occasionally necessary. Due to the nature of this study, participant-observation is the most suitable and effective methodology. Participant-observation allowed me to independently experience different musical and learning practices within Irish traditional music. Considering several of my research questions involve inquiries into the experience of learning traditional music, employing this methodology has clear and significant benefits. Additionally, during my fieldwork, some observations were only possible through direct participation in music-making and educational events. For example, during pubs sessions, musicians typically sit in a circle. Considering this spatial layout, the researcher must participate and experience the session from inside the circle in order to document the various,

and often subtle, educational, musical, and social exchanges (Cawley 2008; Hamilton 1978). Fairbairn, who conducted fieldwork in sessions in Cork, explains:

The fact that communication in sessions is not a matter of musicians directing their efforts towards an audience, but is contained within the musical circle, means that the session can only really be experienced and observed from a playing seat. The musical process is integrated into a social environment, and interactive detail is often obscured to all but the participants themselves (1993:43).

Koning, who conducted field research in pub sessions in Clare, similarly argues that ‘active musical participation may yield data that probably cannot be collected with the use of any other technique’ (1980:429). Rapuano also observed in County Clare sessions, but did not employ participant-observation. She states, ‘As a non-musician, I was no longer able to hear most of the conversations among the musicians’ (2005:28). As a flute and fiddle player, I participated in sessions, and the physical proximity to the socio-musical action allowed me to observe significant cultural, musical, and educational exchanges.

However, as Cooley argues, ‘Music participation is not simply a means for gaining access to cultural information’ (1997:17). Participant-observation provides multifaceted benefits to the fieldworker. I also participated as a student at weekly Comhaltas classes and workshops at summer schools and festivals. Participation in these contexts allowed me to note my own learning processes as well as observe learning in teaching scenarios. While a field researcher can observe the learning process from the back of the classroom in these contexts, the ability to experience the learning process as a student contributed to my personal and musical understanding of Irish traditional music, its culture, and the learning process.

Ethnomusicologists assert that elongated periods of participation in the field can foster an in-depth cultural understanding. Stock argues:

...ethnomusicologists normally learn to perform together with the subjects of their study. This provides close access to the heart of the performance events and

direct personal musical experience, and those studied often share their thoughts and actions much more deeply with a co-performer than with an external observer (2003:136).

In addition to providing access to insiders, participant-observation can foster shared musical and social experiences. Fieldworkers can become emotionally and socially connected to the musicians they work with in the course of their research, and trusting relationships formed during participation positively affect the quality and depth of the ethnography.<sup>28</sup> Beaudry states of her field research: 'human relationships rather than methodology determined the quantity and quality of the information gathered' (1997: 68). Myers also argues:

Sensitive participant observers gain access to private domains of daily life as community members come to trust and confide in them, especially during long-term field research... Ethnomusicologists are more fortunate than anthropologists and sociologists because the private feelings we study are publicly expressed in musical performance. Cultural barriers evaporate when musicologist meets musician. There is no substitute in ethnomusicological fieldwork for intimacy born of shared musical experience (1992:30-1).

During my fieldwork, I was conscious of fostering respectful, positive relationships with the participating musicians.

Within ethnomusicology participant-observation is viewed as a methodology which ensures more intimate relationships within the field, and enhances the validity of the field research data and the interpretation of this data. Myers argues:

The main strategy used in ethnomusicological fieldwork is participant observation... Participant observation enhances validity of the data, strengthens interpretation,

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<sup>28</sup> For a discussion about fostering positive relationships during field research see (Beaudry 1997; Cooley 1997; Hellier-Tinoco 2003; Kisliuk 1997; Kingsbury 1988; Kubik 2000; Mead 1969; Myers 1992; Nettl 2005; Shelemay 1997; Silverman 1995; Slobin 1992; Stock 2003; Tilton 1997, 2003). Within the ethnomusicological literature, scholars such as the ones listed above, also discuss the numerous challenging aspects of field research. During fieldwork, researchers must sensitively and effectively negotiate relationships and cultural, social, and musical meaning. In addition to discussing the positive outcomes of participating with informants in the field, Beaudry highlights the many challenges she faced during her field research in a small, rural, isolated village in the Arctic, and openly discusses her feelings of frustration, isolation, even imprisonment (Beaudry 1997:65).

lends insight into the culture, and helps the researcher to formulate meaningful questions (1992:29).

Ethnomusicologists also use participant-observations as a way ‘to ensure reciprocity and/or to test their understanding of musical data they have gathered’ (Shelemay 1997:191). Often participating in cultural, social, and musical activities leads to a more holistic and experiential understanding of such phenomena. For instance, Rice argues that without his ‘participatory experience of music making and living in Bulgaria, the explanation of what at first glance seemed a rather mystical link between aesthetics and metaphysics – “May it fill your soul.” – would be impossible’ (1997:119). Rice gained insight into complex cultural issues central to Bulgarian musical culture through musical interaction and discussions with Bulgarian musicians during participant-observation in the field.

Participant-observation is a methodology employed by several scholars of Irish traditional music (Cranitch 2006; Fairbairn 1993; Hamilton 1978; Kearney 2009; Koning 1980; O’Shea 2005; Veblen 1991; Waldron 2009a; Waldron and Veblen 2009). Cranitch and Veblen suggest that since some traditional musicians may be skeptical of researchers who do not play traditional music themselves, participant-observation, particularly in session contexts, is essential to fieldwork (Cranitch 2006:8; Veblen 1991:46). Veblen initially observed from a distance, but soon realized that informants expected her to play a more interactive role:

Although I embarked upon this enterprise innocently planning to remain an anthropological “fly on the wall,” it soon became clear that this position was not an option. Alliance with a group seems to be important in Ireland. My informants sought to change me from a neutral bystander to an ally and friend in order to share their perceptions with me (1991:46).

This highlights the importance of engaging in participant-observation during fieldwork within the Irish traditional music community. Hamilton also suggests that participation is a more effective methodology than observation (1978). Instead of taking notes, photographing, and recording sessions as an observer, he employs a less intrusive approach to observing session phenomena by participating as a musician. Hamilton states, ‘I made it a rule to behave exactly as



I normally would, in order not to introduce too many extraneous factors, and to be as objective as possible. For this reason very few recordings were made or photographs taken' (Hamilton 1978:7). O'Shea's experience also highlights challenges facing observers in the field:

...the presence of tape recorders and cameras, even if not used, often detracted from musicians' enjoyment and musical flow, making them self-conscious or hostile towards listeners. As a result, I made very few recordings (2005:31).

During my field research, participation in music-making was my primary methodology. I took very few photographs, and only made a few audio recordings. Additionally, I wrote fieldnotes primarily at home, shortly after events.<sup>29</sup> Rather than notebooks, I used my mobile phone to briefly note important issues to be considered later, in private.<sup>30</sup>

During my research, the balance between participation and observation varied depending upon the particular fieldwork situation. During weekly sessions at the Corner House and Sin É, I participated fully by playing familiar tunes, listening to the unfamiliar, and conversing between sets of tunes. As a flute player with many years of experience, I was able to participate fully in sessions. As a novice fiddle player, however, playing in sessions was problematic as I could not yet play up to tempo. As a fiddle player, I primarily participated in educational activities, such as CCE classes, workshops, and slow or beginners' sessions. Additionally, depending on the particular situation, it was occasionally necessary to observe from afar. For instance, during sessions at traditional music festivals, it was occasionally too crowded to join the circle, so I observed and participated as a listener. Similar to Beaudry (1997:73-4), I used a flexible approach during my field research. My level of participation differed and depended on particular situations and on the expectations of the other musicians in the field. I remained cognizant at all times of Myers' useful suggestion:

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<sup>29</sup> Several scholars provide practical advice on the writing, organizing, and analysing of fieldnotes (Barz 1997a; Beaudry 1997; Delamont 2004; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011; Hamilton 1978; Herndon and McLeod 1983; Kingsbury 1988; Myers 1992).

<sup>30</sup> Hamilton similarly suggests, 'my *modus operandi* was to simply keep my eyes and ears open, when I was playing at a session, and then to make notes later on' (1978:7-8). Because it could be considered rude, I often entered notes on my mobile phone away from the session circle.

The balance between participation and observation depends on the personality of the researcher, field situation, host culture and nature of the research...The successful fieldworker achieves a balance between participation and observation (1992:30-1).

## **Interviews**

Interviews with traditional musicians were a critical part of my field research and furnished the most significant results in terms of data collection. Interviews with the twenty musicians are my primary sources and inform and guide my exploration of musical enculturation. These interviews serve the main purpose of my research – to explore how traditional musicians experience the enculturation process. Interviewees’ narratives about their musical enculturation and opinions reveal a wealth of information, much of which could not be gained through observation alone. Collecting educational histories is a conventional ethnographic methodology, one which plays a central role in this study.<sup>31</sup> Long, open-ended interviews were critical in order for me to get to the heart of individual learning and enculturation processes. As Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder suggest, collecting stories is ‘the best way to transverse the knowledge system in a way that explains the linkages between community activities, knowledge resources, and performance outcomes. Only a story can describe these complex casual relations while incorporating implicit contextual factors that may be crucial to appreciate but hard to codify or generalize’ (2002:168). By exploring interviewees’ educational histories and stories of participating in music-making, I draw meaningful connections between socializing, music-making, and learning, which shed light on the enculturation process. I also interviewed several organizers of traditional music events to gain a different perspective on my fieldwork sites and various learning situations. Including multiple perspectives and ‘insider voices’ in the final representation is a defining and essential philosophy within ethnomusicology. Ethnographers commonly highlight the importance of featuring insiders’ views:

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<sup>31</sup> My research is influenced by other ethnographers who use this methodology (Baily 1988b; Green 2002; Jaffurs 2011; Kingsbury 1988; Lord 2000; Neuman 1990; O’Flynn 2011; Rice 1994; Snosniak 1990; Waldron 2006a, 2006b, 2009a; Veblen 1991).

Unless the academics consider the *insiders'* view right from the start, chances are they will come up with the *wrong* conclusions (Bennett 1999:29).

...any re-statement of other cultures which is not verified by verbal comments from informants is a pure fabrication of the investigator's culturally-bound mind (Herndon and McLeod 1983:66).<sup>32</sup>

Like many music ethnographies, my research involves intensive work with a relatively small number of participants, rather than 'surveys of large populations' (Nettl 2005:13). I selected twenty participating traditional musicians who differed in terms of age, location, and instrumentation (see Table 2).<sup>33</sup> As part of my selection criteria, I aimed to get a diverse group in terms of generation and location around Ireland. Socio-economic class and religion did not play a role in how I selected the interviewees, particularly since this was not the focus of the study. Musicians were selected more so on their skill level, as I discuss in more detail below. My interviewees' ages range from eighteen to eighty, and they were raised in eleven different counties in Ireland. For this reason, diverse narratives emerged. Because several generations of musicians participate in this study, the change in learning practices over the years is also highlighted throughout the dissertation. The enculturation process is so complex in nature that it was necessary to focus the research solely on musicians born and raised in Ireland. Snosniak, who interviewed classical pianists in her ethnographic study, argues that interviewing musicians from multiple nations and cultures creates an overgeneralized portrayal of the learning process (1990:275). To specify the scope of my research, I focus on a selective group of traditional musicians. It is likely that traditional musicians born outside Ireland may experience similar processes, but their experiences may also differ significantly depending on many factors. Researching how traditional musicians outside of Ireland experience learning and enculturation is a rich area of exploration for future researchers, especially scholars interested in issues of globalization, multi-nationalism,

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<sup>32</sup> See also (Berliner 1994:5; Marshall 1982:171; Nettl 1982, 2005; Seeger 1992:101).

<sup>33</sup> See Appendix B for further background information about each participant. I also aimed to establish a relatively representative balance between the two genders. Seven interviewees are female and thirteen are male, which is fairly representative according to O'Shea who argued Irish traditional music performance is still male-dominated (2005, 2008).

identity, or diaspora studies.<sup>34</sup>

**Table 2: Interviews with Irish traditional musicians**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Instrument(s)</u>	<u>Born</u>	<u>Home County</u>	<u>Interviewed</u>	<u>Duration</u>
Seamus Sands	Fiddle, whistle	1963	Newry, Down	2/2/2010	45 min.
Conal Ó Gráda	Flute, whistle, pipes	1961	Cork City	27/4/2010	34 min.
Cormac De Frein	Flute, whistle, piano	1980	Dún Laoghaire, Dublin	12/5/2010 18/5/2010	15 min. 20 min.
Aoife Granville	Flute, fiddle, whistle, fife, piano (F. horn)	1979	Dingle, Kerry	20/5/2010	30 min.
John Reid	Pipes, whistle	1971	Inch, Clare	26/7/2010	34 min.
Lisa O'Sullivan	Fiddle, whistle	1975	Freemount, Cork	4/8/2010	34 min.
Mick Daly	Guitar, 5-string Banjo, mandolin	1950	Cork City	28/9/2010	35 min.
Michael O'Sullivan	Banjo, whistle (céilí band drums)	1978	Freemount, Cork	10/11/2010	30 min.
James Duggan	Fiddle, whistle, flute.	1989	Listowel, Kerry	11/11/2010	65 min.
Ciara Ní Fhearghail	Whistle, button accordion	1991	An Rinn, Waterford	23/11/2010	21 min.
Tomás Ó Canainn	Pipes, whistle, accordion	1930	Derry City	8/12/2010	39 min
Connie O'Connell	Fiddle	1943	Kilnamartra, Cork	11/1/2011	65 min.
Matt Cranitch	Fiddle, piano	1948	Rathduff, Cork	1/2/2011	43 min.
Martin Hayes	Fiddle, banjo	1962	Maghera, Feakle, Clare	4/2/2011	35 min.
Niall Vallely	Concertina (whistle, pipes, trumpet)	1970	Armagh, Co. Armagh	7/2/2011	57 min

<sup>34</sup> Waldron investigated how Canadian adult musicians learn Irish and other Celtic musics, and there are several similarities as well as differences in how Waldron's and my own interviewees learned Irish traditional music (Waldron 2009a). Once such difference was that Waldron suggests her 'un-enculturated' interviewees often 'had difficulty learning the music in the way in which it was traditionally transmitted, that is, through aural/oral learning in context' (2009:58).

Helen Gubbins	Button accordion, whistle, piano, guitar	1983	Lisnagry, Limerick	17/2/2011	64 min.
Liz Doherty	Fiddle, whistle	1970	Buncrana, Donegal	18/2/2011	48 min.
Hammy Hamilton	Flute, whistle, (guitar, banjo)	1953	Belfast, Antrim	18/3/2011	63 min.
Geraldine O'Callahan	Fiddle, whistle, concertina, piano	1983	Freemount, Cork	3/5/2011 10/5/2011	33 min. 13 min.
Mary Bergin	Whistle, fiddle	1949	Shankill, Dublin	20/5/2011	55 min.

Each of the traditional musicians I interviewed has achieved a highly skilled level of playing. Their narratives present a particular perspective on the enculturation process, specifically, how accomplished musicians learn and become enculturated. In order to discover successful learning strategies, Waldron and Veblen also interview accomplished traditional musicians about their educational histories (Waldron and Veblen 2009). Snosniak takes a similar approach, and argues that focusing on highly skilled musicians reveals patterns of successful musical development and effective learning practices. Snosniak searched for:

...regularities and recurring patterns in the educational histories of groups of successful learners, consistencies that might shed light on how unusually successful learning is achieved (1990:274).

Many ethnomusicologists also seek out interviewees who display 'musical and cultural competence rather than representativeness' (Myers 1992:36). However, some propose that musicians of varying types and skill levels should be included in ethnographic studies (Berliner 1994:7; Herndon and McLeod 1983:68; Nettl 2005:145). The views of novice and intermediate traditional musicians are taken into account throughout this thesis. During fieldwork, particularly in workshops, festivals and on the internet, I informally communicated with musicians of all backgrounds.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> However, to present a focused view of the enculturation process it was necessary for the interview data to focus on a particular group of musicians. In the future, it may be useful to investigate possible similarities and differences between novice and advanced musicians' learning practices.

I approached potential interviewees only after I established myself in the field through participating in various sessions and other musical events in the Cork area. This time was critical to establish a rapport with the other musicians and to make myself known to them as a researcher, musician, and person. Developing relationships is essential to fieldwork and music-making in general. For a number of reasons, I felt it was relatively easy to establish relationships during my field research in Cork. First, I was able to participate alongside my interviewees in sessions and other activities, which lead to many fruitful musical and social connections. Second, positive field research relationships, fostered through long-term fieldwork in numerous settings, provided me the opportunity to meet and interact with several suitable interviewees. I often approached skilled and well-respected musicians after meeting and playing with them during my fieldwork in sessions, summer schools, and festivals. If they were interested and willing to be interviewed, we scheduled a meeting at a later time. I also interviewed a few musicians at the suggestion of my other participants. For example, Matt Cranitch told me that Tomás Ó Canainn would be a knowledgeable and insightful participant, and suggested that I contact him for an interview.

Munnelly states that older generations of Irish traditional musicians rarely ‘verbalised their thoughts on their music although many, like Seosamh Ó hÉanaí or Néillidh Boyle, were well capable of doing so when they chose’ (1999:140). Contemporary traditional musicians are ‘much more familiar with, and accepting of, the notion of being interviewed about the music they play and about themselves’ (Cranitch 2006:167). Many of the participants in this study were interviewed in the past by academics, and were therefore, familiar with the process. Participants rarely hesitated and were often enthusiastic to share their memories, experiences, or opinions about the learning process.

The interviews were designed as a semi-structured, open-ended conversation.<sup>36</sup> Waldron suggests that such semi-structured interviews allow ‘participants to describe experiences and raise supplementary issues that they felt

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<sup>36</sup> See Appendix D for more information. All interview questions were carefully worded to prevent my own biases from possibly influencing the participants’ statements.

were relevant to their learning processes' (2009a:57) – a methodology I found quite effective during my own fieldwork. At the start of each interview, I briefly introduced my research interest in learning and enculturation, and each participant gave me permission to record our conversation for later transcription. The majority of the interviews took place in pubs before traditional music sessions. Other interviews took place in cafes after concerts and in kitchens, as it was more convenient for those participants. None of the interviewees received the questions before our scheduled meeting. I began each interview by asking the musician to generally describe the most significant influences which shaped their musical development and current level of musicianship. I also asked musicians to describe their earliest memories of hearing Irish traditional music, and when and how they started learning their first instrument. These broad questions allowed the interviewees to direct the discussion toward learning practices they considered most influential and memorable. Participants often discussed their learning experiences for several minutes without interruption, usually citing other musicians they learned from and material sources, such as commercial recordings.<sup>37</sup> I also prepared a series of back-up questions to stimulate the conversation if an interviewee needed more direction to begin the discourse.

Lastly, interviews with various event organizers added valuable perspectives to my field research.<sup>38</sup> I interviewed three festival organizers,<sup>39</sup> two pub managers,<sup>40</sup> two organizers of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann,<sup>41</sup> and Jeremy Keith, the founder of [www.thesession.org](http://www.thesession.org). Their statements provide useful background information about the history of their particular organizations or premises. For example, Fearghal MacGobhann, the owner and manager of The

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<sup>37</sup> Although participants occasionally went on tangents, it is not a useful strategy for ethnographers to interrupt (Myers 1992:38). Although some discussions seemed unrelated to enculturation, I considered each statement significant to the interviewee's musical experience.

<sup>38</sup> Hamilton also interviewed pub owners to gain a comprehensive understanding of pub sessions (1978:48).

<sup>39</sup> I interviewed Hammy Hamilton, co-founder, co-organizer, and teacher at *Cruinniú na bhFliúit*, John Rynne, an organizer of the Ennis Trad Festival, and Harry Hughes, an administrator of the Willie Clancy Summer School. See Appendix B for more information about my interviewees.

<sup>40</sup> I interviewed Fearghal MacGobhann, the owner and manager of the Corner House, and Aidan O'Halloran, the manager at Sin É. Aidan also frequently sings in Sin É and other venues.

<sup>41</sup> Barry Cogan is the chairperson of the Douglas CCE branch, and Siobhán Ní Chonaráin is an organizer within CCE's headquarters who works to promote CCE's educational activities.

Corner House, discussed the history of music-making in his pub, and also provided valuable information about other Cork City pubs that have hosted traditional music sessions between the 1970s to the present. This historical perspective was useful during my discussions with traditional musicians.

### Learning to Perform as a Research Tool

Rice asserts that since the 1930s 'Ethnomusicologists' own learning of musical traditions is a frequently reported and time-honored practice' (2003:80), and certainly since Hood's seminal article on bi-musicality (1960), learning to perform the music one is researching has become a major ethnomusicological research tool.<sup>42</sup> The methodology emerged out of a significant philosophical shift in ethnomusicology during the mid-1950s, when, as Nettl writes, fieldworkers began to:

...systematically and routinely to study performance of musics. Many scholars and graduate students came to believe that their own minimal competence in performance provided an appropriate background for more serious research, and also gave them credibility in their host communities (1992:389).

Since the 1980s, learning to perform has become a taken-for-granted research technique in ethnomusicology (Nettl 2005:143; Rice 1994:333).

As a traditional flute and fiddle player, while performing in a number of different contexts, including sessions, informal gatherings, and in private, I was able to experience, document, and analyse learning processes and my own enculturation. Engaging in music-making and learning to perform has several methodological advantages. First, it provides first-hand experiential knowledge of Irish traditional music and culture. Without this knowledge, other data gathered in the field during observations and interviews may be misinterpreted or overlooked. Musical knowledge gained through performance allowed me to formulate appropriate interview questions and engage with other traditional musicians during fieldwork. Furthermore, by playing flute and fiddle throughout

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<sup>42</sup> For a full discussion see (Baily 2001; Berliner 1994; Cooley 1997; Koning 1980; Myers 1992; Nettl 1992, 2005; Rice 1994, 2003; Silverman 1995; Shelemay 1997; Tilton 1995; Waterhouse 1982).



my field research, I experienced the same learning practices traditional musicians described during the interviews. In his discussion of the ways in which jazz musicians develop creative expression, Berliner describes the advantages of engaging in and experiencing the learning processes common within a musical culture:

Using myself as a subject for the study – training myself according to the same techniques described by musicians – offered the kind of detail about musical development and creative process that can be virtually impossible to obtain from other methods (Berliner 1994:10).

Learning to perform is an approach which has enhanced my research by providing a practical as well as theoretical understanding of the enculturation process.

In documenting and analysing my learning experiences and progression on both flute and fiddle, I gained insight into valuable and complex educational issues within traditional music culture. Since many traditional musicians play more than one instrument, it seemed beneficial to learn and play two traditional instruments. Indeed, learning flute and fiddle provided multiple perspectives of the learning process. As an advanced flute player, I primarily document how I learned and developed aspects of style, expression, and creativity. As a novice fiddle player, I detail the process of learning basic technique and style, particularly bowing. My experience of learning two instruments raised many issues. For instance, I gained first-hand knowledge that learners can have a high aptitude for one instrument, yet find another quite challenging, even frustrating at times. In my case, I considered learning the flute relatively easy, but I struggled with many of the physical aspects of fiddle playing.<sup>43</sup> This has significant educational implications. In particular, this highlights how important it is for learners to try different instruments and find the one they feel is most suitable,

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<sup>43</sup> I have played flute since 2005 and experienced a relatively rapid progression. As an active saxophone player since age 11, it is possible that my quick development was related to the fact that flute and saxophone fingerings are quite similar, and I previously learned aurally. I began learning the fiddle in March 2010 and naively expected to develop quickly, considering my progression on flute and my previous experience playing Irish traditional music. However, with no background in string instruments, my physical progression on fiddle has been slow, yet steady.

natural, and enjoyable. In making a well-informed choice, learners are more likely to enjoy the learning process and continue participating in music-making.

Documenting and analysing my own learning processes was essential to my study of enculturation. I carefully documented my musical progression, learning practices, emotions, and other educational issues in fieldnotes, a learning journal, and video journal. The fieldnotes detail my learning experiences in sessions, festivals, and workshops, and document interactions with other musicians. In my learning journal, I documented my practicing and playing at home, including how I aurally learned from audio recordings. I also write about issues of emotion, motivation, practice habits, and other thoughts about my own enculturation process. I also video recorded my fiddle playing every 3-4 weeks to capture my musical development. This video journal, which includes performances and verbal commentary, captures my progression from simple airs, like *Báidín Fheilimí*, to playing standard traditional dance music repertoire. The videos were particularly enlightening and allowed me to observe and analyse the physical nature of the learning process, including the progression I made in terms of fingering, bowing, acquisition of repertoire, and performance of ornamentation. Documenting my musical development three ways, through fieldnotes, the learning journal, and video journal, was a productive endeavor. The ability to cross-analyse the information from my fieldnotes, learning journal, and video journal was particularly fruitful and informative. For instance, while examining a video of myself playing fiddle, I could also read my learning journal to get a sense of my practices leading up to the performance.

Since the aim of my research is to investigate on how traditional musicians born in Ireland develop into expressive and accomplished players, it is necessary for the analysis in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 to primarily focus on my interviewees' learning experiences and opinions, rather than my own. While my journal entries do not feature predominantly within the written ethnography, my learning journal was a significant vehicle for cultural understanding during my fieldwork. The process of gathering information about my own learning enabled me to converse with my interviewees in a nuanced way, and our discussions were based on a shared practice of learning traditional music. In short, since I

experienced many of the learning practices that my interviewees discussed, I developed the ability to ask follow-up questions and interpret the interview data in a way that was grounded in the musical practice. For the same reason, documenting my own learning experiences as part of fieldwork also helped me to interpret my fieldnotes, particularly notes taken at festivals, workshops, and summer schools.

### Interpretation and Analysis

After gathering data through fieldwork, interviewing, and documenting my own learning experiences, I organized the information for qualitative analysis. Similar to other ethnomusicologists' approach, I cross-referenced my own field research and past studies from the literature to identify overarching themes (Berliner 1994:7). Below, I briefly discuss some issues of interpretation and analysis to contextualize my research findings. This is followed by a discussion how the researcher's identity effects the formulation, implementation, and interpretation of ethnographic research.

This study depends on multiple methods of inquiry in order to achieve a realistic representation of the enculturation process. When ethnographers employ multiple methods, the different approaches to data collection and cultural understanding often complement one another, contributing to a more nuanced and complete view of the phenomena under examination. For instance, while interviewing is one of the most effective techniques used in this study, many scholars discuss the limitations of this methodology. For example, Csikszentmihalyi writes:

I felt dissatisfied with the usual tools that psychologists relied on to gain access to people's experience, such as interviews and questionnaires. When people try to recall how it felt to climb a mountain or play a great musical performance, their stories are usually quite stereotyped and un insightful (2000:xix).

Sloboda also highlights the difficulties of verbalizing musical experience:

Anyone who has had any significant musical experience

will know that the words to describe it are not always at hand (1990:34).

Although the traditional musicians I interviewed rarely had trouble answering my questions, interview data cannot describe the totality of musical experiences. Because musical thought is essentially a non-verbal form of knowledge, language-based interviews, while useful, should not be the only methodology employed by ethnomusicologists and musicologists.

Interviewing musicians about their educational histories raises complex issues. The traditional musicians' narratives provide a retrospective view of the enculturation process. Many participants' enculturation into the Irish traditional music community began during infancy or early childhood, and because of this, their recollection of formative experiences during this stage of early development may be hazy or forgotten entirely. Memories are imperfect and subject to deterioration over several years, raising questions about interviewing as a methodology. However, in the course of the interviews, many traditional musicians were able to recall early childhood memories, in some cases, in great detail. When interviewees are able to describe such memories, they often reveal a powerful moment during their musical enculturation. Although there are important questions to consider about memory, interviewing traditional musicians about their past learning experiences was fruitful. Sloboda argues the 'autobiographical memory technique is a rich and workable one' (1990:42), and that 'adults often have the words to describe, in retrospect, an experience that as a child he or she would have been inarticulate about' (1990:35). Of course, lapses of memory are a reality which researchers must take into consideration. In my own case, relationships fostered during field research at least partially helped in this regard. For instance, after the initial interview, several interviewees contacted me to add memories, stories, and opinions they omitted or forgot. Some also elaborated and clarified their statements. These communications highlight the importance of long-term engagement in the field and the benefits of using multiple methods of inquiry.

While interpreting the interview data, the researcher must acknowledge that musicians' narratives of the learning process may not necessarily reflect all

of the actual learning practices that contributed to enculturation. Herndon and McLeod argue:

...among all people, there is a difference between what they say they do (or did) and what they actually do (or did). As a result, ethnomusicologists have tended toward the position that studies of music must be done with living people in current situations (1983:1).

Baily and Doubleday (1990) also suggest that musicians' perceptions and descriptions of learning processes do not entirely match learning processes observed during fieldwork. Their field research shows that while Afghani musicians believe music *should* be transmitted formally through notation or the student-master relationship, they actually learn by ear and 'through exposure to the sounds of music, imitation of musical performance, and individual trial and error' (Baily and Doubleday 1990:95). Similarly, my interviewees' opinions about how traditional music should be learned do not necessarily correspond to their own learning experiences. For example, some interviewees suggest that traditional music sessions are less than ideal, or even detrimental, learning environment. However, my fieldwork observations suggest these same musicians commonly listen, experiment, and learn new repertoire during sessions. Therefore, while some describe the session an unimportant learning environment, my fieldwork observations suggest that unconscious and informal learning processes in sessions play a significant role in enculturation. Researchers using multiple methods can address challenges, such as this, that arise while interpreting fieldwork and interview data. In this study, I cross-checked the interviewees' narratives, fieldwork observations, and my own learning experiences to enhance the complexity and quality of the research.

Conflicting information in field observations and interview transcripts can also be challenging to field researchers trying to interpret cultural and musical meaning. However, as several ethnomusicologists argue, discrepancies, contradiction, and even blatant lies by informants should not be considered a mark of poor research or irrelevancy (Blacking 1992; Herndon and McLeod 1983; Nettl 2005). Nettl states of informants:

Purposely, or from ignorance, they may give what their compatriots might think is misinformation, but even the selection of this misinformation on their part may tell us something about the culture (2005:146).

And Blacking argues:

Because words cannot convey the significance of musical experience, ethnomusicological analyses incorporating insights expressed in the language of myth are no less valid than observations in the language of scientific method. Of particular importance are the definitions and contradictions and consistencies in the arguments held in different musical communities or in one musical community (1992:303).

Nettl and Blacking argue that significant meaning can be found in all statements by musicians. Researchers who carefully consider and follow up on all data collected in the field, however seemingly contradictory, gain understanding of participants' cultural and social lives.

### **Interpretation and Identity**

As in all ethnographies, my identity directly affects my perceptions and interpretation of the data. Although I examine my own biases and attempt to limit them whenever possible, the ethnographers' own interests and opinions can never be fully eliminated. The only way to address biases is for the researcher to understand their own identity and how it may affect their interpretation. In this brief section, I outline some of these issues of identity and interpretation. While much of the thesis focuses on how the interviewees experience enculturation, my own preconceptions about learning and enculturation are also present within the ethnography. Kong and Pearson state:

As is true of all researchers, we did not start with a truly blank slate that would allow our categories to "emerge" without the bias of preconceptions. The sociocultural lens we took into this study meant that we viewed learning as a process of the transformation of guided participation (2003:94).

The researcher's identity, as an insider or outsider to the culture, affects fieldwork, interpretation, and the final written ethnography. However, identities

do not merely fall on ‘a continuum from total insider to total outsider’ but instead, ‘it might be well to consider congeries of possibilities’ (Herndon 1993: 67). Indeed, Witzleben states that, ‘Every researcher is an insider in some respects and an outsider in other’ (1997:223). During fieldwork, my identity was somewhere between an insider and outsider. As a traditional flute player, I felt (and often was accepted as) a musical insider. As a participant-observer, most of my interviewees heard me play during sessions and therefore were familiar with my level of playing and understanding of Irish traditional music. This helped during the interview stage, especially since participants were able to reference specific issues, such as regional styles, which may be unknown to musical outsiders. Because interviewees knew me as a musician, they did not feel the need to explain simple background information about Irish traditional music during our conversations.<sup>44</sup>

My perspective is also subject to my outsider identity as an American ethnographer in Ireland. I became interested in Irish traditional music and its culture more than ten years ago. At that time, I was a university student studying jazz and classical saxophone, and I started to become disillusioned with the countless hours of practice and rehearsing necessary to prepare for performances. I felt that my music-making was dominated by preparation – practicing scales, arpeggios, and chord progressions – rather than playing or creating music. I became attracted to traditional music sessions, and began to view them as music-making opportunities that did not require group rehearsals. I was captivated by the notion that I could make music with other people without having to rehearse beforehand. Of course, this was an outsider’s perspective on the session, as it takes a significant amount of time and practice to be able to participate as a musician within this context. Turino (2008) might suggest that I was attracted to the participatory nature of traditional music sessions. I started to regularly attend traditional music sessions in the greater-Boston area, and developed a love of

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<sup>44</sup> I played alongside fourteen interviewees prior to interviewing them (All except for Martin Hayes, Niall Vallely, Liz Doherty, Mary Bergin, Connie O’Connell, and Tomás Ó Cailinn). I interviewed Connie O’Connell without playing music or meeting him previously. Because he was unaware of my musical skill level, during the interview he asked ‘Do you know what a roll is?’ The other fourteen musicians I played music with during fieldwork did not have to ask me questions like this, since they heard me playing rolls numerous occasions.

listening and watching Irish traditional music being played in a social context. This is when my own enculturation into Irish traditional music began. During sessions, I asked the musicians and other enthusiasts about Irish traditional music, and started purchasing and listening to commercial recordings of traditional musicians and groups. I acquired a traditional flute and started playing along to commercial recordings. My musical enculturation was further nurtured by attending sessions where my peers and more experienced musicians encouraged me to play, and provided tips about style and learning repertoire. After making initial contact at pub sessions, I eventually made friends with a network of musicians and started also participating in house sessions, concerts, festivals, and workshops. I continued to learn aurally by listening to recordings, and participated in a number of musical and educational contexts after moving to Ireland in 2007.

As an American conducting field research in sessions, I commonly felt (and was perceived as) a cultural and social outsider. During Friday sessions in the Corner House, I was often the only musician not born in Ireland, the youngest, and one of the few women players. However, this outsider status did not make me feel excluded or limit my participating in musical or social events during my field research. Because I was often perceived as a musical insider, I was able to join the session circle. Additionally, although O'Shea (2005) and Rapuano (2005) discuss the difficulties of being a female fieldworker in traditional music sessions, this is not my experience. Rapuano states:

The majority of the musicians are white, middle-aged men who had definite ideas about the role of women at sessions... my gender presented limitations to gaining access to musicians and to audience participants. I often had to be careful not to appear to be too "friendly" or to be too "knowledgeable," both conditions which alienated me from my population and/or created barriers to developing ongoing relationships (2005:54).

My gender never caused me to feel it was difficult to form relationships in the field. My positive experience with fieldwork in sessions may contrast Rapuano's because she did not engage in participant-observation. Without music-making as a common connection, Rapuano was a musical, cultural, and social outsider,



alienating her from the session musicians. As a female musician and field researcher, I enjoy and find no difficulty joining sessions. While acknowledging gender identity affects fieldwork, my national and social identities seem to have a more immediate and significant impact. Additionally, my academic standing often set me apart from the other musicians. As Myers states, 'However closely your appearance and behaviour match norms of the community, the social scientist is always an outsider' (1992:23).

In short, during my fieldwork I perceived myself as a musical insider, but a socio-cultural outsider. Cranitch (2006) also identified himself as a musical insider, but a cultural outsider to the Sliabh Luachra tradition. Although he is a well-respected fiddle player in this style, he was born outside of the geographical area. Cranitch states that the combination of insider and outsider identities helped 'to create a fuller and more complete picture of that which is under consideration' (2006:23). In my field research experience, the combination of being a musical insider and cultural outsider has provided a rich and complex view of the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians.

### Ethical Considerations

Participant-observation and interviewing involve social interactions with members of a musical community, an undertaking which has ethical dimensions. As Slobin states, 'Most ethical concerns arise from interpersonal relations between scholar and 'informant' as a consequence of fieldwork' (1992:329). Some ethical concerns, which I address below, include the field researchers' responsibilities to fully disclose their intentions, and to respect the privacy and humanity of all people they encounter during fieldwork. As a musician and researcher, I was sensitive to the participants' needs and respected their rights, and it was important to me that they felt comfortable and satisfied with their contributions to the project. Additionally, some of the discourse in the literature about other fieldworkers' experiences led me to be sensitive, or at times even oversensitive, to my actions in the field. For instance, Rapuano states of her fieldwork in sessions:

...many of the musicians were suspicious of researchers...This was especially the case in Ireland, where many of the musicians I spoke with had negative views about scholars writing about them. One of them even said it was “like being an animal in a zoo.” (2005:30).

I was anxious to avoid causing musicians to feel this way, and did not wish to disturb or impose on the musicians’ experience. Because of this, I was shy during initial fieldwork experiences, but slowly grew in confidence as I formed relationships and realized that many musicians enjoyed discussing their learning experiences.

As an ethnographer, it is perhaps natural to hesitate during initial stages of fieldwork for fear of breaching a code of ethics. Anthropologists and ethnomusicologists place a heavy emphasis on ethical issues. For instance, Mead argues that violating ethical codes negatively affects the participants, scholar, and the quality of the research (1969:375-8). Herndon and McLeod also argue that the ‘level of rapport which one gains in any area defines the limits of the data. Good observations and sensitivity aid in establishing rapport with other human beings which, in turn, enriches the ensuing data’ (1983:71). To complicate matters, in a position statement, the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) acknowledges ‘ethical systems and values may differ between ethnomusicologists and their field consultants’ (SEM 1998). Slobin also suggests the researcher’s ethical basis may differ from the culture under investigation, and for this reason, ethical considerations have to be adapted to specific contexts (1992:329). I established a set of ethical guidelines to best suit the project and the participants of this study.

I aimed to protect the rights of all persons I encountered during fieldwork, including musicians, tourists, audience members, and organizers. All of the event organizers and most musicians gave their permission before I started fieldwork observations. During large sessions or festivals, gaining permission from all participants is difficult or impossible. For instance, in sessions with more than twenty musicians, it is often not possible to chat with every member. Musicians can arrive late or leave early without the researcher getting a chance to introduce themselves and their research. Although fieldwork in sessions may be difficult in this regard, making one’s academic identity and intentions known to the

‘subjects’ is mandatory, as Mead’s strongly worded caution indicates:

To fail to acquaint a subject of observation or experiment with what is happening – as fully as is possible within the limits of the communication system – is to that extent to denigrate him as a full human being and reduce him to the category of dependency in which he is not permitted to judge for himself (1969:375).

The Society for Ethnomusicology also calls for relationships in the field to be based on ‘informed consent, rights of privacy and confidentiality’ (SEM 1998). Considering this philosophy, when it was not possible to disclose myself as a researcher, individuals’ behaviours were not used or analysed. While omitting useful fieldwork data because permission was not possible is frustrating, excluding such data is the fieldworker’s only ethical option (Mead 1969:365). I occasionally faced these types of challenges, particularly during my field research in sessions and on the internet. All of the behaviours, actions, and statements presented in this dissertation are included because I received expressed permission from the participants.

Because I engaged in internet fieldwork, there were several relatively new ethical implications to consider. As Reily states, ‘the Internet raises a number of ethical issues that are far from resolved’ (2003:190) and Wilson and Peterson suggest:

Internet phenomena are leading us to ask new questions... Within this environment of change, however, we are also in a moment in which the ethical responsibilities of the researcher are far from clear (2002:461).

Jeremy Keith, the founder of [www.thesession.org](http://www.thesession.org), gave me permission to explore the websites’ content and to discuss it within my study. Keith consider communications on the website to be ‘in the public domain’, therefore, I was free to use it for academic purposes (Jeremy Keith, e-mail correspondence). Members of [thesession](http://thesession.org) voluntarily share ideas on a public website, so one could argue they do not have an explicit expectation of privacy. Waldron, who conducted fieldwork on old-time music websites such as [www.banjohangout.com](http://www.banjohangout.com), describes the cyber ethnographic method of ‘lurking’ as an effective practice, despite ‘the

ethical issues it raises' (Waldron 2011:36-7). She explains:

It is also easier for researchers to remain hidden during cyber research, allowing for true naturalistic observation of the community under study. In Internet culture, the action of being a hidden observer is referred to as "lurking"—referencing persons who read messages on online discussion boards but do not contribute to them (Waldron 2011:36-7).

While 'lurking' is accepted in some research circles and can be a fruitful methodology (see also Atay 2009; Kruse 2012, Waldron 2009b), I have followed the ethical standard outlined by Wilson and Peterson, whom state:

For some researchers, the statements made in publicly accessible discussion boards or other communication spaces are in the public domain and may thus be freely used by researchers. For others, this is a form of electronic eavesdropping that violates the speaker's expectation of privacy. Our feeling, in keeping with the view that anthropology online is substantially the same as any other sort of anthropological research... its ethical principles - of showing respect for people under study, of protecting their dignity and best interests, of protecting anonymity or giving proper credit, and of obtaining informed consent-apply online as well as in face-to-face contexts (2002:461).

While I browsed discussion boards to acquaint myself with online communities, I have not analysed the discourse of online members without their previous and explicit consent. To preserve the privacy of members of thesession, I started my own threads on discussion boards, asking members to contribute their thoughts and opinions. Each thread began with an explicit statement of my academic position, so members who replied understood my purpose and intentions and agreed to participate.<sup>45</sup>

Participants in ethnographic studies are often named to ensure they receive the proper credit for their expertise. Nettle states of anonymity, 'musicians now rather uniformly expect to be treated as individuals and to get credit for their contributions to our literature' (2005:200). Myers also argues that the 'issue of confidentiality...is ambiguous in ethnomusicological research, since the artists we

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<sup>45</sup> See Appendix C for a description of these threads.

study may seek recognition for their work' (1992:28). Although many participants are now named in ethnographic work, it is still a sensitive issue requiring the ethnographer to take appropriate measures. Myers also states, 'The issue of confidentiality has no single simple solution' (1992:28). In my research, ethical issues were approached with flexibility in order to cater to the individual needs of each interviewee. All participants were given the option to either remain anonymous or have their name included,<sup>46</sup> and all were willing to be named in the dissertation. On occasion, I quote musicians anonymously if the statement could be in any way embarrassing or detrimental to the interviewee. Mead argues ethnographers have an obligation to protect participants from negative repercussions of contributing to their research, including legal sanctions, ridicule, or danger (1969:364).

In this thesis, I refer to the traditional musicians as interviewees or participants, rather than informants. I consider the participating musicians as co-authors or research contributors. Much of the analysis in this dissertation is based on their experiences and reflections of their enculturation into the Irish traditional music community. This philosophy of co-authorship is common in modern ethnomusicology:

Some reflexive accounts emphasize the collaborative nature of research, making 'informants' co-authors by narrating dialogues, interpreting cultures as relational and contested (O'Shea 2005:29).

Similarly, Nettl describes fieldwork as 'a cooperative enterprise, and the major informants and teachers should properly be the coauthors of most studies' (2005:158). Myers suggests fieldworkers encourage their interviewees to read and comment on the ethnography at various stages of the research and writing process (1992:36). As co-authors, my interviewees received updates and drafts of the thesis. Some participants provided valuable feedback by commenting on my interpretation and making suggestions for future drafts. Not all interviewees provided feedback, but it was important to provide access to the research and give them the opportunity to review how their experiences were represented.

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<sup>46</sup> In his ethnography of Irish traditional music in Doolin, Co. Clare, Kaul takes a similar approach (2009:11).

Healthy relationships are essential to the validity of fieldwork, but relationships should not be nurtured merely to achieve a higher standard of research. Social interactions with other traditional musicians are intrinsically valuable to me. Fieldwork does not abruptly end, and relationships can (and perhaps should) last many years after the completion of the project (Hellier-Tinoco 2003). The Society of Ethnomusicology argues:

..the responsibilities of field research extend beyond the fieldwork setting and often involve a long-term commitment to the rights and concerns of field consultants and their communities (SEM 1998).

Playing Irish traditional music in the Cork area has become part of my social and personal life - a situation that will continue long after the conclusion of this study. Many of the friendships formed during fieldwork will continue into the future, as will my appreciation of the participating musicians.

## A Pattern of Multiple Learning Experiences

I would like to argue that accomplished traditional musicians learn their repertoire and skills from a variety of sources, and this concept occurs throughout the thesis as a major theme. While describing their musical development, each interviewee discusses multiple learning contexts and practices, including learning from family, peers, and mentors in a variety of settings and using various forms of technology. Their narratives cover a spectrum of informal, non-formal, and formal experiences and suggest that there are multiple pathways into Irish traditional music – more than one way to ‘become a traditional musician’. For this and other reasons, throughout the dissertation I argue that learning Irish traditional music in a variety of ways fosters musical enculturation.

As the interviewees discussed common learning practices, diverse opinions emerged about the effectiveness of each learning experience. For instance, some interviewees stress the challenges of learning during traditional music sessions, while others highlight the benefits of learning in this context. The interviewees’ diverse opinions illustrate that each learning practice provides a

specific set of benefits and limitations. Considering this, I propose that enculturation occurs most successfully when a learner experiences multiple learning practices. The benefits of one learning experience may complement the limitations of another. For instance, while traditional musicians can listen, absorb, and imitate many different styles by listening to commercial recordings, learners cannot ask questions to other practitioners or observe other musicians' movements. Attending live events, like traditional music sessions, complements this more solitary learning practice.

Additionally, the ability to choose from an array of different learning practices caters to traditional musicians' different personalities and learning styles, fostering enculturation. Due to personal preferences, traditional musicians' opinions about the effectiveness and appropriateness of learning practices can differ significantly. One musician might consider a particular learning practice motivating and effective, while another may consider the same practice unproductive or even detrimental. For example, while group tuition provides affordable, informal, and social learning experiences, this context may be ineffective for traditional musicians who prefer learning in one-to-one situations or in private. Additionally, while thousands of young traditional musicians participate in competitions every year, this learning and performing experience does not suit all learners. Because there are multiple ways of learning and engaging with Irish traditional music, learners who dislike competitions can gain motivation and learn in other ways, such as by participating in sessions, festivals, and summer schools. Multiple learning opportunities ensures that enculturation is possible for learners with different needs, personalities and learning styles.

In general, interviewees participated in multiple performance and learning contexts primarily because they enjoyed learning and playing Irish traditional music. There is little evidence to suggest, that interviewees believe that the multiplicity of experiences itself nurtures musical development and enculturation. This was not an argument the interviewees themselves articulated, for instance. Engagement in multiple learning and performance contexts seems to be based on intrinsic enjoyment in learning and playing Irish traditional music, rather than some underlying cultural or theoretical conception that one *should* engage in

multiple learning practices in order to become a traditional musician.

Several scholars discuss the diversity and multiplicity of learning practices within Irish traditional music:

...musicians have learned to sing and play in a variety of ways, including... aural transmission through the use of recordings, and the organization of more formal learning institutions (Hast and Scott 2004:43).

A striking feature of music education across the centuries in Ireland is the richness and diversity of transmissional contexts (McCarthy 1999:3).<sup>47</sup>

Quite often, when describing the learning process traditional music scholars inevitably reference multiple learning practices. For instance, Cranitch highlights that Pádraig O’Keeffe learned much of his repertoire from books, gramophone records, his mother’s family (2006:154), and by interacting with other local musicians in homes and Lyons’ pub (2006:210). Furthermore, in an exploratory study of how adult musicians learn Celtic music in Canada, Waldron found that her participants used ‘a wide variance of learning’ strategies (Waldron 2009a:64).<sup>48</sup> Waldron suggests that this diversity of learning approaches is linked to the fact that her participants had differing level of aural abilities; she suggests that some of her participants primarily learned aurally, while more visual learners used a combination of written sources and aural learning in order to progress as musicians (2009a:64). Additionally, the Irish traditional musicians who participated in Veblen’s research learned repertoire ‘from several sources. Contact with other musicians such as family friends and relatives was considered essential. Likewise, media in the form of radio, records and tape machines were cited as important factors’ (1991:62). While other scholars highlight how traditional musicians learn repertoire and instrumental skills from a variety of

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<sup>47</sup> Within the literature, other scholars discuss the multiplicity of learning strategies within Irish traditional music. Fleming states, ‘There are several different venues where children learn Irish traditional music today, including private lessons, group classes, informal sessions at houses or pubs, and sessions run by Comhaltas, in addition to learning from recordings’ (2004:247). Ó hAllmhuráin also states that ‘Some performers learn formally from written sources, as well as informally from experienced players. Others learn from radio, television, and sound recordings’ (2008:8).

<sup>48</sup> Waldron’s participants learned ‘Celtic’ music, which includes, but is not limited to, Irish traditional music. They also learned repertoire and style from other folk musics, including Scottish music.



sources, my research expands this concept by suggesting that multiple sources affects enculturation as well as the acquisition of repertoire and techniques.

Education literature also refers to the importance of multiple learning experiences. As far back at 1934, John Dewey wrote ‘we depend upon contribution from a variety of sources for our understanding of the meaning of what we are undergoing’ (1980:201). Scholars investigating ‘situated learning’ also emphasize the importance of multiple learning experiences. Lave and Wenger suggest that learners need multiple opportunities for engagement in order to learn a practice. They argue:

To become a full member of a community of practice requires access to a wide range of ongoing activity, old-timers, and other members of the community; and to information, resources, and opportunities for participation (Lave and Wenger 1991:101).

From this perspective of situated learning, learners do not merely need access to information or resources to learn a practice. Novices need to interact with older, more experienced practitioners and with peers at their own skill level in order to ‘become a full member’ of a community of practice. Access to multiple ways of engaging with a musical practice encourages participation and learning. Currently, Irish traditional music is a vibrant and healthy community of practice. Perhaps this vitality is at least partly due to the multiple opportunities provided to novices, who learn how to negotiate complicated issues of identity and culture throughout the enculturation process.

## Chapter 2

### Unstructured Learning Experiences

In this chapter, I explore how musicians learn traditional music and its culture through interacting with their peers, mentors, and family members. I focus specifically on music-making and socializing which occur in homes, traditional music sessions, and other live performance contexts. The non-formal, informal, and sometimes unconscious learning processes discussed in this chapter primarily occur during the course of music-making and socializing, and outside of institutions and organizations. Unconscious learning is closely interconnected to other learning processes discussed throughout this thesis. Green emphasizes that informal learning can be either unconscious or conscious in nature (Green 2002:16), and a lack of purposeful effort is often associated with both unconscious and informal learning practices. Additionally, enculturation is closely linked to unconscious learning, since enculturation is often defined by ‘a lack of self-conscious effort and a lack of explicit instruction’ (Sloboda 1985:196).

This chapter explores various ‘unstructured learning experiences’, which are primarily informal experiences that rarely involve an authority figure who directs the learning process. Music-making, not ‘learning’, is also often the goal of these activities. While the experiences discussed here are informed by musical and cultural traditions, the learning processes are not structured or organized by teachers, institutions, or organizations. It is perhaps easier and more convenient to refer to the learning practices within this chapter as ‘informal and non-formal’, but this may be misleading. Such a label might suggest to the reader that informal and non-formal learning processes do not featured as prominently in Chapters 3 and 4, which is not accurate. For this reasons, when necessary, I refer to the learning practices in this chapter as ‘unstructured’.

Before the advent of modern technology and the establishment of traditional music organizations, enculturation occurred directly through person-to-person transmission. Interacting with other practitioners was the only path to become a traditional musician. While organizations and technology now play a significant role in the enculturation process, many traditional musicians still consider face-to-face interactions one of the most meaningful and effective ways

of learning. I argue that engaging with other traditional musicians is an integral part of the enculturation process. This argument is supported by my field observations and interview data, and throughout the chapter, I also draw upon various learning theories to illustrate the significance of social interactions during the enculturation process. From the view of socially situated learning, Irish traditional music needs to be ‘socially available’, if a learner hopes to develop into a traditional musician. McDermott explains:

...however hard we try, we can only learn what is around to be learned. If a particular kind of learning is not made socially available to us, there will be no learning to do (1993:277).

In the first section of this chapter, I explore how interacting with a community of practitioners, including mentors and peers, plays a significant role in the musical enculturation process. I outline and emphasize the general importance of social and musical interactions, and discuss how traditional musicians interact with one another in private settings. Following this, I explore how family members play a significant role in the enculturation process. The social and music interactions I explore in this section are particularly rich and complex, and because of this, there are numerous educational implications to consider. I follow this with an exploration of social interactions and the informal learning processes which occur during Irish traditional music sessions. I conclude with a discussion of how participating and attending other live music-making events, such as concerts and dances, can foster enculturation.

Throughout the discussion, common themes of informal and unconscious learning emerge, and each section highlights the value of interacting musically and socially with other practitioners of Irish traditional music. The learning experiences discussed in this chapter, and throughout the thesis, overlap in several ways. For instance, traditional musicians commonly record their peers during live music sessions in order to learn the tune later in private. This experience involves peer-directed learning, informal learning in sessions (discussed in Chapter 2) and using technology in order to learn (discussed in Chapter 4). Throughout the dissertation, I highlight these complex interconnections, which illustrates the holistic nature of the enculturation process.

## Interacting with a Community of Practitioners

In this section, I suggest that interaction with a community of practitioners is a meaningful and integral part of the enculturation process within Irish traditional music. In this context, practitioners include traditional musicians, singers, dancers, and enthusiasts. The Irish traditional music community may be considered a community of practice. Within that community, engaging with other practitioners is important in order to learn and become assimilated into its practice or activities. Evidence from my interview data supports this social learning theory. Several interviewees suggest that being surrounded by a network of musicians is essential in order to develop into an experienced and expressive traditional musician. Aoife Granville states:

A lot of us have people that we learned from that without them we probably wouldn't have taken the steps in becoming musicians... I think it's really important to have someone or to have a network of people (Granville, interview).<sup>1</sup>

This 'network of people' can be considered a 'community of practitioners', to borrow Lave and Wenger's terminology (1991). Even musicians who learn their instrument and repertoire directly from a family member or one particular teacher are significantly influenced by other practitioners. During social and musical interactions, newcomers often absorb cultural, social, learning, and musical meaning simultaneously through engaging with the practice itself. During such interactions, novices also can begin to feel a sense of belonging to the community of practice. Becoming a traditional musician involves significant and prolonged engagement with other practitioners. It takes several years of listening, absorbing, imitating, and playing to grow accustomed to the cultural and musical norms and to learn to play in an expressive, creative, and individual way.

The interview data suggests that listening is one of the most important types of interactions with other practitioners. This is perhaps unsurprising since music is an aural art form and Irish traditional music is an aural culture. From an educational point of view, listening to other musicians provides a model for imitation. Interviewees suggest listening is imperative in order to develop as a

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<sup>1</sup> **Aoife Granville** is a teacher, researcher, and flute and fiddle player from Dingle, County Kerry. Her PhD thesis explores Dingle's wren tradition (Granville 2012). She teaches at several summer schools and workshops throughout the year, and has released a solo album entitled *Sráid Eoin Shuffie*. For more information about the interviewees see Appendix B.

musician. When asked how he developed his style, Tomás Ó Canainn stated:

Obviously it makes it a lot easier if you associate with traditional musicians, and you make somebody or some people your model... it certainly has a lot to do with the surrounding and what sort of music is normal around there and what sort of music they are picking up (Ó Canainn, interview).<sup>2</sup>

To Tomás, interacting and listening to other practitioners provides a model and an opportunity to absorb stylistic nuances. Throughout the thesis, listening and imitating emerge as common and interrelated themes.

Experienced traditional musicians can learn and remember up to five hundred tunes (Ó hAllmhuráin 2008:8). Musicians have different ways of recalling and keep track of tunes in their memories. Some interviewees suggest that they can remember and recall repertoire more easily if they learn directly from other traditional musicians. Seamus Sands, John Reid, and Cormac De Frein suggest they recall melodies more readily when they are able to associate a tune with a person who they learned the tune from or a place in which they learned it (interviews).<sup>3</sup> For instance, John Reid describes how he associates tunes with his friend, and how this association often triggers his memory:

Any tune I learn off Liam, I think of him when I'm playing it. If I'm trying to remember it [a tune], I think of him and I end up actually remembering it (Reid, interview).

Other musicians recall repertoire by thinking about the names of tunes, commonly played 'sets', or their favourite commercial recordings.

Traditional music-making involves both social and musical interactions.

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<sup>2</sup> **Tomás Ó Canainn (b. 1930)** is an author, lecturer, composer, singer, piper, and accordion player originally from Derry. He has taught, played music in lived in Cork for over forty years. In addition to his publications on Irish traditional music and its culture (Ó Canainn 1993), Tomás has written an intriguing memoir about his musical life and travels (Ó Canainn 1996). For more information about the interviewees see Appendix B.

<sup>3</sup> **Cormac De Frein (b. 1980)** is a flute player from Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin. Cormac originally moved to Cork City to work as an engineer, but retrained and is now working as a secondary school teacher. Cormac leads many sessions in Cork City and is well-known in the area for his powerful, driving flute playing. **John Reid (b. 1970)** was born into a well-known musical family in Inch, Co. Clare. Many of John's family are pipers and dancers. John has lived and worked in Cork for several years as an engineer and professional musician. He currently works on his land and makes uilleann pipes. **Seamus Sands (b. 1963)** is a fiddle player from Newry, Co. Down. He has lived, raised his family, and worked as an engineer in Cork for more than twenty years. In recent years Seamus has also learned how to make fiddles, apprenticing and working under Jeremie Legrand. Seamus also released an album in 2013 with the flute player Dermot Rafferty entitled *The Green Bunch of Joy: Traditional Music from Armagh and Down*. For more information about the interviewees see Appendix B.

When traditional musicians play informally together, discussions often occur in between the music-making. Such musical and social exchanges affect learners musically, socially, and culturally, fostering the enculturation process. Many of my interviewees emphasize the importance of causally chatting and playing with other musicians during music-making events. Geraldine O’Callaghan suggests that she learns musical, cultural, and historical aspects of Irish traditional music by interacting with other musicians:

...sitting down and listening to a musician and learning by ear and imitation, you’re aspiring to their music. As well as absorbing a tune, you’re absorbing their love of it and their respect for it. You might be learning where they learnt it from, you learn a story that went with how they learned it or the person that the tune is called after (O’Callaghan, interview).<sup>4</sup>

Geraldine’s experience above suggests that one gains an understanding of the broader culture of traditional music by interacting with other musicians. This development of cultural understanding is a key to enculturation, as it involves more than learning melodies and techniques. Several participants suggest that understanding the socio-cultural practice and the context of Irish traditional music is vital to enculturation, and it is through interactions with other musicians this understanding develops.<sup>5</sup> Connie O’Connell believes that talking and playing with other musicians is the ‘only way that you really find out about music’:

Traditional Irish music, to my mind, is handed down orally generation to generation, and that’s the only way you can really do it... I think the only way that you really find out about music and its source is there is nothing like meeting the musician themselves, talking to them. You would be talking to them about the weather,

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<sup>4</sup> **Geraldine O’Callaghan** is a teacher, researcher, and fiddle player from Freemount, Co Cork. For more information about the interviewees see Appendix B.

<sup>5</sup> (Matt Cranitch, Liz Doherty, Geraldine, O’Callaghan, Connie O’Connell, Conal Ó Gráda, and Seamus Sands interviews). **Matt Cranitch (b. 1948)** is a teacher, author, lecturer, researcher, and fiddle player from Rathduff, Co. Cork. Matt has recorded several solo albums as well as recordings with the groups Na Filí, Sliabh Notes, and Any Old Time. **Liz Doherty (b. 1970)** is a fiddle player, lecturer, teacher, and researcher from Buncrana, Co. Donegal. She has recorded and toured with Nomos, Fiddlesticks, the Bumblebees, and Riverdance. Her research interests include the Cape Breton and Nova Scotia fiddle traditions. Liz is currently a lecturer of Irish traditional music at the University of Ulster. **Connie O’Connell (b. 1943)** is a composer, teacher, and fiddle player from Kilnamatra, Co. Cork. **Conal Ó Gráda (b. 1961)** is a well-known flute player, composer, and teacher from Cork City. His two solo albums, *The Top of Coom* (1990) and *Choc Buí* (2009), display a strong and distinct style of flute playing. Conal has also recorded and performed with the Raw Bar Collective, alongside Benny McCarthy and Dave Sheridan. Conal helped to establish, organize, and teaches at *Cruinniú na bhFliúit*. For more information about the interviewees see Appendix B.

but you are finding out their personality (O'Connell, interview).

Connie suggests that even conversations about non-musical subjects (chatting about the weather) play a subtle yet significant role in the enculturation process. Connie suggests that 'meeting the musicians' is an effective way to 'find out about the music.'

Interactions with other practitioners provide a way of learning through listening, absorption, and imitation, and create a socio-cultural context for the transmission of cultural and historical aspects of Irish traditional music. Furthermore, when learners experience social and musical interactions with other practitioners, their own identities develop. 'Learning' always involves a change to the self. Indeed, the Oxford English Dictionary defines learning as 'a process which leads to the modification of behaviour or the acquisition of new abilities or responses'. Lave and Wenger's concept of a 'legitimate peripheral participation' describes the process by which novice practitioners slowly become more experienced members of a practice (1991). From this perspective, in addition to learning repertoire and technique, novice musicians also slowly begin to change their identities from outsiders to more central members of the Irish traditional music community. Changes to identity occur gradually as newcomers learn the history, customs, and socially accepted norms of a community of practice, and begin to engage in music-making.<sup>6</sup>

In the discussion below, I first explore the interactions between learners and mentors, outlining how older, more experienced musicians provide advice and models for imitation. Following this, I discuss the influence peers have on each other's musical enculturation. I suggest that peer-directed learning plays a significant role in the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians. While learning occurs when musicians interact with older, more experienced musicians, Hammy Hamilton points out that younger musicians and peers also play a role in musical enculturation (interview).<sup>7</sup> Hammy explains how he, himself, learned about

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<sup>6</sup> Although this section discusses interactions between practitioners, in a sense, the entire thesis is dedicated to this subject. In Chapters 2, 3, and 4, I explore the learning and enculturation processes which occur during social and musical interactions in a diversity of situations and settings.

<sup>7</sup> **Hammy Hamilton (b. 1953)** is a teacher, scholar, composer, and flute player from Belfast, Co. Antrim. After moving to the area several decades ago, Hammy now lives and makes flutes in his workshop in Cúil Aodha, Co. Cork. Along with other locals, Hammy helped to establish, organize, and teach at *Cruinniú na bhFlúit*. For more information about the interviewees see Appendix B.

glottal stopping from Conal Ó Gráda.<sup>8</sup>

Conal is a good bit younger than me, Conal was really just a kid when I met him first. But I would have no problem with learning from someone younger than me. People always think, you only learn from people older, but that's not the case. If somebody is doing something that you're not, no matter what age you are you'd be like 'oh!' You can incorporate all types of things into your own thing (Hamilton, interview).

While peers are generally considered persons of similar status and age, and mentors are generally older and more experienced, within the Irish traditional music community, the boundaries between peers and mentors are often blurred. Younger musicians and peers can act as musical mentors in certain instances, and relationships between traditional musicians can fall somewhere between the typical roles of peers and mentors.

## Mentors

In communities of practice, mentors and experienced members introduce newcomers to activities, accepted behaviours, and pertinent skills related to the practice (Lave and Wenger 1991).<sup>9</sup> In this thesis, mentors refer to experienced practitioners who traditional musicians look and listen to for inspiration and imitation. Mentors can include teachers, family members, commercially recorded artists, and other traditional musicians in the community. Mentors are often older and more experienced, but younger traditional musicians can also act as mentors in certain cases. Indeed, as I explore below, musicians often learn a great deal (socially, culturally, and musically) from their peers and musicians who are only slightly older than themselves. Although the term has connotations of instruction and teaching, mentors can purposefully advise or unintentionally guide novice traditional musicians by providing a model for imitation. Interactions between learners and mentors involve both conscious and unconscious learning processes.

Within the interview data, all twenty participants discussed musicians that they looked up to and admired. Lisa O'Sullivan states, 'Everybody has an influence and everybody subconsciously takes an influence from their heroes or

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<sup>8</sup> Glottal stopping is a throat technique traditional flute players use to emphasize and articulate phrases, pulses, or particular note.

<sup>9</sup> Waldron also uses the term mentors to describe more experienced musicians who encourage, teach, or guide others (Waldron 2006b). In many instances, this is a more appropriate term than 'teachers'.



music teacher. That's inevitable' (interview).<sup>10</sup> The interviewees' relationships with musical mentors are diverse, as they consciously and unconsciously learned from mentors in numerous settings, including festivals, classes, workshops, and through listening to commercial recordings. As Williams suggests, 'The home is a frequent venue for Irish traditional music playing. In a kitchen or living room the setting is informal, there are fewer listeners and more participants' (2010:21). While I comment on other settings elsewhere in this dissertation, in this section I focus on interactions which occur in private homes.

As many of the interviewees' narratives indicate, spending time with older, more experienced musicians can profoundly affect enculturation. For instance, during his college years, Seamus Sands often visited musicians he greatly admired, in order to play, chat, and learn tunes. Instead of relying solely on a local network of practitioners, Seamus traveled around Ireland, calling to the houses of fiddle players, including John Kelly, Joe Ryan, Paddy Canny, and Bobby Casey. These face-to-face encounters had a profound effect on Seamus, as he explains:

What's important to me in a lot of the tunes that I play, would be I associate a lot of them with people that I have learnt them from... I made an effort when I was younger to go to the old fellas' houses and sit down and learn it from them, and play it with them. And thirty years later, I relate it back to that. So to me that's important... To me that's much more important than the notes that you can see in a book, I mean anybody with a bit of classical training can pick up a reel from *Ceol Rince na hÉireann*.<sup>11</sup> There are thousands of tunes and you can play through them all, but that's only half of the picture (Sands, interview).

While Seamus learned a great deal during these spontaneous encounters, they were not 'lessons'. Rather than moments of teaching, these interactions were based on sharing and collaborating through fiddle playing. Seamus's narratives illustrate that he gained social and cultural understanding from his mentors, as well as musical information. Interestingly, Seamus contrasts these encounters to learning from written sources. He suggests that playing tunes from written

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<sup>10</sup> **Lisa O'Sullivan** is a fiddle player from Freemount, Co. Cork. She works as an artist, educator, and part-time professional musician in the Cork City area. Alongside her brother, Michael O'Sullivan, Lisa is a founding member of the group, the Céilí All-Stars. For more information about the interviewees see Appendix B.

<sup>11</sup> As discussed in Chapter 4, *Ceol Rince na hÉireann* is one of many printed collections of Irish traditional music (Breathnach 1963, 1976).

collections is perhaps relatively easy and convenient, whereas interacting with older practitioners provides an understanding which cannot be learned through notation alone. For Seamus, learning tunes is only one part of the process, and he experienced the second ‘half of the picture’ through interacting with other fiddle players and traditional musicians.

Connie O’Connell speaks about similar learning experiences. He describes visiting his mentors and considers these encounters to have been very influential to his musical development:

I went out to the likes of Denis Murphy, Johnny O’Leary... I went to the house and I made tapes inside of Denis Murphy; he and his wife talking and chatting inside at home near the fire and we’d play tunes. And that was the way to get to know about music. It was a great thing to find out what kind of people they were, and sit down with them and understand what kind of personality it was (O’Connell, interview).

Rather than lessons, Connie’s encounters with Denis Murphy were based on informal music-making and socializing. Connie visited Denis Murphy and Johnny O’Leary to get to know them as people, as well as to learn their music. Both Seamus and Connie place great emphasis on the importance of understanding the socio-cultural aspects of Irish traditional music, not just mastering the technique and repertoire. Their musical enculturation was fostered through their interest in social and cultural matters and by getting to know and play with their musical mentors.

Because of the often casual and social nature of interactions between mentors and learners, the learning which occurs is often informal, coincidental, or unconscious. For this reason, there is a danger that the importance of these interactions can be overlooked. Take, for instance, Conal Ó Gráda’s description of interactions with his mentor, Seamus Mac Mathúna. While their relationship was informal and casual, Conal’s statement below highlights the influence Seamus had on Conal:

He didn't actually teach me but he kind of exposed me to recordings of flute players. When I was growing up it was really only a couple of records you could listen too; Seamus Tansey, one of Roger Sherlock’s, Paddy Carty, and that's about it. But he would have played tapes of McKenna, John Joe Gardner, and exposed me to a whole world of flute playing. That had a huge impact on me (Conal O Gráda, interview).

Seamus did not teach Conal, but acted as a mentor by providing listening material, inspiration, and advice.

Overall, interviewees learned a great deal, both musically and socio-culturally, by interacting with older, more experienced practitioners of Irish traditional music. Mentors provide important models for imitation, and influenced every interviewee. Many of the interviewees considered these experiences to be the most influential ones in terms of their musical development.<sup>12</sup>

## Peers

In general, the significant role played by mentors in the transmission of Irish traditional music is commonly emphasized within the traditional music community and the literature.<sup>13</sup> However, in comparison little is written about the role peers play in learning and transmission processes. Perhaps older, more experienced musicians are considered more authentic, representative, or appropriate models for learners to imitate. In many instances, this indeed can be the case. While mentors play a significant role in the enculturation process, peers, too, play an equally important role. Interaction with peers provides particular educational, social, and musical needs.

Many young musicians are exceptional players, and act as models for imitation for their peers. Wenger argues that more experienced peers act as a source of information and represent the ‘history of the practice as a way of life. They are living testimonies to what is possible, expected, desirable’ (Wenger 1998:156). Traditional musicians who interact and look to their peers can informally absorb both musical and socio-cultural behaviours, and many examples of this are found within the interview data. For instance, Ciara Ní Fhearghail was encouraged by and learned from her two older brothers, Seán and Caoimhín Ó Fhearghail, both exceptional multi-instrumentalists from County Waterford (interview).<sup>14</sup> Despite the closeness of their ages, Ciara looked to her brothers for inspiration, advice, and help during the learning process. Ciara

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<sup>12</sup> Further examples of interactions with musical mentors are outlined in other sections of this thesis, including sections on family, summer schools, and tuition.

<sup>13</sup> A few biographies and ethnographies, for example, highlight how well-known Irish traditional musicians have learned from mentors (often family members or neighbors) (Mac Aoidh 1994; Meek 1987; Vallely, Piggott, and Nutan 1998).

<sup>14</sup> They are not exceptional for their age, but for any age group. Caoimhín was the recipient of the TG4 Gradam Ceoil award for Young Musician of the Year in 2012.

gained musical knowledge from her brothers and their behaviour showed her that participation in Irish traditional music was possible and enjoyable.

Traditional musicians of the same peer group often chat, listen, learn, and play traditional music together in each other's homes. These informal and private music-making experiences have many educational and social benefits. Novice musicians who are not ready to play fast dance tempos in a session setting may find informal music-making at a friend's house less pressurized, yet still a social, enjoyable, and motivational activity.<sup>15</sup> In private settings, peers are able to converse for a long period of time, play slowly, and can start and stop the music at their convenience, which is generally not appreciated by publicans and patrons of pubs. The interview data revealed that calling around to friends' houses to play tunes is a common experience. During the early stages of the learning process, Cormac De Frein did not take lessons or have a flute teacher, but he often called around to other flute players for advice, to learn new tunes, or to play music (De Frein, interview). He states:

There was a few people that I knew growing up that I use to call around to and ask 'how do you do this'. There was Eamonn de Barra from school and Tom Doorley lived up the street, the flute player from Danu. He was about five years older than me, but he was just two years older than my sister. All the lads on the street use to play football and he was one of them. So I used to go up to him a bit, I don't know if you would call them classes, but just call around for a while, just say, "Show us how to do this." (De Frein, interview).

Cormac often purposefully, but informally learned through playing music with his peers. He asked specific questions about technique or an aspect of style, but Cormac does not consider these lessons. Cormac's relationship with Tom Doorley is an example of the blurred boundaries between peer or peer-mentor relationships. One might view Tom as Cormac's mentor, since Cormac looked to him for advice and inspiration. However, although Tom is a few years older, he is still in Cormac's peer group. Cormac is one of several interviewees who were self-taught. Without a teacher, gaining informal advice and support from peers throughout the learning and enculturation process is invaluable.

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<sup>15</sup> In my own learning experiences, I enjoy playing pub sessions on the flute. However, as a beginning fiddle player, my technique is not yet developed enough to play in sessions comfortably. For me, playing at home is a better learning experience, as I often play with other musicians who are at a similar skill level.

Hammy Hamilton is also a self-taught musician. Hammy states that while learning in the 1970s, he developed musically by interacting with a group of young flute players in the Belfast area.<sup>16</sup> Hammy states that ‘It wasn’t as if there was an elder generation of flute players in Belfast’ (Hamilton, interview). At the time, Hammy did not have access to written instrumental tutors, lessons, classes, or frequent connections to an older generation of flute players. For this reason, social and musical interactions with his peers were crucial to Hammy’s musical enculturation. Hammy explains how he developed flute technique and ornamentations:

I probably asked somebody. I don’t know how typical this is, but in my case it would have been contemporaries of mine, opposed to older players, because I would have been a little bit shy to ask. Whereas somebody who was learning alongside me, but was making more progress, I would have asked them (Hamilton, interview).

Even when older musicians were present, Hammy often preferred to pose questions to his peers. This illustrates an advantage of peer-directed learning; some learners are more comfortable seeking advice from peers, rather than from mentors or teacher figures. I propose that the extent of the influence peers have on a musicians’ enculturation depends on two factors - the individual’s learning style or preference, and the availability of other educational resources, including materials and human resources. Hammy often felt more comfortable learning directly from his peers, and he relied on them since he did not have a teacher. Depending on the availability of resources and learning styles, other learners may rely more on their teacher or an older mentor in order to learn their repertoire and musical skills.

The interview data suggests that playing music with peers on a regular basis affects the development of style.<sup>17</sup> Cormac De Frein describes how his own

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<sup>16</sup> Hammy referred to a number of flute players as part of this group, including himself, Desi Wilkinson, Frankie Kennedy, Tara Bingham, Gary Hastings, and Harry Bradley (Hamilton, interview).

<sup>17</sup> (Mick Daly, Cormac De Frein, James Duggan, Hammy Hamilton, Connie O’Connell, Lisa O’Sullivan, Michael O’Sullivan, Seamus Sands interviews). **Mick Daly (b. 1950)** is a singer, guitar and banjo player from Cork City. Mick has performed with several Irish traditional music, folk, and old time music groups, including Any Old Time, The Lee Valley String Band, The Mary Black Band, Scullion, and Four Men and a Dog. Mick leads sessions in the Corner House pub. **James Duggan (b. 1989)** is a teacher and fiddle player from Listowel, Co. Kerry. James graduated from University College Cork as a student of English and Irish. James also teaches at the Douglas CCÉ branch. **Michael O’Sullivan** is a banjo player from

style developed:

I think it's through listening. You take pieces from different people you like and end up with your own style. No one, well, very few people come up with their own style completely from scratch. They're doing the same thing as other musicians around their age or a bit older than them (De Frein, interview).

In Cormac's view, developing a personal style involves absorbing other players' techniques, inflections, and musical approach. Absorption occurs through listening, and musicians make conscious and unconscious decisions about which stylistic elements to keep as their own. Interestingly, Cormac believes that musicians develop their own style by listening and interacting with musicians their own age or 'a bit older', not by imitating the style of an older generation of musicians. This issue which emerged within my interview data highlights the socially situated nature of the enculturation process and the importance of peer-directed learning. Michael O'Sullivan also comments about how he developed his own style by playing and listening to a diverse group of musicians:

You don't really steal little things from people, but subconsciously if you listen to something over and over again you might have your own version or a variation in the tunes. I think it's from listening to all different styles and playing with different people. Definitely the people you play with affects the way you play (O'Sullivan, interview).

Both Michael and Cormac emphasize that style develops unconsciously through repeated listening and playing with peers. They highlight the process of borrowing elements of style from other musicians, but do not purposefully aim to replicate any one musician's style entirely. Their own personal style of playing emerges from years of experience playing and listening, and by amalgamating aspects of other musicians' styles.

As indicated above, interactions with peers can influence style and aid in the acquisition of repertoire and techniques. I also propose that peer-directed learning provides learners with relevant social experiences within Irish traditional music, and therefore nurtures musical enculturation. Enculturation is more likely to occur when a novice participates in Irish traditional music and feels that this practice is relevant to their social and cultural life. This is a significant advantage

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Freemount, Co. Cork. Michael is a founding member and frequently performs with the Céilí All-Stars. For more information about the interviewees see Appendix B.

of peer interaction during the enculturation process. Learners who participate alongside peers can see immediate social benefits of playing traditional music. According to several interviewees, playing and socializing with peers provided highly motivational experiences. Many were motivated by the social side of Irish traditional music, especially during adolescence and early adulthood. For instance, Lisa O'Sullivan states:

I wasn't the type of musician that sat furiously learning tune after tune. It just didn't do it for me. I was quite lazy in that respect... I liked the whole socialability of it, and I got energy from other people playing rather than sitting on my own... I didn't have the discipline, but I always had the passion and the love for it, so I kept going with the whole socialability side of it (O'Sullivan, interview).

Lisa's peers had a profound impact on her musical enculturation. Particularly in her teenage years, Lisa lacked the discipline and motivation to learn new tunes and practice on her own. Interacting and playing with peers kept her musically active, and encouraged her to continue playing Irish traditional music. Among other things, musical enculturation requires longevity, and longevity is nurtured through consistent, relevant social relationships within the Irish traditional music community. Mick Daly also discusses why he has played Irish traditional music so frequently and consistently over the years:

Because I love it, and because of friendship I've formed with Dave [Hennessey] and Matt [Cranitch], and I went on from there to join others. From that point of view, it was just a case of you just play music with your friends. So, these are just a bunch of people I hung out with over the years, and that's why I suppose I got immersed in it (Daly, interview).

Through consistent interactions with his peers (a community of practitioners), Mick became 'immersed' in Irish traditional music. As he entered into the community of practice, Irish traditional music became a part of Mick's life, and over the years he developed into an experienced musician. Mick absorbed the musical style, repertoire, and culture through social interactions. Peer-directed learning and relevant social interactions encourages prolonged participation. This longevity of participation is crucial to enculturation, which is a lifelong process. In this way, relationships with peers play a significant role in the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians.

## Family Influences

Family plays a significant and complex role in the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians. The importance of family connections frequently emerged within the interview data. For some interviewees, social and musical interactions with family members were the most profound learning experiences in terms of their enculturation and development as musicians. Eighteen out of the twenty interviewees described significant musical experiences with family members, and eight listed their families as the primary musical influence in their lives.

However, the types of family interactions described by interviewees are by no means homogeneous. The interview data also reveals a wide variety of socio-musical interactions within families. Therefore, the influence of family is difficult to generalize. The participating musicians came from a variety of different family backgrounds. Some interviewees experienced a great deal of musical interactions with their immediate and extended families, while others experience little to none. This section explores these diverse family connections, and how this affects musical enculturation.

The experience of learning from a family member in one's own peer group, such as cousins or siblings, is significantly different than learning from older family members, such as parents, grandparents, aunts, or uncles. In this section, I explore four categories of social and musical interactions, including exchanges with:

- parents<sup>18</sup>
- siblings
- members of the extended family
- family members who are not musicians, singers, or dancers

Interestingly, only a small number of interviewees developed their instrumental abilities directly from their parents. In contrast, within my interview data interactions with siblings constitute a much more common experience. Members of the extended family, including aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, etc., also play an important role in enculturation, especially for interviewees who did not play music with members of their immediate family. In this section, I also explore how family members who are not active in music-making can play a role in the

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<sup>18</sup> This category also includes caregivers and guardians of children. 'Parents' is used here for sake of brevity. In this study, however, all my interviewees discussed interactions with their birth parents.



learning and enculturation process. This area is often overlooked by educational researchers. I outline how family members who are not singers, dancers, or musicians can nurture, encourage, and influence young traditional musicians. For sake of brevity, I often refer to such family members as ‘non-musicians’. Many of my interviewees did not come from a long line of music-makers, but were raised in families where Irish traditional music was listened to and appreciated. Some interviewees described family members as enthusiasts who had a passion for Irish traditional music. Such family members often provided encouragement, motivation, and support throughout the many years of musical enculturation.

As part of this research, I reviewed Irish traditional music literature for references to family, learning, and transmission practices. This provided historical and cultural information, and revealed a few interesting patterns about the role family plays within Irish traditional music. Scholars often discuss how traditional music is transmitted from ‘generation to generation’. Some define Irish traditional music, in part, by the aural transmission process which occurs between older and younger generations of musicians.<sup>19</sup> This transmission between generations often occurs in the home environment. Children reared by instrumentalists, singers, and dancers experience and absorb the music-making of their musically experienced family members. Children who do not come from musical families also learn from older generations of players during interactions with neighbours and mentors.

Many writers carefully outline family connections, and illustrate that many exceptional traditional musicians descend from musical families. For example, in his ethnography of Irish traditional music in Doolin, Co. Clare, Kaul suggests that, ‘music tended to run in some families and not in others. Often, those who can play are the granddaughters or the nephews or the sons of some well-known musician, and often, their brothers and sisters are good players as well’ (Kaul 2009:35). Many biographies of exceptional Irish traditional musicians, including Michael Coleman and Willie Clancy, also highlight how these musicians were raised in musical family environments.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, in

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<sup>19</sup> For example, Cranitch states Irish traditional music ‘is played ‘by ear’, and passed on from one generation to the next’ (2001:7). For more examples of definitions of Irish traditional music which include a statement about intergenerational aural learning, see (Breathnach 1996:2; Hast and Scott 2004:17; Kaul 2007:704; Ó Canainn 1993:1; O’Connor 2001:3; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008:8; Vallely, Piggott, and Nutan 1998:7; Vallely 2008:7-10).

<sup>20</sup> For examples, see biographical accounts of Michael Coleman (Bradshaw 1991), Willie Clancy (Hannan 1999; Kearns and Taylor 2003; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008), Tommie Potts (Ó hAllmhuráin

his book, Gaul details the lives of several influential traditional musicians and singers, the majority of whom, including Seamus Ennis, Sean Maguire, and the Rowsome and Doran families, were born into musical households (Gaul 2006). In his historical ethnography, Mac Aoidh also highlights the importance of families to Irish traditional music in Donegal, and details the educational and social links between musical families and fiddle players. For example, Mac Aoidh outlines the musical history of each area of Donegal by describing the multiple generations of fiddle players who played and influenced music-making in each locality:

More so than any other district in County Donegal, the southwest had seen a series of family-based fiddling dynasties. Almost every village had one and in some district most townlands... In places, the history of playing here seems to go back to the very roots of the music... Possibly the earliest established of the local fiddle dynasties was that of the intriguing Mac Fhionnlaiochs, or McGinleys of Loch Inse (Mac Aoidh 1994:266).

Mac Aoidh also discusses other influential clans, such as the Doherty, Gallagher, McConnell, Campbell, and Boyle families. From Mac Aoidh's perspective, family plays a central role in transmission practices in Donegal.

Within the literature and everyday discourse, influential families with a long tradition of participation within Irish traditional music are occasionally referred to as 'dynasties'. For example, the Rowsome family in Dublin and the Doherty family in Donegal helped to sustain traditional music during its low ebb, around the 1930s until the 1950s. These families did not merely transmit music within their own families; families from the traveling community, such as the Doran's and Doherty's, taught students and influenced other musicians throughout the country. Willie Clancy, for example, first heard the uilleann pipes as a teenager when he met the traveling piper, Johnny Doran, at a local fair (Kearns and Taylor 2003:24-5). Doran had a huge effect on the young Clancy, who eventually became an exceptional piper. In this way, the influence of musical dynasties can be widespread.

Within the interview data, there are a number of references to influential musical families with unbroken traditions of music-making. John Reid states:

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2008; Ó Súilleabháin 1999), Pádraig O'Keeffe (Hanifin 1995; Cranitch 2006), and Junior Crehan (Hast and Scott 2004:9).

People who've reached the pinnacle with their music normally come from a musical family and it can go back four or five generations. So there's a certain breeding factor. Like myself, my grandfather was a piper, his father was a fiddler and the father before was a fiddler... My mother's side then, my grandmother's a concertina player...Garrett Barry would be related to me... and all my mother's people were dancers... (Reid, interview).

John also suggests that 'the unbroken chain of musicians' in his family allowed him to imitate traditional music which was 'closer to the root' (Reid, interview). He considers family as a major influence on his musical enculturation and development. Consequently, he carefully illustrates his own family connections, especially highlighting well-known family members and multiple generations of music-making. From John's perspective, family connections are not simply a matter of prestige and pedigree, they are also a direct source of musical knowledge from the past. Within the literature, learning from older family members is described as one of the highest status methods of transmission within Irish traditional music (Hamilton 1978:42; O'Shea 2006-7:7). While it is not the purpose of this study to explore the authenticity of learning practices, noting the status of this particular learning experience establishes a useful cultural context for our discussion here.

## Parents

My interview data reveals that traditional musicians experience a wide variety of socio-musical interactions with their parents. Some interviewees had multiple and consistent musical interactions with their parents who were active or occasional instrumentalists, singers, and/or dancers. Other interviewees experienced little to no music-making with their parents, as they were not players, singers, or dancers. Furthermore, interviewees with musically active parents did not have uniform experiences; Some were directly taught by their parents, while other interviewees only had informal or casual musical interactions with their parents. The level of formality often depended on family dynamics and personalities within the family.

Only five musicians - Mary Bergin, Matt Cranitch, Martin Hayes, John Reid, and Niall Vallely - were raised by instrumentalists.<sup>21</sup> I anticipated a higher

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<sup>21</sup> **Mary Bergin (b. 1949)** is a tin whistle player from Shankill, Co. Dublin. Born into a musical family, Mary started learning the whistle at the age of nine, and is now acknowledged as one of the most accomplished tin whistle players of her generation. She performed and recorded with the group Dordan, and has released two remarkable solo albums, *Feadóga Stáin* (1979)

number, because it is often believed that musicians ‘who’ve reached the pinnacle with their music normally come from a musical family’ (Reid, interview).

Veblen’s research also suggests that Irish traditional musicians are commonly introduced to music-making by their mothers and fathers (1991:11), and thirteen out of fifteen of Veblen’s interviewees ‘came from musical families where one or more of the family members sang, played or danced’ (1991:58).<sup>22</sup> Based on my interviewees’ narratives, however, learning a traditional instrument directly from parents is not a common experience.

The five interviewees raised by musical parents list their families as primary influences in terms of their musical education and development. Their narratives also reveal diverse socio-musical relationships with their parents. For instance, Niall Vallely was taught by his parents in structured classes, but also learned a great deal from his mother and father non-formally and informally. John Reid, Matt Cranitch, and Martin Hayes describe formal, non-formal, and informal interactions with their fathers, while Mary Bergin picked up her father’s repertoire entirely by what she describes as ‘osmosis’. Learning by osmosis is an informal, subconscious process of musical absorption.<sup>23</sup> The considerable differences in these experiences create a rich and complex area of investigation. The effect parents have on enculturation is difficult to generalize and must be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Niall Vallely’s learning experiences with his parents were structured and relatively formal:

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and *Feadóga Stáin 2* (1993). In 2000, Mary won TG4’s Gradam Ceoil award for Musician of the Year. Several years ago, Mary moved to An Spidéal, Co. Galway, where she now teaches locally. **Martin Hayes (b. 1962)** is fiddle player and teacher from Maghera, Co. Clare. Raised in a musical household near Feakle, Martin is known as one of the most masterful and expressive fiddle players within contemporary Irish traditional music. He currently lives in Connecticut, USA, but often tours Ireland and the world with guitarist, Dennis Cahill. Martin and Dennis have also collaborated on commercial recordings, and Martin has released two solo albums (see Discography). **Niall Vallely (b. 1970)** is a concertina player from Armagh, and is well-known for his innovative and creative work as a musician and composer. He has a distinct contemporary style, developed from eclectic musical influences. Niall has recorded and toured with his groups, Nomos and Buille. For more information about the interviewees see Appendix B.

<sup>22</sup> Veblen’s findings about family influences are relatively general. Although she suggests musicians are often introduced to traditional music by their parents, Veblen does not detail if this is done primarily through singing, dancing, playing, or listening practices.

<sup>23</sup> Berliner states: ‘Reflecting on their early childhoods, many jazz artists describe the process by which they acquired an initial base of musical knowledge as one of osmosis. They cultivated skills during activities as much social as musical, absorbing models from varied performances’ (1994:22).

The first biggest influence would be my parents, in several different ways. In terms of just learning traditional music in the first place, or even wanting to learn it. They both played music, but more importantly they both taught music. They put on a series of classes called the Armagh Piper's Club. So it was a pretty natural thing to move into learning music. And I suppose my listening to music and everything connected to it was shaped by the things they liked - certainly up until my teens. As it turns out, I kind of like some of the same things anyway (Vallely, interview).

Niall was influenced by his parents in numerous ways. They introduced Niall to traditional music, instilling in him an interest and passion to learn it. Niall asserts that his parents continued to shape his musical tastes and sensibilities into his teenage years. Additionally, Niall learned much of his early repertoire and basic instrumental technique in his parents' structured weekly classes at the pipers' club. Niall also experienced a great deal of informal learning outside of structured classes, as his parents brought him to sessions, dances, house parties, festivals, and other social and musical gatherings. From an educational point of view, Niall's formal learning experiences were reinforced by informal musical and social interactions with his parents and his parents' peers. This combination of experiences grounded Niall's musical development in everyday social life. He was enculturated into the Irish traditional music community from a young age.

John Reid, Matt Cranitch, and Martin Hayes describe informal, non-formal, and formal socio-musical interactions with their parents. They were occasionally taught or guided by their fathers, but did not experience the level of formality or structure Niall experienced in his parents' classes. Matt Cranitch describes his experiences with his father:

I first started the fiddle at home with my father teaching me but, as my mother has often related, the lessons tended to take the form of he'd play the fiddle and I would sit watching him playing. The actual teaching didn't amount to a huge amount. So they sent me to - when I was about nine - to Cork School of Music (Cranitch, interview).

Matt's informal lessons with his father were mainly based on observation and demonstration. Although unstructured, these lessons provided a model and initial exposure to traditional fiddle playing, and influenced Matt's enculturation until age nine. Recognizing the haphazard nature of these encounters, Matt was enrolled in classical violin classes in order to receive some formal training and

understanding of music. Although lessons between father and son stopped, Matt and his father frequently played music together throughout the enculturation process, particularly in a family band situation (Cranitch, interview). Matt continued to learn from his father informally and non-formally during these interactions. The longevity and consistency of these family interactions were vital to Matt's enculturation.

Martin Hayes experienced a spectrum of formal, non-formal, and informal socio-musical interactions with his father, PJ Hayes. Martin explains:

He encouraged me a lot, but he never asked me to practice or suggested anything, or pushed me in anyway. But he was always available for an opinion or to get a point of view on something, or to get some sense of direction. He didn't like a direct one-on-one teaching scenario too much, although I did learn my first selection of tunes directly from him by sitting across from him in the kitchen. He played and I'd listen, watch, and copy him. So I basically learned my music that way (Hayes, interview).

The types of socio-musical interaction between Martin and his father changed throughout the different stages of the learning process. Initially, PJ provided direct instruction based on informal guidance, observations, and imitation. PJ's instruction can be considered informal or non-formal in nature since he did not have a predetermined agenda; he did not require Martin to practice, or formally assess his ability or progress. Martin did not receive tuition from his father consistently throughout his learning processes, in part because PJ did not particularly like direct teaching situations.

As Martin developed as a fiddle player, interactions between father and son became even more informal. Martin describes his learning experiences after a period of learning from his father in his kitchen:

But after that, it was like tapes and records, and it was me locked away in a room with a fiddle having an idea that I wanted to sound like. I would learn tunes, and try this with them, and try them that way, then play them for my dad and get his opinion. And he didn't play any pop psychology with me, no reverse psychology. There was no need for him to nurture me or anything like that. He would tell me *exactly* what I was doing, so I knew when he told me something it really was exactly what he thought. It wasn't what he thought I should hear in order to encourage me; He would just tell me it was no good, if it was no good. If it was good, he would just

say it. So I had this barometer that could always tell me what was happening, which was very useful (Hayes, interview).

Martin began learning aurally by listening and playing along to commercial recordings. Once this self-directed learning practice was initiated, exchanges between PJ and Martin became less instructional and more based on casual discourse. Martin felt able to openly ask his father for advice on his fiddle playing and progression. PJ consistently provided honest feedback, so Martin never wondered if his father's critiques were too harsh or sugar-coated. Raised in this atmosphere, Martin appreciated his father's support and candour, wholeheartedly trusting and respecting his father's critiques. This type of direct and trustworthy relationship created a positive learning environment. Additionally, Martin learned informally by listening and playing along with his father during rehearsals and performances with the Tulla Céilí Band. As a child, Martin observed rehearsals and performances, and he later joined the band and played alongside his father and uncle, Paddy Canny (Hayes, interview). In this way, Martin had prolonged and consistent musical interactions with his father into adulthood.

Martin's musical relationship with his father can be characterized as close, but not stifling. From an early age, Martin absorbed the sound of his father's east Clare fiddle style, but he did not slavishly copy his father's music. As described above, Martin learned from and was influenced by commercial recordings of Irish traditional music. Martin is well-known for his exceptional technical prowess, personal style, and expression. His proclivity for independent thinking and learning, coupled with consistent exposure and support from his father are major contributing factors in his musical enculturation.

Martin's experiences above illustrate a multiplicity of learning activities. He learned aurally by listening to and playing along with recordings, and this practice is reinforced by social and musical interactions with his father. Martin's learning experience was enriched by multiple avenues of engagement. He reaped the benefits of private exploration and self-directed learning, as well as social interactions with his father - a senior member of the tradition. Had Martin only interacted with his father, or only learned from recordings, he may not have developed into such a unique and creative musician. Interactions with family members, céilí bands, informal music-making, and commercial recordings

provided Martin with a diversity of learning experiences and multiple points of entry into the Irish traditional music community.

Mary Bergin considers her family the first and primary influence to her musical development. Musical interactions with her father were completely informal. Mary states about learning her first tunes: ‘I had no one in particular teach me. My father just used to play the tunes slowly and I’d hear the tunes and just pick them up myself’ (Bergin, interview). Her father loved traditional music, but only played a handful of tunes, including polkas and waltzes, on the accordion. While Mary’s father did not directly teach her technique or repertoire, he acted as a musical model and inspired Mary to become a traditional musician. He also encouraged her music-making and took her to countless musical events, such as sessions, house parties, and festivals. Mary unconsciously developed her style, technique, and early repertoire through listening, playing, and experimenting with traditional music in numerous settings. This process was initiated in her home environment. Similar to Martin, while Mary is significantly influenced by her father, she also developed through self-guided, autonomous learning practices.

Although parents who are instrumentalists have a profound effect on their children’s musical development, it is descriptive rather than prescriptive to suggest that musical parents ‘cause’ their child’s successful enculturation. It is too simplistic to suggest, for instance, that children raised by traditional musicians will become traditional musicians. While this certainly can be the case in many instances, many accomplished Irish traditional musicians were not raised by musicians, including several of my interviewees. Furthermore, not all children raised by active traditional musicians develop into traditional musicians themselves. Some children born into musical families may become more interested in sports or visual art, for example. While the influence of parents cannot be denied, free-will, personalities, individual learning styles and thinking dispositions ultimately determine if a person will commit and start identifying themselves as a musician (Tishman, Jay, and Perkins 1993). The effect parents have on enculturation, therefore, must be judged on a case-by-case basis.

While only five musicians had parents with instrumental backgrounds, other interviewees had parents who occasionally, but inconsistently, played instruments. Ciara Ní Fhearghail, Tomás Ó Canainn, and Connie O’Connell’s parents played a little accordion, fiddle, and melodeon respectively. However,



their parents either gave up playing at a certain point or only played the instruments very occasionally. Ciara, Tomás, and Connie did not learn technique or repertoire from their parents, but they experienced traditional instruments and music-making from an early age. Because their parents were interested in music and supportive of their children's musical interests, Ciara, Tomás, and Connie were raised in a musical atmosphere which encouraged their musical curiosity and enculturation.

Many interviewees' first memories of Irish traditional music involved observing a parent's singing.<sup>24</sup> These memories were particularly profound for interviewees who did not have instrumental musicians within their families. During these experiences, interviewees also often developed or expanded their interest in traditional music. Geraldine O'Callaghan discusses singing practices within her family environment:

My mother and my grandmother sing, but there was no instrumental tradition really in my family. I have an uncle who played a little bit of tin whistle and he would have been very encouraging when I was growing up, but there wasn't music being played at home or anything like that (O'Callaghan, interview).

Tomás Ó Canainn is also strongly influenced by his mother's singing. Tomás explains how being from a family with a strong singing tradition effects his instrumental playing and style:

Many of the things I do are connected to the way I sing... When I'm playing a slow air of a song, I don't know whether I'm playing or singing it's so much a part of me. So I'm sure that very much influenced my way of playing... Singing was always an important thing for me from the very beginning. But then again my family were all into singing so that just happened naturally (Ó Canainn, interview).

When children are exposed to singing, they begin to absorb musical syntax, which is a crucial first step musical development (Bluestine 2000, Gordon 1997). From this, I suggest that families who do not have a tradition of instrumental music-making can play a significant role in musical enculturation and learning processes. Singing and dancing practices can expose children to melodic,

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<sup>24</sup> This is clear in my interviews with Aoife Granville, Geraldine O'Callaghan, Hammy Hamilton, Cormac De Frein, Lisa O'Sullivan, James Duggan, Tomás Ó Canainn, Ciara Ní Fhearghail, and Connie O'Connell.

rhythmic, and stylistic nuances of Irish traditional music. This musical exposure can encourage musical interest and provide a foundation for future development, learning, and enculturation.

As discussed later, my research also suggests that parents who do not actively play music, sing, or dance play a role in enculturation. Interviewees who were not raised by instrumentalists, dancers, or singers recalled memories of listening and discussing music with their parents. Such parents often exposed their children to Irish traditional music via commercial recordings, radio, television, live concerts, and festivals. Listening together is an important socio-musical experience and for many, this served as an introduction to traditional music. The interview data also suggests that parents motivate children and provide support and encouragement throughout the stages of musical development.

### **Early Exposure to Music**

Regardless of their parents' musical background, the vast majority of interviewees were exposed to music very early in childhood. This is consistent with Veblen's findings that Irish traditional musicians start learning at a young age (5-7 years old) (1991:59).<sup>25</sup> Developmental researchers suggest that one of the most important factors in musical development is early exposure to music.<sup>26</sup> For example, Gordon emphasizes that during early childhood 'there are critical periods associated with surges of neurological connections and synapses' (1998:1). Gordon argues that children develop 'listening abilities' before the age of 5 or 6, and therefore, in order to achieve their musical potential, he asserts that children should absorb and experience music informally before the start of formal schooling (Gordon 1999:43). From this perspective, musical development is largely dependent on early experiences provided by parental figures and close relatives. Rogers also suggests:

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<sup>25</sup> Interviewees in my study were exposed to music at a young age, but structured learning in classes, workshops, and summer schools often occurred later in childhood, around ages 7-9 (if at all).

<sup>26</sup> See (Bluestine 2000; Fox 1990, 1991; Gordon 1997, 1998, 1999; Ostwald 1990; Rogers 1990; Shetler 1990; Valerio et al 1998). Many cultures also recognize the importance of early exposure and participation in music-making. Afghani musicians believe 'that *early exposure* to the sounds of music was especially important in the development of musical ability' (Baily and Doubleday 1990:95).

Because young children are quite attuned to music, musical experience in early childhood will result in greater musical development. This premise draws its support from evidence of increased musical development in those children who have received considerable musical experience in early childhood (1990:3).

Infants, toddlers, and young children seamlessly and efficiently absorb the musics of their culture through play and interaction. Because children absorb and imitate the social world around them, enculturation occurs naturally during early childhood experiences of music-making.

Early exposure to music often correlates to a sense that musical participation and learning is a ‘natural’ process. Several of my interviewees describe their music learning experiences during early childhood as easy, fun, or natural. For instance, Niall Vallely states:

I learned the first couple of tunes on the whistle when I was very small, I was about 4 or something.... I never thought of it being difficult... I learned so much stuff when I was so young that a lot of it just seemed second nature. I don’t remember the earliest things to be honest (Vallely, interview).

Although his earliest memories are not acutely detailed, Niall’s immediate memory and impressions depict his early learning experiences as natural and enjoyable. One might suggest that Niall has, perhaps, forgotten the challenges during these early stages of the learning process. Although this may be the case, it is significant that Niall remembers the learning experience as relatively easy and natural, not as an endeavor which required sacrifice or discipline, for example. It is also significant that Niall’s enculturation began prior to his earliest memories, because this indicates that Niall’s introduction to music-making began at a very young age. Music was entwined with everyday social life in the Vallely household. At the age of four, Niall did not analyse the learning process. His musical experiences were based around playing, absorbing, listening, and imitating the world around him. His parents’ passion for music created a rich musical environment, encouraging Niall’s enculturation and development.

Other interviewees described similar types of ‘natural’ learning processes.<sup>27</sup> For instance, in Matt Cranitch’s family, music-making was a part of

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<sup>27</sup> (Mary Bergin, Martin Hayes, Niall Vallely, John Reid, Connie O’Connell, Liz Doherty, Tomás Ó Canainn, Lisa O’Sullivan and Matt Cranitch, interviews).

everyday social life. Matt was naturally and gradually introduced (enculturated) to musical life. His musical enculturation is similar to how we learn language – through consistent exposure, interaction, play, and imitation. Matt Cranitch discusses his learning experiences:

I grew up in a musical family. I was playing the fiddle since I was eight years of age. My father played the fiddle and accordion. We had a family band situation at home. We went to the fleadh cheoil, feis, and social occasions played at school concerts, parish concerts and so on. So I suppose music was part of what I always did. When other people went to lots of games and matches, and I went to some, but for us music was just a part of the growing up process (Cranitch, interview).

Early exposure to music is a significant factor in how Niall Vallely and Matt Cranitch developed into such confident, able, and creative traditional musicians. I suggest that learning, developmental, and musical enculturation processes are naturally fostered when parents provide their children with early exposure to music-making.

Within the Irish traditional music literature, there are several references to music being passed down, inherited, or being ‘in the blood.’ For instance, Gaul writes about Sean McGuire, the virtuoso fiddle player from Belfast: ‘His father played the piccolo, flute and tin whistle. He had inherited his music from his own father, so music was in the blood’ (2006:99). Music being ‘in the blood’ is used either literally or metaphorically within traditional music discourse. Tommy Peoples also states: ‘Irish music’s ornamentation cannot be written or vice versa, played properly from the written notes. It has to be in the blood’ (1994:13). This view may lead some to believe that music is genetically inherited. However, within ethnomusicological and educational literature, scholars emphasize that musical environment plays a greater role in enculturation than biological inheritance. For instance, Blacking argues that ‘no convincing correlations have been shown between a person's excellence in music and possession of abilities that are claimed to be inherited’ (1992:311).<sup>28</sup> Additionally, Gordon states, ‘Though one may wish to believe that a child inherited his music potential from his parents or grandparents, such a conclusion is not warranted’ (1990:327). Gordon also argues ‘there is no evidence to suggest that it is inherited. This

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<sup>28</sup> For similar assertions within the ethnomusicological literature see (Baily and Doubleday 1990:97; Blacking 1990:76; Chanan 2002:374).

means that the level of music aptitude with which a child will be born cannot be predicted on the basis of ancestry' (1999:44). Children raised by traditional musicians may have a musical advantage over children who are not raised by singers, musicians, or dancers. However, I propose that this is not because of a musical inheritance. Children of musicians often develop into highly skilled musicians because they are able to absorb music and experience a rich musical environment during early childhood - a critical time of human development. Although musical parents play a significant role in the enculturation process, John Reid, Matt Cranitch, Martin Hayes, Niall Vallely and Mary Bergin did not develop musicality due to heredity or genetic make-up. They absorbed and imitated their musical environment. Because music was a central part of family life, it was likely to be considered an important life skill.

In addition to early exposure, parents active in traditional music-making provide opportunities for their children to experience longevity of participation within Irish traditional music. In a discussion of Old-time music culture and identity formations, Turino proposes that longevity is necessary for stylistic and creative development:

Longevity of socialization within and investment to the activity influences the degree of competence, comfort, and creative freedom during performance. Usually people who grow up with a style are simply more comfortable than those who did not, because the habits of performance were formed at an early age (2008:162).

When children frequently experience music-making, even by early adolescence they can experience longevity of participation within Irish traditional music, fuelling their enculturation.<sup>29</sup> A child raised by a fiddle player, for example, grows accustomed to the style and cultural practices of Irish traditional music by frequently observing and listening. By age ten, the child has a decade of experience listening and absorbing the syntax and musical practices. While children from musical families benefit from experiencing early exposure and longevity of participation, it must be emphasized that children from all family backgrounds can experience longevity of participation within Irish traditional music. My interviewees who did not have parents who were active singers, dancers, or musician, listened, absorbed, and learned Irish traditional music in

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<sup>29</sup> 'Longevity of participation' can be considered approximately ten or more years of relatively consistent participation in music-making.

other ways, including listening to commercial recordings, attending live concerts, sessions, classes, workshops, summer schools and festivals. Their musical enculturation was possible, in part, because these multiple opportunities to listen, learn, and practice Irish traditional music.

During early childhood, important emotional connections are also made between parents and children. Developmental researchers emphasize that positive experiences and emotions establish a healthy association to music. For instance, Rogers states:

An infant's early experiences of loving parents' songs imbues music with an emotional connection to these loved parents, and the child's own music may create a feeling of connectedness which can last a lifetime (Rogers 1990:4).<sup>30</sup>

Due to many positive associations, it is easy to romanticize family socio-musical interactions. However, as with all human relationships, interactions between family members are complex and can affect learners in both positive and negative ways. The relationship between uilleann piper, Paddy Keenan, and his father comes to mind here. Paddy descends from a family of traveling pipers, and a common story describes how Paddy was locked in a room until his father, John Keenan was satisfied with his progress (Ó Canainn 1993:121). In an interview with Zena Lee (2001), Keenan discusses his father's strictness, stating John's possessiveness caused him to run away to London. Paddy states:

I felt I should get away from my dad's strong influence. As protective and right as he might have been, I found it sometimes impossible... I needed to find a way to grow and express myself (Keenan quoted in Lee 2001).

If negative socio-musical interactions occur between children and parents, there is a risk that children may start associating music with negative emotions. When music-making involves more negative feelings than positive, children are likely to rebel or abstain from future participation because of the emotional risk involved. However, whether or not a child abandons music depends on a number of factors, including their personality traits, the type and frequency of the negative emotions, and how much autonomy and control they have in their

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<sup>30</sup> Fox also states that 'Music educators must also be conscious of the emotional environment created in and through musical interactions; these encounters provide a crucial portion of the human context for musical development' (1991:46).

musical life. In Paddy Keenan's case, he rebelled for a time against his father, took a break from traditional music, and developed an interest in the blues. However, Paddy remained an active Irish traditional musician throughout most of his life.

## Siblings

According to the interview data, musical interactions with siblings are much more common than interactions with parents. While only five interviewees played and learned instrumental music alongside their parents, the majority of the interviewees had significant learning and playing experiences with their siblings in various settings.<sup>31</sup> In a case study with two Irish traditional musicians and teachers, Waldron also highlights that learning alongside siblings is a significant learning experience (2006b). As discussed throughout this section, these commonplace experiences significantly impact musical enculturation. Below, I describe how interactions with family members of the same peer group often provide motivation and inspiration.

Compared to interacting with parents, musical and social engagement with siblings provides a different type of learning experience. Interacting within a peer group often nurtures a sense of belonging to a community of practice. When a young musician frequently participates in traditional music-making with their peers, they are much more likely to identify Irish traditional music as their own culture. Such musicians do not consider traditional music an outdated activity of past generations, but view it as a current and relevant part of socio-cultural life. In this way, interacting with siblings is connected to the discussion above about the role peers play during the learning process. In addition to learning from an older generation, musical enculturation is nurtured when family members of a similar age interact with one another, particularly due to the social implications of these interactions.

For musicians born in musical households, interacting with parents and siblings created an environment conducive to enculturation. The five interviewees with parents who were instrumentalists also interacted with their siblings, which diversifies their educational and musical experiences. When asked if he thought

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<sup>31</sup> Interviewees, including Matt Cranitch, Cormac De Frein, Liz Doherty, James Duggan, Conal Ó Gráda, Aoife Granville, Helen Gubbins, Ciara Ní Fhearghail, Lisa O'Sullivan, Michael O'Sullivan, and Niall Vallely, played and learned Irish traditional music alongside their siblings (interviews).

the learning process was challenging, Matt Cranitch states:

I grew up in a music family, so to speak. There was always music being played at home. I have a sister, who is a classical violinist, and my other sister Brid plays the fiddle and piano. I have another brother who plays the silver flute. So, it was always part of what we did and from that point of view, while it was difficult and one had to practice and learn stuff, the environment helped it along and it was the environment in which we grew up. So I think that's a great help (Cranitch, interview).

Matt benefited from musical interactions with his parents, and this experience was enriched by numerous interactions with his siblings. Music was a part of the family dynamic, and Matt was socialized into this environment. Music-making with his siblings reinforced the idea that music is a social activity relevant to Matt's own generation.

For the fifteen interviewees who did not play music with their parents, musical interactions with siblings were particularly influential in terms of learning and enculturation processes. Playing and learning traditional music alongside siblings creates a musical environment in the home, aiding enculturation. For instance, although Conal Ó Gráda's parents were not instrumentalists, they supported their children's musical education. When Conal was young, his father identified Conal's potential on the tin whistle and signed him up for lessons at the Cork Pipers' Club (Ó Gráda, interview). Conal's sister Máire also enrolled, and both musicians are strongly influenced by Micheál O Ríabhaigh, their teacher at the pipers' club. Siblings often form close musical bonds, because they come from similar backgrounds and often share influences, including teachers.

Younger siblings often look up to their older siblings for social cues and modes of behaviour. Having older, more experienced musicians in the house is a major benefit. Even if siblings are only slightly older and more experienced as musicians, they provide a useful musical model for imitation. For instance, family influences played a key role in Ciara Ní Fhearghail's enculturation. While her father only occasionally played music, her two older brothers were significantly influential. Ciara states:

Music was always in my family and I was always listening to different types of music at home. My brother played fiddle from an early age, so he kind of influenced me to start...My father use to play a bit, but not much. It



was nice to kind of hear music in the house from a young age (Ní Fhearghail, interview).

Ciara and her brothers learned from a local accordion player, Bobby Gardiner. This common connection between the siblings helped coordinate their music-making at home. Ciara also states that Bobby ‘didn't always want to give us notes. He tried to get us learning half the tune by ear. My brothers always helped me anyway and taught me as well at home’ (Ní Fhearghail, interview). While aural learning can be challenging or intimidating to some novices, Ciara was able to rely on her brothers for extra support and help while learning repertoire aurally at home.

Helen Gubbins also learned alongside her siblings during tuition at her local Comhaltas branch.<sup>32</sup> Like Ciara, Helen looked up to her older siblings for inspiration about future possibilities:

I was the youngest of six kids and so I looked up to my other siblings. They could already do what I wanted to be able to do and I could see them doing it every day around me. And that was just a good motivator... and it wasn't just in music but it was in everything, all education. They went to college and they got a certain mark and I thought if I was a relation to them, I should be capable of doing it, achieving a standard comparable to that. It's not beyond me, or potentially I could do the same. All those kind of motivating factors encouraged me in music and in general encouragement I got from my siblings (Gubbins, interview).

Attending lessons, classes, and summer schools with siblings is a common experience within traditional music circles. Sharon Shannon explains that she started learning music because her brother, Gary was learning to play:

He went to tin whistle lessons locally in Corofin. Then we followed him. But most of what my older sister Majella, myself and Mary learned – he taught us (Shannon in Vallely, Piggott, and Nutan 1998:186).

Sharon's parents were dancers, so the Shannon children were raised in a musical environment. However, they did not learn instrumental music from their parents. Gary Shannon developed an interest in instrumental music-making, influencing

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<sup>32</sup> **Helen Gubbins (b. 1983)** is an accordion, whistle, and piano player from Lisnagry, Limerick. She studied music at undergraduate and graduate levels at University College Cork. She has also toured with various groups, including Five Mile Chase, Owenabue Valley Group, and The Irish Rambling House. In 2010, she released a duet album with Tim Langen, entitled *Boys of 25 and the Connaught Heifers*. For more information about the interviewees see Appendix B.

his younger sisters in a profound way. Similarly, Liz Doherty's parents did not play Irish traditional music, but all her siblings played and danced from a young age. She describes the musical activities in her home:

There was a lot of music in the house because we all practiced our dancing for an hour every evening, and our music together for an hour every evening. So there was music in the house for two solid hours every single evening, but we weren't listening to the new recordings, it wasn't on the radio or TV. There was music-making, but we would have never sat down and played together outside of practice time. It was quite different, and that wasn't unusual in our area at the time (Doherty, interview).

While younger children often look up to their older siblings, older siblings are also influenced by interactions with younger peers and siblings. Liz, the eldest daughter in the family, considers interactions with her younger siblings significant, and she speaks about these memories positively.

Social and musical interactions with siblings were particularly significant to those interviewees who did not play, sing, or dance with their parents. Parents often bring their children to the same teacher or Comhaltas branch for lessons, and this allows the children to practice a shared repertoire together at home. Musical interactions with siblings were also important to interviewees raised by musical parents. For these musicians, interacting with family members of the same generation provides another way to engage in Irish traditional music-making. Although interactions with older musicians, such as parents or grandparents, are often considered 'high status' learning experiences, we must not overlook the significant role siblings, cousins, and peers play in the learning process.

### Members of the Extended Family

Even more common than interactions with siblings, traditional musicians often make music with members of their extended family, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, great-uncles, and great-aunts. Most of my interviewees indicate that members of their extended family played an influential role in their musical enculturation. Socio-musical interactions with members of the extended family often have a less direct impact on enculturation when compared to the interactions which occur within the immediate family settings. However, this

depends on the closeness of the family members, in terms of physical distance and quality and closeness of their relationships. As illustrated in this section, members of the extended family play several roles in guiding enculturation. They can be casual musical acquaintances or play the role of formal musical teacher or mentor.

Several interviewees were introduced to traditional music by members of their extended family. Seamus Sands discusses his early musical influences:

The musical influences that shaped my early playing would have been mainly family type of influences. My father didn't play, but some of my cousins and some of my father's cousins would have played... That would have been probably my first exposure to hearing maybe slides or a couple of reels, things like that. So, certainly, family would have been very much there at the start (Sands, interview).

Aoife Granville also discusses the music-making and singing traditions in her extended family:

Both sets of grandparents were singers, so I would have always been aware of that from a young age - sean-nós singing. Also my granddad, from Galway would have been a very good singer in English and my cousins all played on my mom's side, so that would have been the first exposure to it (Granville, interview).

Lisa O'Sullivan also states:

My dad's uncle played fiddle... My grandmother would have adored it. My grand-aunt played the concertina. So it was always there. There were plenty of records in the house... So it would have always been there in the background anyway just through relations and the older generation. So, I think we were exposed from a young age (O'Sullivan, interview).

Musical and social interactions with members of the extended family were particularly influential to interviewees who did not learn instrumental music from their parents. When music-making did not occur in the home environment, having one or a number of traditional musicians within the extended family provided an introduction to Irish traditional music culture. Many interviewees became more interested in traditional music as a result of these interactions. Although James Duggan and Liz Doherty's parents were not musicians, their decision to play fiddle was influenced by a tradition of fiddle playing within their

extended families. James had access to a fiddle at home because his grandfather and great-grandfather were fiddle players. He developed an interest in the fiddle, so the old family fiddle was repaired and James began classes (Duggan, interview). Liz Doherty also discusses how she decided to learn to play the fiddle:

My mom's uncle played the fiddle and he used to play for the dancing competitions locally and that's why I was given the fiddle... So it was like, sure try the fiddle because there's one there (Doherty, interview).

James and Liz had access to the instrument itself and the ability to talk to family members about fiddle playing. Access to instruments and a community of practitioners is essential in terms of enculturation.

Interviewees reared by musical parents also described important musical interactions with members of their extended families. For example, Martin Hayes spoke fondly of playing alongside his uncle, Paddy Canny, in the Tulla Céilí Band. Martin says that his father and Paddy have distinct fiddle styles, and consequently, Martin acquired different skills and stylistic nuances from each fiddle player. Martin suggests he gained his rhythmic approach by listening to his father's fiddle playing, while he was influenced heavily by Paddy's 'lyricism' (Hayes, interview). As another example, Tommy Peoples was influenced by his father's playing as well as his cousin, Joe Cassidy, whom Tommy visited for fiddle lessons (Mac Aoidh 1994:197). According to Mac Aoidh, Tommy and Joe's lessons consisted of:

...playing tunes and learning new ones. Joe placed an emphasis on strict staccato bowing and passed on his ability to read to Tommy. These Sunday trips to his cousin's house were always anxiously awaited by Tommy... a trip to Joe Cassidy's was tantamount to an adventure (1994:197).

Musical interactions between family members can involve informal, non-formal, or formal learning practices. In the examples above, Martin Hayes was informally influenced by his uncle's fiddle playing, whereas Joe Cassidy's method of teaching reading skills and fiddle technique to Tommy Peoples is an example of a more formal learning experience.

In some cases, experiences with members of the extended family were influential or inspirational even though little or no musical interactions occurred.

For instance, Tomás Ó Canainn lists his grandfather as a significant musical influence, even though he never met him. Tomás states:

My grandfather was a man called Francie Murphy - my mother's father - and he played the fiddle and then my mother learnt and got the fiddle and all from him. And even though I never met him, I always have this feeling inside me that it's harking back into somewhere there, but that's maybe just fairy-story stuff. But I feel it (Ó Canainn, interview).

Within the literature, many stories involve descriptions of people learning traditional music or songs through mystical sources, such as deceased family members, fairies, and geographical sources such as streams and rivers.<sup>33</sup> While it is easy to dismiss these experiences as fanciful, when a musician believes these sources influential in terms of their musical development, it behooves the ethnographer to consider these issues seriously. Since Tomás never met or heard his grandfather play, he did not acquire repertoire or style from him (unless it was transmitted through an intermediary, such as his mother's music-making). However, the significant issue here is not that Tomás learned particular tunes, technique, or style from his grandfather, but that he feels a musical, social, cultural, and historic connection to Francie. Tomás considers music a part of his family's traditions, and therefore he pursued it as a meaningful and worthwhile activity throughout his life. This feeling of connectedness and relevance is a significant factor in terms of Tomás's musical enculturation.

As discussed further in the next section, my research indicates that members of the extended family can affect enculturation when they are not experienced musicians. For example, Connie O'Connell discusses how an aunt first bought him a fiddle, and how he learned some various basic, but important, fragments of information about the fiddle from his uncle:

I had an aunt and she actually bought me my first fiddle. So, I had the fiddle then, and I didn't know how to play it, because there were no teachers around at that stage -

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<sup>33</sup> Nettl states the concept, 'of acquiring music directly from supernatural sources are very widespread among human societies, simple and complex' (2005:29). The Blackfoot people believe music is learned through supernatural visions (Nettl 2005:393). Within Irish traditional music, Seamus Tansey often evokes landscape in his discussions of style and expression (1999, 2008). Junior Crehan also makes numerous references to the faeries' influence on music-making (see Hast and Scott 2004). There are several references to faeries influencing musical ability in Mac Aoidh's ethnography of Donegal fiddling. Mac Aoidh details stories of how the faeries influenced the repertoires of Tarlach Mac Suibhne, Neillidh Boyle, Bidi a' Mhuc Ros, the Doherty family, and Michael and Jim Coleman (1994:55-67).

nobody at all in the area. So I was playing for a long time and I didn't know what I was doing with it. I tuned up just to the scale – 'do-me-sol-do' - four strings. I was only using one finger, so there was only one note between every two strings. Savage stupid thing to do, but at least I was able to bring out one tune on it... Anyway, my aunt's husband wasn't able to play fiddle, but his father use to play fiddle before him... So he called in one night and he said, 'I think this is the right way to tune it,' which *was* the conventional way of doing it. He said, 'I'm not a hundred percent sure about this.' He couldn't play it. He hadn't a clue, but he had some idea that this was the right way to tune it. So he actually showed me how to tune a fiddle, and he couldn't play it at all. So, I started there and I was self-taught from then on (O'Connell, interview).

Without a teacher or mentor in the locality, Connie was mostly self-taught. Left to his own devices, Connie devised his own method of tuning, a phenomenon Green describes as a 'natural learning process' common among self-taught popular musicians (Green 2002, 2005a).<sup>34</sup> Although Connie's uncle did not know how to play the fiddle, he was able to show Connie the conventional tuning based on memories of his father's fiddle playing. Connie's aunt and uncle played a role in his haphazard introduction to fiddle playing even though they were not musicians. Connie's experience highlights that family members who have little or no musical skills can affect musical enculturation in unexpected ways – a concept I explore further in the next section.

### The Influence of 'Non-Musicians'

My research suggests that family members who are not active as music-makers can play a role in enculturation, often a significant one. Within the literature, this area has yet to be discussed in depth. Many of my interviewees were encouraged by 'non-musicians' throughout the learning process.<sup>35</sup> Praise from parents and other family members often motivated interviewees to continue learning and participating in Irish traditional music.

As argued above, musical interactions with family members are crucial during the early stages of development. However, the music-making which occurs between family members does not necessarily need to be of a high musical

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<sup>34</sup> During the initial stages of self-guided learning, Mick Daly also tuned his guitar in an unconventional way (Daly, interview).

<sup>35</sup> In this section, 'non-musicians' refers to family members who do not sing, dance, or play music.

standard in order to positively affect musical growth. Along with scholars of Music Learning Theory (Bluestine 2000; Gordon 1997, 1998, 1999, 2001; Valerio et al 1998), my research suggests that family members of all skill levels can introduce, encourage, and instill a level of respect for music. Of course, by providing excellent models for imitation, musical interactions with exceptional traditional musicians are highly beneficial to enculturation. However, enculturation is fostered by consistent and enthusiastic musical interactions, not merely when learners imitate and replicate 'good playing' within family settings. In their early childhood music curriculum, Valerio et al (1998) suggest that many parents who lack musical confidence, experience, or knowledge often hesitate to participate in singing, dancing, and music-making. They emphasize that 'Parents or caregivers need not be amateur or professional musicians to engage their children in developmentally appropriate music and movement activities' (Valerio et al 1998:8). From this perspective, a household with no music-making is far more detrimental to children's musical development than a household where parents sing, dance, and play music poorly, but enthusiastically. Even if a family member can only play, sing, and dance at a low skill level, the interactions simulate children's developing musical senses. Enthusiastic and consistent music-making, of any musical quality, creates an environment which celebrates music-making and musical expression. In this way, family members with limited musical skills can play a significant role in the enculturation of their children, nieces, nephews, and grandchildren.

Suzuki's teaching method and philosophy stresses the importance of creating suitable musical environments for children's enculturation (Suzuki 1968, 1981). To create a suitable musical environment, Suzuki emphasizes the importance of family interactions, even when parents are not experienced or comfortable singers or musicians. Many teachers in Japan using Suzuki's methods suggest that children should perform for their parents on a nightly basis (Starr 1990:379). Campbell also suggests that parents who are not singers, musicians or dancers can have a positive effect on musical development by providing a positive musical environment for their children. She states that 'In homes where parental attitude is positive and involvement in music is extensive, music achievement is likely to occur or to advance more quickly than in homes with little or no live or recorded music' (1991:88-9). Of significance here, Campbell considers listening to recorded music an important type of musical

‘involvement’. Even if the parents cannot play, their involvement through watching and participating as audience members encourages the children’s music-making and development.

Within my interview data, there are several examples that suggest family members who are ‘non-musicians’ play a role during the enculturation process. For instance, James Duggan suggests that while parents do not have to be musicians, dancers, or singers, they do need some sort of interest in traditional music in order for their children to excel in learning Irish traditional music. James states:

Parents don't even need to play, but there needs to be some sort of a background. The parents have to be at least interested... there needs to be support from the parents in the background. Even if its things like putting on a CD, *Raidió na Gaeltachta*,<sup>36</sup> or taking them to a concert (Duggan, interview).

This view most likely developed from James’s family experiences; While his parents are not musicians, James describes them as musically interested and supportive. James’s parents frequently accompanied James to traditional music concerts and festivals (Duggan, interview), and he was reared in a household that respected traditional music.

Parents do not have to be musicians, singers, or dancers to interact musically with their children. Parents who actively listen to traditional music can expose their children to Irish traditional music. In this way, live concerts, commercial recordings, radio, and television can provide an alternative way for families to musically interact with one another. Parents who are enthusiasts can also discuss the music and relevant issues. While these experiences do not compare to performing alongside family members, I suggest listening together is a socio-musical interaction which influences musical development and enculturation. Several interviewees suggest that listening to recordings was a memorable family activity.<sup>37</sup> These musical experiences were particularly meaningful to interviewees who did not play music or sing with their parents. Helen Gubbins relayed a strong memory of her family listening to De Dannan.

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<sup>36</sup> *Raidió na Gaeltachta* (RnaG) is an Irish-language radio station which broadcast Irish traditional music on a regular basis.

<sup>37</sup> James Duggan, Cormac De Frein, Helen Gubbins, Lisa O’Sullivan, and Geraldine O’Callaghan discussed memories of listening to Irish traditional music with various family members (interviews).



Her parents were not musicians, but her father enjoyed listening to traditional dance tunes, while her mother preferred traditional songs. Helen and her family listened to De Dannan's commercial recordings during car journeys because the group's mix of tunes and songs satisfied each family member's musical tastes and interest. Helen remembers these experiences as important social moments in her family life (Gubbins, interview). Additionally, Geraldine O'Callaghan recalls a memory of her uncle and his record collection. Geraldine did not learn repertoire or instrumental technique from her uncle, but he was an encouraging traditional music enthusiast.<sup>38</sup> Geraldine states:

He was one of the most encouraging influences that I had in terms of practicing my music. He just really wanted me to be a musician and wanted to give me the love of music that he had. He had a very small record collection... I remember he had this Sean McGuire record and he was going out to milk the cows one day, and he said 'When I come back in you're to have that learnt.' I was very young. I wasn't learning that long at all. At the best of times you'd do well to learn a Sean McGuire tune by ear, but I learned the tune and this crazy variation that he does at the very end of the tune. And I was able to play for my uncle when he got back in from milking and there was a great reward like, 'Oh you've done a really great thing!' That bit of encouragement, having that at home was a big plus (O'Callaghan, interview).

In this example, because the uncle is absent while Geraldine independently learns the tune aurally, it may seem like niece and uncle are not interacting musically. However, the uncle provided a positive music environment where Geraldine had access to commercial recordings, as well as providing encouragement and motivation to learn in the first place. When Geraldine mastered his challenge, her musical behavior was praised, encouraging her future participation. While no teaching or demonstration takes place between uncle and niece, Geraldine recalls this as an important moment during her musical development. Geraldine's participation in Irish traditional music was praised within the family setting. In this environment, learning fiddle felt relevant to social life and musical enculturation was encouraged.

While many of my interviewees acknowledge the significance of being born into a musical family, several also emphasize that learners do not

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<sup>38</sup> While Geraldine's uncle played a little harmonica and tin whistle, he played a motivational role in Geraldine's musical enculturation, rather than acting as a musical mentor or teacher.

necessarily have to come from a musical family to become an accomplished traditional musician. Mary Bergin, for example, states:

I suppose children of musicians would have a head start getting some recognition whereas somebody from a non-traditional background would probably have to be pretty good before they get a look and get encouraged...but, traditional music was a music of the people. It wasn't a status thing... It was more on merit and always has been on merit rather than who you are or where you come from. In my opinion, the merit of your playing is how you would get the recognition and respect (Bergin, interview).

Mary acknowledges that children from musical families may be at an advantage, especially during the early stages of learning. However, she also suggests that recognition and achievement originates from individual merit. A similar sentiment emerged in Veblen's research. Tara Diamond suggests that 'traditions of musical families persist, although it is easier for a nonmusical family person to learn now' (Veblen 1991:85). While family background can play a significant role in the enculturation process, family background alone does not determine how well a traditional musician develops as an artist. Similar to Tara Diamond's comment, Liz Doherty suggests that traditional music organizations and institutions have made it easier for children born into families without a tradition of instrumental music-making:

In the past, obviously to be a piper you were coming through these great dynasties of piping.<sup>39</sup> But, once you had the Cork Pipers' Club in place that allowed everybody to come in and engage in piping (Doherty, interview).

Prior to the establishment of pipers' clubs, pipers were likely to descend from musical families, and piping traditions were mainly passed on within family settings. Over the past sixty years, newly established clubs and institutions provide learners of all backgrounds an opportunity to learn and develop into traditional musicians.<sup>40</sup> While the influence of family is still prevalent, a multiplicity of learning experiences has benefited learners who do not come from a family of musicians, singers, or dancers. Liz also suggests:

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<sup>39</sup> This is an example of 'dynasties' used in reference to musical families who transmitted traditional music over multiple generations.

<sup>40</sup> In Chapter 3, I discuss learning experience in organizations such as Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and pipers' clubs.

It's definitely changing, even in my own experience. If we look at the tradition, you can see who's coming from huge families - that their parents, or siblings, or aunts and uncles played. I would very much be like 'Orphan Annie' in the middle of that because I really don't have anybody who played... But I had every opportunity that I could have had... The tradition today - the opportunities are all there... So, I don't think you have to come from a long line of musicians anymore (Doherty, interview).

When music-making occurs within the family home, children can directly and frequently listen, observe, and participate in Irish traditional music-making. Children whose families are not active in music-making learn and experience traditional music in other ways, including lessons, sessions, summer schools, and by listening to commercial recordings. Parents who are 'non-musicians' play an important role in supporting their children's participation in these educational and musical activities. As Vallely states, 'In order for the music to be handed on, or made available to children, the altruistic parents need to be spurred by some ideological or educative motivations' (2008:13). Helen Gubbins suggests that learners need access to traditional music, either by interacting with family, peers, or mentors or by attending tuition of some sort. Helen states:

You need access. If you don't have traditional music in your family, there are ways around it. But for most people, you need money, you need to go to classes, you need an instrument... My family were interested, but it wasn't like we had a lot of people coming over. My cousins who were also learning came over, but there wasn't anyone in my parents' generation. There wasn't somebody who already knew how to do it really well and we could learn from. So, my parents paid for that, and later on I paid for it myself (Gubbins, interview).

Attending classes and summer schools cost money, and in this way, there is an additional economic benefit of coming from a 'musical family'. Children from musical families often inherit instruments and receive free musical advice. Fortunately, for children born into family with little musical activity, there are multiple ways to learn and engage with Irish traditional music.

A number of issues arise when we compare the relationships between non-musicians and their children and relationships that occur between individuals within musical families. For instance, when discussing the role that family members play during musical enculturation, the possible tensions, power relations, and expectations, particularly within families with a long tradition of

music-making can be explored. While my interviewees did not discuss such issues in detail, a couple musicians suggested that children of well-known musicians may experience a sense of obligation or pressure to fulfil a musical role within the family unit. Children born into well-known musical families, or ‘dynasties’, may feel social pressure to perform at a similar level of their family members of previous generations. Two of my interviewees highlight the complex relationships within musical families. Geraldine O’Callaghan suggests that being born into a family of musicians can make ‘it much easier to be socially accepted initially’, but she also states that ‘in some circumstances that can work against you too’ (O’Callaghan, interview). Liz Doherty also suggests that young musicians from well-known musical families may face expectations that they need to conform to their parents’ or grandparents’ style of playing:

Is it a richer experience if you’re coming from a family of musicians? I’m sure it’s great to go home and there being sessions in the house and all, but it must be a bit restrictive as well that kind of pressure and legacy and you have to play it a certain way (Doherty, interview).

When high expectations are placed on young musicians, it is possible for their creativity and personalized expression to be stifled. This type of socio-musical pressure can originate from individuals or groups of people within or outside of the family unit.

Of course, to a great extent, relationships within families are individualistic and determined by numerous sets of criteria, including personality traits and family histories. None of the five interviewees whose parents were instrumentalists reported feeling an expectation that they needed to play in a particular style or experienced family ‘pressure’ to become a musician. Indeed, as discussed above, Niall Vallely, Martin Hayes, and Mary Bergin were highly influenced by their parents, but did not feel the need to copy their parents’ styles directly. While family legacy may put pressure on learners to play in a particular way (either consciously or subconsciously), this situation does not necessarily stifle creativity. As discussed above, Martin Hayes was born into a family of East Clare fiddle players, and while he was heavily influenced by musicians within his family, Martin also feels his creativity was fostered through listening to a variety of musicians and engaging in numerous music-making opportunities.

In this section, I have outlined the various ways family members influence the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians. Intimate and daily interactions between parents and children can be the most influential relationships in a musician's life. However, only a few interviewees learned their instrumental skills directly from a parent. Traditional musicians more commonly played and learned instrumental music through interactions with siblings and members of their extended family. My research also suggests that non-musicians play a significant role in the enculturation process. Through encouragement, discussions, and listening to Irish traditional music together, family members who are not singers, dancers, or musicians can provide a social context for music-making and introduce learners to the musical style and culture. Parents with backgrounds in music, singing, and dancing also commonly have informal interactions with their children, such as listening together and talking about Irish traditional music. Although subtle, these interactions are significant in terms of learning and enculturation. Parents of all musical backgrounds who play, sing, dance, discuss, and listen to music alongside their children provide a basis for future learning experiences, and provide a relevant social introduction to Irish traditional music.

## Irish Traditional Music Sessions

Sessions are considered the most widely pursued activity within Irish traditional music (Fairbairn 1993:1; McCann 2001:91; Vallely 2008:73), and Hamilton describes sessions as 'probably the most important performance situation' (1996:222). In the following section, I suggest that sessions play a considerable role in the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians. The interview data suggests that traditional musicians are musically and socially affected by experiences in sessions. However, interviewees have diverse experiences and opinions about learning in session situations and many have mixed feelings on the subject. Some consider sessions an important educational sphere, while others have serious misgivings about the educational effectiveness of the session. Analysing how sessions, as a socio-musical phenomenon, affects enculturation is complex. There are numerous types of sessions, relationships, interactions, learning styles, and personalities to consider. For this reason, generalizations about the effect of sessions on learning and enculturation are often

oversimplified.

In this section I explore the interviewees' learning experiences in sessions, and outline how these experiences affect enculturation. I propose that the educational effectiveness of a session depends on a number of different factors, including each individual's learning style, reasons for attending the session, and the quality of the social relationships and interactions within the session. Some sessions are more conducive to learning than others, depending on the personalities of the musicians, and social, musical, acoustic, and spatial elements of each session. O'Shea warns that many attempts to conceptualize group music-making leads to a 'tendency to idealise the process of making music together (as if it *always* produced a transcendent experience) and to elide the experiences of participants (as if *everyone* had the same experience)' (2008:136). In order to avoid overgeneralizations, I explore the learning process in traditional music sessions by focusing on specific learning experiences, as described by my interviewees. Focusing on each interviewee's experiences and opinions also presents a more complex view of the socio-musical phenomenon.

I begin by exploring the basic characteristics, a historical context, and the different types of Irish traditional music sessions. Following this, I analyse how traditional musicians acquire repertoire and techniques through listening, observing, and conversing with other session participants. I also argue that the session is a significant socio-musical event which fosters enculturation. Much of the learning which takes place in sessions is informal and experiential in nature, occurring through engagement and participation with others. Titon argues that experiential learning leads to a 'more general understanding, not only of music, but of people - of others and of oneself' (1995:287-8). Finally, I discuss the challenges of learning traditional music in the session context.

I reference a number of important sources of literature that informs my approach, analysis, and interpretation. Ethnographies, specifically by Hamilton (1978), Fairbairn (1993), and O'Shea (2005, 2008), are particularly useful in their exploration of sessions as a musical, social, and cultural phenomenon. Although the learning process is not at the centre of their investigations, these works provide insight into how sessions affect the learning and transmission of Irish traditional music. Education researchers, including McCarthy, Veblen, and Waldron (McCarthy 1999a, Veblen 1991, 1996; Waldron 2006b, 2009a; Waldron and Veblen 2009), have contributed an educational perspective of the session as a

phenomenon. My analysis here, with its emphasis on the social processes of enculturation, elaborates and expands upon my M.A. thesis (Cawley 2008). This dissertation analysed how traditional flute players learn new repertoire and technique during sessions.

### **Characteristics of Irish Traditional Music Sessions**

Irish traditional music sessions are informal music events, which often occur in pubs, but also in houses, halls, and other public places. Two or more traditional musicians come together to play a selection of Irish traditional dance tunes, the order of which is not determined beforehand. Jigs and reels are the most common tune types played in sessions, although other tune types are also popular in particular localities.<sup>41</sup> Sessions range considerably in size. Regular pub sessions generally involve between three and ten musicians, while it is not uncommon to see dozens of musicians during sessions at festivals or fleadhanna. It is difficult to define the session beyond this general description, as Hamilton suggests, ‘The session by its very nature defies a short concise definition...’ (1978:10). While subtle to outside observers, musical behaviours and social conventions can differ significantly session to session. Vallely suggests that ‘Each session is different, each area has its peculiarities. Each pub owner has particular attitudes and perceptions, as has each musician or group of musicians’ (2008:75), and Fairbairn states ‘What is acceptable in one session is very often unpopular in another’ (1993:226).<sup>42</sup> For this reason, analysing sessions from an educational perspective is a rich and complex area of exploration. Sessions provide a spectrum of educational experiences - from inspiring, stimulating and encouraging experiences, to learning experience which may be detrimental to a newcomers’ confidence, or anywhere between these two poles. Throughout this section, I suggest that effective learning depends on the quality and the type of social relationships, conventions, and interactions which occur during the session.

Session musicians typically sit in a circle or semi-circle, facing each other. Williams states that session musicians ‘face each other, not the audience if there is one, because Irish music does not require an audience’ (2010:10). Fairbairn

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<sup>41</sup> Slides and polkas are common in many parts of Cork and Kerry, while mazurkas and highlands are common in Donegal. Songs and slow airs are occasionally featured during sessions, but this also depends on the particular session. Some sessions feature multiple songs, while others can be almost entirely instrumental.

<sup>42</sup> Ó hAllmhuráin also suggests that ‘each session has its own internal logic, social code and sense of time, all of which vary from one setting to the next’ (2008:188).

also states that ‘communication in sessions is not a matter of musicians directing their efforts towards an audience, but is contained within the musical circle’ (1993:43).<sup>43</sup> The spatial layout of the session allows musicians to observe the musical action and converse in between the music-making. Several scholars contrast the session layout with formal staged performances. For instance, Hast and Scott argue that sessions are not ‘a performance in the conventional sense’ in part because the musicians play ‘for each other and immensely enjoying one another's company’ (2004:5). Sessions are generally considered public, informal music-making events, rather than concerts or presentational performances.

Irish traditional music sessions are more participatory than presentational in nature. Turino suggests that all music-making fall on a spectrum of experiences, from the participatory to presentational (2008). He defines presentational performances as ‘situations where one group of people, the artists, prepare and provide music for another group, the audience, who do not participate in making the music or dancing’ (Turino 2008:26). In contrast, participatory performances are:

...a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions, only participants and potential participants performing different roles, and the primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role (2008:26).

Participatory performances also tend to involve participants of varying skill levels, and ‘opportunities to improve one's skills are common’ (Turino 2008:31). During such music-making, novices benefit educationally from observing and interacting with more experienced members.

The circular spatial layout is one indication that traditional music sessions are participatory. While session musicians can (and often do) acknowledge, consider, and play to the other listeners outside the session circle, in general the musicians direct the music-making to the other musicians within the session circle, as suggested above. Additionally, session participants often do have ‘varying skill levels’. Hamilton states that experienced musicians generally tolerate beginners in session:

Musicians when learning tend to join session before they can contribute anything worthwhile to it (This is

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<sup>43</sup> See also (Hamilton 1978:38).



from the point of view of the other musicians).  
However, they are tolerated because the more advanced musicians realise that this is the only way in which aspiring musicians can learn (1978:46).<sup>44</sup>

Hamilton suggests that the session is generally accepted as an avenue to learn Irish traditional music. From this point of view, participating in sessions is a step that many experienced traditional musicians go through. Because sessions are a significant part of modern Irish traditional music culture, they are also a part of the enculturation process. However, learners are generally tolerated as long as they remain sensitive to the particular social and musical conventions of the session.

Irish traditional music sessions exhibit characteristics of both presentational and participatory performances. For instance, in many sessions singers and audience members often do not sit within the musical circle or participate equally to the instrumentalists throughout the night.<sup>45</sup> Such sessions fall somewhere on the spectrum of presentational and participatory performances. A purely participatory music culture would expect all members to participate, while within the traditional music sessions, there is still a distinction between musician and audience, insider and outsider. However, compared to concerts or staged performances of Irish traditional music, the session is most certainly more informal and participatory in nature.<sup>46</sup>

I suggest that the informal and participatory characteristics of Irish traditional music sessions foster learning and enculturation processes. Learning processes are not only present, but as scholars suggest, learning is an inherent part of Irish traditional music sessions. The informal nature of sessions creates a space where learners can listen, learn, engage, play, and practice Irish traditional music. Cranitch suggests the informality of the session may facilitate ‘an informal interactive learning atmosphere’ (2006:101). Fairbairn also states:

The learning function is intrinsic to musical behaviour in the session and is one of the things that distinguishes it from formal group activity (1993:126).

Later on in this section, I expand this concept by exploring my interviewees’

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<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Fairbairn states, ‘Most musicians will tolerate an elementary but receptive player who demonstrates un-intrusive respect; the session is commonly accepted as a learning situation and most remember their own early attempts’ (1993:223).

<sup>45</sup> Friends or partners of musicians occasionally sit within the circle if there is extra space. This also depends on the particular session and relationships between all involved in the event.

<sup>46</sup> O’Flynn also suggests sessions are informal and participatory (2009:79).

informal learning experiences within the session context.

### **Historical Context**

Irish traditional music sessions are a relatively new phenomenon within Irish traditional music culture. Numerous scholars indicate that pub sessions became popular between the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>47</sup> For instance, Hall states that pub sessions did not occur ‘before the mid-1960s in rural Ireland, where regular drinking in pubs was not a significant feature of social life’ (1995:4). There are earlier references to ‘sessions’ within the literature, however. Hamilton indicates that pub sessions took place in Sliabh Luachra prior to 1950:

It is almost impossible to give a precise date of birth for the pub session. In some areas, notably the Sliabh Luachra region of the Cork/Kerry boarder, there was traditional music in some pubs by the late 1930s, but within the country as a whole, this seems to have been ahead of its time by several decades (1999:345).

Cranitch’s research also suggests pub sessions occurred in Sliabh Luachra before the 1950s. He suggests pub sessions were an importance part of Pádraig O’Keeffe’s musical life.<sup>48</sup>

With regard to the pub, Lyons’, where this music was played, it was obviously an important place in Pádraig’s life, and, in a certain sense, can itself be considered to have played a significant role by virtue of having facilitated the very process of transmission of the tradition (2006:210).

O’Connor (2001:64) and Carolan (1997:39) use also the term sessions in reference to the informal Irish traditional music events that Chief O’Neill organized in houses, halls, saloons, and the Irish Music Club in Chicago in 1901. Because O’Connor and Carolan only provide a basic account of these musical events, it is difficult to assert with certainty the events are similar to contemporary traditional music sessions. The accounts also do not clarify if the

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<sup>47</sup> Some interviewees also discussed the emergence of the session during their own lifetime in the 1950s and 1960s (Connie O’Connell and Tomás Ó Canainn, interviews). Some scholars emphasize that sessions became popular amongst Irish immigrants and musicians in the UK and North America, suggesting sessions initially emerged outside Ireland (Kaul 2007:705; O’Connor 2001:115; O’Shea 2008:108; Williams 2010:17). For a discussion of the history of the session see also (Fairbairn 1993; Foy 1999; Hamilton 1978, 1999; Hast and Scott 2004:14; Kaul 2007:705, 2009; Kearns and Taylor 2003:30; Mac Aoidh 1994:34; O’Shea 2008:108, 2005:198-9; Valley 2008:69; Waldron and Veblen 2009; Williams 2010).

<sup>48</sup> Pádraig O’Keeffe (1887 – 1963) was born near Castleisland, Co. Kerry. He is well-known for his Sliabh Luachra style fiddle playing.

musicians in 1901 described the music-making as ‘sessions’.

Within the literature, many scholars discussing the emergence of sessions place this historical development in an importance context – the decline of group dancing traditions due to the passing of the Dance Halls Act of 1935.<sup>49</sup> Prior to the pub session, the main performance context of Irish traditional music was dancing events. With the passing of the Dance Hall Act of 1935, the Irish government (influenced by the Catholic Church) banned highly popular dancing events, including house, barn, and cross-road dances. The Dance Hall Act required all dancing events to be held in licensed halls around the country, which had a massive effect on traditional music and rural life. Dancing and music practices began to separate, and this trend intensified with the emergence of the pub session in the 1950s and 60s.

Scholars also commonly highlight that sessions and the *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann* gained popularity around the same time (Fairbairn 1993:126; Hamilton 1999:345; O’Shea 2008:108). In 1951, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann began hosting annual *fleadhanna* and music competitions to promote Irish traditional music.<sup>50</sup> Sessions were and still are a popular feature of the *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann*. Fairbairn argues that the *Fleadh*, ‘popularised the pub-environment as a new context for traditional music-making in both rural and urban areas. Even in centres of strong and unbroken traditional activity, the session and the pub-music culture replaced kayleering and the house dance’ (1993:126). Hamilton also suggest the establishment of the *fleadh* ‘helped to reinforce the importance of the session as musicians from different parts of the country met and swapped tunes’ (1999:345). Sessions now occur worldwide and remain the main performance context of Irish traditional music.

### **Types of Sessions**

In addition to pub sessions, Irish traditional musicians socialize and play music sessions in homes, organizations, clubs, and at traditional music festivals and summer schools. The different types of sessions have subtly contrasting characteristics and fulfil different social, musical, and educational purposes. I

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<sup>49</sup> For more information on the Dance Hall Act and effects to cultural and musical life see (Brennan 2004:10; Fairbairn 1993:126; Hast and Scott 2004; Hamilton 1996:151-3; Kaul 2007:705, 2009; Kearns and Taylor 2003:30; Mac Aoidh 1994:34; McNamara and Woods 1997; O’Connor 2001:59; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008:131-2; O’Shea 2005: 84; Vallely 2004b:13; Williams 2010).

<sup>50</sup> *Fleadhanna* is plural for ‘*fleadh*’, the Irish word for festival. I discuss *fleadhanna* in Chapter 3.

argue that the purpose of a session can affect learning processes and behaviours throughout the event. In this subsection, I explore the general features, functions, and purposes of the various types of sessions. I also discuss how each session is a slightly different learning environment with its own educational implications.

The most common type of session is the regularly occurring pub session. Pub sessions typically occur once a week, although they also occur spontaneously or on a fortnightly or monthly basis.<sup>51</sup> Hamilton classifies pub sessions into two categories: paid and unpaid sessions (1978:19). During my fieldwork in Cork City, the vast majority of pub sessions I attended involved some sort of payment. In *Sin É* and the Corner House, the publicans typically pay two or three core musicians to stabilize the session, and to provide music throughout the night. By the 1980s paid sessions became the norm (O'Shea 2005:198-9), and O'Shea suggests that in paid sessions, unpaid participants can feel marginalized or tensions can arise between musicians (2005:130). While tensions are certainly present in some paid sessions, according to my field observations, unpaid musicians also commonly play and socialize alongside their paid counterparts without social tension. Around the Cork City area, paid musicians generally (but not always) tend to select and lead more tunes than their unpaid counterparts, perhaps because they have a responsibility to 'lead' the session. However, unpaid musicians contribute to the music-making throughout the evening, commonly participating equally, or sometimes more than, the paid musicians. As Kaul states, 'non-paid musicians are still encouraged to 'lead' a set of tunes at least some time during an evening' (2007:708).

House sessions are also common within traditional music circles. House sessions are either planned in advance or occur spontaneously. In my experience, many spontaneous house sessions occur after a pub session concludes and the musicians and enthusiasts relocate someone's house to continue playing and socializing. While pub and house sessions share many similarities, house sessions are often more informal and almost always unpaid affairs. Musicians do not have to conform to publicans' or punters' expectations, so elongated conversations are common in this context. House sessions also often occur for several hours, and it

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<sup>51</sup> In Cork City, the Corner House hosts a large session every first Friday of the month, which is well-attended and popular amongst listeners and practitioners alike. Many musicians I informally spoke with suggested that the first Friday session feels special since it only occurs once a month (fieldnotes, 4 February 2011). See Appendix C for background information about my fieldwork in pubs in Cork City.

is not uncommon to see musicians leave and re-enter the session circle many times throughout the night in order to eat, drink, or chat amongst the other musicians and attendees. In this way, house sessions are often informal, social and musical events. Due to the level of informality, I suggest that house sessions are educationally beneficial to learners, especially to individuals who may dislike pub settings for personal, social, or musical reasons.

During Irish traditional music festivals and *fleadhanna*, spontaneous sessions often breakout in pubs, on the streets, and other public places. Sessions are also organized as part of festival programmes and often led by well-known traditional musicians. Sessions are popular and attractive feature of most traditional music festivals, including CCÉ's *fleadhanna*. Hamilton suggests 'the vast majority of musicians who attend *Fleadhs* do not enter these competitions, and attend mainly to play in sessions with other musicians' (1978:13). As festival-based sessions usually involve large numbers of participants and specters, musicians of varying ages and backgrounds commonly play in large circles or concentric circles.<sup>52</sup> These sessions are often unpaid, and participants take turn selecting tunes to play together. While to the outsider this may seem like an organic and democratic process, like most sessions, some musicians exert more control over the music-making than others. This usually depends on social dynamics, personalities, musical status, and playing abilities of the musicians involved.

Sessions at festivals offer a significantly different learning experience compared to weekly pub sessions. The regularity of the weekly pub session allows learners to grow accustomed to the other participants' repertoire and particular social behaviours and conventions. In contrast, during festival sessions, musicians can play together once and never interact again. Regular pub sessions provide opportunities for musicians to form intimate and long-lasting social and musical relationship. Sessions at festivals provide an opportunity to play, listen, and socialize with traditional musicians from diverse localities, and learners are exposed to a broad range of repertoire and styles. My interviewees suggest that interacting with other musicians outside one's immediate social circle is important during the learning process, and that these connections are often made

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<sup>52</sup> Old-time sessions also 'often take the form of concentric rings, with the core musicians, who have played together, at the center and increasingly less experienced musicians in the outer rings' (Turino 2008:180). O'Shea describes a similar practice in Irish traditional music sessions (O'Shea 2005:198).

during sessions at festivals. For example, John Reid learned many tunes while playing in sessions during the Willie Clancy Summer School. John describes why he feels his experiences in these sessions were important:

The thing about sessions is you *have* to move outside your circle. You have to expose yourself playing with different people... You have to get out there. Get away from your own sessions and hear different tunes and different sessions (Reid, interview).

As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, festivals are often crowded with musicians, enthusiasts, and drinkers, and therefore learning can be challenging or impossible at times. However, the interview data indicates that interacting and networking with other traditional musicians during festival sessions is a significant experience during the enculturation process.

‘Slow’ or beginners’ sessions, which can take place in pubs, homes, halls, or clubs, are relatively new learning and performing contexts. Many traditional music organizations, such as CCÉ, have established beginners’ sessions to provide novice and intermediate musicians an opportunity to play tunes in social, but less pressurized, context. While musicians still sit in a circle and take turns choosing and playing traditional dance repertoire, the tempos in beginners’ sessions tend to be slower than in the typical pub session. Additionally, while it is uncommon within pub sessions, one can observe participants using or exchanging ABC or staff notation during beginners’ session.

Rapuano suggests that ‘Beginner’s sessions were created in the past several years as a way to channel the least experienced musicians out of the more advanced sessions’ (2005:24). In my experience, beginners’ sessions are usually established by teachers or learners who hope to play traditional music in a group setting. While pub sessions are somewhat informal and participatory in nature, many novices may feel unready or intimidated by participating in pub session situations; Fitting in with the other, perhaps more advanced musicians, may be challenging both socially and musically. Some learners may be motivated by learning in social settings but are intimidated by pub sessions. To these individuals, participating in beginners’ sessions can be a useful educational and musical experience (Cawley 2008:24). Fairbairn suggests that when musicians participate in a session where they are on ‘equal footing’ with the other musicians (meaning similar musical skills), ‘musical satisfaction and enjoyment’ increases

(1993:222). In beginners' sessions, learners are surrounded by others in their same situation. They can discuss challenges and exchange tips on instrumental techniques and the learning process. When participants feel musically and socially comfortable throughout the event, participating in sessions can be a positive learning experience. This feeling of social and musical security is also a key aspect to belonging, identity, and enculturation.

In addition to hosting beginners' or slow sessions, some traditional music organizations, such as CCÉ and various pipers' clubs, also host intermediate or advanced sessions. While most CCÉ and pipers' club sessions are held in community halls or clubs, some host pub sessions as well.<sup>53</sup> At the branch level, CCÉ sessions provide an alternative to pub sessions and cater to learners who enjoy social aspects of the learning process. These sessions are family-oriented and are often attended by children, teens, and adults. On their website, CCÉ advertises their sessions as a fun way to learn:

Many of our branches offer regular music sessions. These sessions... can be a great way to hear the music in the social context it was designed for. In addition to being a lot of fun, playing in sessions regularly will improve your ear dramatically, sometimes without you being aware of it! ([www.comhaltas.ie/education](http://www.comhaltas.ie/education) [accessed 9 March 2011]).

During my fieldwork at the Douglas CCÉ Branch, I regularly participated in sessions hosted in the hall of the *Gaelscoil na Dúglaise*.<sup>54</sup> At the branch, musicians of all abilities are encouraged and welcomed to participate in the session circle, which runs from approximately 6-9PM on Wednesday nights. The slow session begins at 6PM, followed by a more intermediate session later in the evening. While the majority of players are adults, players of all ages frequently participate. The Douglas CCÉ session is informal, and participants often join for only a few sets of tunes while waiting for their classes to start. There are no expectations to remain for the majority of the session, which is a common social convention in many pub sessions. The Douglas branch's *cathaoirleach*,<sup>55</sup> Barry Cogan, states that some of the branch's teachers join the session to provide

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<sup>53</sup> Within the literature, several scholars mention the significance CCÉ and pipers' club sessions have on transmission practices (Mac Aoidh 1994:200; Meek 1987:23; Ó Canainn 1996:67; O'Connor 2001:114; O'Flynn 2009:67-8; Veblen 1991:87; Valley 2008:74).

<sup>54</sup> *Gaelscoil na Dúglaise* is a Irish language primary school in Douglas, Cork. As discussed in Chapter 3, many CCÉ branches are based in schools, GAA clubs, or other community centres. See Appendix C for more information about my fieldwork at the Douglas CCÉ branch.

<sup>55</sup> *Cathaoirleach* is Irish for Chairman.

encouragement, musical stability, and to make sure that no one musician is dominating the musical event (Cogan, interview). The teachers do not select tunes, but facilitate the session so members of the branch can start their own tunes. Teachers also gently encourage shy players and provide a steady and clear tempo to stabilize the music for the group. While Mac Aoidh criticizes CCÉ sessions for being run by ‘committee members and not musicians’ (1994:34-5), this is not the case at the Douglas CCÉ, where musicians and teachers of all skill levels participate.<sup>56</sup> In Chapter 3, I explore sessions and other CCÉ and pipers’ club activities in more detail.

### Acquiring Repertoire and Technique

In previous research, I explored how flute players acquire repertoire and technique through imitation, observation, listening, and conversing during traditional music sessions (Cawley 2008). In this section, I expand on this research by exploring the interviewees’ experiences in sessions. Sessions provide a socio-musical context in which to listen, observe, and engage with other practitioners of Irish traditional music.<sup>57</sup> Listening is a vital part of musical development, and as explored below, traditional musicians engage in active and purposeful listening while attending and participating in sessions. Consequently, the learning process is an inherent part of playing in sessions. Fairbairn suggests that the ‘process of discovering, playing and increasing a shared repertory of traditional tunes, versions and settings is fundamental to any session’ (1993:35).

Depending on the type of session, the ability to acquire new repertoire and instrumental techniques may differ significantly. During sessions at festivals, for instance, musicians can interact with other practitioners and hear new, unknown tunes. Without repeated listening, however, it is difficult to retain and acquire new repertoire and absorb nuances. For this reason, during sessions at festivals, it is common to see musicians recording sessions (most often by using their mobile phones or digital devices), in order to listen and learn tunes at a later time. In contrast, a musician ‘who attends a particular session regularly shouldn’t have to bring a tape recorder to learn tunes. With enough repetitions, they should soak

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<sup>56</sup> As I discuss in Chapter 3, CCÉ branches can differ significant in terms of philosophy and activities, which may partially explain the difference between Mac Aoidh and my own descriptions of CCÉ sessions.

<sup>57</sup> Waldron also suggests that sessions provide an opportunity to informally learn Irish traditional music in ‘context’ (Waldron 2006b:12).



into his brain over the course of time' (Foy 1999:26). Because weekly pub sessions occur regularly, learners can repeatedly hear common repertoire and grow accustomed to local and individual styles of playing. O'Shea argues that repetitive listening 'is ideal for musicians in the process of learning a particular repertoire and style' (2008:129). Repetitive listening also fosters enculturation since 'redundancy is the central mechanism for creating new social habits of thought and action' (Turino 2008:197). Williams also argues that during sessions some of the 'best elements of an evening's music might reveal themselves only through repeated attendance, participation, and careful listening' (2010:14). For participants who attend on a regular basis, the consistency of pub sessions provides a unique opportunity for learning and enculturation.

Absorbing and acquiring new repertoire is one advantage of participating in sessions on a regular basis. Many of my interviewees describe their experience of learning new tunes in sessions.<sup>58</sup> For instance, Niall Vallely believes that he learned a considerable amount of new repertoire during his time in college when he was playing sessions on a nightly basis. During various sessions in the Cork City area, Niall heard and learned new tunes through repeated listening and imitation. Niall also suggests that when playing many sessions a week, he became bored of playing the same tunes over and over again, and this encouraged him to learn new repertoire:

I rarely get to sessions [now] and my rate of learning tunes has almost slowed down to zero and I think that's connected. When you're not playing in the session, you don't have an outlet for playing new tunes, so you learn less. When I was in college and the years after in the early 90s, I played sessions every single night in Cork. For a period I was doing 7 or 8 sessions a week. So, you end up learning a lot of stuff because you end up getting bored playing the same tunes (Vallely, interview).

Traditional musicians acquire new repertoire during sessions in three primary ways. Firstly, musicians can unconsciously absorb new tunes. A novice, for instance, may attend a weekly session and hear an unfamiliar tune. After listening to the new tune on numerous occasions, they become familiar with the melody and may be able to hum the melody. At this stage, the novice has learned the tune aurally, although they may or may not have learned to play the tune on

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<sup>58</sup> Mick Daly, Hammy Hamilton, Cormac De Frein, Michael O'Sullivan, Lisa O'Sullivan, Mary Bergin, Geraldine O'Callaghan, Niall Vallely, and Seamus Sands, all commented that they learned many tunes informally and aurally by attending sessions (interviews).

an instrument yet. Hammy Hamilton describes this type of scenario, and believes that he has acquired much of his repertoire by attending sessions. He states:

In a session, someone would play a tune, and I'd say, 'Wow, that's an interesting tune.' Then I might hear it a couple weeks later and eventually I'd be walking down the street one day and realize I'm humming the tune. And I'd say, 'That's the tune that so and so played in the session.' And once that process arrived, it resurfaced as something I could hone; I always find it a simple process (Hamilton, interview).

Through repeated listening Hammy absorbs a tune aurally, which is an unconscious process. After a learner absorbs a new melody, then they are able to experiment playing the melody on an instrument. Unconscious learning processes are common within the session context, primarily because traditional musicians usually participate for social and musical reasons. Learning is usually a secondary goal, if an aim at all. Much of the learning which occurs happens as a consequence of participating and listening to other practitioners in the act of music-making.

Secondly, traditional musicians can acquire new repertoire by listening, absorbing, and quietly attempting to play along in the session. As a teenager, Geraldine O'Callaghan engaged in this practice, and describes the process:

My own experience of learning in sessions as a teenager was if you didn't know a tune, you tried playing along very softly while the session was going on. The more I did that the more confidence I built up of my ability to pick a tune up quickly. As an adult musician you can have the bare bones of a tune picked up after of two rounds hearing it in a session. Learning in sessions is very important (O'Callaghan, interview).

Geraldine refers to being able to pick up 'the bare bones' of a tune 'after two rounds' – meaning that experienced traditional musicians (with developed aural and technical skills) are able to play the core features of a new or unfamiliar melody on the second repeat of the tune.<sup>59</sup> Many traditional musicians have and use this ability to learn quickly during sessions. While instruments, such as the flute and fiddle, are able to play quietly in a session, other instruments, including the uilleann pipes and accordion, may be difficult or impossible to play quietly

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<sup>59</sup> In sessions and other performance contexts, Irish traditional musicians repeat dance tunes at least once, and usually numerous times before concluding or progressing onto the next tune in the set.

while experimenting on an unfamiliar tune. Learners of such instruments could easily disturb the session, and therefore, some learners opt to abstain from ‘learning’ new tunes during sessions. In this way, the session may facilitate the acquisition of repertoire more easily for some instrumentalists more than others. Connie O’Connell discusses the delicacy and challenge of trying to learn new tunes in a session:

You’re not going to pick up a tune at the session; You’re going to spoil the session. People will get very bored of you, but it depends on the session itself, who you’re playing with, how big the session is, how small the session is - There is a lot to be said about sessions (O’Connell, interview).

According to Connie, the ability to learn new repertoire also depends on the particular session, including the number of musicians and types of personalities involved. Attempting unknown tunes may be accepted in one session, while distained in another.

Thirdly, traditional musicians can gain interest and an insight into new tunes at a session, and continue the learning process in private at a later time. Tomás Ó Canainn suggests that he does ‘not necessary learn’ in sessions, but he often hears new tunes he would like to learn. He gains an interest in a tune at a session, then ultimately learns the tune through other sources, such as collections or by asking a friend. Tomás states that sessions:

...are a good place to give you a wink about tunes. I would not necessarily learn at them, unless you go to a regular session and they keep doing the same thing, then you kind of pick it up as you go... But, in a session you might say, ‘God, that’s a wonderful tune.’ Somebody might say the name, and then you would go and chase it, either in O’Neill’s Collection or some other friend who might know it (Ó Canainn, interview).

This can be an effective learning experience when the musicians know the names of the tunes played at the session. Without this bit of information – and some traditional musicians are notorious for not knowing the names of tunes – researching tunes heard in sessions can be challenging.

It is in learners’ best interest to acquire commonly played tunes at their local pub session, as this increases their ability to participate throughout the event. For this, and other reasons, several interviewees learned new tunes in sessions out of necessity, rather than for their own educational benefit or personal

interest. For instance, Geraldine O’Callaghan contrasts learning a tune in a session to learning aurally from a commercial recording:

When you sit down to learn a piece of music from a recording, you’re learning it because you choose that piece of music for some reason... But if you’re learning music in a session, it’s more out of necessity so you’re actually able to play in the session or be accepted by the musicians (O’Callaghan, interview).<sup>60</sup>

Learning common tunes increases learners’ repertoire, but also helps novices to feel a sense of commonality and belonging to the other musicians in the session. When Cormac De Frein moved from Dublin to Cork, he learned a lot of new repertoire by playing in sessions in Cork City. By frequently playing in sessions, Cormac grew accustomed to tunes commonly played in Cork, which expanded and broadened his repertoire (De Frein, interview).<sup>61</sup>

While session musicians of all ages and skill levels can listen, absorb, and learn new repertoire, older or more experienced musicians can relearn or rediscover tunes they once knew in the past, but have since forgotten. Seamus Sands discusses this phenomenon:

What I find great about the likes of a session, if someone comes and they start off some tunes that I mightn't have played in literally fifteen or twenty years... I used to know an awful lot of tunes. I forgotten so many of them and they'll come back, but someone has to start them (Sands, interview).

With thousands of tunes in the Irish repertory, sessions act like a collective memory bank. Tunes are learned, forgotten, and then remembered again through interacting with other musicians in the session. Tunes are not entirely forgotten, but can spring back to the memory through hearing another musician play it in a session.

In addition to learning repertoire through repeated listening, absorption, and imitation, learners can also observe new instrumental techniques in session

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<sup>60</sup> Cormac De Frein, Michael O’Sullivan, Seamus Sands, and Niall Vallely also discussed learning tunes in sessions out of necessity (interviews). For instance, Michael states, ‘Somebody joining the session regularly have their own sets of tunes, and they might play a tune I don't know. You would pick it up, but you're only doing it out of necessity rather than an actual interest’ (O’Sullivan, interview).

<sup>61</sup> Commonly played repertoire can differ by region and session. In the Cork and Kerry area, polkas and slides are much more common in session compared to the rest of Ireland, for instance. Musicians moving from Dublin to Cork, as in Cormac’s case, can begin to absorb local repertoire by frequently listening and participating in sessions.

situations. Depending on the particular situation and individual learner, frequently participating in sessions can significantly affect learners' development of technique or musical style. Sessions provide an opportunity to observe other musicians' techniques, playing styles, and approaches in a social setting. In comparison, learners cannot observe such techniques while learning by listening to commercial recording. Green suggests that in many musical cultures, such as popular music, jazz, and traditional musics, watching and imitation are 'prime activities' during the enculturation process:

Musicians learn not only from listening to each other, but also from watching each other... watching and imitating the actions of more experienced players are prime activities in the enculturation and apprenticeship practices of many traditional musics and jazz (2002:82)

Observation of technique can also occur during classes, workshops, concerts, or by viewing videos of traditional music performances on television or streaming on the internet. However, the session provides an inexpensive and accessible way to observe traditional music-making. Significantly, the informal and participatory nature of the session also allows learners to ask questions and discuss their observations with the other session participants.

Through careful observations in sessions over an elongated period of time, learners can also begin to understand stylistic nuances and subtleties. Many novices may find ornamentations and bowing challenging to learn purely by ear. In sessions, learners can begin to understand technique and style through a combination of aural and visual observations. For instance, a novice flute player may be able to hear rolls, but may not understand how rolls are physically executed. In a session situation, they may be able to view other more experienced flute players playing rolls throughout the night, and begin to understand at least the basics of what rolls look like while played in the context of a tune. Within the interview data, Matt Cranitch discusses how he purposefully observed sessions to understand different approaches to bowing. At the time, Matt was researching and writing his fiddle tutor book (Cranitch 2001). Matt discusses his observations:

When I was writing the fiddle book, I spent three or four years going to sessions without playing. I know that seems strange, but I use to sit in sessions, perch myself and watch what fiddle players were doing. Then I would go home and try to emulate what they were doing... That was great training and a great help at the time

(Cranitch, interview).

These observations helped Matt to produce a useful tutor, and deepened Matt's understanding of bowing and fiddle styles.

My interview data also indicates that participating in sessions exposes traditional musicians to many different styles. For instance, James Duggan attended many sessions during his college years, and found it useful to hear and observe different stylistic approaches (interview). Over the years, James developed his own style by attending classes, sessions, and by listening to commercial recordings. James discusses how he developed his own fiddle style:

I might take something I hear in a session, you know, a certain way a person is playing part of a tune. I might take that away from it, rather than the actual tune... If I were to pick any tune that I play, it might be a basic version from Ann [McAuliffe] with other bits in it learned from recordings or learned from playing sessions with people (Duggan, interview).

James learned tunes from his teacher, Ann McAuliffe, and then continued to learn and develop subtleties and the stylistic nuances of fiddle playing through a combination of listening to commercial recordings and to other musicians in sessions. James developed into the fiddle player he is today by engaging in multiple learning experiences, including attending sessions, classes, workshops, festivals, and listening to commercial recordings.

### Enculturation and Sessions as Social Events

As many traditional music scholars emphasize, sessions are inherently social as well as musical events. Foy states, 'To think of sessions as strictly musical events is to harbor a misunderstanding. They are also social events' (1999:46), and Kaul suggests that:

Sessions are social events as much as they are musical events. A great deal of chatting, joking, and general interaction occurs. Unlike a concert, the boundaries between the session and the surrounding environment are porous, and the musical performance becomes one aspect of a large social milieu (2009:1).

McCann describes the session as 'an extremely widespread phenomenon, allowing at best (deliberate moral overtones) the shepherded involvements of younger or less experienced players by older and respected musicians' (2001:91).

In this section, I explore this ‘shepherding’ of novice musicians, although I use the term enculturation. Below, I argue that the social and informal nature of sessions fosters enculturation in three meaningful ways. First, sessions provide social interactions with peers and more experienced practitioners of Irish traditional music. The interview data suggests that these encounters motivate, introduce, and guide newcomers into the session circle and the community of practice. Second, learners can gain cultural understanding of contemporary Irish traditional music culture by discussing music events, issues, trends, new artists and albums with other session attendees. I conclude by exploring some unwritten rules of the session, often referred to as session etiquette. I suggest that newcomers to session learn new socio-cultural behaviours, as well as new repertoire and techniques.

Sessions are a major activity within the community of practice, and many musicians and enthusiasts consider sessions an important part of Irish traditional music culture. For this reason, learning how to play and act in sessions is often considered a musical skill that young traditional musicians ought to develop. Geraldine O’Callaghan considers learning how to play sessions a ‘very necessary part of learning’, and a process which ‘everyone has gone through it some way or another’ (O’Callaghan, interview). Lisa O’Sullivan also recognizes the central role sessions play in traditional music culture, and suggests that sessions are venues for mutual musical sharing:

It seems to be the main forum for playing this kind of music, so I think they are essential for anyone who's learning. It's like, why you are learning. You want to go out and share the music and take more in. It's just very organic, isn't it? It's a two way thing. You're trying to give something to this group, and you're taking a lot back as well by learning and just sharing what you know... It's a great place just to learn not to be selfish (O'Sullivan, interview).

In Lisa’s view, this ‘sharing’ and learning ‘not to be selfish’ are examples of two social behaviours learners can grow accustomed to and develop in a session context. This relates to McCann’s argument that the session is a ‘gift cycle’. He states:

The session conforms readily to the idea of a “gift cycle”: “In a gift cycle the gift is given without contract or agreement about return. And yet it does return; a circulation is set up and can be counted upon” (Hyde

1983:114). The gift is the risk of self, the tunes, the songs, the chat, the shared experience, the history of personal endeavor (McCann 2001:93).

Sharing of music, ideas, and stories is inherent in sessions, and this leads to significant implications for learning and enculturation processes.

Some interviewees believe that sessions provide a way of becoming immersed within Irish traditional music and its culture. John Reid believes that learners can ‘soak’ up the music over an elongated period of time if they consistently attend sessions. He states:

I believe if people come down to the session often enough, it will soak into them. It's something you can't learn tomorrow but, you have to soak yourself in it for a while. People eventually do get it (Reid, interview).

The interview data also suggests that attending sessions has played a significant role in many of my interviewees’ musical enculturation. Mick Daly, for instance, primarily learned and became involved in Irish traditional music by ‘hanging out in sessions’ and generally ‘being in a musical circle’ (Daly, interview). Mick discusses the importance of sessions in the Phoenix bar in Cork, where he absorbed many tunes:

You'd meet up with someone in the bar and they'd be playing Irish tunes. And you just play along on guitar and eventually the tunes get into your head (Daly, interview).

By participating in sessions, traditional repertoire slowly entered Mick’s musical memory. While these sessions were meaningful educational experiences, Mick did not attend in order to learn. He states:

I didn’t go to learn, it was just a social thing. You went because you went for a pint anyway and there was a bunch of people just playing tunes, so you brought your guitar or whatever and sat along. It's what you did (Daly, interview).

The informal and social nature of sessions creates an atmosphere that is conducive to enculturation and learning. Alongside his peers, Mick absorbed the repertoire and style of the musical culture, and began to identify himself as a guitar player and traditional musician.

Through frequent and prolonged participation in sessions, novices can



begin to feel part of a musical circle. This sense of belonging is essential for identity formation and enculturation. Within the interview data, there is a related example of how sessions can foster musical enculturation in this regard; Geraldine O'Callaghan and a number of other students attended sessions in Connell's Pub with their teacher, Con Herbert. As a young fiddle player Geraldine (and the other students) mostly listened, but also played when prompted and encouraged by the older more experienced musicians. The youngsters were eased into session playing - a process which educationalists refer to as scaffolding. Eventually as a teenager, Geraldine and her peers gained the confidence to establish and lead their own sessions.<sup>62</sup> Geraldine considers this a significant stage in her development as a traditional musician, as she explains:

We started going to sessions when we were about eleven, maybe. Our teacher, Con [Herbert], used to take us to Dan Connell's Bar in Knocknagree, which is closed and it's an awful loss. But at that time it was a hub of Sliabh Luachra music. Johnny O'Leary used to play there... We'd go and spend most the time listening, but the encouragement that we received from Johnny and the other musicians playing there was immeasurable really. It contributed to our confidence and ultimate ability to play in public. For example, I remember at some point in the night Con or Johnny would make it a point of asking us to play, so we did get an opportunity to play the material that we knew and were comfortable with. That would have been my earliest memories of going to sessions... As we got older, we'd start our own sessions and that was a very significant thing really in our lives - to have the confidence to sit down and start our own session (O'Callaghan, interview).

This is a particularly strong example of how young musicians are often shepherded by more experienced musicians within session contexts. By participating in sessions consistently over the years, Geraldine O'Callaghan moved from a peripheral role in sessions to a more central role, and gained the confidence to lead her own sessions.

The ability to discuss music, learning, and life in general with other traditional musicians plays a significant role in the enculturation process. I suggest that the informality of sessions allows musicians and enthusiasts to chat to one another before, during, and after the music-making. While it is not

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<sup>62</sup> In Waldron and Veblen's study of the informal learning practices of adults in sessions, one of their interviewees also 'values session playing because it builds her confidence and self-esteem as a musician' (2009:66).

common for musicians to be deep in conversation during the music-making, brief exchanges do frequently occur. As Fairbairn states, ‘any player might stop at any point, to have a drink, to hear a comment or question or for any other reason’ (1993:32). Many scholars and traditional musicians emphasize the importance of discussions during sessions. Keegan states that ‘the chat between the tunes is just as important as the tunes themselves’ (2006:16), and Kevin Crawford suggests:

...it's the *craic* between the sets of tunes, the talking, and finding out a few old stories. You know, there's an awful lot of history that's passed down about other players. It's not just the tunes that are actually passed on in sessions (Crawford in Hast and Scott 2004:42).

Scholars also suggest that that information about repertoire is transmitted during discussions in sessions. For instance, musicians often learn the names of tunes during conversations in-between sets of tunes, as both Hamilton and Ó hAllmhuráin indicate below:

Immediately after a set of tunes is finished, the players generally relax, sip their drinks, light a cigarette, and converse with each other. Conversation at this point usually revolves around the last tune played (Hamilton 1978:39).

The interlude between tunes is an important opportunity for conversation, and for learning names of tunes and sources (Ó hAllmhuráin 2008:188).

In-between sets, learners can gain basic information about a tune, and then are able to research the tune at home by using written sources or commercial recordings, for example.

During sessions, traditional musicians also commonly discuss other musical topics, such as upcoming gigs, festivals, new albums, and ‘non-musical topics’, such as sports, work, family, and life in general. Even discussions about everyday life can cause participants to feel socially connected to the other session musicians. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder suggest that social exchanges can be significant in terms of the overall vibrancy of a community of practice, although the value of such exchanges is often initially overlooked. They state:

Many of the most valuable community activities are the small, everyday interactions – informal discussions to solve problems, or one-one-on exchanges of information... The real value of these exchanges may not be evident immediately (2002:60).

I suggest that many types of discussions in sessions can nurture social learning and enculturation processes. Discussions in sessions are influential in terms of social cohesion and they can be encouraging to newcomers who may begin to feel socially accepted into the group.

Within sessions, there are subtle unwritten rules of musical and social behaviours, often referred to as 'session etiquette', which can differ significantly from session to session. Even musicians within the same session can have different opinions what is socially and musically acceptable. O'Shea states this causes sessions to be 'vulnerable to disruption because these 'rules' are not made explicit' (2008:130). A breach or disagreement about session etiquette often results in confusion or tension within the session circle. Hamilton suggests that behaviour is 'probably the most important factor in deciding whether a musician will be accepted as a session member' (1978:27). It is, therefore, in the learners' best interest to understand and negotiate the social norms and acceptable behaviour as soon as possible. As Wenger suggests, a newcomer's ability to continue learning and participating within a community of practice depends on being accepted into the group:

In order to be on an inbound trajectory, newcomers must be granted enough legitimacy to be treated as potential members. If a community... rejected a newcomer for some reason, that person would have a hard time learning (1998:101).<sup>63</sup>

Part of becoming accepted in sessions involves a newcomer learning musical and social skills. As Foy suggests, knowing how to conduct oneself at a session 'is not something you're born with... these things must be learned either by example or outright instruction' (1999:9-10). Learning socially acceptable behaviours and expectations is a major part of the enculturation process. Many Irish traditional musicians learn about these behaviours explicitly or implicitly while participating in traditional music sessions.

A number of my interviewees believe that by participating in sessions, they gained a general understanding of Irish traditional music and its culture, including session etiquette. For instance, James Duggan suggests that he learned much about session etiquette and about how people interpret tunes in their own way. He states:

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<sup>63</sup> By 'inbound trajectory', Wenger is referring to moving from a peripheral role in a community of practice towards a more central role as a leader within the practice.

I use to go to a session in Listowel... and I learned a lot about session playing there... Maybe you would call it session etiquette sort of stuff. But I wouldn't have been going really to learn tunes as such. It would have been to learn other people's approach to music; How different people interpret different tunes and variations (Duggan, interview).

Although James did not acquire much repertoire at the session, he learned how to conduct himself in session situations. In short, James grew accustomed to the socio-musical behaviours of his musical culture (and locality). Additionally, James became aware of the different ways musicians can interpret and vary tunes. James was influenced by the musicians' creativity and expression, which encouraged and inspired him to learn different variations and interpret tunes for himself (Duggan, interview). As another example from my interview data, Aoife Granville suggests that she developed a general 'feel' for traditional music while listening and playing sessions. Similar to James, Aoife also indicates that she learned more about the general musical style and session etiquette, rather than learning many new tunes:

Learning in the session sometimes isn't just about the tunes, it's about etiquette, it's about listening. It's where I got a better feel for the music as opposed to learning an awful lot of tunes... I would learn tunes in sessions, but I wouldn't retain them sometimes. It's more about the whole music generally that you can learn in sessions (Granville, interview).

I assert that sessions inherently involve musical and social interactions, and these interactions can often foster learning and enculturation processes. However, not all interactions during sessions are positive and egalitarian. Relationships between session participants mirror the complexities of human relationships in everyday life. Some session participants may form intimate, positive, healthy, relationships, while other relationships may be strained in some way. Interactions often fall between these two extremes, remaining somewhat neutral; session musicians occasionally play and interact with one another casually. As Fairbairn states, 'it is not unusual to participate in a session and leave knowing only the names of the players on either side of you' (1993:24). During sessions, when relationships are strained some participants can feel (or be) socially excluded or marginalized. Rapuano states:

...pub sessions foster a sense of belonging and solidarity with a community...Yet, not everyone is included in sessions, nor are those who are included integrated in the same way. Some are in fact purposefully excluded or relegated to the margins (2005:123).

Some novices can feel like, or actually be, outsiders and this can lead to anxieties, insecurity, or outright rejection. When this happens the quality of the musical and educational experiences deteriorates. O'Shea describes how musical outsiders can be 'frozen out' of a session:

...it is a common enough experience that a musical outsider – from another country, another generation, another county, another pub in the same town – will not be made welcome to participate in a session. If an unwanted musician does join a session, they maybe 'frozen out' in various ways, as I have witnessed and (to my shame) participated in (O'Shea 2006-7:8).

When a participant is 'frozen out', it is difficult for novices to experience a social connection to the group and the development of the ability to play Irish traditional music in sessions can be significantly stunted.

While negative social interactions can be detrimental to the learning process, I suggest they can also be important 'learning moments'. For instance, when something goes wrong in a session – either musically or socially – it is a meaningful opportunity for learners to grasp what happened, what should have happened, and how this can be improved upon in the future. Novices begin to change their behaviour only after this realization. A relevant example is found within my interview data; Hammy Hamilton, a self-taught musician, learned a great deal about Irish traditional music and flute playing by participating in sessions. Hammy describes how as a learner in sessions in Belfast, he was often told to 'shut up' by more experienced musicians if he disturbed the music-making, either by playing poorly or while attempting to learn a tune. The musicians provided a type of 'reverse encouragement', according to Hammy:

It was sort of a school of hard knocks because people from Belfast are sort of renowned for being forthright. So you'd be told to shut up very quickly, much more so than now-a-days. That was good in one sense because if you weren't told to shut up that meant that you were doing something right. It was almost like a reverse encouragement. But, in general, if someone is trying to learn in a session and it can really interfere with the

whole process if they don't know the tune properly  
(Hamilton, interview).

Although blunt feedback is often disheartening, when Hammy did not receive negative attention, Hammy perceived this as a form of positive feedback. From this feedback, Hammy slowly grew accustomed to which behaviours (both musical and social) were acceptable in sessions. He learned from his mistakes, which the other musicians directly pointed out to him. While Hammy experienced criticisms from other musicians – and such public criticisms can be disheartening to learners – these were important learning experiences.

My research suggests that many types of social interactions during sessions can affect learning and enculturation processes. Positive relationships formed in sessions, of course, can encourage learners. I have also suggested that unpleasant exchanges can be important learning moments. Musical enculturation is not about avoiding confrontation at all times or conforming blindly to others' expectations. It is about learning to negotiate social norms and meaning. Wenger argues that novices learn how to negotiate cultural and social meaning through prolonged discussions and interactions with other practitioners (Wenger 1998). Attending sessions will and do not automatically foster enculturation. In order for enculturation to occur novices must learn to negotiate social and musical issues in order to be accepted into the session circle. Musical enculturation occurs when learners experience a change to their musical and social selves.

### Some Concerns

My interviewees have differing opinions about the usefulness and effectiveness of traditional music sessions as learning environments. These diverse narratives indicate that some learners consider participating in sessions a useful educational experience, while others can find the experience musically and/or educationally unfavorable. In this section, I explore a number of concerns about trying to 'learn' in sessions. I argue that sessions are not inherently effective or ineffective learning environments; the effect sessions have on learning and enculturation depends on a number of factors, including the individual's learning style. While prolonged participation in sessions can foster enculturation, the quality of the learning experience also depends on the quality and types of interactions which occur during the session.

As emphasized above, sessions are not utopian musical events where all

participants automatically feel connected to each other. O'Shea suggests that much of what has been written about the session tends to romanticize the interactions and musical event. She states:

A good deal of what has been written about the session reveals a propensity to romanticise, to view it through the distorting lens of other, idealising narratives such as those of the nation, with its assumption of cultural unity and the associated myth of the robust integrity of country life (2008:120).

Indeed, there are many examples of such romanticising with the literature. For instance, Hast and Scott state that sessions seem to 'embody the heart of the tradition, in which individuals are highly valued within a well-defined community, and camaraderie, good humor, respect, love for the music, and love for the land exist side by side' (2004:15). McNamara and Woods also write that the session 'draws on the emotions of those enfolded to achieve a kind of timelessness. There are no limits on the number of people who can participate and time itself ceases to be a factor' (1997:106).<sup>64</sup> While these descriptions of sessions are not necessarily incorrect, they are overtly positive in nature, and possibly misleading. Timelessness, passion, and camaraderie can occur in sessions, but these are not characteristics of all or most Irish traditional music sessions. During my fieldwork, I did experience a sense of timelessness on occasion, particularly during special occasions, such as festivals, house, and spontaneous sessions. During these moments, I lost track of the minutes and hours most likely because I was so focused on the music-making and socializing, a phenomenon that Csikszentmihalyi calls 'flow' (1996, 2000). In comparison, during regular weekly sessions in Sin É and the Corner House, I experienced timelessness more infrequently. While a sense of flow is possible, it is not representative to suggest that 'time ceased to be a factor' during these sessions. On the contrary, Tuesday night sessions in Sin É promptly end on time, either exactly at midnight or a few minutes before, and it is not uncommon to observe musicians checking their watches throughout the evening. Many musicians in the Cork area are students or have regular day jobs in the mornings, and therefore, time can certainly be a factor for many participants of weeknight sessions.

Additionally, contrary to McNamara and Woods's suggestion (1997:106),

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<sup>64</sup> As an additional example, Foy suggests that sessions are 'the wellspring of Irish music, its beating heart. Its importance to the tradition must never be forgotten' (Foy 1999:65).

there are ‘limits’ to how many people are able to join the session. While there is no strict or specific maximum number, particular socio-musical conventions and the physical space available within a session can limit the number of participants. Some traditional musicians believe that particularly instruments, such as the guitar, bouzouki, and bodhrán, should be limited to one or two each per session (Foy 1999:18). In Cork City, I have observed some guitar players hesitate to play when another guitar player is already leading the session. Some Irish pubs are also quite small and can only accommodate a certain number of musicians. Overcrowded sessions can pose challenges to learners or cause tensions or awkwardness amongst musicians. One significant issue is that not all musicians may be able to find space to play within the session. Sin É is a small, narrow pub in Cork that is popular amongst tourists, locals, drinkers, and traditional musicians alike. While Tuesday night sessions in Sin É are typically relaxed and quiet, the sessions on Friday are often very crowded with musicians and drinkers. The pub is so narrow that only about ten musicians are able to squeeze around the session table in a corner. I occasionally observed musicians arrive late to a crowded session, and fail to secure a seat for the night. During these moments – which I have experienced myself – musicians generally stand outside the session circle to drink, listen, and socialize, or leave the pub in search of another venue. Depending on the situation and size of the pub, there are limits to how many musicians can join the session.

O’Shea rejects romantic notions of the session, and frequently discusses problematic issues that can arise during Irish traditional music sessions, including disagreements, misunderstandings of session etiquette, commodification, and the marginalization of women and socio-cultural outsiders (O’Shea 2005, 2008). She suggests that sessions ‘may seem a delightfully egalitarian form of musical participation. This is not necessarily the case, however, for the session operates neither as a democracy nor as a meritocracy’ (O’Shea 2008:105). She also asserts that musical status, including who exerts the most control over tempos and repertoire, are determined by ‘a musician’s instrument, ability, reputation and seniority are all important, as are a broad repertoire, Irish nationality, personality, an old regional playing style and being male’ (2008:105). The musical status of session musicians directly affects social interactions, power relations and social norms. One such social norm, is that musical status plays a role in participants’ physical location within (or outside of) the session circle. According to my field



observations, session leaders and other high status musicians typically sit in the 'best' seats available, in terms of comfort and ability to hear and project the music. The leaders generally sit directly at the session table with their backs towards the wall and face the other session musicians and bystanders in the pub. It is often common for these musicians to sit down first, followed by their acquaintances who sit in close proximity. Less experienced, unpaid, and/or visiting musicians with a lower musical status often sit around the table facing the session leaders, and have their backs to the 'audience'. When sessions become very crowded, concentric rings may form around the table, and in this case, beginners and low status musicians sit furthest away from the session leaders whom form a core around the table. Non-musicians and complete outsiders generally remain outside of the session circle entirely. According to my observations, when low status musicians knowingly or unknowingly sit in the 'high status seats', a more experienced musician or leader may briefly and politely ask to exchange places with the occupier. Such moments are often subtle to the outside observer and may go unnoticed.

O'Shea's (2005, 2008) and Rapuano's (2005) research suggests that women are often marginalized in traditional music sessions. O'Shea provides a historical context and suggests that women continue to be marginalized in pub sessions, because the pub is historically a male sphere. She also suggests that sessions tend to be led by male musicians, and because males are employed as session leaders, O'Shea asserts that this gives them a 'legitimacy and authority that women musicians lack. Although a small minority of women have gained employment at pub sessions, in general, women are not perceived as 'leadership material' (2008:107). Rapuano describes sessions as a male-dominated activity, and states that 'men still outnumber women by almost 10 to 1' (2005:38). In contrast to O'Shea and Rapuano's research, during my fieldwork, particularly in Sin É and the Corner House in Cork City, I commonly observed women employed to lead sessions. My fieldwork observations also suggest that males are still in a majority, but that majority is much slighter than Rapuano suggests.<sup>65</sup> In Cork City, I have participated in many sessions that were 'male-dominated', but others were 'women-dominated' or well-balanced in terms of gender. This being

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<sup>65</sup> Perhaps Rapuano's research observations occurred in a locality where sessions are particularly male-dominated. It is also possible that more women are participating during the years of my observations (2009-2012) than during Rapuano's observations before 2005.

said, throughout my entire fieldwork experience, on multiple occasions I participated in sessions that I was the only female instrumentalist, but I can only recall two instances that I played in an all-female pub sessions. Back in the 1990s, scholars suggested that women participate in sessions in greater numbers than in generations past. For example, Hamilton states:

...at the present time practical involvement in instrumental music seems to be the equal prerogative of both sexes. Certainly in the observation of areas such as sessions and traditional music classes women are to be seen in equal, or in even greater numbers than men (1996:110).

McLaughlin also states that ‘there is a fairly even balance between males and females who attend sessions’ (1992:69).

Within the literature and interview data, there is little consensus if sessions are effective learning environments. While sessions are generally acknowledged as a site for learning, several interviewees warned about the challenges learners face while trying to learn during sessions. For instance, Conal Ó Gráda states that he ‘didn’t learn much in sessions. I wouldn’t have learned new tunes. You can also learn it wrong in a session’ (interview). Some interviewees believed that sessions are not conducive environments to develop creativity and self-expression. Aoife Granville suggests that young musicians who are fanatical about playing in sessions can place too much emphasis on participation and neglect listening practices.<sup>66</sup> Aoife proposes that this lack of listening can negatively affect the development of creativity and self-expression:

I just don't think people listen enough before playing. It's all about playing, playing, playing, and no one stops to listen... There's an attitude with teens - and with other musicians as well - that they just have to keep playing. But unless you stop and listen to someone else's playing, you're never going to learn. I remember sitting at sessions and just sitting back and listening to what people are doing even if you knew the tune. There's always something different someone will be doing with it (Granville, interview).

The popularity of sessions has placed a greater emphasis on participation. While participation in music-making is essential in order to develop into a traditional musician, so too is listening. Participation at the expense of listening can be

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<sup>66</sup> Connie O’Connell, Liz Doherty, and Conal Ó Gráda (interviews) similarly suggested that some overzealous session musicians can prioritize playing over listening in session contexts.

detrimental to the development of creative expression because learners are not listening, absorbing, or critically thinking about other traditional musicians' approaches, variations, or individual nuances of their styles.

Within the literature, O'Shea also suggests that solo performance skills are difficult to develop and hone solely by participating in sessions. She states:

By confining their musical learning and performance to pub sessions, musicians limit their ability to develop the solo performance skills that are most highly valued in Ireland (2005:251).

Solo performance skills, such as the ability to ornament and vary tunes, are immensely important within Irish traditional music culture. From O'Shea's viewpoint, the conformity and group setting inherent in sessions does little to nurture subtle more expressive elements of solo playing. In past research, I have suggested that during sessions, flute players are able to breathe wherever and as often as they like, because the tune is played by the other instrumentalists (Cawley 2008). This does not encourage creative phrasing or breathing, and I suggest that this skill is primarily learned during solo playing and practice.

For some novices, especially young children, pub sessions are perhaps not ideal learning environments. Sommers Smith discusses several characteristics of pub sessions which may interfere with the learning process:

... often a loud, smoky, drink-filled experience during which musicians play as fast as they can for as long as they are able, to the delight --and sometimes the indifference--of pub patrons. Sessions like this can be exciting, but when the playing becomes competitive, such gatherings subvert the social conventions of the playing and sharing of a traditional music (2001:120-1).

The physical space of pub sessions creates issues for some learners and children. There are also concerns about the competitive and intense nature of sessions. Performance pressures can negatively impact novices who cannot technically keep up with fast session tempos. Connie O'Connell suggests that sessions can put a significant amount of pressure on young traditional musicians:

I give out like hell - Kids playing at the fleadh now, they go about two hundred miles per hour, and if you watch the session, one or two kind of lead the throng. They're picking all the tunes, and they're kids, and the rest of them have red faces! They don't know the tunes, they are frustrated and all under pressure, and it shouldn't be

like that at all. Music is music. You're there to enjoy yourself, not to be frustrated and blood pressure going through the top of your head. You find that in an awful lot of sessions, maybe not in older people, but the younger they are they have this tendency of trying... they have no manners as far as music is concerned. You really have to share and listening to other people (O'Connell, interview).

Connie suggests that while sessions can be venues for sharing and listening to Irish traditional music, he also suggests that many young traditional musicians can be overwhelmed by the social and musical pressures of the session. In my interpretation, while some musicians consider these performance pressures challenging, exciting, or inspiring, others can interpret them as frustrating, intimidating, or demoralizing experiences. Martin Hayes suggests that the pressures of playing in sessions can cause some learners to develop insecurities. He states:

In some ways, I think that sessions have been quite bad for the music. You know, they make people feel very anxious about their playing: do I know enough tunes, is this person sitting next to me a better player than me, will I disgrace myself... (in Kearns and Taylor 2003:157).

Some novices join sessions before they have developed the musical techniques or adequate number of tunes necessary to participate alongside other traditional musicians. Novices who join sessions before they are ready can disturb the music-making as well as other session participants' learning experiences. This is a serious concern amongst many practitioners. During sessions, when there is a diverse mix of highly skilled and novice musicians, many challenges can arise for all participants. From another perspective, however, when novices participate alongside more experienced traditional musicians during sessions, they can learn and progress a great deal, both musically and socially. Wenger suggests there are many reasons to 'shelter newcomers from the intensity of actual practice, from the power struggles of full participation, and possibly from the abuses of established members' and 'there are all sorts of reasons to shelter old-timers from the naiveté of newcomers' (1998:275). Despite this Wenger asserts that in order for novices to become experienced practitioners, they need to interact with an older generation of practitioners. He states:

...the generational encounter involves not the mere transmission of a cultural heritage, but the mutual negotiation of identities invested in different historical moments. When old-timers and newcomers are engaged in separate practices, they lose the benefit of their interaction (1998:275).

From this point of view, novice traditional musicians become enculturated and learn how to negotiate their own developing identities by engaging with more experienced musicians. If they only participate in beginners' sessions, for instance, they will not reap the benefits of interacting with an older generation of practitioners.

### Concluding Thoughts

Are sessions more appropriate learning environments for novice, intermediate, or advanced musicians? Within the literature, some scholars address this question. Some suggest that novice musicians, in particular, benefit significantly by playing alongside more advanced session musicians. Sommers Smith suggests that sessions 'can be extraordinary informal learning experiences for the novice player, where tunes and their histories can be easily transmitted from one person to another' (2001:120). O'Shea also suggests that novice musicians have more to gain compared to more experienced traditional musicians. O'Shea states that:

...many of the highest-status musicians avoid playing in public sessions; indeed, some musicians deplore the 'musical brawl' of the larger session... It is the novice and improving players who show most enthusiasm for sessions and have more to gain from them. They can 'sit it' and play along with more proficient leaders, acquiring repertoire and style while concealing their deficiencies (2008:132).

In contrast, Mac Aoidh proposes that novices often feel insecure in sessions:

Sessions will always serve as avenues for hearing tunes, observing and talking about technique etc. It must be said however, they are too intimidating for the very beginner and for a developing player in the early stages (1999:108-9).

This suggests that musicians who feel ready and comfortable are likely to benefit musically and educationally by participating in sessions. Fairbairn (1999:36)

suggests that musicians of all skill levels inherently learn during sessions.<sup>67</sup>

Fairbairn explains this is due to group interactions and the informality of the performance event:

It is not only beginners who are learning in the sessions, the process is intrinsic to the whole activity of group playing. The fact that material is not formally prepared beforehand, and the unpredictable nature of the event itself combine to incorporate the learning function as an essential feature of performance (1993:36).

The social and aural nature of sessions encourages assimilation of new repertoire, stylistic approaches, and social behaviours. This applies to musicians of all skill levels. Novice musicians have different educational needs than advanced musicians. Their experience of a session, and what they take away from these musical events, differs significantly to what a master musician may experience. While we cannot assert that novice or advanced musicians benefit ‘more’ from sessions, it is useful to explore what each musician gets out of the learning experience. Novices benefit from listening and absorbing new repertoire, observing techniques, and playing alongside and socially interacting with more experienced musicians. More advanced musicians, on the other hand, can listen to the other session musicians’ interpretation of tunes and experiment with varying tunes in new and interesting ways. More advanced musicians also gain confidence and experience by participating as leaders within the musical community.

Interviewees have differing viewpoints about what is actually learned in sessions. Some felt that they acquired many new tunes by participating in sessions, while others considered it challenging to learn repertoire during a session. Some interviewees felt subtle elements of style were difficult to learn, while others emphasized that listening in sessions broadened their stylistic influences. While sessions provide opportunities to listen and observe live music-making, several interviewees have concerns about the effectiveness of the session as an educational environment. Consequently, the effect sessions can have on musical enculturation is complex. The interview data suggests that participating in sessions is an effective and motivational learning experience for many traditional musicians, but not for all musicians, or all of the time. I suggest that

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<sup>67</sup> Hamilton also suggests that musicians of varying skill levels learn during traditional music sessions (1978:48).

educational effectiveness of sessions depends on a number of factors including the quality of the relationships within the session, and the learners' personality and learning preferences.

When musicians frequently observe, interact, and engage with their peers and more experienced musicians, and when these interactions are primarily positive, sessions can significantly affect musical enculturation. Positive experiences can encourage learners to continue participating and make them feel a part of the social group. However, when a musician feels like, or actually is, ostracized by others in the session, they can become demoralized and disconnected from the group. This may jeopardize future participation, as the learner may begin to consider participating in sessions as emotionally risky. I propose that the ability to learn in a session highly depends on the quality of the relationships and interactions between participants. Fairbairn proposes a similar assertion, and she emphasizes that the session environment and relationships can significantly affect the learning process:

The feasibility of the learning process in the session situation depends on environmental and contextual factors, the background of the players and their inter-relationship governs its focus (1993:235).

Within sessions, the efficacy of the learning process is also highly dependent on the personality of the learner, including their dispositions, learning styles, and preferences. One learner may feel intimidated by a session, while another learner, perhaps with a more outgoing personality, may find the same event inspiring. To some learners, traditional music sessions can be effective and motivational learning experiences, while others can consider them detrimental to the learning process. This indicates that learners can have different reactions to the same situation during a session. More importantly, a learner's reaction and interpretation of events can significantly affect their learning experience. Fuhrer (1993) suggests that when confronting a new situation, newcomers react in various ways; He argues that when novices realize that their performance is not matching with expectations, they often feel embarrassed or fearful (1993). They cope with this fear either by searching out more information to correct their misstep, or by attempting to cover up their incompetence by withdrawing either physically or mentally. In the first response, the learner is motivated by a 'task-related goal', and the second response is more socially motivated (1993:205).

From this perspective, learners in sessions can analyse where their performance is not matching the more experienced players, or they may try and conceal their deficiencies in order to fit in. Each reaction determines how a musician experiences ‘learning’ within the context of a traditional music session.

## Other Music-Making Contexts

I propose that other live music events, including concerts and gigs, also play a role in the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians. In contrast to the participatory nature of sessions, these events are more presentational. Many traditional musicians attend concerts and gigs, and during these experiences, they listen, observe, and discuss traditional Irish music with other musicians and enthusiasts. In addition to being frequent audience members, many of my interviewees perform in concerts and gigs in solo and group playing capacities, and this type of engagement with Irish traditional music shapes their musical and life experiences. This section is brief because within the traditional music literature, the role of concerts in the transmission process is rarely discussed. Additionally, compared to concerts and gigs, my interviewees described their experiences in sessions in greater detail. Although it may seem like live music events have a limited role in the enculturation process, these are often influential and motivational socio-musical events. Rice argues that musical enculturation often occurs during ‘performance events’, which he describes as ‘occasions for learning a variety of music-related behaviors as well as more general lessons about cultural knowledge and social behavior’ (2003:74). Musical performances are important events within the Irish traditional music community, and are often highly anticipated by musicians and enthusiasts.

Contemporary traditional musicians observe traditional music-making in numerous contexts, including sessions, classes, and by watching videos on television, DVD, or streaming on the internet. Prior to the 1950s, however, Irish traditional music was primarily observed and listened to during concerts, fairs, dances, and other informal music-making events. Post-1950, observations during concerts and gigs are still important to enculturation. At concerts and gigs, learners are exposed to exceptional traditional musicians’ performances, and this provides a musical model for imitation and emulation at a later time. Concert



attendees can hear and see the music-making in action. As a young whistle player, Mary Bergin was significantly influenced by seeing Willie Clancy in concert. Mary describes the moment:

I remember hearing Willie Clancy at an *Oireachtas* concert in Dublin, which was a major experience for me because we never went to Dublin. We were out kind of in the country at that stage; we'd just go into the city once a year. My father told me that I use to say to him, 'Does that sound like Willie Clancy?' So, I obviously was influenced even though I only heard him once (Bergin, interview).

This concert was particularly influential because Mary did not have a teacher, and she states that 'there weren't many whistle players. In the early years I wouldn't have heard many. I just heard him [Willie Clancy] once' (Bergin, interview).

Mary also comments that she may have unconsciously been influenced by Willie Clancy's whistle technique; both Mary and Willie Clancy play tin whistle with their right hands on top (left hand on top is the norm). By seeing Willie Clancy in concert, Mary was motivated to play her whistle, and according to her father, she was inspired and enthusiastic to try and emulate his playing, even from a young age.

I suggest that informal social interactions during concerts and gigs play a significant role in enculturation. Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasize that engaging socially with other practitioners is crucial in order to feel a part of a community of practice. Traditional musicians can make important social connections with other practitioners during concerts and gigs. Enthusiasts and traditional musicians of all skill levels commonly attend concerts and gigs, and converse with one another throughout the evening. Audience members can discuss an array of different issues, including the performance itself, new albums, upcoming traditional music events, or matters of everyday life.

Irish traditional music concerts and gigs take several forms, and therefore, musical and social experiences at these events are diverse. Gigs and concerts can be headlined by a variety of performing acts, including large ensembles (e.g. The Chieftains, Dervish, etc.), smaller groups (e.g. Triúr, Raw Bar Collective, Teetotalers), or soloists.<sup>68</sup> Presentational performances of Irish traditional music

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<sup>68</sup> Well-known traditional soloists often perform with guitar players or other accompanists. For example, Martin Hayes and Dennis Cahill frequently play concerts together. Purely solo concerts are relatively uncommon.

can be informal, non-formal, or formal in nature. Within everyday discourse within the traditional music community, ‘gigs’ are generally more informal than ‘concerts’, although elements of informality occur in both events. Irish traditional music concerts may seem for formal, because they often take place in large, commercial venues, such as theatres or opera houses. These are usually ticketed events, which start and stop within a particular predetermined timeframe.

There are notable similarities between concerts of Irish traditional music and western classical music. Both are primarily presentational performances during which spectators show their appreciation by clapping after the music-making, and they are distanced from the performers on stage. Similar to a classical music event, the performing traditional musicians get ready backstage, while the audience waits in their seats. However, even the more formal traditional music concerts are typically more informal than a night at the opera or symphony. At traditional music concerts, the dress code of both the audience and performers is comparatively more informal, and audience members often express their excitement before, during, and after the music-making in the form of shouts or ‘hups’.

‘Gigs’ often occur in smaller venues, such as pubs, bars, or community halls. Gigs are also presentational performances, generally with a distinction between performers and audience members. Traditional music gigs exhibit many informal characteristics. The smaller space may create a feeling of intimacy, and some performers joke or address individuals in the audience in between the music-making. Additionally, many small venues do not have a separate ‘backstage’ area, and it is not uncommon to see performers mingling with audience members before or after the gig.

During concerts and gigs, learners have the ability to meet, greet, or chat with performers of Irish traditional music, and I propose that these interactions can be significantly motivational and play a role in the enculturation process. Because of the informality of many traditional music gigs and concerts, learners may have the opportunity to meet their musical idols, which can be an inspirational and meaningful experience. This can be particularly true for learners who have listened and been significantly influenced by the musicians’ commercial recordings for a number of years.

Over the short term, attending a gig may inspire or motivate a learner to listen or practice more frequently. Additionally, traditional musicians often sell

their commercial CDs at gigs, and when learners purchase these albums can continue to listen and learn at home. In this way, the performers' influence can last long after a concert concludes. James Duggan purchased CDs after hearing traditional musicians in concert, and he discusses how he eagerly awaited traditional music concerts at a theatre in his hometown of Listowel:

There was a theatre in Listowel and... about once a month they would have a trad gig so, I saw people like Frankie Gavin, John Carty, Martin Hayes, so I would have been influenced by each of them, kind of as they came. So after I heard John Carty, I'd get a John Carty CD... so I kind of went through different phases (Duggan, interview).

I suggest that the experience of buying a CD directly from a musician is particularly meaningful. Listening to the CD later can bring up memories of the night of the concert and meeting the musician. These social connections and memories enrich and contextualize the listening and learning experience.

Lastly, dancing practices can also play a role in musical enculturation. Several of my interviewees participated in both presentational (competitive step dancing) and participatory dance events (set dancing) throughout their musical enculturation. Additionally, several interviewees also participated in céilí bands over the years, and felt that playing for dancers affected the development of their rhythm and style.<sup>69</sup> Other interviewees believed that participation in dancing affected their musicality (Liz Doherty and John Reid, interviews). While there is a strong link between Irish traditional music and dance, exploring the influence of traditional dance on musical enculturation in detail is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, this is a rich area of exploration in the future.

## Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I have proposed that Irish traditional musicians experienced musical enculturation by interacting socially and musically with peers and mentors in various contexts. Much of the discussion revealed that informal and unconscious learning plays a significant role in the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians. I argued that family members affect learning and enculturation processes in multifaceted ways. Only five of my twenty

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<sup>69</sup> (Martin Hayes, Geraldine O'Callaghan, Lisa O'Sullivan, and Michael O'Sullivan, interviews).

interviewees learned repertoire and instrumental techniques from their parents. I have suggested that family members who are non-musicians can play a prominent and influential role during the learning process. I also argued that family members of all musical skill levels can provide their children with an early exposure to Irish traditional music through engaging with listening practices alongside their children.

My research suggests that the overall educational efficacy of participating in sessions depends on a number of factors, including the quality of relationships within the session, and the individual's personality and learning preferences. Some interviewees suggest that there are numerous challenges associated with trying to 'learn' in sessions. Some also believe that traditional music sessions are social and enjoyable environments in which to listen, exchange, learn, and practice Irish traditional music. My research suggests that participating in sessions is not an inherently effective or ineffective learning experience. Each learner will have their own perception about the educational usefulness of traditional music sessions.

Each learning experience described in this chapter provides specific educational benefits, as well as challenges or limitations. For instance, when musicians learn through peer interactions, they may begin to feel that traditional music is relevant to their lives. However, compared to musical mentors, peers often have less musical expertise, experience, and advice about the learning process. As another example, by attending live concerts and gigs, learners can experience influential social interactions and become more connected to the musical community of practice. However, concerts are expensive, occasional, do not involve active participation. One could suggest that participating in sessions is a more interactive experience. Because each learning experience provides a specific set of educational benefits and limitations, musicians who learn and participate in multiple contexts often have especially rich learning experiences; a combination of learning experiences can complement one another. When learners engage with other practitioners in multiple learning and musical activities, they can develop a holistic and nuanced understanding of Irish traditional music and its culture.

## Chapter 3

### Learning Experiences in Organized Settings

Between the 1930s and 1950s, Irish traditional music was at a low point in popularity, practice, and transmission.<sup>1</sup> Many organizations and events were established in response with the aim to promote and transmit Irish traditional music. Such institutions provided new learning contexts, and traditional musicians gained new platforms on which to perform and interact with other practitioners. In discussing situated learning, McDermott describes the importance of organizations and community events:

...learning is not in heads, but in the relations between people. Learning is in the conditions that brings people together and organize a point of contact that allows for particular pieces of information to take on relevance; without the points of contact, without the system of relevancies, there is no learning (1993:292).

In this chapter, I describe how organizations, summer schools, and festivals provide ‘points of contact’ for learning and practicing Irish traditional music. To many interviewees, these socio-musical experiences played a significant role during the enculturation process. I explore learning experiences which occur in organized settings, including experiences in schools, extra-curricular tuition hosted by clubs and organizations, summer schools, workshops, and festivals. I also discuss the educational implications of participating in CCÉ competitions.

Compared to the discussion in Chapter 2, learning experiences described in this chapter are typically more conscious, purposeful, and organized. As McCarthy suggests, the emergence of traditional music organizations and summer schools caused transmission practices to become more formalized:

In this century, the process of learning traditional music, while it has maintained many qualities associated with informal learning, has become 'schooled' or institutionalised in some instances and has assumed many of the instructional characteristics of formal

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<sup>1</sup> For literature on the decline and revival of Irish traditional music see (Brennan 2004; Fairbairn 1993; Hamilton 1996, 1999b; Hast and Scott 2004; Kaul 2009; Kearns and Taylor 2003; McNamee 1992; Moloney 1999; O’Flynn 2009; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008; O’Shea 2005; Vallely 1999, 2004b, 2008; Williams 2010). This is also discussed in more detail throughout this chapter.

While many of the learning experiences discussed in this chapter exhibit characteristics of formal learning, informal and non-formal learning processes also feature. For instance, while Comhaltas classes are organized and lead by a teacher, many of these classes display characteristics of informal music learning, such as aural imitation, and a lack of formal assessment. While more structured and organized, the various learning experiences discussed in this chapter are positioned at different points on the informal/formal learning spectrum.

Many Irish traditional music festivals, summer schools, and organizations emerged during or after the revival of Irish traditional music, during the 1950s, 60s, and later. Consequently, older generations of musicians are generally less influenced by structured learning experiences than musicians born after 1950. Some of my interviewees, for instance, have never attended lessons or workshops, because these opportunities were not available when they were first learning (Mary Bergin, Hammy Hamilton, Tomás Ó Canainn, Connie O’Connell, interviews). Connie O’Connell states, ‘There were no workshops at that time when I was learning fiddle. They didn’t do any workshops at the fleadh or festivals. There was no such a thing’ (interview). While a number of interviewees did not experience structured learning as children, all twenty interviewees experienced informal music-making and competitions at various traditional music festivals.

Within the Irish traditional music literature, descriptions of new learning contexts occasionally include negative connotations.<sup>3</sup> For instance, Hast and Scott compare learning at organized, institutional events to learning at sessions in Gleeson’s Pub in County Clare:

While festivals, schools, clubs, competitions, and concert halls provide important venues for the sharing of Irish traditional music today, these are, by definition, *contrived* occasions, created by people who set out to promote the tradition. Gleesons provides a different kind of experience: the life of the music in a community where the music has been getting along “on its own,” patronized by local people and performed by local musicians, for generations (2004:1).

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<sup>2</sup> Veblen (1991:185) and O’Shea (2005:120) also suggest that transmission practices have shifted to a more formal mode since the emergence of Irish traditional music organizations.

<sup>3</sup> Institutionalized learning experiences are also quite ‘controversial among musicians’ (O’Shea 2005:120).

They contrast ‘contrived’ activities with community-based sessions which occur naturally ‘on its own’. Sessions are viewed as natural, cultural events, while festivals, clubs and organizations are conceived as somewhat artificial. However, I suggest that many events organized by organization, club, and festival committees are just as ‘community-based’ as pub sessions. Pub sessions are also ‘contrived’ musical events. Many of the organized events and activities described in this chapter, such as Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, are major events within the Irish traditional music community.

I propose that organized classes, summer schools, and festivals play an important role in the enculturation of contemporary Irish traditional musicians. Although many of these learning experiences are now commonplace amongst traditional musicians, they have not replaced learning from peers, mentors, family, and within session contexts. Learning in institutions and organized events can be considered additional opportunities for engagement with Irish traditional music-making. Over the past sixty years, organizations, competitions, festivals, summer schools, and workshops have accelerated and enriched the learning process for many traditional musicians.

In any community of practice, special events in the calendar (such as festivals, conferences, and retreats) are integral to the vitality and growth of the community (Chaiklin and Lave 1993, Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002, Wenger 1998). Wenger argues that in order to effectively encourage participation and learning processes, institutions must feel relevant to the community of practitioners:

Institutionalization in itself cannot make anything happen. Communities of practice are the locus of “real work.”...Designing processes and policies is important, but in the end it is practice that produces results, not the processes and policies. The challenge is to support rather than displace the knowledgeability of practice (1998:243).

From this point of view, institutions do not perpetuate or transmit Irish traditional music. Rather, it is the musicians and enthusiasts within the organization (and these practitioners’ music-making and discourse) who contribute to the strength of the musical community. Institutions are only influential and educationally effective when practitioners within the community find musical, cultural, or social meaning within the organization’s actions. When organizations’ activities

directly relate to the aims of the community, practitioners are more likely to identify or participate within the institution. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder argue that:

Participation can certainly be encouraged, of course, but the kind of personal investment that makes for a vibrant community is not something that can be invented or forced (2002:36).

Institutions promote, rather than create, communities of practice. Within Irish traditional music, institutions, such as Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and the Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, have achieved relevance through their cultural activities and are considered influential educational and cultural organizations. As discussed throughout this chapter, this feeling of relevancy is directly connected to the educational effectiveness of each learning experience.

## Learning Experiences in Schools

My field research and the literature both suggest that Irish traditional music is transmitted primarily outside of school settings. However, some interviewees had meaningful musical experiences in school. This brief section analyses the interviewees' experiences (or lack thereof) of learning traditional music in school. I focus primarily on learning processes, not the schools system itself or issues of teaching, curriculum, and bureaucracy. My reason for not focusing on schooling is similar to Lave and Wenger's approach to researching learning processes. They aimed to 'develop a view of learning that would stand on its own' and reserved analysis of schooling for future research (Lave and Wenger 1991:40). Learning activities in schools also differ from learning processes which are 'embedded in the routines of activities in other social settings' (Säljö and Wyndhamn 1993:328). Through teaching and implementation of curricula and policies, schools provide more formal and organized learning experiences, and foster specific types of social relationships between students and teachers. Schools are 'very specific contexts' (Lave and Wenger 1991:40), in which to investigate learning, developmental, and enculturation processes. For this reason, the learning of Irish traditional music in school is a complex phenomenon and deserves its own full and separate analysis.

As Swanwick points out, schools and colleges 'only constitute a fraction



of most people's life experience' (1988:136), and within Irish traditional music, this is particularly true. Many traditional music scholars acknowledge that traditional musicians most commonly develop their skills outside formal schooling.<sup>4</sup> Mac Aoidh, for example, states:

Despite being a recognized portion of the curriculum, traditional music in primary schools must be said to be a hit and miss affair... those in secondary school music classes and seeking to develop their interest in traditional music generally have obtained their training outside the formal educational structure (1999:107-8).

A more recent Comhaltas report also suggests:

Although recognised within the school curriculum, the teaching of the traditions and music in particular, is far from satisfactory. The location of schools and the personal interest of the teachers will determine to a very large extent whether or not they will feature on the timetable (Comhaltas 2004:23).

Studies focusing on schooling and teaching also suggest that Irish traditional music is largely transmitted outside schools (McCarthy 1999a, 1999b; Veblen 1991). McCarthy states:

In my historical study of Irish music education in a cultural context,<sup>5</sup> I found that the strength of music education in Ireland has traditionally been located outside the formal education system (1999b:41).

While traditional music does play an important role in the curricula of some schools, this is not consistent across schools throughout Ireland.

There are several historical reasons for this lack of traditional music in schools. During much of Ireland's colonial history, Irish culture, including dance, language, poetry, music, and song, was repressed during English rule.<sup>6</sup> Irish cultural practices were not tolerated, let alone taught in schools. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to detail the history of music education within the Irish school system (see McCarthy 1990, 1999), a brief historical context is useful here. Kearns and Taylor state:

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<sup>4</sup> See (Burgess 1999; Comhaltas 2004:23; Hamilton 1996; Kearns and Taylor 2003; Mac Aoidh 1999; McCarthy 1999a, 1999b; O'Flynn 2009; Vallely 2004b; Veblen 1991).

<sup>5</sup> McCarthy is referring to her PhD thesis (McCarthy 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Ó hAllmhuráin (2008:29-35) and Hast and Scott (2004:23) provide a good overview of this era of Irish traditional music history.

It is, perhaps, not surprising that traditional music and dance should have found no place in formal education in Ireland in colonial times...However, it is surprising that following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 no serious attempt should have been made to include traditional music, song or dance in the curricula of schools until comparatively recently (2003:85).

With the exception of Irish language and *sean-nós* songs from the tradition, after 1922, the new Irish government had little effect on the transmission of Irish traditional music, as the state's involvement with Irish traditional music 'was almost nonexistent' (Hamilton 1996:298). Although traditional music is gaining appreciation and presence within many Irish schools, it is not yet common or experienced by all (or most) Irish schoolchildren. Vallely states:

...the music in schools is still generally poor (but in many cases excellent, and is sometimes quite inspirational). The state examinations provide for it in the curriculum, but amazingly are not backed up by teaching it (2004b:7).

The Comhaltas report (2004), Mac Aoidh (1999), Vallely (2004b) suggest that depending on the interest of teachers and principals, traditional music education may be exceptional in some schools, but overall, inconsistencies remain.

As outlined later in this chapter, each year thousands of pupils learn to play traditional instruments during extra-curricular classes and summer schools. Due to the influence and efficacy of such institutions, teaching Irish traditional music in school may not seem entirely necessary, because the music is being successfully transmitted without formal schooling. Indeed, some caution that the musical culture may become inflexible and formal if it were transmitted primarily through the school system. Mac Aoidh, for example, characterizes the formal education system as too rigid, and emphasizes the potential of informal methods of transmission:

I do not see any change towards greater support for traditional music in the formal system of education. It is a large structure characterised by its being rigid, resistant to change and a writer of its own agenda of which it is convinced. The informal educational system shows much greater signs of promise (1999:110).

Vallely states there is a common concern amongst practitioners that 'schoolroom teaching itself can yield only systemization and Stepford Wives zombies among

commentators and players' (2004b:31).<sup>7</sup> My research suggests that even when traditional musicians learn music in school, it is only one of many important learning experiences they have during their musical enculturation. In other words, formal schooling is an additive, rather than the primary learning experience within Irish traditional music culture.

There are others who view the lack of traditional music in schools as a missed opportunity to introduce Irish traditional music to a wider population of school children in Ireland. Matt Cranitch suggest that the school system is often criticized because 'children leave school with little or no knowledge at all of what one might call the native music idiom' (Cranitch, interview). Matt believes this reveals a 'big deficit', and explains that when children do learn Irish traditional music in schools, this is typically 'due to the enthusiasm of one or two of the teachers there, and not the education system per se' (Cranitch, interview). Although participation, appreciation, and interest in Irish traditional music is currently at a high point, Matt suggests that thousands of children in Ireland lack a basic education in Irish traditional music, due to a lack of exposure in the school and home environments. While many children do participate in traditional music-making, Matt attributes this to musicians, teachers, and parents, and not the school system. Traditional musicians, enthusiasts, and scholars have differing opinions about the need to implement traditional music education in formal schooling, an issue which may best be explored in another study.

My interviewees' narratives differ significantly in terms of their musical experiences in school, which further highlights the inconsistency of traditional music instruction through Irish schools. Some experienced little or no musical exposure, while others had meaningful, consistent, and multiple experiences learning traditional music during their schooling. One of my interviewees, Connie O'Connell (b. 1943), had no formal training in Irish traditional music. He states:

There was no music in school - none whatsoever. In the national school that I went to in Kilnamatra, it was rural. There would be about one hundred pupils, and I think I was the only one who played any music at all (O'Connell, interview).

Other interviewees, including Ciara Ní Fhearghail (b. 1992), Geraldine

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<sup>7</sup> However, Vallely is not anxious about this actually happening, as he also refers to formal education 'only an additional structure for the music anyway' (2004b:36).

O'Callaghan (b. 1982), Lisa O'Sullivan (b. 1975), and Michael O'Sullivan (b. 1978), experienced traditional music on multiple occasions during the average school week. These interviewees learned how to play tin whistle and traditional music played a strong role in their schools' culture.

The interviewees' narratives also differ in terms of the quality of their musical experiences. While some interviewees discussed positive musical experiences, others had negative associations and memories of music in school. For instance, in Mary Bergin's experience, although her school provided a basic introduction to the tin whistle, this did not benefit her in any significant way. Mary (b. 1948) was quite bored during these classes, since she had already learned many whistle tunes on her own at home. Mary states:

There was music one year in the primary school, but I was well ahead of them... I was playing from that early age... I remember being able to play the tunes because she had me as an example in front of the class. Traditional music wasn't taught in schools really, or even classical music. There wasn't much emphasis on music (Bergin, interview).

School experiences did little to enhance Mary's musicality.<sup>8</sup> Mary also reveals that she often played her whistle on the school bus, but a couple of students teased her for playing 'old-fashioned' music (Bergin, interview). During Mary's childhood in the 1950s, the traditional music revival was in its infancy, and music was not nurtured within most national schools. Mary's enculturation occurred mostly at home and during informal music-making in house, pub, and pipers' club sessions around Dublin.

Growing up in the 1990s, James Duggan also received a basic introduction to tin whistle, but did not learn much traditional music repertoire, style, or aspects of the culture. James describes his experience in school:

In around fifth class, about ten I suppose, I did whistle for about a year... It was just stuff like Frère Jacques and Happy Birthday. The teacher wasn't a music teacher as such, but she was able to write the staff and play a bit on the whistle. I don't think she could play jigs or reels or anything like that on the whistle. She never did them anyway (Duggan, interview).

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<sup>8</sup> It must be noted that Mary Bergin is perhaps one of the most accomplished tin whistle players of her generation. For this reason, Mary's experiences and perception of the music in her school most likely differs significantly than that of her classmates.

Although he played tin whistle in school, James's enculturation largely occurred through enrolling in extra-curricular classes with Nicky and Ann McAuliffe, listening to commercial recordings, playing in sessions, and traveling to traditional music festivals. While James had musical experiences in school, it did little to educate or enculturate him into Irish traditional music culture.

Several other interviewees also received a rudimentary introduction to music during their schooling, and this often fueled their musical interest. Conal Ó Gráda, for instance, was introduced to the whistle in a school band. After showing a musical aptitude in the band, Conal's father enrolled him into classes at the Cork Pipers' Club with Mícheál Ó Ríabhaigh (Ó Gráda, interview). While Conal's enculturation occurred primarily outside of school, he had enjoyable musical experiences in school and decided to pursue music further by enrolling in extra-curricular activities.

While several interviewees were introduced to tin whistle in school, it was less common for them to learn other traditional instruments. Only four interviewees were introduced and learned their primary traditional instruments in a school setting: Geraldine O'Callaghan (fiddle), Michael O'Sullivan (banjo), Lisa O'Sullivan (fiddle), and Ciara Ní Fhearghail (accordion). In the 1980s and early 1990s, Geraldine, Michael, and Lisa all attended the same school, Freemount National School (N.S.), in their small village of Freemount in North Cork near the Limerick border. They were taught by Con Herbert, the local principal and concertina player from County Limerick. All three spoke about Con with fond memories and admiration.

Lisa O'Sullivan describes Con Herbert as very involved and connected to the Irish traditional music community. Lisa also describes the music-making in school as constant and enjoyable:

I was very lucky to have my principal in my primary school be my music teacher. He was very much involved, very dedicated and up there in the trad music scene. So, he would be well-respected and well-regarded as a musician and he taught us from maybe eight onwards... There was constantly music everywhere in school. We played at lunchtimes. Eventually when we reached the classes that he taught, we were playing a lot. And he encouraged everyone in each class to become involved in musical groups, to enter competitions and so on. So, it was always a big fun thing for us to hang out and play as friends at school. So he would have been very very influential,

and his opinion mattered greatly (O'Sullivan, interview).

Geraldine O'Callaghan also acknowledges Con as a significant influence to her musical development. She discusses the musical culture that Con fostered in the national school:

My earliest and my longest influence in traditional music would be my teacher, Con Herbert... When I started national school, all of the kids in the other classes were already playing music... It's going to sound idyllic but this is how it actually was; music happened at any part of the school day. It was as much a part of the school day as having your lunch... It could happen at any time. You'd be in class and you'd be told to take out the instruments. Or he would just put on CDs, or tapes or he'd pick up the box himself and play away. And he'd say, 'I'd give a pound to anyone who could tell me the name of that tune.' So everyone would be competing to try and name the song or tune... It was every day, and it would have been all day everyday if Con had his way (O'Callaghan, interview).

All three acknowledge that their musical education and experience in primary school was quite exceptional, and recognize the majority of school children are not afforded the same opportunities. Michael O'Sullivan states, 'It took me a long time to learn how luckily we were that we had it [traditional music] in school because not a lot of people get a chance to learn it' (O'Sullivan, interview).

Freemount N.S. has a rich musical tradition, but this is primarily due to the influence of one enthusiastic teacher, not because of national policies, initiatives, or a well-developed and implemented curriculum. As Geraldine tells, music was not a mandatory subject or part of the curriculum:

Every child had the opportunity to learn, some loved it, some didn't. Just from my memory, the kids that didn't participate during the school day would have been maybe doing homework or something. They certainly weren't forced into doing it... It wasn't graded and it wasn't mandatory. It was very natural and inclusive and just really warm kind of environment (O'Callaghan, interview).

Con Herbert and his students had an exceptionally close student-teacher relationship. As discussed later, Con established a local céilí band and Comhaltas branch, which operated out of the school in the evening. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 2, Con took students to sessions in the Sliabh Luachra area. These experiences grounded the participating pupils' into the local musical

culture of the North Cork area. Con was a leader in the local music community, so his influence was not confined to the school setting. Con's students benefited from interacting with him as an authentic and experienced practitioner of Irish traditional music.

Wenger explains why teachers like Con can affect learners so significantly during their introduction (or enculturation) into a new community:

...teachers, parents, and other educators constitute learning resources, not only through their pedagogical or institutional roles, but also (and perhaps primarily) through their own membership in relevant communities of practice. In other words, it is not so much by the specific content of their pedagogy as by their status as members... teachers need to "represent" their communities of practice in educational settings. This type of lived authenticity brings into the subject matter the concerns, sense of purpose, identification, and emotion of participation (Wenger 1998:276).

Wenger argues that when teachers are active members of a community of practice, learners can absorb information in the context of the practice, and are more likely to identify with the information. In this way, as a teacher and practitioner, Con provided his students a meaningful learning experience which was situated within the context of the musical community of practice. Con did not just transmit repertoire and instrumental skills. His pupils gained a sense of connection to Irish traditional music because of Con's identity within the musical community.

Many of my interviewees value informal and social experiences they had in school, and suggest these experiences played a role in their musical development and enculturation.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, interviewees did not discuss formal learning experiences, such as influential classes, lessons, projects, or school concerts. More often, interviewees emphasized that school was important because they were surrounded by like-minded people who were interested in Irish traditional music. For instance, Cormac De Frein studied music for his Leaving Certificate, but he states this formal study did little to influence the way he plays the traditional flute (De Frein, interview). Cormac's experience preparing for the Leaving Certificate focused around classical music. For this reason, his formal music education in school did little to prepare him to play or understand Irish

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<sup>9</sup> Lisa O'Sullivan and Geraldine O'Callaghan's descriptions of the informal music-making in their school are good examples of this.

traditional music or its culture. Cormac suggests that other traditional musicians in his peer group were much more influential than his teachers in terms of his musical development and enculturation:

When I went to secondary school there was a load of music. It was an incredible school for musicians. I wasn't playing trad at the time, but there were people in the class that were inspiring musicians. And there was one flute player, Eamon DeBarra, and I heard him playing the flute and I said, 'Man, I have to learn the flute!' That's how I kind of got into trad (De Frein, interview).

Many of Cormac's peers at school were traditional musicians, and exposure to their music-making in and outside of school inspired Cormac to learn the traditional flute.

Throughout the past few decades, several colleges and universities have implemented undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Irish traditional music.<sup>10</sup> During traditional musicians' time at university, music-making with peers can be a significant part of social life. The interview data suggests that musicians that frequently participate in music-making at university, but often outside of the classroom. When musicians frequently participate in music-making while third-level students, they can experience a rich, and socially situated learning processes. In this way, being involved with music-making outside of the university classroom can foster musical enculturation.

Several interviewees described influential musical experiences at university, and many were involved with music-making in their universities in different capacities. Eight of the twenty interviewees studied music at third level.<sup>11</sup> Several others were not enrolled as music students, but were influenced by informal music-making during their years as university students. For instance, James Duggan attended University College Cork (UCC) as an English student, and he feels that his time at UCC influenced his fiddle playing and style. He attributes this to being exposed to other musicians and different styles of playing (Duggan, interview). James was influenced by informal interactions with other students at lunchtime concerts, sessions, and activities hosted by UCC's

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<sup>10</sup> For information about Irish traditional music and third level education see (Cranitch 2001:5; O'Connor 2001:97; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008:182; O'Shea 2005:24; Vallely 2004b:7). The International Council for Traditional Music Ireland also list current degree programmes in Ireland, see ([www.ictm.ie/?page\\_id=14](http://www.ictm.ie/?page_id=14) [accessed 14 January 2013]).

<sup>11</sup> (Aoife Granville, Matt Cranitch, Tomás Ó Canainn, Niall Vallely, Liz Doherty, Hammy Hamilton, Helen Gubbins, and Geraldine O'Callaghan interviews).



traditional music society. Matt Cranitch discusses his experience playing and socializing with members of *An Chuallacht*, UCC's Irish language society:

I went to the University in Cork and studied electronic engineering, but in the back of my head I always knew that I would study music as well. So some years later I did a second stint, and... did a music degree... Even when I was studying electronic engineering, I tended to meet up with people who were musicians. I remember joining *An Chuallacht*, which was the Irish language society. They had social events like sessions and céilís and so on. So I guess music was an important part of my life at the time (Cranitch, interview).

In addition to informal learning processes, formal study at university can influence Irish traditional musicians' musical development and viewpoints. Tomás Ó Canainn discusses how third level education influenced his conceptualization of Irish traditional music:

I did the B-mus at UCC... So that pushed you in a certain direction... I am interested in the theories and writing about it [traditional music]. You know, when you write a bit about music, you tend to get a bit formally looking at it, and that way maybe that's not the average musician's way of doing it. I think it's not, but it's interesting that a number of people do it (Ó Canainn, interview).

Tomás recognizes that the formal study of Irish traditional music is not the norm amongst traditional musicians. Because of his experience at UCC, Tomás has a positive attitude towards the academic study of traditional music, and asserts that studying has expanded his understanding of the music and its culture. Additionally, Matt Cranitch describes how he developed an understanding of Sliabh Luachra fiddle playing:

At UCC, I embarked on a Master's, and my subject was on Mick Duggan a pupil of Pádriag O'Keefe's... I learned a huge amount from him and Johnny O'Leary. On one of my early field recordings with Duggan, I recorded various settings of tunes and I transcribed some of those... Duggan used to do a fair bit of offbeat droning and double stopping with the bow, and I transcribed all of that stuff meticulously... And when all that was done - and it took ages to do this thing - I looked at it, I said 'Right, I know how Sliabh Luachra music works. I now know what it is.' And from that day on, I knew that to get inside the stylistic nuances of fiddle playing, one had to look beyond the notes; You have to look at the bowing (Cranitch, interview).

Through transcription and analysis during a postgraduate course, Matt developed a deeper understanding of the stylistic nuances of Sliabh Luachra fiddle playing. Matt realized that particular bowing techniques largely determined one's fiddle style. While this is quite a formal approach, this experience shaped Matt's life experience and musical enculturation. Matt developed into an exemplary Sliabh Luachra style fiddle player through years of listening, imitation, experimentation, playing, research, and study. While formal study does not play a role in most fiddle players' enculturation, in Matt Cranitch's case, this experience must be acknowledged. Other interviewees, including Aoife Granville and Hammy Hamilton, have studied and conducted M.A. and PhD research on Irish traditional music (Granville 2012; Hamilton 1978, 1996).

## Extra-Curricular Tuition

The majority of my interviewees learned to play their instruments outside of school hours by enrolling in extra-curricular tuition at Comhaltas branches or pipers' clubs.<sup>12</sup> Extra-curricular tuition is a significant learning context within the Irish traditional music community. To musicians who enroll in classes or lessons, traditional music teachers are often highly influential mentors who introduce learners to Irish traditional music and its culture. In this section, I explore how extra-curricular tuition provided by organizations, clubs, and independent teachers plays a significant role in learning and enculturation processes. Several interviewees described their music teachers as the most significant influences in terms of their musical development.<sup>13</sup> For instance, James Duggan describes his teachers, Nicky and Ann McAuliffe, as his 'most direct influences' and states, 'Most of my formal learning would have been with them. Most of my technique and approach would have been through them' (Duggan, interview).

On a basic level, tuition provides learners with direct interaction with more experienced practitioners of Irish traditional music. Pupils learn repertoire, technique, and new social behaviours through direct teaching and demonstration. Irish traditional music tuition typically takes place outside of school hours in

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<sup>12</sup> (Cormac De Frein, Liz Doherty, James Duggan, Helen Gubbins, Ciara Ní Fhearghail, Geraldine O'Callaghan, Conal Ó Gráda, Lisa O'Sullivan, Michael O'Sullivan, Seamus Sands, and Niall Vallely interviews).

<sup>13</sup> (Cormac De Frein, Liz Doherty, James Duggan, Helen Gubbins, Ciara Ni Fhearghail, Geraldine O'Callaghan, Conal Ó Gráda, and Niall Vallely interviews).

community centres, schools, halls, and private homes, and involves a spectrum of informal, non-formal, and sometimes formal learning experiences. The teacher's approach and the types of relationships within classes considerably affect the learners' experience. Because tuition takes many forms, there are numerous implications to consider, and differing effects to the enculturation process.

The teaching of Irish traditional music has a long and rich history. For generations instrumental teaching has occurred informally within the family home, and between pupils and masters of dancing, piping, and fiddle playing. McCarthy describes the common 19<sup>th</sup> century practice of receiving tuition from piping and fiddle masters:

Master teachers were identified in the immediate community or in a neighbouring community and pupils were sent to them for lessons. In other cases, these masters were itinerant and travelled around to the pupils' houses. When the master and pupil met for a lesson, the master would often inscribe a tune in the pupil's book to help him recall it after the lesson in the master's absence (1999:101).

This mode of tuition has continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Pádraig O'Keeffe, for instance, traveled around and taught fiddle to pupils in the Sliabh Luachra area (Cranitch 2006:2). Several scholars emphasize that historically teachers have played a significant role in the transmission of Irish traditional music. Veblen suggests that the influence of teachers on transmission has 'remained constant over time. The teacher continues to be a community resource, tradition bearer and facilitator' (1991:xii). In certain localities, teachers were vital to the survival and transmission of Irish traditional music. Cranitch highlights how a lineage of Sliabh Luachra fiddle players passed on the music from one generation to the next. He points out that Corney Drew learned from the blind itinerant fiddle player Thomas O'Grady, Drew in turn teaches Cal O'Callaghan, and O'Callaghan teaches his nephew, Pádraig O'Keeffe (Cranitch 2006:135).

While independent teachers have a rich history of transmitting Irish traditional music, tuition provided by institutions is a relatively new learning context which became common during and after the 1970s.<sup>14</sup> Hammy Hamilton describes the lack of traditional music classes available in the early 1970s, and contrasts this to how learners now commonly learn from teachers:

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<sup>14</sup> This is an approximation. In some localities organizations may have provided traditional music tuition prior to the 1970s or much more recently.

For somebody in my position back in the early 70s, there were no classes. There were no teachers as such, so you're only choice was to educate yourself. And basically how you did that was lock yourself in your bedroom, and then you tried to go to sessions and sort of learn on the hoof as it were. People learning these days, almost everybody has a teacher (Hamilton, interview).

Mary Bergin also suggests that 'years ago, there really weren't formal classes as such. It was passed on through exposure. That was how most people learned' (Bergin, interview). This is reflected with my interview data; the interviewees born before or during the 1960s are mostly self-taught and learned alongside their peers during informal music-making.<sup>15</sup> All of the interviewees born after 1970, and some born in the 1960s, attended classes at CCÉ branches or pipers' clubs.<sup>16</sup> Learning experiences in organizations and structured settings now play a more central role in musical enculturation than in the past.

Below I introduce common characteristics of group and individual tuition. Following this, I explore the role of CCÉ and pipers' clubs by analysing the interviewees' learning experiences. The focus of the discussion remains on the learning process, rather than the organizations' structure, policies, or history. Lastly, I discuss the social nature of tuition and explore how attending traditional music tuition can influence and nurture the enculturation process.

### **Individual and Group Tuition**

Generally coinciding with the school calendar, Irish traditional music organizations commonly provide individual and group tuition approximately from September to May. This structure provides an opportunity for learners to consistently engage with and practice Irish traditional music throughout the year. A few interviewees suggest that this consistency and prolonged engagement aided their musical enculturation.<sup>17</sup> Helen Gubbins discusses how classes at her local Comhaltas branch provided consistency through the learning process:

I always valued the element of consistency... In terms of traditional music, I had one teacher from when I was five until I was eighteen. She taught me every Saturday morning, she still teaches ten years later in the same

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<sup>15</sup> (Mary Bergin, Mick Daly, Hammy Hamilton, Martin Hayes, Tomás Ó Canainn, Connie O'Connell, interviews).

<sup>16</sup> Some were only enrolled briefly, while others had more substantial experiences in these settings.

<sup>17</sup> (Liz Doherty, Helen Gubbins, Michael O'Sullivan, interviews).

school. That's throughout the year and then in summertime, there are group and band competitions to look forward to (Gubbins, interview).

Helen valued the structure of classes throughout the school year, and looked forward to festivals and competitions during the summer months. Helen attended her local Comhaltas branch in Limerick from the late 1980s until approximately 2001. Because her musical participation was prolonged and consistent, Irish traditional music gradually became part of her social life. When this occurs, learners are more likely to begin identifying themselves as traditional musicians.

Although more organized and structured than the learning experiences discussed in Chapter 2, Irish traditional music tuition is characteristically informal and non-formal in nature. In both group and individual tuition settings, pupils often learn by watching, listening, and imitating the teacher, and classes often lack formal elements, such as assessments, examinations, and direct verbal or written instructions. Because teachers explicitly guide students and direct learning activities, however, tuition provides purposeful and structured learning processes. With both informal and formal characteristics, learning processes that occur during traditional music classes are often 'non-formal' - that is, positioned somewhere in the middle of the informal/formal spectrum. During his late childhood, James Duggan attended group instrumental classes and describes the tuition as structured in some ways and unstructured in others:

It was structured in the sense that I went to Ann every Wednesday at 3PM, and I'd go to Nicky every Thursday from 8-9PM, and it was October to Christmas, after Christmas to March. The classes weren't very structured in the sense that Ann might decide on the spot what she was going to teach you. She would just have the tune in her head and would write it out from memory while you're sitting there... She might play the tune and say, 'Do you know this?' and if you didn't, she would write it out and record it for you (Duggan, interview).

While James's classes were structured in terms of set times and location, his teachers taught non-formally and informally. In many traditional music classes, the 'curriculum' is not predetermined by committee members of an organization, but by the teacher who chooses repertoire based on their preferences and tunes that they consider appropriate. In many instances, such as James's experience above, the teacher intuitively decides on repertoire to teach during their classes. Other traditional music teachers have a more systematic way of introducing

simple tunes before progressing to more advanced tunes which require technical proficiency on an instrument.

Traditional music teachers do not usually teach technique and style separate from repertoire, which is a common practice within Western classical music. Separate exercises, etudes, and scales, for instance, are uncommon in traditional music classes. Keegan suggests, ‘breathing exercises have not been adopted by performers to any great extent yet’ (1992:35).<sup>18</sup> Expressive elements of traditional music-making, such as bowing techniques and ornamentations, are demonstrated – either explicitly or implicitly – during the teaching of repertoire. Seamus Sands suggests that during his group fiddle classes, his teacher focused more on teaching repertoire, and did not teach even basic techniques, such as how to hold the bow. Seamus suggests elements of technique and style came to him informally over the years:

In the classes that I had with my brothers and sisters... that was more about learning the tunes. Certainly it would have taught me the basics, like what a roll was, but that's where it would have stopped. There was nothing about how to hold the bow or how to do bow triplets or slides or whatever. So they would have just come to me over the years. I wouldn't have been formally trained in those types of things (Sands, interview).

Seamus primarily and gradually developed his fiddle style by playing and listening to Irish traditional music in diverse contexts, such as in houses, sessions, festivals, concerts, and on commercial and non-commercial recordings. I argue that while many learners are introduced to instrumental traditional music during structured tuition, traditional musicians commonly develop their technical abilities and creative expression through a combination of listening and playing traditional music in a variety of contexts.

Group and individual tuition provides different learning experiences. Within the Irish traditional music and music education literature, the merits of group tuition and individual instruction are often compared and contrasted. Some suggest that individual instruction is more educationally beneficial, since subtle elements of style and self-expression are challenging to transmit in group settings

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<sup>18</sup> During my fieldwork at the Douglas Comhaltas branch, I did observe warm-up breathing exercise during a flute class (fieldnotes, 9 March 2011). However, it was the only time I observed breathing exercises demonstrated in a traditional flute class, workshop, or lesson.

(Breathnach 1986; Burgess 1999; Mac Aoidh 1999). Breathnach argues:

Certainly it is more convenient to teach an air to a group than to each individual in turn. The harm occurs in having the group reproduce the air as a group, and in training each child to subordinate or direct his activities towards achieving the desired group effect. Traditional playing, it must be remembered, is of its very nature a personal expression (1996:122).

Additionally, Mac Aoidh describes the one-on-one music lesson as ‘the most tested’ format to teach instrumental traditional music (1999:109). Some music education scholars also suggest that individual expression is challenging to nurture in group music classes. In an early childhood curriculum, several scholars compare music learning and language learning in group settings:

...imagine the outcome in language learning if children were asked to speak only in groups, repeating what the teacher said. They would learn only to imitate what others around them are saying and so could not give meaning to what they said (Valerio et al 1998:4).

They suggest that while group singing and rote learning is widespread in schools around the world, it does little to stimulate personal musical expression. From a traditional music perspective, when learners only learn in group settings, they may have difficulties trying to interpret repertoire for themselves.

Of my interviewees who received instrumental tuition, most experienced both individual and group classes during the learning process. The interview data reveals significant differences in the experience of learning in individual, rather than group tuition. Several interviewees discussed their learning experiences large, mixed instrument, group classes.<sup>19</sup> Helen Gubbins, for instance, learned tin whistle and accordion alongside approximately thirty other students of varying traditional instruments, such as fiddle, concertina, and flute. While Helen learned basic technique and repertoire, she suggests that group lessons did not nurture the development of her accordion technique. She feels that her underdeveloped technique made it difficult for her to perform in solo competitions confidently. Helen describes the disadvantage of not having classes with an accordion teacher:

I didn’t have a solo teacher, and my performance skills weren’t honed. I didn’t have access to an accordion

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<sup>19</sup> (Helen Gubbins, Geraldine O’Callaghan, Lisa O’Sullivan, Michael O’Sullivan, Liz Doherty, James Duggan, interviews).

teacher nearby... I didn't have the skill or confidence  
how to perfect a tune (Gubbins, interview).

Helen eventually took individual lessons with Martin Connolly, and describes these lessons as 'more systematized and organized' (Gubbins, interview). Martin often taught tunes in order to specifically address Helen's technical deficiencies. The individual attention she received from Martin was not possible in the large, mixed instrument group setting. While traditional music teachers value and often provide learners' with individual attention in group tuition settings (Veblen 1991:69), learners received much more focused and prolonged individual attention during one-on-one lessons.

However, group tuition provides a distinct set of educational and social advantages. Firstly, for many families, group tuition offers affordable music instruction. Helen Gubbins, the youngest of six children, discusses attending group classes as a family:

There were so many people there that it was very  
affordable for us. I think it was like one or two pounds  
each per student, and there was always four of us going.  
She never really charged us more than five pounds for  
the whole family, so my parents could afford that, so we  
could always go to it (Gubbins, interview).

As discussed in Chapter 2, learning alongside her siblings was an important experience during Helen's enculturation into Irish traditional music.

Secondly, through listening, observing, and talking with their peers, group tuition provides a multidimensional learning experience. Students can learn from one another as well as their teacher. Suzuki's philosophy of music education emphasizes the influential role peers during the learning process.<sup>20</sup> Suzuki urges parents not to ignore the benefits group tuition offers learners:

...although they [parents] make sure that their children  
attend the private lessons, they often fail to bring them  
to the group lessons. But the fact is that what the  
children enjoy most is the group playing. They play with  
children who are more advanced than they are; the  
influence is enormous, and is marvellous for their  
training (Suzuki in Starr 1999:380).

Liz Doherty learned in mixed instrument group classes, and enjoyed learning from her peers and teacher, Dinny McLaughlin. Liz discusses the advantages of

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<sup>20</sup> Green also discusses the importance of peer-directed learning (2002).



this social learning scenario:

There's a lot to be learned from group playing and I think a lot of the artists out there all learned in these group playing situations rather than individual classes... There's a lot happening in the 'conversation' and you can hear how other people are picking up the same thing differently. So recently I've gone back to the group model. I think there is more to be got out of that than the one-on-one class (Doherty, interview).

Liz also suggests that a private lesson 'may be a bit unnecessary', especially for novices (Doherty, interview).

Group tuition provides a different learning and social experience than individual tuition, and therefore, learners who learn in both settings enjoy multiple and complementary educational advantages. During individual tuition, learners receive individual attention and detailed advice from experienced musicians, which aids the development of technique, style, and expression. Many learners find the social aspect of group tuition motivational, and at the very initial stages of the learning process, a weekly one-to-one lesson is perhaps not necessary. Intermediate musicians, perhaps, benefit more from individual lessons, since subtle aspects of style, expression, and instrumental techniques are generally covered in this context. It is not entirely useful to debate which setting – group or individual – is more educationally sound; rather, it is more valuable to examine which type of tuition is developmentally appropriate and suitable to each learner's needs.

### Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann

Established in 1951, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ) is the largest and most influential organization which promotes Irish traditional music. CCÉ's diverse educational and musical activities include organizing summer music schools (*Scoil Éigse* and *Meitheal*), music festivals (*fleadhanna*), competitions, concert tours, céilithe, and traditional music sessions. Comhaltas also maintains a traditional music archive and publishes educational resources, such as tutorials, CDs, DVDs, and tune books.<sup>21</sup> Every year thousands of learners of all ages enroll in classes and participate in activities at CCÉ branches, of which there are hundreds all around the world. McCarthy discusses how CCÉ's diverse activities

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<sup>21</sup> These publications are available on CCÉ's website, [www.comhaltas.ie](http://www.comhaltas.ie), which also provides free online resources and information about CCÉ's history, aims, and current events.

profoundly influence the transmission of Irish traditional music:

...the single most important agent and patron in the transmission of traditional music has been Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. Young performers are not only taught in regular classes but also exposed to the experience and expertise of the masters through sessions, workshops, concert tours, television programmes, and festivals. A rich learning context is provided, achieved primarily by the organization being rooted in the community and working consistently at the local level (1999:167).

While Comhaltas is an impressive global organization, classes and local activities are often considered the most influential aspect of CCÉ's work. In this section, I discuss CCÉ's branch system and learning processes which take place during CCÉ's weekly tuition. By presenting and interpreting my interviewees' experiences at their local CCÉ branch, I explore the role CCÉ classes play during the enculturation process from the point of view of the learner. Other Comhaltas activities, such as their summer schools, festivals, and competitions, are detailed later in this chapter.

### Image 3: Comhaltas logo and artwork



While a full literature review of CCÉ's history, politics, policies, and bureaucracy is not necessary here,<sup>22</sup> a short cultural and historical context is useful. Comhaltas was established in response to the low ebb of participation in Irish traditional music, song, and dance during the 1930s and 40s. Many feared traditional music was in danger of dying out altogether. CCÉ states:

The social scene was changing in Ireland and the same opportunities for young people to be exposed to native music-making and dancing were disappearing. The

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<sup>22</sup> This is discussed at length elsewhere. See (Breathnach 1986,1996; Fleming 2000, 2004; Hamilton 1996; Henry 1989; Kaul 2009; Kearns and Taylor 2003:45; Keegan 1992; McCarthy 1999; Mac Aoidh 1994; O'Connor 2001; O'Flynn 2009; Ó hAllmhuráin 1998; Ó Murchú 1987; O'Shea 2005, 2008; Vallely 1999, 2004b, 2008; Williams 2010).

house-dance and the crossroads-dance were giving way to the many changes taking place in Ireland. It was obvious that a network of classes was the answer and it can now be recorded that we have one of the most extensive education networks of its kind in the world (Comhaltas 1998:7).

While scholars acknowledge CCÉ's contribution to the transmission of Irish traditional music, within the literature, there are numerous criticisms of CCÉ policies and philosophies, including disapprovals of CCÉ's emphasis on competition, and their political and religious affiliations.<sup>23</sup> However, within the literature and my interview data, criticisms of CCÉ are often leveled at the bureaucracy surrounding the organization, while CCÉ's local activities are less controversial.

CCÉ's social, musical, educational, and cultural impact derives largely from its grassroots approach and their active members who promote traditional music at the local branch level. Comhaltas describes how their branches function as 'nurseries', nurturing the development of traditional musicians:

The branches are more than simply local music schools. Comhaltas provides the "nursery" setting in which young students spend most of their formative years learning and perfecting their art forms, while developing an attachment and commitment to our rich cultural heritage that will stay with them throughout their lives (Comhaltas 2004:9).

Scholars generally acknowledge CCÉ's local branch structure as highly effective and influential in terms of musical and cultural transmission. For example, Hamilton argues that CCÉ's strength lays in 'its branch structure and the way in which these small local branches drew on local resources in the form of older musicians and singers' (1996:166). McCarthy also highlights the importance of CCÉ's emphasis on local communities within their educational structure:

CCÉ transformed the way in which traditional music teaching was organized, and it created new opportunities for Irish youth to be immersed in the culture of music. Just as its roots were in local communities of music-makers so also was its philosophy based on a community concept, with the local branches central to the welfare of the organization (McCarthy 1999:135).

I argue that instrumental classes which are rooted in a social and local context

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<sup>23</sup> See (Breathnach 1986, 1996; Fleming 2000, 2004; Hamilton 1996; Henry 1989; Kearns and Taylor 2003; Keegan 1992; Mac Aoidh 1994; O'Shea 2005, 2008; Vallely 2004b, 2008).

foster learning and enculturation processes. One of CCÉ's greatest achievements is that the organization is relevant to (and now a part of) Irish traditional music culture. Teachers, organizers, and volunteers at the local level are active participants within the community of practice.

Several interviewees acquired their first tunes and instrumental techniques at their local CCÉ branches, and many described these experiences as positive, motivational, or fun. Many Comhaltas branches operate one night a week in local schools or community centres. Weekly tuition and other activities at CCÉ branches provide learners with opportunities for consistent engagement. Michael O'Sullivan describes the activity at his local CCÉ branch throughout the year:

Classes would start in September, and there would be a ten to twelve week session. You'd do a lot of playing. Then after Christmas, there's another ten to twelve week session. I suppose it was all building up towards fleadh cheoils, and there was a good bit of practicing then during the summer. So it was pretty much all the time (O'Sullivan, interview).

Comhaltas branches provide a variety of musical and learning activities throughout the year, which breaks up the learning process into different tasks. In many CCÉ branches, tuition is the primary activity during the school term, and during the summer months, some members focus on preparing for competitions. Members who participate throughout the entire year experience diverse and consistent musical participation. When learners engage in socializing and music-making activities at their local branch, they can experience a musical and educational richness. A strong connection to a local musical organization can also foster musical enculturation, since learners may begin identifying with the group and Irish traditional music.

Diverse learning processes occur during CCÉ instrumental classes. In general, the level of formality is set by each teacher's methodology and approach. CCÉ tutors, not policymakers or committee members, decide the curriculum, repertoire, and if (or how) notation will be used. However, the *cathaoirleach* and other organizers also play a role in establishing the branches' philosophy.<sup>24</sup> Some branches place an emphasis on competition, while others focus on non-competitive activities, such as tuition, sessions, recitals, concerts, and céilithe.

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<sup>24</sup> *Cathaoirleach* is Irish for 'chairman'.

Many branches promote both competitive and non-competitive activities. Since branches have the flexibility and autonomy to establish their own philosophies and activities, branches can differ significantly in terms of informal and formal learning activities.

According to the interview data, informal, non-formal, and formal learning takes place during CCÉ classes. Aoife Granville describes the learning processes at her local Comhaltas in Dingle, Co. Kerry as ‘somewhere between organized and disorganized’ (interview). Because informal and formal learning processes often occur within the same class, many CCÉ classes are more appropriately labelled ‘non-formal’ in nature. Some of my interviewees also describe their learning experiences in CCÉ classes as formal in nature. Seamus Sands, for instance, attended his local CCÉ in Newry, Co. Down in the 1970s, and he compares his CCÉ classes to the formal music education he received as a violin student. Seamus perceives his experiences at CCÉ as formal primarily because of the structure of the classes, prevalence of notation, and teacher-directed instruction. Seamus states:

I was going to local Comhaltas type classes. There was a fiddle player teaching a whole bunch of us and we use to sit around with some notation in front of us, and we'd learn a tune a week... That wouldn't have been unusual to me because at the same time I was doing a structured learning process with classical music. I wouldn't like to suggest to you that it was just sitting in sessions and picking it all up by hearing things. No. In my case at least, there was certainly a bit of formal classes and structure (Sands, interview).

Liz Doherty also experienced a somewhat formal and structured education at her local CCÉ. Her teacher, Dinny McLaughlin, taught using notation and was meticulous about slurring and bowing techniques. Liz states:

We all had our notebooks and we wrote down the tunes, and because Dinny was a fiddle player he was really into that we had good bowing and that we all had the same bowing... He'd show us where to put a slur and we all would have bowed it. And you know what? To this day I can play any of those tunes exactly the way Dinny taught us to. But yeah, [we learned] nothing by ear... (Doherty, interview).

When tutors use notation and explicitly teach instrumental techniques, CCÉ classes are more formal in nature.

For many pupils, enrolling in CCÉ tuition can be a significant learning experience and can play a role in their musical enculturation. At her local CCÉ, Geraldine O’Callaghan initially attended mixed instrument group classes with Con Herbert, who established the branch in Freemount. As an older pupil, Geraldine also received fiddle tuition from Mac Dara Ó Raghallaigh. To Geraldine, fiddle classes with Mac Dara were inspirational and provided an opportunity to learn from a master fiddle player. She discusses her learning experiences:

I have very clear memories of the first day being taught by Mac Dara Ó Raghallaigh and being blow away by his ability on the instrument... For me to be taught by a virtuosic, master fiddle player was a mind-blowing experience at that age... I was so impressed with his playing initially, and the fact that he was such an impressive player drove me as a pupil to work harder and try to excel... Trying to emulate that was the challenge (O’Callaghan, interview).

I suggest that Geraldine’s experience at CCÉ was enriched by the ability to interact with her peers during group tuition and by learning from such an accomplished fiddle player and teacher during the later stages of her development. While not all CCÉ branches provide access to musicians of the caliber of Mac Dara Ó Raghallaigh, Con Herbert’s connections within the community made this possible at Geraldine’s local CCÉ.<sup>25</sup> Leadership, such as the kind exhibited by Con Herbert, is one of the most important factors in an organization’s success. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder explain:

Effective community leaders typically are well respected, knowledgeable about the community’s domain, well connected to other community members (they know who’s who in the community), keen to help develop the community’s practice (2002:80-1).

The Freemount CCÉ branch is an effective organization, in part, because teachers, volunteers, and committee members are active participants within the Irish traditional music community.

### Pipers’ Clubs

The many pipers’ clubs established in Ireland and around the world are influential

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<sup>25</sup> Lisa and Michael O’Sullivan also attended classes and other activities at this CCÉ branch (interviews).

organizations that promote and teach uilleann piping. They also promote Irish traditional music in general through various activities, including classes, sessions, archives, recitals, summer schools, publications, and festivals. Many pipers' clubs also host tin whistle and other traditional instrument classes. Some clubs have relatively long histories, such as the Cork Pipers' Club, established in 1898 (Mitchell 1999:90; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008:116-7), and The Dublin Pipers' Club, established in 1900 (O'Connor 1999:110). Other pipers' clubs were established during the revival of the 1950s and 60s in response to a decline in piping.<sup>26</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 2, prior to the establishment of pipers' clubs, the piping tradition was primarily transmitted within piping families and through itinerant pipers. Pipers' clubs currently provide learning opportunities to a wider population of learners.

Several of my interviewees learned their instruments in classes and activities organized by pipers' clubs. Niall Vallely learned tin whistle in his parents' classes at the Armagh Pipers' Club, and Niall suggests that the club's classes and informal activities were highly memorable and motivational (Vallely, interview). Tomás Ó Canainn and Conal Ó Gráda learned at the Cork Pipers' Club under the tutelage and mentorship of Mícheál Ó Ríabhaigh. Conal describes Mícheál as the first and most significant musical influence. Conal describes these experiences:

I started going to the pipers' club around ten... I learned a lot of tunes there. Mícheál was always meticulous about the ornamentations. You got it right from the start, you know? I'd say, probably a good portion of the tunes I still know, are the ones I learnt back then (Ó Gráda, interview).

Tomás Ó Canainn's experience at the Cork Pipers' Club was more informal and social in nature. Tomás states that he was not 'exactly a student' at the club, but often received informal guidance and advice from Mícheál Ó Ríabhaigh during informal sessions at the pipers' club (Ó Canainn, interview). Tomás writes about these experiences in his memoir:

Mícheál ran the Pipers' Club in Dún Laoi on the North Mall. As far as I can remember, it met there on a Saturday night and began with a class for his young piping students. After an hour or so of that, there would

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<sup>26</sup> Two examples are the Armagh Pipers' Club, established in 1966 (Vallely 1999:9) and Na Piobairí Uilleann founded in 1968 (Vallely 1999:299; Williams 2010:134).

be a general musical session, not confined to pipes, not to any particular age-group. Mícheál, strapped into a big set of Taylor pipes, would be at the centre of things, controlling what was being played and who would play it. I would often go to that session (Ó Canainn 1996:67).

Compared with CCÉ, Pipers' clubs often place less of an emphasis on, or openly discourage music competitions. The national organization of pipers, Na Píobairí Uilleann, plays a role organizing the Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy.<sup>27</sup> The school and Na Píobairí Uilleann both emphasize the importance of non-competitive performance and recitals (Kearns and Taylor 2003:51-2). Niall Vallely discusses the Armagh Pipers' Club focus on non-competitive music-making:

They make a big effort to not get involved in the competition thing and to develop a sort of a social thing for the kids. So, I suppose it is more like a club than a just a school. There are other things that happen other than learning tunes in a schoolroom. And I think that makes a big difference (Vallely, interview).

Niall also suggests that organizers of the club were flexible and they supported pupils who were interested in competitions. In Niall's view, the emphasis on social and informal events at the club was helpful in creating a positive and holistic educational experience.

### Tuition and Enculturation

During traditional music classes, learners can acquire repertoire and instrumental techniques, but perhaps more importantly, tuition provides learners with opportunities to interact musically and socially with mentors and peers within the community of practice. In this section, I explore the ways in which socio-musical interactions during tuition can foster musical enculturation. I propose that musical enculturation is most effectively nurtured when learners experience tuition alongside other music-making and social activities within the Irish traditional music community. To some learners, attending weekly tuition can instill a passion to learn and play Irish traditional music. Niall Vallely suggests that some learners (but not all) will develop a love for traditional music in class contexts, and ultimately pursue the activity outside of class:

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<sup>27</sup> Na Píobairí Uilleann literally translates to 'the uilleann pipers' (Vallely 1999:299).



It invariably seems to happen that they [learners] go to the classes for a number of years and then a certain number of them get a deeper interest or a deeper love for it. And they go off to sessions, and listen and play with other musicians and they go beyond the bounds of the class (Vallely, interview).

For some learners, tuition can spark their interest to seek other musical opportunities, such as listening to commercial recordings, and participating in sessions, concerts, and festivals.

According to some of my interviewees, attending weekly Irish traditional music classes seemed somewhat like a school-like activity, and this raises some important issues regarding the role of weekly tuition during the enculturation process. For instance, Helen Gubbins states her experiences in CCÉ classes were ‘kind of like school; it took on the feeling of school’ (Gubbins, interview). While Helen learned many tunes during group tuition, pupils in her group class did not exchange or play tunes together for enjoyment; Helen describes how her and her peers learned and practiced repertoire taught in class, but this is where their sharing ceased:

It wasn’t very social. We didn’t play tunes together without a specific goal in mind. So there was very, very little sharing of tunes, like ‘Oh I got a new tune, do you want to listen to it?’ They would be like, ‘What are you doing more work for? We only needed to learn these tunes’ (Gubbins, interview).

Liz Doherty also compared her experiences in group tuition to school. Liz states:

Never ever did we think, ‘Oh, I could go learn a few more tunes myself.’ No way! It was a bit like school. You read what you were told to read or you did whatever maths you were told to do. It would never occur to you to do a bit more... I didn’t have any recordings of Irish music, we were never listening to it in the house. There was nothing like that at all. You just went to school, you went to dance, you went to music, you practiced them all, and that was it. It wasn’t really until I was about sixteen that someone gave me a De Dannan tape and The Traveler Reel was on it, and I wanted to try to play it (Doherty, interview).

To Helen and Liz, learning Irish traditional music was initially an activity they were expected to participate in, similar to school. Both Helen and Liz’s families had an interest in traditional music, and they were signed up for classes along with their siblings. Learning new tunes, exploring, sharing, and playing Irish

traditional music with peers outside of class were not important aspects of Helen or Liz's social lives as young children. However, as they developed into their teens, Helen and Liz both gradually began to develop an intrinsic interest in Irish traditional music. Helen and Liz's experiences in CCÉ classes mark the beginning of their enculturation into Irish traditional music. Musical enculturation is a lifelong process, which involves diverse and numerous social and musical experiences. In this way, attending weekly tuition is only part of the more complete process of becoming a traditional musician.

In addition to structured classes, informal music-making and socializing in branches and pipers' club plays a role in musical enculturation. I propose that informal and social activities complement the more structured learning processes which take place during tuition. As mentioned in Chapter 2, many CCÉ branches and pipers' clubs host their own traditional music sessions, and this provides members with opportunities to listen and play tunes they learn during tuition, in a social and informal context. CCÉ or pipers' club sessions are sometimes slightly more organized, and more welcoming and encouraging to beginners than the typical pub session (Henry 1989:71-3). For instance, weekly sessions at the Douglas CCÉ branch is led by instrumental tutors who ensure novice participants are not excluded from the music-making (Barry Cogan, interview). While some traditional musicians critique CCÉ sessions for being contrived or too regimented (Fleming 2004:247), this largely depends on the particular branch and the session leader. The sessions that I observed at the Douglas CCÉ were well-organized, as tutors often encourage each musician to select a tune. The sessions were also occasionally led by students and members of the branch, and the tutors interjected very little, if at all.

While participating in tuition can foster learning and enculturation processes, several of my interviewees suggest that it can be challenging to develop a nuanced understanding of Irish traditional music and culture primarily by attending classes. Some participants, instead, emphasize the importance of listening and playing with other traditional musicians outside of class settings. For instance, Niall Vallely suggests that without listening experiences, pupils may have difficulty playing and understanding traditional style and rhythm. Niall accentuates that learners gradually develop personal style and expression by listening to a variety of styles outside of class situations. I asked Niall how traditional musicians develop their own style of playing, to which he replied:

If kids take a class or adults learn stuff from a book or a video - if that's all that happens, I think that's difficult [developing style] - if people don't listen to the music outside the class setting (Vallely, interview).

Matt Cranitch also questions the effectiveness of enrolling children to CCÉ classes in order to 'learn', when parents and children are not listening to Irish traditional music during their day-to-day lives; Matt states that some children attend CCÉ classes and then 'for the next week they won't hear a note of traditional music. Their aural diet that they hear at home is pop music on TV and radio, and consequently they have no reference for listening... And I think therein lies the real problem' (Cranitch, interview). Without other ways to listen and engage with traditional music-making, Matt feels that learners may not be able to understand 'the inner hidden meaning' of traditional music (Cranitch, interview).

The discussion above highlights the fact that education programs and organizations cannot 'substitute for the world and be the entire learning event. It cannot be a closed system that shelters a well-engineered but self-contained learning process. On the contrary, it must aim to offer diverse connections to communities outside its setting' (Wenger 1998:275). Tuition at CCÉ, pipers' clubs, and other organizations can potentially educate, inspire, and nurture music development and enculturation processes. However, these classes cannot 'be the entire learning event'. As my interviewees' life experiences suggest, developing into a traditional musician involves engaging with Irish traditional music in multiple learning and music-making contexts.

In this section, I explored the interviewees' experiences of learning during extra-curricular tuition. Several interviewees enrolled in classes and learned their first tunes at their local CCÉ branch or pipers' clubs. I emphasized how students informally, non-formally, and sometimes formally learn basic repertoire and instrumental techniques. Based on the interviewees' experiences, I suggest that attending weekly tuition can be viewed as an initial phase of musical enculturation. Throughout their lives, interviewees also engaged in several other learning scenarios. In addition to acquiring repertoire and musical skills, tuition provides valuable opportunities for pupils can make social connections to their mentors and peers. As Kearns and Taylor suggest, 'formal classes are only one aspect of the learning process. As in all educational processes, interaction with fellow students is extremely important in the development of skills and

knowledge' (2003:93). Social connections made during tuition can continue outside the classroom, and this is especially the case when organizations also host informal sessions alongside their structured classes.

I have suggested that learning and enculturation processes are nurtured when learners receive tuition in conjunction with other informal learning experiences. In a related matter, when pupils' life experiences coincide with material taught in class, the learner is more likely to understand and identify with the material. Alerby and Ferm propose that 'learning music improves when pupils' experiences of a music lesson are incorporated with their earlier experiences of music. In this regard, experiences outside the school context are of course important' (2005:180). From this point of view, the experience of attending weekly tuition is enriched when learners also experiencing music-making outside the classroom context. Life experience significantly affects learners' perception and understanding of material covered in class. In this way, learners with multiple musical experiences prior to, during, and after their time enrolled in classes are more likely to identify with Irish traditional music on a musical and social level.

## Summer Schools and Workshops

In this section, I analyse the various learning and enculturation processes which occur during summer schools and festival workshops. I begin by introducing some general characteristics of traditional music summer schools and workshops, and highlight some common learning processes in these structured contexts. Following this, I focus on two schools, Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy and Scoil Éigse, which were chosen primarily because of their significance within the traditional music community (see Images 4 and 5). My interviewees' narratives focus on these summer schools, which provide a significant amount of data.

Since the 1970s, traditional music organizations, such as CCÉ and pipers' clubs, have established summer schools to promote and transmit Irish traditional music to a new generation. Dozens of schools take place throughout the year, but most occur during the summer months (see Table 2). Many traditional music festivals also host workshops in traditional music, song, and dance alongside their other music events (see Table 3). The summer schools and festivals listed below

differ in purpose, philosophy, activities, location, and numbers of attendees. Some summer schools and festival workshops cater to learners of all traditional instruments, skill levels, and ages, while others target specific instruments or require an intermediate or advanced level of playing. Considering the diversity of summer schools and festival workshops, more research is needed to explore the educational implications of participating in these events.

**Image 4 and 5: Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, Scoil Éigse programmes**



**Table 2: List of major Irish traditional music schools in Ireland**

School:	Location:	Traditionally held:
Scoil Cheoil an Earraigh	Kerry	Mid-February
Éigse an Spidéil	Galway	Mid-late February
Blas Summer School	Limerick	Late June
Coleman County Bodhrán School	Sligo	Late June
Seosamh Mac Gabhann Summer School	Mayo	Early July
Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy	Clare	Second week of July
Meitheal Summer School	Limerick	Mid-July
South Sligo Summer School	Sligo	Mid-July
Joe Mooney Summer School	Leitrim	Late-July
Scoil Acla	Mayo	Late-July
Scoil Éigse	Location varies	Mid-August
O'Carolan Harp Summer School	Roscommon	August
The Cairdeas na bhFidleiri	Donegal	August
Scoil Samhna Shéamuis Ennis	Dublin	October
Scoil Gheimhridh Frankie Kennedy	Donegal	Late-December

**Table 3: List of major Irish traditional music festivals in Ireland that organize workshops**

Festival:	Location:	Typically held:
Ballincollig Winter Festival	Cork	Late-January
The Gathering	Kerry	Late February
Corofin Trad Festival	Clare	Late February
Micho Russell Memorial Festival	Clare	Late February
Ceardlann Earraigh	Kildare	Late March
John Joe Maguire Memorial Festival	Cavan	Early March
Clifden Traditional Music Festival	Galway	Mid-April
Cruinniú na bhFliúit	Cork	Week after Easter
Kilfenora Music Festival	Clare	Late April
Fleadh by the Feale	Limerick	Early May
Baltimore Fiddle Fair	Cork	Mid-May
Skerries Traditional Music Festival	Dublin	May
Fleadh Nua	Clare	Late-May
Feakle Traditional Festival	Clare	Mid-August
Masters of Tradition	Cork	Mid-August
William Kennedy Piping Festival	Armagh	Mid-November
Coleman Traditional Music Festival	Sligo	Late-August
Johnny Keenan Banjo Festival	Longford	Late-September
Patrick O’Keeffe Traditional Music Festival	Kerry	October

Many summer schools and festivals are hugely successful, some drawing thousands of visitors every year. Some traditional music scholars suggest that the most popular festivals and summer schools, such as the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann and Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, act as ‘pilgrimage’ cites (Dowling 1999:65; O’Shea 2008). My fieldwork observations and interview data attest to the popularity of these events; Most of my interviewees attended summer schools and festivals throughout the many stages of their musical development, although not always as registered students. Summer schools and festivals host workshops and more informal activities, such as sessions, concerts, and dances. Every summer, thousands of musicians and enthusiasts partake in these informal events without enrolling for tuition, causing many summer schools to take on a festival-like atmosphere. During structured workshops, students have the opportunity to learn new repertoire and instrumental techniques directly from their musical idols and expert traditional musicians. They can also gain a more nuanced understanding of traditional music style, expression, culture, and history. As explored below, my research suggests that a combination of informal and structured learning experiences at summer schools and festivals fosters musical enculturation.

Numerous traditional music scholars recognize the educational and socio-cultural benefits participating in traditional music summer schools and workshops

provides learners of Irish traditional music.<sup>28</sup> Mac Aoidh suggests that workshops are special events on the calendar that rekindle musicians' enthusiasm to learn and practice Irish traditional music:

As children attending local classes may lose some interest over time, the attendance at weekend workshops, learning new tunes and techniques, hearing new players and, very importantly, meeting other children and finding the fun in playing the music, serves to fire their interest (1999:110).

Waldron and Veblen, who interviewed adult learners of Irish traditional music, state that their interviewees 'valued summer schools because of the intense and compact learning environment and also for of the sense of community fostered during the events' (2009:65). As explored later, many of my interviewees also valued summer schools for these reasons. While rarely considered formal schooling or training, summer schools and festivals allow students to become fully immersed in Irish traditional music by participating in traditional music for an entire week (Kearns and Taylor 2003:95). Pupils at summer schools are encouraged to participate in musical, cultural, and social events outside the classroom. This is similar to pupils who immerse themselves in the Irish language during 'Irish college' in the Gaeltacht.<sup>29</sup>

Summer schools and workshops at festivals provide a relatively intense learning experience. Between the early morning classes and late night music sessions, students often sleep very little, but learn a significant amount of repertoire from their teachers and peers. While the intensity can provide motivation, inspiration, musical growth, and immersion into the musical culture, summer schools and festivals are short-term learning experiences. Mac Aoidh views the length of these experiences as a shortcoming, and states that 'There are fifty one other weeks in the year where the pupil is likely to be requiring tuition' (1999:109). Sommers Smith also states:

These schools offer an opportunity of experience something like the traditional process in a compressed

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<sup>28</sup> For a full discussion about transmission and summer schools and festivals, see (Dowling 1999; Hast and Scott 2004; Kearns and Taylor 2003; Mac Aoidh 1999; O'Connor 2001; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008; O'Shea 2005, 2008; Sommers Smith 2001; Vallely 1999, 2004b; Waldron 2006a; 2009a; Waldron and Veblen 2009).

<sup>29</sup> A Gaeltacht is an Irish speaking area. At Irish Colleges during the summer, many Irish pupils immerse themselves in the language by attending classes as well as informal social events including céilithe and sessions.

unit of time, although they cannot replicate the longer-term musical relationship of earlier eras (2001:119).

Sky also argues that ‘because of the compressed nature of these schools, they cannot replace the experience of living in an Irish traditional music community’ (Sky 1999:104). Due to their temporary nature, summer schools and workshops at festivals are one of several important learning experiences during musical enculturation. Other socio-musical interactions, such as long-term relationships formed during weekly tuition and sessions, provide an equally important, but different learning experience. Because each learning experience provides unique educational advantages, learners who partake in multiple learning and musical activities have diverse and rich learning experiences.

Through listening, watching, and imitating, traditional musicians learn new instrumental techniques and aspects of style during summer schools and workshops. In particular, these experiences benefit young traditional musicians who primarily learn in mixed instrument groups during weekly tuition. As explored earlier, many of my interviewees learned in mixed instrument tuition, and many of their teachers did not play their particular instrument. While mixed instrumental classes can transmit repertoire and basic technique, stylistic nuances can be difficult to acquire in this setting. Several interviewees emphasize that they learned a great deal about instrumental style and expression by attending summer schools. Niall Vallely suggests that attending CCÉ’s summer school, Scoil Éigse, was an influential learning experience, particularly because he did not have a concertina teacher or mentor in his locality (Vallely, interview). Niall was able to learn from exceptional concertina players and teachers, such as Noel Hill. Additionally, Michael O’Sullivan developed his banjo technique and style, in part, by attending summer schools and weekend workshops. Michael contrasts learning the banjo in this context to learning in mixed instrument classes, which were taught by a concertina player:

Banjo wasn’t his [Con Herbert] main instrument. He could play it alright but he didn’t have much in the way of technique. So, you would learn more in a workshop than you would for a couple of years, because you were dealing with specialist teachers (O’Sullivan, interview).

Aoife Granville also suggests that she attended ‘a lot of workshops and I learned an awful lot from them’ (interview). Because she did not have a flute teacher at home, Aoife states that she ‘would take everything, and I would learn away for



the rest of the year myself' (Granville, interview). When pupils at summer schools and workshops gain insight into style and technique, they can continue the learning process throughout the year through personal exploration and practice at home.

### Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy

Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, also known as the Willie Clancy Summer School or 'Willie Week', is one of the oldest, most popular and successful Irish traditional music summer schools. As a quantitative measure of the school's success, over 70 per cent of students return to the school for a second time (Kearns and Taylor 2003:101). Numerous musicians and scholars praise the efforts of the organizers and teachers at Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy (SSWC), and acknowledge the school's educational and cultural influence.<sup>30</sup> Ó hAllmhuráin describes the school as an inspiration to 'other schools all over the West of Ireland' (2008:170). Meek also states that the 'friendly atmosphere' at the school helps learners to 'feel totally uninhibited in discussing their difficulties and their aspirations with some of the best-known traditional players in the world' (1987:112). My interview data suggests that Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy is one of the most influential educational and cultural events on the traditional music calendar. In this section, I analyse the interviewees' learning experiences and outline educational implications of attending the SSWC.

Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy was established in 1973 in memory of the piper, Willie Clancy.<sup>31</sup> Before his death, Clancy conceived of organizing a traditional music school, but it was Muiris Ó Rócháin and local musicians, such as Martin Talty and Junior Crehan, who implemented the idea (Vallely 1999:331). Kearns and Taylor discuss the origins of the school:

Just a few months after Willie's passing, some friends and musical companions launched the School in Miltown Malbay, and within a decade it had become recognized as Ireland's foremost venue for teaching traditional music (2003:7-8).

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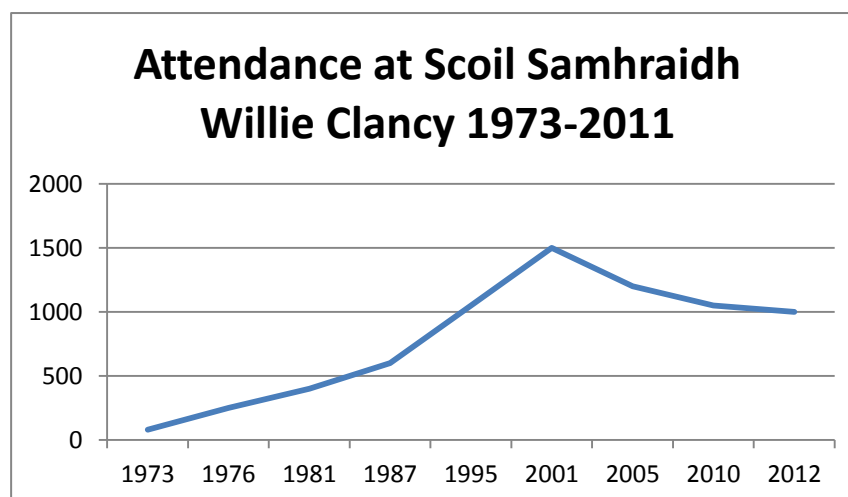
<sup>30</sup> For examples, see (Hast and Scott 2004; Kearns and Taylor 2003; Meek 1987; O'Connor 2001; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008; Vallely 1999; Williams 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Many traditional music schools and festivals were established in memory of influential musicians, such as Scoil Gheimhridh Frankie Kennedy and Seosamh Mac Gabhann Summer Schools. Memorial festivals also include the Micho Russell Memorial Festival, William Kennedy Piping Festival, Patrick O'Keeffe Traditional Music Festival, and the Johnny Keenan Banjo Festival.

CCÉ and Na Píobairí Uilleann jointly organized the first summer school, but due to differences of philosophy, CCÉ withdrew from the committee after the first year (Kearns and Taylor 2003:5; Hast and Scott 2004:55). As discussed in the next section, Comhaltas established their own summer school, Scoil Éigse, which has a slightly different educational philosophy.

Occurring the second week of July every summer since 1973, attendance at SSWC has steadily increased over the years from a humble eighty students in 1973 to close to fifteen hundred by 2001 (see Table 4) (Kearns and Taylor 2003:120). Over 20,000 people have enrolled in the school since 1973, and up to 40 per cent of attendees travel from outside of Ireland (Kearns and Taylor 2003:148). Every July, the small town of Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare is overrun with visitors of Willie Week. The atmosphere during the week resembles an international music festival, more than a ‘school’.

**Table 4: Attendance at Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, 1973-2011<sup>32</sup>**



The school offers instrumental and dancing classes, which are held in schools, GAA clubs, hotels, pubs, and private homes in the Miltown Malbay area. Except for the occasional lecture, demonstration, and music-making in pubs, singing ‘has never occupied a major place in the week’s events’ (Kearns and Taylor 2003:77). Tuition is available on most traditional instruments (except

<sup>32</sup> The information on this table from 1973-2001 is based on a report by Kearns and Taylor (2003:120). The remainder of the numbers are based on an interview with Harry Hughes I conducted as part of my fieldwork. Harry, the director of the school, states that in recent years the number of SSWC students has stabilized around the one thousand mark. Harry also suggests the surge of pupil numbers in the late 1990s was due to a revitalization of set dancing (Hughes, interview).

bodhrán) and pupils are expected to have acquired basic instrumental technique prior to enrolment. An exception is made for beginning uilleann pipe students, since Na Píobairí Uilleann play a role in organizing and running SSWC. Classes are relatively inexpensive; in 2011, it was only €140 for access to a whole week of classes, workshops, lectures, and recitals.

On the first day of the school, learners are placed in differentiated classes according to their experience and skill level. Students are asked to play a musical selection in order for organizers to determine the most appropriate class. While this procedure enhances the effectiveness of classes for both students and teachers, it can feel like an audition. Some students may perform poorly if they are nervous or not use to this formality. While problems can occur in placing students into classes, the school cooperates with students who feel they have been placed in the incorrect class. Students and teachers can request a change in placement (Kearns and Taylor 2003:101). Despite the effort of the organizers, skill levels in classes can still differ significantly, creating challenges for tutors and students alike. However, students can form a strong social bond with one another and their tutor throughout the week.

The school's philosophy directly affects learning processes and experiences, and therefore, it is relevant to explore these issues here. Kearns and Barry (2003) provide considerable insight into the schools' philosophy and history.<sup>33</sup> The purpose of SSWC, in general, is to promote Irish traditional music and its culture. Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy aims to maintain a 'cultural context' for their pupils to learn Irish traditional music. Kearns and Taylor discuss this philosophy, highlighting the importance of 'learning in context':

What sets apart the 'classical' and the 'traditional' musician is largely the context in which the repertoire is both learned and performed. The School's founding objective was to enable the musical culture of the local community to be passed on to future generations by its practitioners, thus, hopefully, maintaining its 'traditional' context (2003:127).

The school's philosophy emerged from the traditional musicians and enthusiasts

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<sup>33</sup> Taylor researched the school and worked closely with the founding directors, Muiris Ó Rócháin and Harry Hughes (Kearns and Taylor 2003; Taylor 1998). Taylor's fieldwork with the organizers offers important insight into the school's history, philosophy, and evolution over the years. Although I corresponded with Harry Hughes via e-mail, it was not possible to interview him or Muiris Ó Rócháin in person during my fieldwork. (Sadly, Ó Rócháin fell ill and passed away in 2011).

who established the school. In this way, Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy's goals and needs 'intersect with the passions and aspirations of participants' within the musical culture (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002:32). This at least partially indicates why the organization has been so influential and successful over the years. The school's purpose is directly relevant to practitioners of Irish traditional music, and this is one reason why musicians have embraced and celebrated the school's activities since its inception. While SSWC aims to provide learning within a 'traditional' context, the school offers a relatively new learning context. The school reinvents, rather than preserves, the 'old' context. Kearns and Taylor question if the school is 'the heir of past traditions, is it a revival activity or, at worst, perhaps some kind of invented tradition?' (2003:146). Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy promotes older cultural traditions, but the conscious attempt to organize transmission and music-making in a new institutional and structured context inevitably leads to changes in transmission, musical practice, and culture; In contrast to the life experience of an older generation, to many young musicians, playing music and attending classes at Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy is a significant musical experience.

Organizers of the school promote activities that share characteristics of Irish traditional music culture, such as non-commercialism, non-competitiveness, and informal learning and music-making. The school aims to establish a cultural context for learning based on their philosophy and ideas of Irish traditional music culture. Since the school is primarily 'an amateur affair, run by enthusiasts for enthusiasts. There has never been a serious attempt at sales or marketing' (Kearns and Taylor 2003:120). Kearns and Taylor outline the school's philosophy of non-commercialism, which is connected to the idea that traditional music is a shared practice, rather than a commodity, and they state that the school:

...offers no financial incentives to its teachers, depending instead on their dedication to maintaining and passing on a shared philosophy of the tradition. Roughly, this translates to a belief that traditional culture is not an object for individual commercial exploitation, but a possession to be shared by a community (2003:125).

The school also promotes the non-competitive nature of Irish traditional music. SSWC's founding director, Muiris Ó Rócháin, argues that competitions 'are totally against our philosophy. What we have is something that people come and

they learn, they enjoy it and, hopefully, it rubs off' (Ó Rócháin in Kearns and Taylor 2003:66). Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy (and Na Píobairí Uilleann) advocates 'learning traditional music for the sake of appreciating it, rather than treating it as a prelude to winning competitions' (Ó hAllmhuráin 2008:170). Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy also emphasizes participation in informal music-making and learning. The numerous social and informal music activities throughout the week cultivate *communitas*, or a sense of togetherness within a community (Turner 1969). Structured classes are also characteristically informal or non-formal, based on aural modelling. The school lacks a set curriculum, and individual tutors have the freedom to select what and how they teach.

While Kearns and Taylor provide insight into the school's history and philosophy, their descriptions occasionally include romantic notions that Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy is more authentic than other schools and organizations. Kearns and Taylor compare the SSWC to Scoil Éigse:

[CCÉ's] annual summer school or *Scoil Éigse* was launched... Ironically, at branch level, many CCÉ teachers recommend their students to attend the Willie Clancy Summer School in order to absorb the 'real tradition' (Kearns and Taylor 2003:140).

It is problematic to suggest Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy transmits the 'real tradition', or provides a more authentic learning experience than Scoil Éigse. Indeed, there are numerous similarities between the two summer schools; both were established in the 1970s, and both host structured classes, social and informal music activities. Furthermore, many well-known traditional musicians teach at both summer schools, and use the same or similar teaching methods. The fact that CCÉ teachers encourage students to attend Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy is not surprising, controversial, or an indication they think SSWC is a more authentic experience; CCÉ is not in conflict or competition with SSWC. Teachers encourage pupils to attend Willy Week because it is considered an important cultural and music event within the musical community.

Based on my field observations and interview data, I suggest that attending Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy can foster enculturation in a variety of ways. First, Willie Week is a highlight on the calendar of annual events, and I suggest that Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy has become an important part of contemporary Irish traditional music culture. Many musicians attend every

summer or perhaps every other summer, and some attended throughout their lives as children, teenagers, and adults. The week has become a major site for socializing and music-making. Because thousands of musicians visit during the week, adult traditional musicians may attend Willie Week to catch up and play tunes with other musicians they have befriended over the years. Musicians who attended as pupils in the 1970s also enrol their own children in classes and enjoy the informal music-making throughout the week (Seamus Sands, interview).

Second, I propose that informal activities throughout Willie Week can affect the enculturation process, and these activities can be particularly meaningful and motivational for teenage and adult musicians. As mentioned early, the atmosphere during Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy is festival-like; thousands of visitors attend solely to meet up with friends and to play music. Hast and Scott suggest, 'While the formal activities are well attended, it is the informal music making around the clock that attracts musicians from all over Ireland, Europe, and America' (2004:57). While musicians may have attended classes in the past, the majority of visitors to Miltown Malbay are not enrolled in classes.<sup>34</sup> The around the clock sessions during Willie Week attract thousands of musicians, enthusiasts and drinkers whom fill pubs and streets (weather depending). During my fieldwork, I ventured out around 11AM to play a session before the crowds became overwhelming. A session was in full swing, but it was initially difficult to surmise if the session was beginning or still going from the night before (fieldnotes, 7 July 2010).

Many of my interviewees describe the informal activities and music-making during Willie Week as influential and motivational. John Reid suggests that sessions during Willie Week encouraged him to move outside his comfort zone and to meet new musicians. He emphasizes that he heard new repertoire and styles, and that it is important to 'move outside your circle' during the learning process (Reid, interview). Geraldine O'Callaghan also considers sessions in Miltown Malbay to be educationally beneficial. She discusses her own learning experiences:

We went to Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, and when we were very young, most of our time in Miltown

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<sup>34</sup> This is based on fieldwork observations and conversations with Willie Week attendees (fieldnotes, 6 July 2010). While around 1,500 students are enrolled in classes annually, many thousands crowd the streets, pubs, and surrounding areas of Miltown Malbay throughout Willie Week.

would have been spent listening, and tape recording James Kelly and that level of musicians playing around the village. Then obviously as we got older we'd start our own sessions (O'Callaghan, interview).

The educational impact of informal activities should not be underestimated, as according to my interviewees they play a role in social learning processes. In an ethnographic study about learning processes at Goderich Celtic College, a summer music school and festival in Canada, Waldron also argues that informal music activities provide valuable learning experiences (Waldron 2006a, 2009a). Similar to my own participants, Waldron's interviewees also valued social and informal interactions, in addition to their learning experiences in structured classes.

While participating in sessions during Willie Week, learners may also experience frustrations; the pubs are often hot, noisy, crowded, and many are not conducive to singing and dancing.<sup>35</sup> During crowded sessions, musicians may lose their seat if they go to the bar or toilet, which is comparatively uncommon during smaller, weekly pub sessions. Within the literature, the manner in which Willie Week sessions are portrayed can differ significantly. For instance, O'Shea describes the large, crowded sessions as a game 'of cat-and-mouse between musicians who want to play together without their session being 'invaded'' (2005:167). O'Shea also suggests that unpleasant moments in sessions are caused by 'by ignorance, opportunism or the fanatic need to play' (2005:171). In contrast, Hast and Scott state that because 'the pubs are small in Miltown, the intimacy and intensity makes many of these sessions magical both for players and listeners' (2004:57). Hast and Scott are correct; Sessions during Willie Week are intense in nature. However, it is our individual perspectives and expectations which largely determine if this intensity will be felt as stressful or 'magical'. And, of course, in many session situations, stress, frustration, excitement, and inspiration can be felt at various times throughout the event, often simultaneously.

Throughout Willie Week, musicians who disdain crowds often search for quieter environments in surrounding villages, such as Coore, Mullagh, and Quilty, in order to play tunes and socialize. Although not organized by Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, to many visitors, sessions in surrounding villages can

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<sup>35</sup> There is, however, an unofficial 'singers' pub' in Miltown Malbay during Willie Week, where attendees are expected to remain quiet and respectful during the songs.

be some of the most memorable events during Willie Week. The many sessions around west Clare contribute to the festival-like atmosphere. Despite the popularity of the sessions, organizers emphasize that the school is ‘an educational institution’ (Kearns and Taylor 2003:120). Sessions are ancillary activities initiated by musicians who visit Miltown Malbay throughout the week. Although technically unconnected to the school, sessions during Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy are highly visible, well-attended, and significant social and musical experiences. For this reason, I suggest that they play a role in many traditional musicians’ learning and enculturation processes.

My interview data also suggests that enculturation is fostered through intergenerational connections between teachers and students during classes and informal music-making during Willie Week. The success of Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy is partially due to the quality traditional teachers the school attracts. Teachers are active, accomplished, and well-respected traditional musicians within the community, and act as musical and social models for imitation. Seamus Sands was influenced by interactions with such traditional musicians and tutors. Seamus suggests that in addition to acquiring repertoire and techniques in class, interacting with tutors at the school provided musical inspiration that lasts many years:

I was lucky enough at a couple Willie Clancy weeks to have the opportunity to be taught by John Kelly and Bobby Casey - both of who are dead. Ok, technically it was a help, but it was very inspirational as well to learn from people like that. And even now quite a few years later it still inspires me to think that I had the opportunity to play with some of those people (Sands, interview).

These social memories and connections to other traditional musicians can influence musical enculturation and learning processes over the long-term.

### Scoil Éigse

Literally meaning ‘school of learning’, Scoil Éigse is a summer school organized by CCÉ. Comhaltas describes Scoil Éigse as ‘a learning experience focused on cultural discussion and participation’.<sup>36</sup> My interview data suggests that Scoil

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<sup>36</sup> Comhaltas advertise this on their fleadh Cheoil website, [www.fleadhcheoil.ie/whats-on/scoil-eigse/](http://www.fleadhcheoil.ie/whats-on/scoil-eigse/), [accessed 11 June 2012].



Éigse and Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy are the two most influential traditional music summer schools. According to Siobhán Ní Chonaráin, a CCÉ administrator, recent attendance at Scoil Éigse has been between 500-850 pupils depending on the year, but these figures can be as high as 3,000 once visitors to Scoil Éigse recitals and sessions are also included (Ní Chonaráin, interview). Although the organizations' philosophies differ, learning processes at Scoil Éigse and SSWC have several similarities. Many well-known traditional musicians teach at both summer schools, and have the autonomy to decide what is taught in their instrumental classes. In both summer schools, pupils are generally taught through aural demonstration and imitation, and when notation is provided, it usually functions as a memory aid. Both summer schools also host an array of informal music-making and social activities. Despite these parallels, Scoil Éigse provides a slightly different learning experience than Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy. In this section, I explore my interviewees' learning experiences at Scoil Éigse, many of which significantly influenced their musical development. Compared to the SSWC, there is comparatively less literature about Scoil Éigse's history, philosophy, and activities,<sup>37</sup> and therefore, much of the discussion below is based on my field research.

Established in 1972, Scoil Éigse traditionally takes place in August, the week before the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann. Scoil Éigse students often compete during the Fleadh and arrive a week early to learn new tunes and techniques from well-known traditional musicians. Then, they can try out their new tunes and techniques during the Fleadh's various activities. In contrast to Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, students of Scoil Éigse are usually preparing for competitions the following week. In this way, although Scoil Éigse does not actively promote competition, it is closely connected to the competitive culture at the Fleadh Cheoil. While CCÉ's competition structure is controversial amongst scholars and musicians, Scoil Éigse is generally acknowledged as one of the most educationally and culturally beneficial aspects of the Fleadh.<sup>38</sup> Similar to Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, Scoil Éigse accepts traditional instrumentalists of all ages, but tuition is not provided to absolute beginners. Students are also placed in appropriate classes depending on their skill level. Scoil Éigse not only provides

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<sup>37</sup> For a history of Scoil Éigse see (Vallely 1999:330; [www.fleadhcheoil.ie](http://www.fleadhcheoil.ie), [accessed 11 June 2012]).

<sup>38</sup> I discuss the Fleadh Cheoil and CCÉ competitions in the following section.

tuition, but also aims to promote cultural immersion. CCÉ asserts that Scoil Éigse provides:

...quality teaching of quality material in a family/youth-friendly cultural immersion setting and as a result it gained in popularity primarily through word-of-mouth ([www.fleadhcheoil.ie/whats-on/scoil-eigse](http://www.fleadhcheoil.ie/whats-on/scoil-eigse), accessed 11 June 2012].

Like Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, Scoil Éigse emphasizes a non-commercial, community-based philosophy. Students can apply for scholarships to Scoil Éigse at their local CCÉ branches, which positively affect many deserving young musicians who may not be able to afford the opportunity to travel and attend the summer school. CCÉ, a non-profit organization, is well-known for its strong, grassroots, community support.

For many interviewees, particularly those born during and after the 1970s, Scoil Éigse was a memorable learning experience.<sup>39</sup> Many were inspired by meeting and learning from experienced traditional musicians. Lisa O’Sullivan, for instance, attended Martin Hayes’s class at Scoil Éigse as a teenager. At the time, Lisa was experiencing a decline of interest in traditional music, and Lisa suggests that Martin’s music and ideas rekindled her interest and passion for Irish traditional music and fiddle playing:

As a teenager, I slightly dropped a lot of it [playing fiddle]... Then when I hit sixteen or seventeen, I went to Scoil Éigse in Clonmel, and Martin Hayes was my tutor. And that was like a whole new phrase. It was like the lights went back on, and I came out of my teenage whatever. So it really turned a new corner for me. I became completely and utterly overwhelmed by the man and his music and his ideas (O’Sullivan, interview).

For Lisa, learning from Martin Hayes at Scoil Éigse was not merely a moment when important musical information was passed on; it was significant in terms of her identity formation as a traditional musician. Lisa moved from a teenage phase of disinterest, towards an adult appreciation of Irish traditional music. Interacting with Martin during Scoil Éigse was a powerful experience for Lisa during a time when motivation was problematic. Michael O’Sullivan also believes Scoil Éigse classes motivated him during his teenage years. Michael took banjo classes at Scoil Éigse with Brian McGrath, and he describes the classes as ‘a huge influence

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<sup>39</sup> (Liz Doherty, James Duggan, Helen Gubbins, Geraldine O’Callaghan, Lisa O’Sullivan, Michael O’Sullivan, and Niall Vallely, interviews).

that time. Workshops were a huge factor when you're a teenager in keeping you interested and realizing that there are other people playing' (O'Sullivan, interview). As a student at Scoil Éigse, Michael acquired many tunes and banjo techniques. More importantly perhaps, Michael gained inspiration being around other musicians his own age, and realizing that traditional music was relevant to his social life. This provided the impetus to continue participating throughout his teenage years and into adulthood.

Interviewees also suggest that Scoil Éigse classes are useful and effective learning experiences, because they are led by master musicians. During classes, learners are able to observe and imitate exceptional models of their particular instrument, and this can transmit instrumental techniques as well as stylistic nuances. Over the years, Geraldine O'Callaghan suggests that she gained insight into many aspects of fiddle style by interacting with tutors and exceptional traditional musicians at Scoil Éigse. Geraldine discusses her experiences:

I remember going to Scoil Éigse one year and Denis Liddy was teaching me. And he taught me an upper cut... and it was something that I didn't know previously and it was something that immediately became a part of how I regularly played. So it was something very very small, but incredibly influential (O'Callaghan, interview).

## Irish Traditional Music Festivals

To many musicians and enthusiasts, attending traditional music festivals are significant musical, cultural, and social experiences. Music-making and socializing at festivals have noteworthy implications in terms of the enculturation process. However, learning is often a secondary goal, if a goal at all. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder argue that annual events and festivals create an important rhythm for the community, and foster a sense of unity, consistency, 'movement and aliveness' (2002:62). Festivals give practitioners something to look forward to throughout the year, and provide opportunities for traditional musicians to meet or reconnect. In this section, I propose that festivals are influential socio-musical events which contribute to enculturation and learning processes in complex ways. I discuss informal learning at festivals, focusing mainly on CCÉ's annual Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.<sup>40</sup> I conclude with a discussion of the

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<sup>40</sup> The Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann is also referred to as the All-Ireland Fleadh, Fleadh Cheoil, or

educational implications of participating in CCÉ competitions.

Throughout Ireland's history, music festivals have played a role in preserving and transmitting musical traditions. The Belfast Harpers' Festival in 1792 aimed to revitalize the dying harp tradition (Hast and Scott 2004:25; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008:72; Williams 2010:59), and since then, numerous music festivals have been organized to promote or reinvigorate musical traditions. In the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, the Feis Ceoil was established to provide new competitive performance opportunities for classical and traditional musicians. McCarthy discusses the history of the Feis Ceoil:

The Feis Ceoil or Music Festival Association was founded in 1895... The aims of the Feis Ceoil were to promote the study and cultivation of Irish music and music in general in Ireland, to hold an annual Feis Ceoil, consisting of prize competitions and concerts (1999:73-74).

Although many traditional musicians have participated in Feis competitions over the years, the Feis Ceoil is currently not a well-attended or significant festival within the traditional music community. The Feis Ceoil is often considered a classical music event, although it still hosts traditional music competitions (Hamilton 1996:39). While many uilleann pipers competed in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Feis Ceoil 'gradually ran out of steam in the 1920s. Although the movement enjoyed only a relatively short-lived popularity among traditional musicians, it did inspire the notion that some might become concert performers' (Kearns and Taylor 2003:87).<sup>41</sup> From the point of view of traditional musicians, the Feis ultimately became obsolete when CCÉ established the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in 1951.

It seems that new traditional music festivals are established every year, in different locations, with different aims and purposes. A decade ago, summer was 'festival season', but now Irish traditional music festivals occur throughout the calendar year. Several festivals popular amongst traditional musicians take place

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simply 'the Fleadh' – an abbreviation used throughout this chapter for brevity. Fleadh means 'festival' in the Irish language (fleadhanna is the pluralized form). A 'fleadh' can also refer to other CCÉ music festival, (e.g. the Munster Fleadh).

<sup>41</sup> Leo Rowsome participated in Feis competitions, for instance: 'In the early 20s, competitions were the order of the day, and it was through taking part in competitions that Leo came to prominence' (Rowsome 1995:3). Bradshaw suggests that Michael Coleman was influenced by participating in the Sligo Feis Ceoil (1991:36-7). For more information on the Feis Ceoil see (Hamilton 1996, 1999b; Hast and Scott 2004; Kearns and Taylor 2003; McCarthy 1999; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008; O'Shea 2005).

during the tourist ‘off-season’, such as the Ennis Trad Festival held in November. Because traditional music festivals differ significantly in purpose and activities, the educational effects of festival participation are multifaceted. For the purposes of exploring the educational implications of attending traditional music festivals, I have classified the types of festivals into three broad categories: education-based, competition-based, and performance-based festivals.

Education-based festivals have explicit aims and goals to transmit Irish traditional music and its culture. Classes, lectures, and recitals are usually the primary activities and the focus of these festivals, although informal music-making and performances, such as sessions, also commonly feature. Since many summer schools have ‘festival-like’ atmospheres, it could be suggested that they also fall into this category. Some education-based festivals, such as Cruinniú na bhFliúit and the William Kennedy Piping Festival, promote the transmission of particular traditional instruments.

Competition-based festivals aim to promote traditional music by raising standards through organized competitions. Such festivals include, the Feis Ceoil, Oireachtas na Gaeilge, and CCÉ’s fleadhanna.<sup>42</sup> CCÉ competitions are by far the most popular in terms of participation and attendance. Indeed, as explored later on, when discussing traditional music competitions my interviewees always referred to CCÉ events.

**Table 5: List of performance-based Irish traditional music festivals<sup>43</sup>**

Name of festival:	Location:	Typically held:
Temple Bar Trad Fest	Dublin	January
Ballincollig Winter Festival	Cork	January
Corofin Traditional Festival	Clare	February
Clifden Traditional Music Festival	Galway	April
Baltimore Fiddle Fair	West Cork	May
Patsy Farrell Festival	Longford	August
Ballyshannon Folk & Traditional Music Festival	Donegal	August
Feakle International Traditional Music Festival	Clare	August
Masters of Tradition	Cork	August
Dingle TradFest	Kerry	September
Tulla Trad Festival	Clare	September
Cork Folk Festival	Cork	October
Ennis Trad Festival	Clare	November

<sup>42</sup> Oireachtas na Gaeilge is an event which hosts performances and competitions of Irish music, song, dance, and poetry.

<sup>43</sup> All the spellings on this table and throughout this chapter are the official spellings of each festival (such as the Dingle TradFest, and the Ennis Trad Festival). This is by no means an extensive list. A relatively up-to-date list of Irish traditional music festivals (and links) is available online at [www.livetrad.com](http://www.livetrad.com).

Performance-based festivals lack educational and competitive purposes, and tend to have informal agendas and aims (see Table 5). Many of these festivals may not aim to transmit or even promote traditional music; instead, they celebrate music-making through concerts, gigs, and sessions. When workshops are hosted by performance-based festivals, attendance is generally low.<sup>44</sup> Traditional musicians typically attend performance-based festivals primarily to listen, play music, and socialize. The majority of adult, experienced traditional musicians no longer attend workshops, and late night sessions usually take priority over daytime classes. Traditional music sessions are a main feature of performance-based festivals, and are often organized as part of the festival programme. Organizers of the Ennis Trad Festival, for example, employ well-known traditional musicians to run sessions throughout the town's pubs. A session schedule appears in the festival's programme, so listeners and musicians can attend the session which interests them the most (see Image 6).

**Image 6: Ennis Trad Festival programme**



**ENNIS TRAD FESTIVAL**  
NOVEMBER 11 TO 15

**ANY OLD TIME SHUCKIN' AND JIVIN' (THURS)**  
**THE WEST WIND (IN ASSOC. WITH CLARE FM) (FRI)**  
**MÁIRTÍN O'CONNOR, CATHAL HAYDEN, SEAMIE O'DOWD AND JIMMY HIGGINS (FRI)**  
**SENIOR CÉILÍ BAND COMPETITION (SAT)**  
**THE DAVE MUNNELLY BAND AND TRAD DISCO (SAT)**  
**THE BROCK MCGUIRE BAND WITH NOEL BATTLE (SUN)**  
**CHARLIE HARRIS, MAEVE DONNELLY, GERALDINE AND**

**Over 100 sessions throughout the weekend!**

*Also... masterclasses in various instruments :: dance workshops :: festival fry :: CD launches :: trad-themed charity table quiz (proceeds to Cahercalla Hospice) :: céili*

**FRIDAY NIGHT SESSIONS**

VENUE	TIME	MUSICIANS / SINGERS
AUBURN LODGE HOTEL	9.30pm	Jimmy McGreevy, Eithne Ní Dhomhail, Sinéad Heagney, Eamon Riordan
THE COPPER JUG	9.30pm	John Wynne, John McEvoy, Tom McDonagh
MICKY KERIN'S	9.30pm	Noel O'Donoghue & Friends
O' KEEFE'S	9.30pm	Niamh O' Dea, Mirella Murray, Tóla Custy
MAY KEARNEY'S	9.30pm	C Session Aoibhearn Devlin, Eamonn Cotter, Tim Collins
CRUISES	9.30pm 11.30pm	Shane Hayes & Friends Bad Pennies
CIARAN'S BAR	9.30pm	Edel Fox, Denis Liddy, Elvie Miller, Garry Shannon
THE ROWAN TREE	9.30pm	Candlelight Gig Meadhúbh Boyd, Catherine Drapier, Roma Casey, Steph Geremia, Sandra Steinort
PREACHER'S	9.30pm	Anne-Marie McCormack, Anthony Quigney, John Maloney
BROGAN'S	9.30pm	Siobhan Peoples, Geraldine MacNamara, Noel O'Grady, Pádraig Kelleher
THE DIAMOND	9.30pm	Seamus Heneghan, Denis Ryan, Catherine McEvoy
POET'S CORNER, OLD GROUND HOTEL	10pm	Karol Lynch, Murty Ryan & Friends
F.J. KELLY'S	9.30pm	Conor Caldwell, Tríona Flavin, Tom Morrow
THE USUAL PLACE	9.30pm	Dave Hennessy, Katrina Emtage, Barry O'Donovan, Tony Di Marco
BRIAN KELLY'S	9.30pm	John Kelly, Meabh O'Hare, Trish Hutton, Grace Kelly
O'HALLORAN'S	9.30pm	Dermot Lennihan, Eamon Coyne, Mick Coyne, Peter Gallagher
ENNIS GOLF CLUB	9.30pm	Dan Brudair, Angelina Carberry, Dave Sheridan (Flute)

At all types of traditional music festivals, sessions are sites of informal learning, musical participation, and socializing. During festival sessions,

<sup>44</sup> During my fieldwork, I observed low workshop attendance at several performance-based festivals, such as the Baltimore Fiddle Fair, Cork Folk Festival, and the Ennis Trad Festival.

musicians meet other practitioners and are exposed to new styles and repertoire. The interview data suggests that interacting with other musicians at festivals sessions is musically, educationally, and socially influential in terms of musical enculturation.<sup>45</sup> Festival sessions are intense, compared to weekly pub sessions; Cormac De Frein suggests that playing in long sessions at festivals forces him to explore his memory for tunes. Listening and playing with other musicians also reminds Cormac of tunes he may have forgotten over the years. Cormac states:

If I go to a festival and I'm playing for the whole day, about four or five hours... You end up dragging tunes out of your head that you haven't played in years... If you're playing nonstop for two days, and you're trying to think of tunes you haven't played yet, it's amazing the amount of tunes that come out of your head. Or someone else plays one that you use to play... So, that's what I like about festivals really. Just tunes you haven't played in ages and someone reminds you of it (De Frein, interview).

For traditional musicians, festival sessions can be a different and exciting musical experience, which breaks the monotony of everyday life. Lisa O'Sullivan suggests that the weekly pub session can become a little 'insular', but attending sessions at festivals can reinvigorating the learning process:

Being in the same session every week - it just becomes a little bit insular, and sometimes that one festival might just inspire you just go 'I'm going to learn loads of new tunes!' I always find that I come back from a festival just buzzing and feeling all inspired (O'Sullivan, interview).

Lisa gains inspiration from festivals by hearing new tunes and playing with other musicians, and I suggest this is a significant learning experience, especially during adulthood. Experienced traditional musicians (those who have played for more than a decade), tend to learn almost entirely through informal means, including listening and playing in sessions and along to commercial recordings. I suggest that informal music-making at festivals are particularly meaningful to teenage and adult practitioners; participating in festival sessions plays a role in the long-term process of musical enculturation.

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<sup>45</sup> (Lisa O'Sullivan, Michael O'Sullivan, John Reid, Seamus Sands, Hammy Hamilton, Niall Vallely, Cormac De Frein, Tomás Ó Canainn, interviews).



## Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann

Established in 1951 by CCÉ, the annual Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann is the largest Irish traditional music festival, and one of the most important events within the Irish traditional music community. The Fleadh provides social and musical outlets for traditional musicians, and is generally acknowledged for the role it played during the revival.<sup>46</sup> Every August, hundreds of musicians, singers, and dancers of all ages compete in several categories of the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.<sup>47</sup> The Fleadh also attracts thousands of musicians, enthusiasts, and spectators. In recent years, some estimates have been as high as 200,000 visitors (O'Flynn 2009:50). The vast majority of attendees do not compete at the Fleadh, but attend for social, cultural, and musical reasons. The Fleadh is more than a music competition; it is a festival which includes diverse activities, such as recitals, concerts, céilithe, sessions, and workshops at Scoil Éigse.

Within the literature, scholars emphasize that informal events at the Fleadh are influential musical and educational moments. Henry suggests that the Fleadh's informal music events encourage public interest in Irish traditional music:

The informal music events as well as the formal ones stimulate much interest and activity. Players come... to play in the informal sessions on the streets and in the pubs. Families come to support their competing members, and in the process more people are exposed to the music. All musicians are stimulated by the attention and respect they receive (1989:75).

Hamilton also highlights that socializing and playing sessions at the Fleadh Cheoil is nearly equal to the competitions in importance. He suggests:

Alongside the competitions, the social aspect of the fleadh was of immense importance. Only a small minority of the musicians who would attend would be directly involved in competition, the others would simply see the event as an opportunity for music making and meeting friends (1996:166-7).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> For a discussion of CCÉ's role during the revival, see (Hamilton 1996:164; Hast and Scott 2004:49-51; Kaul 2009; Ó hAllmhuráin 1998:123; O'Shea 2008, 107; Vallely 2004b:29; Williams 2010).

<sup>47</sup> Musicians compete in four different age categories; under 12, 12-15, 15-18, and the over 18 (senior) competition. Regional competitions take place throughout Ireland and the rest of the world. For more information about competition rules and regulations see ([www.comhaltas.ie](http://www.comhaltas.ie)).

<sup>48</sup> Williams also suggests that 'Perhaps the most important aspect of any festival or competition is the spontaneous musical activity occurring off stage. At almost any Irish festival, most of the nearby pubs are packed with bystanders who watch [the] musicians' (2010:215).



As explored in this section, my fieldwork observations and interview data also suggests that informal and social activities at the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann fosters learning and enculturation processes.

My interviewees emphasize that competitions are only one aspect of the whole Fleadh experience. James Duggan suggests that the Fleadh ‘is more than the competition’ (Duggan, interview) and Niall Vallely states, ‘I use to love going to the fleadh. To me, it was more about going and playing tunes and hanging out with people’ (Vallely, interview). Many interviewees’ narratives about the Fleadh focused on the informal music-making and social events.<sup>49</sup> Mary Bergin, for instance, did not take the competitions too seriously, and most of her pleasant memories of the Fleadh are of non-competitive social and musical events:

I really didn't think of it in terms of competitions, because all the competitions were held in these awful schools. I saw it as an opportunity for me to be brought to the fleadh... I remember a load of whistle players would be playing in the jacks in these awful schools and someone would come in and yell, ‘You're on!’ You had to race into the competition and play a couple tunes and then go back to the jacks to play some more. We didn't even know who won half the time. It was absolutely irrelevant! The *craic* was just having tunes together and playing. That's honestly what I remember about competitions (Bergin, interview).

The traditional musicians who participated in Veblen’s research also valued ‘the camaraderie and festive occasions’, so much so that, as Veblen points out, they often did not think to mention that they competed during the fleadh (1991:90). Because of the social nature of events at the festival, to many musicians, the Fleadh is a site of socialization, enculturation, and learning.

To musicians born before the 1940s, the establishment of the Fleadh Cheoil na Éireann transformed socio-musical life and modes of transmission. Prior to the Fleadh, opportunities to play with hundreds of traditional musicians from diverse localities were rare (perhaps except for traveling musicians). The Fleadh made it possible to interact with a large network of traditional musicians. Tomás Ó Canainn discusses how the Fleadh provided a site of communal musical and social exchanges, and significantly impacted his musical life:

Sean MacNamara, round about 1956, went over to the

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<sup>49</sup> (Mary Bergin, Liz Doherty, James Duggan, Hammy Hamilton, Connie O’Connell, Conal Ó Gráda, Lisa, O’Sullivan, Michael O’Sullivan, Seamus Sands, and Niall Vallely, interviews).

Fleadh at Ennis, and he came back with this big news all about Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and the Fleadh Cheoil. And that changed our whole perspective. So then, we started going every year to the Fleadh, wherever it was. So that was a big thing for us, because then you would meet what we would call real Irish musicians. You would be picking up tunes and after a while they would be picking up tunes from you, so that was a very very nice time (Ó Canainn, interview).

While participating in the Fleadh's diverse activities, Tomás heard new repertoire and styles, but more importantly, he was able to practice and celebrate Irish traditional music in a new context alongside a multitude of other practitioners. Such interactions are crucial during the learning process, and certainly played a role in Tomás's musical enculturation.

For musicians who attend regularly, the annual Fleadh can become a consistent, yet still exciting routine. My research suggests that many traditional musicians attend the Fleadh throughout the various stages of musical development, throughout childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood. The educational implications of this are numerous and significant. A musician's experience and their participation in the Fleadh can differ significantly depending on their age and stage of development. In general, children's experiences at the Fleadh include participating in Scoil Éigse, competitions, and listening, watching, and playing in daytime and early evening sessions. Teenagers also engage in these activities, but their experiences can differ to that of children because they often focus much more on socializing with their peers. The adult musicians attend gigs, concerts, and participate in informal music-making, but most adult musicians do not compete or attend Scoil Éigse. Lisa O'Sullivan suggests that the Fleadh provides different outlets for learners at varying stages of their musical development. She discusses how her experience at the Fleadh changed over the years:

I just kept going [to the Fleadh] all the way through. You saw other people your age playing, and it became a little scene, a little thing. And then as an older teenager and early twenties, the whole drinking thing became a little more prevalent and became a bit more about the fun and meeting boys and all this carry on. I still really enjoy them today (O'Sullivan, interview).

I argue that because CCÉ provides a multitude of activities throughout the week, musicians of all skill levels and non-musicians alike have meaningful social and

musical experiences at the Fleadh.

During fleadhanna musicians engage with a diverse community of practitioners and like-minded people, and I suggest that these interactions can directly affect musical enculturation. Learners who attend the fleadh realize that hundreds (or thousands) of their peers engage in similar music-making activities. This validates their music-making at home, since Irish traditional music seems like a socially relevant practice. Lisa O’Sullivan describes why she enjoys attending the Fleadh:

I think they are just great to go and meet other people  
and hear other styles and hear new tunes and just chat  
and meet like-minded people. It kind of gets you into  
the whole spirit of the tunes (O’Sullivan, interview).

When learners feel that a practice is relevant to their lives, they are more likely to continue participating and to identify themselves as traditional musicians. While making meaningful connections to other practitioners at the Fleadh, learners can also feel a connection to the community of practice. The Fleadh Cheoil acts as a site for face-to-face networking, socializing, learning, and music-making.

In addition to establishing new connections, my research also suggests that while attending the Fleadh, musicians can strengthen already established relationships with their peers. For instance, many local communities and CCÉ branches prepare, travel, and attend the Fleadh as a group. Preparing for competitions can bring a community together. Hast and Scott suggest that competitions can be ‘community builders: at the branch or regional level, they bring people of different generations together to participate in a local community event’ (2004:50). Lisa O’Sullivan feels that the Fleadh strengthened preexisting bonds she had with peers and acquaintances from her own locality. She explains:

There was a real community thing; we got on a bus and  
the whole small village that I’m from went and  
participated in these fleadhs and just had so much fun  
(O’Sullivan, interview).

To Lisa, preparing and traveling to the Fleadh was a community activity.

Because the Fleadh is an intense musical experience, it may seem like a distinct, yet interconnected community. The Fleadh is often viewed as ‘a little scene’ (Lisa O’Sullivan, interview) or a type of community of its own. James Duggan suggest, by attending fleadhanna over the years he felt he ‘became a part

of a community, you know? A different community as well' (Duggan, interview). The competitive nature of the Fleadh is the most significant difference between the Fleadh Cheoil and everyday musical life within the traditional music community. Competitiveness is not a characteristic of other traditional music-making events, such as sessions or céilithe, for instance.

## **Competitions**

Participating in music competitions directly impacts learners' musical development, identity, and sense of worth. In this section, I explore the educational advantages and limitations of participating in traditional music competitions. The interview data suggests that some learners are motivated by competitions, while others feel competing was detrimental to their musical development. Other interviewees have mixed views on the subject.

Many Irish traditional musicians participate in CCE competitions, and to these musicians preparing, performing, and learning from the results can be an immensely significant learning experience, especially during childhood and adolescence. Seventeen of the twenty interviewees competed at fleadhanna,<sup>50</sup> and due to this pervasiveness, the educational implications of participating in competitions warrants thoughtful and continued investigation and discussion. It must be noted that my research is quite narrow in scope; because my interviewees are exceptional traditional musicians, their narratives present a specific musical experience. If one were to interview traditional musicians of varying skill levels, a much different perspective would emerge. Additionally, I agree with McCarthy who states that the 'significance of competition in the development of Irish musical culture deserves to be treated in a separate study' (McCarthy 1999:191). Further investigation and research is needed to explore the educational implications of participating in Irish traditional music competitions.

Traditional musicians and scholars often deliberate if competitions are an effective way to promote and encourage excellence in Irish traditional music. Indeed, 'The effects of competitions on the life of Irish traditional music and dance are vehemently debated' (Hast and Scott 2004:53). Kaul also states:

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<sup>50</sup> (Mary Bergin, Matt Cranitch, Cormac De Frein, Liz Doherty, James Duggan, Aoife Granville, Helen Gubbins, Martin Hayes, Geraldine O'Callaghan, Tomás Ó Canainn, Connie O'Connell, Conal Ó Gráda, Lisa O'Sullivan, Michael O'Sullivan, John Reid, Seamus Sands, and Niall Vallely, interviews).

To this day, opinions about CCE and the competitions can sometimes be bitter. Some musicians I know regularly attend *fleadhanna* and look forward to the exciting atmosphere that surrounds them, but many musicians are also equally dismissive. The latter feel strongly that the very act of competing and judging fosters a misguided elitism in the music and erodes its original evocation of a sense of community (2009:52).

As explored throughout this section, while some interviewees have strong opinions, many have mixed feelings about learners participating in CCÉ's competitions. Some participants enjoyed competing as children, but have concerns about competitive playing. Other interviewees personally disliked competing, but acknowledged the educational advantages of competing, such as gaining motivation to practice.

The limitations and merits of competition have also been debated since the beginning of formal music education, and continue into the present. As Austin suggests, 'For most of this century, the relative merits and pitfalls of music contests have been debated' (1990:21).<sup>51</sup> Music educators have 'recognized a rather specific list of advantages and disadvantages of music contest participation. Those educators who advocate music contests tend to de-emphasize weaknesses in the process, while those opposed to contests are prone to overlook potential benefits' (Walker 1998:223). I do not argue for or against competitions; I begin by exploring the 'specific list of advantages' of participating in competitions. Following this, I discuss the disadvantages and challenges.

Women, in particular, have benefited by participating in CCÉ competitions (O'Shea 2005; 2008). O'Shea suggests that before the 1950s, male traditional musicians had opportunities to play in pub sessions, where they garnered at least some informal recognition of their musical abilities. She argues women, on the other hand, largely did not participate in pub sessions, and therefore had fewer opportunities to learn and perform Irish traditional music than male musicians. O'Shea proposes that women 'were nurtured, not in pubs, but in domestic and institutional settings such as Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann' (2008:108-9). For both male and female traditional musicians, CCÉ competitions provide a performance platform and a way of gaining recognition for one's

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<sup>51</sup> Burnsed and Sochinski also suggest that 'Music educators are generally divided in their opinions about the effects of the competition movement' (1983:25). For further discussion and a history of music competitions, see also (Austin 1990; Burnsed and Sochinski 1983; Camp 1990; Chenoweth 1947; Dykema 1923; Fowles 1929; Jones 1943; Maddy 1936; Miller 1994; Sloboda 1990; Walker 1998; Wilson 1926).

musical accomplishments. All-Ireland champions enjoy a heightened status and are often afforded more performance opportunities, within and outside of CCÉ's organization. Winners of CCÉ competitions are often invited to play and perform in other contexts. Tomás Ó Canainn suggests that 'winning was important just because it gave you a certain status and it got you among the better players' (Ó Canainn, interview). To Tomás, a heightened status was not inherently beneficial or the goal of competing; it provided more opportunities to play with other accomplished traditional musicians. He states that winning 'meant that you got to know more people and more people would want to know you because you were so-called pipes champion and all that. So it was a great time, a very exciting time indeed' (Ó Canainn, interview). According to Tomás, these types of interactions with other musicians nurtured his continued development as a traditional musician.

Within the literature and my interview data, motivation is highlighted as one of the primary educational advantages of participating in music competitions. Sky suggests that even traditional musicians 'who oppose or hold serious reservations about the value of competitions often acknowledge that they are a good way for youngsters to work toward a goal and that they provide an incentive for practicing' (1997:156). Music educators also argue that competitions 'motivate students to performance and achievement levels much higher than would be reached otherwise' (Walker 1998:224).

Several of my interviewees described how CCÉ competitions motivated them to practice, which helped them to achieve a higher standard of performance. Because Irish traditional musicians often learn informally, participating in competitions can provide learners with useful tangible goals. Interviewees suggest that children, in particular, need motivation to practice, and for them, preparing for competitions fulfilled this function. Lisa O'Sullivan states that during childhood, she 'practiced like there was no tomorrow' for CCÉ competitions (O'Sullivan, interview). Michael O'Sullivan also states that competitions 'were your measuring stick and it was something to aim for because when you were younger it was one of the only things to keep you practicing' (O'Sullivan, interview). Additionally, Seamus Sands discusses both the 'pros and cons' to participating in competitions. While he has some concerns over the inherent subjectivity of adjudicating competitions, Seamus is unconvinced that participating in competitions is detrimental to learners. Seamus discusses how

competitions motivated him as a child and teenager:

If I wasn't working towards competitions, I wouldn't have played as much as I did... In general, I like to have targets, deadlines. I suppose personally-wise I'm competitive in sport and anything else. So that kind of worked for me as a trigger. Looking back, there are pros and cons to it. How can you take four or five competent musicians and say one's better than the other? You're really choosing the style that you like. But certainly, I'd have to say it got me learning lots of tunes, it got me to sit down with the tape recorder and different versions I might not have heard. It's all very well saying competitions are a bad thing, but I'm not convinced that they are, particularly for kids; it's whatever works (Sands, interview).

Seamus identifies himself as a competitive person, who enjoys working with deadlines and targets. For this reason, Seamus feels that preparing for and performing in competitions was an effective learning experience.

Because competitions provide learners with concrete goals, preparing for competitions is a (somewhat) formal and structured learning experience.<sup>52</sup> Some interviewees described their learning as more disciplined or systematic when preparing for competitions. Aoife Granville discusses how competitions help learners to focus and become more disciplined with their practicing. She suggests that when preparing for competitions she started to consciously practice and perfect aspects of her style and technique:

I had to be disciplined and improve. So it worked, but it was hard work... That was probably the first time I started thinking about what I had to do. I was kind of breaking it down – the ornaments and maybe changing a bit of how I was doing the rolls, and making sure they were really rhythmic... It was the first time I had to think about the technique as a whole (Granville, interview).

Aoife's learning experience can be viewed as conscious and purposeful in nature.

Competitions provide learners with extrinsic motivations. McCarthy states the extrinsic rewards of traditional music competitions create a more formal mode of transmission, comparative to the 'pedagogical traits of classical music' (1999:136). Niall Vallely also believes that preparing for CCÉ competitions is similar to classical music tuition. Niall also compares the process

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<sup>52</sup> Fleming also refers to traditional music competitions as a type of 'structured learning environment' (2004:244).

of studying for piano exams to learning only a few tunes for CCÉ competitions:

...to learn your three tunes to play in the fleadh every year; It's a bit like how people learn classical piano... You're taught in order to do the exam and you learn the piece for the exam, but you don't actually learn any music really... If that's all there is, it doesn't seem to work (Vallely, interview).

This highlights how extrinsic rewards can significantly affect the learning process; Several interviewees suggest that some learners focus on perfecting a handful of tunes in order to compete well during fleadhanna.<sup>53</sup> When musicians (or their teachers) choose this method, the learner focuses on performing and competing well, rather than learning a broad repertoire of tunes for casual music-making in sessions, for instance. Extrinsic rewards motivate their technical and stylistic development, perhaps at the expense of a large repertoire of tunes.

Learners can also experience intrinsic rewards during music competitions. Csikszentmihalyi provides the example that a composer may be extrinsically motivated to complete a composition in order to get paid, but while composing, he is likely to be intrinsically motivated to create his music (2000:22). While extrinsic rewards are not detrimental to learners, Csikszentmihalyi suggests that intrinsic motivations play a significant role in developing creativity and achieving 'flow' – a mental state in which a person is immersed and intensely focused on a particular activity. He states, 'People who enjoy intrinsic rewards describe what they are doing as significantly less competitive and more creative than those who rely to a greater extent on external incentives' (Csikszentmihalyi 2000:32). My interviewees' narratives suggest that during childhood, competitions acted as an extrinsic motivator. Eventually, all of my interviewees became intrinsically interested in Irish traditional music, and no longer relied on extrinsic motivations to play or practice. In this way, extrinsic rewards may be useful to aid learners to the stage of musical development in which they begin to intrinsically enjoy music-making and learning.

Success in competitions can motivate or inspire musicians to continue participating in traditional music-making – both non-competitively and

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<sup>53</sup> Helen Gubbins states, 'There were many disadvantages to doing Fleadh Cheoil competitions every year, and just learning and perfecting your three or four tunes' (interview). Liz Doherty also suggests, 'We never learned many tunes, but we could play the tunes we knew very well. So for all the years that I went to classes with Dinny, I'd say I probably learned about a dozen tunes' (Doherty, interview).



competitively. Winners are praised for their abilities and accomplishments, and this recognition validates them as traditional musicians and may raise their level of self-confidence. A few interviewees mention that success in competitions fueled their incentive to continue competing. Matt Cranitch states, 'I did enter competitions and was successful at a young age. So, that acted as a type of impetus as well to continue' (Cranitch, interview). Even modest achievement in competitions seems to motivate learners to continue. James Duggan discusses his experiences at CCÉ competitions, and suggests without modest success, he may not have continued competing as long as he did:

I've been going to the All-Ireland fleadh every year... If in those first couple of years, I hadn't won anything, I don't know if I would have bothered with the fleadhs... I came in second in the All-Ireland in the airs... I won the under-18 in Munster in 2007, got second in the All-Ireland. So I guess the little bit of successes here and there that's probably why and what kept me interested in competitions (Duggan, interview).

When musicians feel that they have performed well (not necessarily only when they win), competitions can be positive learning experiences.

Learners may face challenges and issues while preparing for, performing, and dealing with the results of music competitions. Musicians often highlight the inherent subjectivity involved in judging music competitions. For instance, Seamus Sands asked: 'How can you take four or five competent musicians and say one's better than the other? You're really choosing the style that you like' (Sands, interview). Related to issues of subjectivity, educators, scholars, and musicians also have concerns about music competitions standardizing musical expression and promoting conformity. Miller argues the inherent conformity of music competitions causes them to be 'the antithesis of productivity' (1994:31). Miller also discusses how competitions inherently involve conformity and standardization, and how this affects musical creativity:

In order for competition to work, people must be measured by the same standard. The same rules apply to everyone, and the game must be played the same way each time. Creativity and individualism are the opposite of competition because the very nature of creativity is to originate something new that defies standardization (1994:31).

Within the Irish traditional music community, conformity is also viewed as an

inhibitor of creativity, variation, and individuality of expression.<sup>54</sup> One common concern is that competitors will alter their style to conform to judges' subjective preferences. Mary Bergin suggests that competitions may be detrimental to learners trying to develop their own sense of style and creative interpretation and expression. Mary discusses the pressures learners face while competing:

In competitions now-a-days, people are looking to see who is adjudicating and what they are going to look for. So they're aiming to be what that person wants or likes. And that's very detrimental, I think. That's very bad for people developing their own style of playing. It's very limited because you have kids focusing, and they know that this adjudicator likes this and they're going to focus on that... Things like that are not good (Bergin, interview).

While standardization is an intrinsic part of music competitions, many traditional musicians compete yet retain and continue developing their own individualistic styles. Indeed, All-Ireland champions are often praised for their technical prowess and exceptional creative expression and original style. Vallely describes a common fear that competitive standards 'can yield only systemization and Stepford Wives zombies among commentators and players' (2004b:31). However, he refutes this view by suggesting that:

...the status of top players today, most of whom have won their standards-controlled All-Ireland titles (at a conveniently distant time in the past of course) answers these fears – individual stylists are still obvious (2004b:31).

Many of my interviewees are good examples of the endurance of individual styles and expression despite participating in (and winning) CCÉ competitions.<sup>55</sup> Although he aimed to perform to the best of his ability, Martin Hayes discusses how he did not alter his style in order to win competitions:

I never really adapted my music for competition. I just did what I did. I think it was a freer time. I think adjudicators were less formal and less dictated to by rules or dos and don'ts... I didn't design the foolproof: 'Here we are, we're going to show all the techniques she

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<sup>54</sup>For a discussion on the standardizing of musical styles see (Fleming 2004; Henry 1989; Kearns and Taylor 2003; Mac Aoidh 1994; Ó hAllmhuráin 1998; O'Shea 2008; Sky 1997; Vallely 2004b).

<sup>55</sup>For instance, Mary Bergin, Martin Hayes, Tomás Ó Canainn, Connie O'Connell, Conal Ó Gráda, and Niall Vallely, have all won medals at the All-Ireland Fleadh, yet have distinct individual styles.

could possibly want to hear played in a traditional manner, or in the Coleman style.' I never bother with stuff like that. I don't think I let competitions shape me in anyway. But I used to summon a lot of feeling to play. It was a strong sense of occasion for me and I would give it all my heart and soul (Hayes, interview).

Martin also suggests that he competed during a 'freer time', suggesting that he believes competitions are currently perhaps more constricting.<sup>56</sup>

Some musicians and commentators feel that 'regional discrimination' (Henry 1989:91) is rife within CCÉ's competitive structure, and competitions may negatively affect the development and transmission of regional styles. Mac Aoidh suggests that because tune types, such as highlands and barn dances, are disallowed from CCÉ competitions, the organization is biased against Donegal style fiddle playing (Mac Aoidh 1994, 1997). Cranitch also points out that polkas and slides, prominent tune types in the Sliabh Luachra area, are also not accepted in CCÉ competitions (2003:24). CCÉ competitions only permit standard repertoire common throughout Ireland, such as reels, jigs, and hornpipes. While these are valid concerns, it must be noted that several traditional musicians who play in distinct regional styles have won All-Ireland titles. While Mac Aoidh criticizes CCÉ's policy towards Donegal fiddle playing, in his book he also highlights Donegal fiddlers who have won All-Ireland titles (Mac Aoidh 1994). The results also suggest that All-Ireland champions come from diverse localities and regional styles. Furthermore, Keegan suggests that CCÉ competitions have played a role in reviving regional styles:

...there had been a revival of interest in the older, regional styles largely through the efforts of Comhaltas who reward their reproduction through a system of competitions (1992:131).

Several educators highlight the negative effects music competitions can have on young learners. McCarthy suggests that in Ireland, as early as the 1890s, the 'negative effects of music competitions were acknowledged officially... In national schools, the ills of competition in children's music education – fear, compulsion, humiliation, jealousy – were discussed' (1999:84). Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, educators in the United States have also acknowledged competitions as 'a major threat to mental health' (Chenoweth 1947:21), and educators in the

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<sup>56</sup> Mary Bergin also emphasized that 'In competitions now-a-days, people are looking to see who is adjudicating and what they are going to look for' (Bergin, interview).

UK have also ‘roundly condemned music competitions for their damaging effects’ (Sloboda 1990:40). Furthermore, Sharon Jones critiques the highly competitive nature of classical music conservatories, due to the related risks of ‘anxiety; nightmares, headaches and stomach aches; performance phobias; sleeping disorders; music-related physical pain; increased sibling rivalry’ (1990:391).

While my interviewees did not discuss extreme distress, such as sleeping disorders or physical pain, some described competing as ‘nerve-wrecking’ or ‘demoralizing’. Lisa O’Sullivan states, ‘The whole competition thing can be so difficult and so cut-throat. You don’t get recognition a lot of the time’ (O’Sullivan, interview). Solo competitions can be particularly stressful, and some interviewees suggest that the group and céilí band competitions were more enjoyable and less stressful. In several cases, interviewees gained confidence by participating in group competitions. The slow air competitions were also considered more accessible than the high-pressure solo competitions (James Duggan, Aoife Granville, interviews). Helen Gubbins describes competitions as ‘the biggest barrier’ that she encountered during the learning process. As a petite accordionist, Helen felt unable to compete with the strong, ‘masculine’ style of accordion playing that typically dominated Fleadh competitions. Struggles with competition left Helen feeling ‘a little bit demoralized’ (Gubbins, interview). She felt that her style would never be appreciated, that there was no place for her in the competitions:

I really loved the music, there was no shortage of expression there really, but I didn’t have a very good style of playing. It wasn’t very solid or stable.... I kind of felt sometimes that there was never going to be a place for me in that competition. I didn’t have the technique, and I thought my style was never going to be appreciated (Gubbins, interview).

Because of these circumstances, participating in competitions were not particularly effective learning experiences for Helen. As Helen suggests, she was already intrinsically motivated to play and practice Irish traditional music; instead of acting as a motivator, the pressures to compete contributed to a few insecurities about her musicality.

The vast majority of competitors never achieve All-Ireland glory, and perpetual defeat can be demoralizing. Losing can lead the ‘less talented, the less

confident, and the less fortunate down motivational dead-end streets' (Austin 1990:24-5). Musicians who struggle with competitions may question their musical ability and legitimacy as traditional musicians. Entering another music competition can begin to seem emotionally risky. Some learners may decide that the benefits of competitions are not worth this risk, and withdraw from competitions. (In more serious cases, some may even withdraw from music-making in general). Chenoweth also suggests that competitions can be emotionally detrimental to winners as well as losers:

One of the chief evils of music competition is not merely its unwholesome influence on those who fail but also on those who succeed in winning honors. Paradoxical as this may sound, any mental hygienist will spot the danger in this immediately. It is the danger of becoming a perfectionist (1947:21).

Winners may begin to associate their sense of self-worth with winning competitions, being the best, or being perfect, and therein lies the danger. Young competitors can become fixated on their own achievements, rather than on sharing of music and interacting with their peers. As the All-Ireland fiddle champion, Paddy Glackin states:

I came through the process of winning competitions, but they certainly gave me a false sense of my own importance, because really it has nothing to do with the interaction of music which is the most important thing (1992:36).

While preparing and participating in music competitions, some learners will feel motivated, while others many experience mixed or negative emotions. I suggest that personality and learning styles at least partially explain why there are such diverse experiences and opinions about CCE competitions within my interview data. Lisa O'Sullivan explains that she did not particularly enjoy participating in solo competitions. Instead of arguing that competitions are detrimental or ineffective learning experiences, she highlights that they did not suit her personality type:

I found solo competitions extremely nerve-wrecking. So, I never took to them, but the group thing was fun... I think it can be slightly destructive if you don't have the personality type that can take the knocks. I got a few knocks as a teen and I just found my confidence gone a little bit. It just wasn't my personality type (interview).

Niall Vallely identifies himself as a competitive person, but also suggests that music competitions did not suit his learning style or preferences. Niall discusses his experience competing at fleadhanna, highlighting how he often became bored with only preparing a few tunes for the competition:

I had a funny relationship with the competitions. I'm a competitive sort of a person. I like trying winning games and stuff like that, but I never actually did very well in the fleadh competitions. I just didn't relate to it... I'd kind of got bored of practicing the one tune to play it. So I'd often change my mind at the last minute and play some other tune, and then make a mess of it. I never really did well in the competitions (Vallely, interview).

I argue that CCÉ competitions are not simply beneficial or detrimental to young traditional musicians; in order to achieve a more nuanced view of the effect of competitions, we must consider an individual's personality and learning preferences. Participating in competitions can be a significantly effective learning strategy for some learners, but not for all.

Research from several disciplines examines how competitions affect people of differing ages, genders, and personality types. Some studies indicate that men tend to favour and succeed in competitive environments compared to their female peers (Burnsed and Sochinski 1983:25; Csikszentmihalyi 2000:20; Price 2008).<sup>57</sup> Price suggests that a 'number of recent experimental studies have found that men respond much more strongly than women to competition' (2008:320), and this may be due to 'a natural female propensity for cooperation rather than competition' (2008:322). Outgoing, dominate personalities are more likely to feel comfortable in high pressure situations, such as music competitions. Price concluded that if competitions favour one group over another, organizations need to seriously reconsider hosting competitions at all (2008:333).

Most CCÉ competitors are children, teens, and young adults, and for this reason, fleadh competitions are often viewed as 'a forum for learning music' and 'a rite of passage into an adult musical world' (Fleming 2004:249). Fleming discusses why traditional musicians tend to 'outgrow' competitions:

...even though thousands of children compete each year,  
dwindling numbers in competitions for older age

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<sup>57</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate the possible gender differences involved in CCÉ competition, and further research is needed in the future.

categories indicate that many children stop competing in their early teens. Several musicians I spoke with confirmed this trend... This phenomenon can be attributed to many factors, including negative experiences with competition, Comhaltas's association with young children, its "oldfashioned" image among young musicians, and basic teenage rebellion (2004:249).<sup>58</sup>

Several of my interviewees also suggest that traditional musicians eventually 'outgrow' competitions.<sup>59</sup> For instance, John Reid states that 'You kind of give up competitions after 18, that's it...' (Reid, interview). Some interviewees stopped competing after achieving their competitive goals. Others experienced uncomfortable or negative emotions, and competing no longer seemed useful or satisfying. Martin Hayes discusses how and why he stopped competing during his late teens:

I was nineteen or something; that was the end of that. You do outgrow it. It was fine, but you reach a point where the idea of music as a competition doesn't make sense anymore. Kids can respond to it in that sense, but I actually didn't feel that competitive about it (Hayes, interview).

Additionally, Conal Ó Gráda won several All-Ireland metals, but Conal observed the negative effects losing had on many of his peers. He discusses his experiences competing and why he decided to withdraw from competitions around age sixteen:

I won the All-Ireland a few times, on different instruments, in different age groups. But when I was sixteen or seventeen, I just said 'naw'. I remember walking out to my father and said, 'Never again.' He said, 'Why? But you just won!' I said, 'I know, but I didn't like it, ya know?' The main reason was a lot of the guys who came in second or third were good friends of mine, and I thought they were great players. And just to see the kind of impact on them, as a result going against them, I just thought it wasn't really kosher. It just didn't seem to fit (Ó Gráda, interview).

In this way, music competitions can 'create social tension among musicians' (Fleming 2004:242).

If competitive performances are common amongst children and

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<sup>58</sup> Meek (1987:17-8), Munnelly (1999:144), and Veblen (1991:121) also discuss how musicians tend to stop participating in their teens or twenties.

<sup>59</sup> (Michael O'Sullivan, Conal Ó Gráda, John Reid, Martin Hayes, Connie O'Connell, interviews).

adolescence, but rare amongst experienced practitioners, is the ability to compete a necessary or important musical skill? If music competitions are not an activity that experienced musicians engage with, should children be focusing their attention on competitions during childhood? Perhaps learners would benefit more, educationally, socially, and musically, by imitating the non-competitive music-making of their mentors and more experienced musicians.

CCÉ established the Fleadh Cheoil competitions in order to raise performance standards within Irish traditional music. Some suggest that these aims have been achieved, and therefore, competitions are perhaps not as necessary as they were in the past. For instance, Sky argues, ‘now that Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann has succeeded so well in reviving Irish traditional music, the All-Ireland competitions are no longer necessary, or need to be reassessed and revised’ (1997:167). Mary Bergin also suggests that the fleadh competitions succeeded in raising standards and the general public appreciation of Irish traditional music. Mary suggests that competitions are no longer needed and overemphasizing competition can be detrimental to learners:

Fleadhs came into being in the first place because the music was at such a low ebb and really it was essential to bring people together and raise the standard. But I think it’s counterproductive now... I don’t think it needs the competitions. I think the competitions served their purpose in the beginning because there was insensitivity. It brought people together in a conscious way to play music and it just gave a status. It gave an okayness and opportunity to meet likeminded people... But I think now-a-days competitions have gone totally out of control and are giving the wrong message (Bergin, interview).

I propose that CCÉ should consider the possibility of establishing more non-competitive performance opportunities at fleadhanna. Since many learners are motivated and positively affected by competitions, it is perhaps not pragmatic to eliminate competitions from the Fleadh programme. However, as the largest Irish traditional music festival, CCÉ’s Fleadh Cheoil is in a unique position to place a greater emphasis on non-competitive performances. Non-competitive performances, such as recitals and concerts, could benefit competitive and non-competitive personalities alike. Mary Bergin suggests that instead of competitions, CCÉ should host ‘exhibitions’ in order to motivate children to practice and to achieve a high standard of performance:



It should be exhibitions and just encouraging kids to get up to perform in front of somebody and everyone applauding. That's what was important to me ... and I think that's what's important to kids. Not criticism and saying, 'You're not as good as that fella,' or 'that girl is better than you.' I don't think it really does anything. I know the challenge – some kids need a goal to aim for. But the aim should be to get up there and to perform, rather than compete against someone (Bergin, interview).

From an educationalist's perspective, if the Fleadh included a variety of competitive and non-competitive performance opportunities learners would benefit from diverse and rich learning experience. If recitals and concerts were central activities during fleadhanna, learners could prepare for performances, without worrying about judges' expectations or their competitors. Instead, they could focus on music-making alongside their peers as part of a concert programme.

**Image 7: Gig-Rig at the Fleadh Cheoil na Éireann, Cavan 2011**



**Photograph by author**

It must be acknowledged that CCÉ does host and encourage non-competitive performances in their branches and during fleadhanna. For a number of years, the Fleadh Cheoil has featured a 'gig-rig' – a large stage in the centre of the host town – which provides free entertainment to festivalgoers (see Image 7). On the gig-rig, one can view traditional musicians of all ages performing to large audiences. However, during my field observations, I noticed that most of the acts that performed on the gig-rig were large group ensembles (Fieldnotes, 18 August 2011). The Fleadh currently hosts more non-competitive music-making than in

years past, but children and teens generally do not play solos to audiences unless they are involved in competitions. Additionally, many of the non-competitive concerts and gigs at the Fleadh Cheoil are platforms for adult musicians, such as well-known traditional music groups and solo artists. I argue that learners would benefit tremendously if the Fleadh Cheoil hosted non-competitive solo and small group recitals.

I have discussed how informal music-making and socializing at the Fleadh Cheoil na Éireann plays a role in learning and enculturation processes. I also explored the advantages and limitations of participating in CCÉ competitions. Due to a number of factors, including learning styles and personality, participating in competitions is an effective and motivating learning experience to some learners, but not necessarily to all or most. Walker (1998) discusses the history of competition culture, specifically within the context of school jazz and concert band programmes in the United States. He suggests that because the merit of music competition continues to raise questions, music education in the US has generally and gradually shifted towards non-competitive performances (Walker 1998:221). Some propose that recitals and video journals are more effective than competitions in assessing students' progress (Austin 1990:25). I suggested that CCÉ can host even more informal and non-competitive performances to their already diverse programme.

## Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I have examined common learning experiences that occur in more organized settings, including tuition at clubs and organizations, traditional music summer schools, and festivals. Many of the learning experiences discussed in this chapter involve informal and non-formal learning processes, including aural learning and imitation. In the first section, I discussed some of my interviewees' experiences learning traditional music in school. While some had profound experiences, music learning and enculturation largely occurs outside of formal schooling. The majority of my interviewees did not learn their primary instrument in school, and interviewees who did have access to instrumental classes in school acquired much of their repertoire and instrumental techniques outside of school. In contrast, the majority of my interviewees received extra-curricular tuition in organizations, such as CCÉ and pipers' clubs. I have

suggested that during tuition learners form social connections with their teachers and peers, and that these social connections play a role in musical enculturation. I also focused on the two largest summer schools – Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy and Scoil Éigse – and described how structured classes and informal activities at summer schools aid the enculturation process. Lastly, I discussed the largest traditional music festival Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann and explored the various benefits and disadvantages of participating in competitions. My research indicates that informal, non-formal, and social events at the Fleadh Cheoil have the greatest impact on musical enculturation. This raises many questions about the importance of the competitive events.

Within the traditional music community, learning by attending weekly tuition, summer schools, and festivals are common learning experience. However, none of my interviewees learned Irish traditional music only in these settings. The process of becoming a traditional musician involves several other informal, non-formal, and social learning experiences. Conversely, some interviewees were self-taught and learned almost entirely outside institutional and organizational settings (Hammy Hamilton, Tomás Ó Canainn, Mary Bergin, Connie O’Connell, interviews). While organizations provide numerous opportunities for people to learn, play, and socialize with traditional musicians and teachers, it is incorrect to suggest that learners need to attend tuition, summer schools, festivals, and participate in competitions in order to develop into a traditional musician.

Traditional musicians commonly learn by engaging with other traditional musicians at CCÉ branches, pipers’ clubs, summer schools, and festivals. I argue that the more structured learning practices described in this chapter complement the more informal experiences discussed in Chapter 2. Unstructured, informal experiences provide learners with essential social and musical contexts in which to learn and play traditional music. Learning experiences in organized settings provide a structure to the learning process, and provide learners with goals, motivation, direct instruction, and diverse opportunities to interact with other practitioners. As many interviewees suggest, experiencing traditional music outside institutional settings is critical in order to develop a rich understanding of Irish traditional music and its culture. I argue that musical enculturation is a lifelong and complex process which requires multiple opportunities to listen, play, and engage with Irish traditional musicians in various contexts.

## Chapter 4

### The Use of Technology during the Enculturation Process

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse how Irish traditional musicians use technology and how this effects enculturation. In this thesis, technology refers to the artefacts and physical materials which represent, recreate, or capture music aurally, visually, or audio-visually. During the enculturation process, many Irish traditional musicians commonly use print materials, audio and video recordings, the internet, and other innovations such as smartphones. Using technology to learn Irish traditional music may seem like a completely different process to the social, face-to-face learning practices described in Chapters 2 and 3. However, throughout this chapter I suggest that engagement with various forms of technology is a socially situated practice and plays a significant role in the enculturation process.

Technology effects music-making, transmission, and enculturation in complex ways, as Deschênes suggests:

...the technological developments of the past hundred years or so have irremediably transformed our relation to music, making the musical situations considerably more complex and elusive (1998:139).

Various technologies significantly alter how we experience and learn music. Within Irish traditional music, the use of technology has created new learning practices and significantly impacted social life. Engaging with certain forms of technology, such as audio recordings for example, is a common experience during the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians. The research discussed in this chapter illustrates that technology provides a spectrum of experiences. Some of these experiences are educationally advantageous, while others are less so, and, some musical skills are more difficult to acquire using technology than others. Therefore, when learners engage in diverse and multiple learning experiences, they benefit from the complementary advantages of each particular learning method. While I establish necessary historical contexts below, this chapter does not attempt to present a history of each technology within Irish traditional music culture. My aim is to examine how traditional musicians experienced technology during the learning and enculturation process.

There is a close and important connection between the use of technology and the enculturation process. As Lave and Wenger argue, engaging with technology is part of the process of becoming a full participant in communities of practice:

Becoming a full participant certainly includes engaging with the technologies of everyday practice, as well as participating in the social relations, production processes, and other activities (1991:101).

Pea and Brown argue that ‘new interactive technologies redefine – in ways yet to be determined – what it means to know and understand, and what it means to become “literate” or an “educated citizen”’ (1993:vii-viii). Wilson and Peterson urge ethnographers to investigate technology as a cultural process, to specifically explore how people use and find meaning in their use of technology (Wilson and Peterson 2002:461). Technology is not separate from cultural processes; it is a part of cultural processes in modern society. In this chapter I argue that engaging with various forms of technology is a significant part of what traditional musicians do.

The chapter begins with a review of germane literature from multiple academic disciplines, and explores the general effects of modern technology to socio-musical life and corresponding educational implications. In this first section, I establish a theoretical context for issues that emerged during my field research. This is followed by an exploration of the ways traditional musicians use written sources, audio recordings, visual recordings, the internet, and other emerging technologies during their enculturation. According to the interview data, written sources and audio recordings are the most commonly used technologies, while learning through visual recordings, the internet, and new emerging technologies are less pervasive. All of these forms of technology have significant implications for teaching, learning, and enculturation processes within Irish traditional music.

## Technology and Musical Life:

### An Introduction and Literature Review

Before the advent of phonography, radio, television, and the internet, listeners needed to be present at live music-making events to have a musical experience. However, in modern societies, music is primarily heard and experienced by using various technologies. As Drucker argues, 'Technology stands today at the very centre of human perception and human experience' (1970:64). Since technology is omnipresent in modern life, the use of technology is a significant social experience and practice. Technology also affects how we are introduced to our musical culture, and therefore plays a role in enculturation.

Anthropologists and other social scientists emphasize that technology directly affects, and is affected by socio-cultural processes. However, in the past technology was considered 'peripheral to culture' and 'a context for, rather than a central part of, culture' (Wilson and Peterson 2002:450). Scholars have shifted their thinking in this matter, and Wilson and Peterson suggest that now it is acknowledged that 'information technology and media are themselves cultural products, the ways that individual and community identities are negotiated' (2002:450). Within several academic disciplines, the use and development of technology is now considered and investigated as a socio-cultural practice.<sup>1</sup>

For several reasons, using technology to learn music may seem like an unsocial learning experience. Private, isolated, convenient listening practices are possible because of phonographic technology. Nowadays face-to-face interactions with other musicians are not the only way to develop musicality. As the necessity of these personal interactions decreases, many fear that the social side of music-making will inevitably decline or become devalued. As I discuss later in this chapter, sound recording distances music-making from its original context, leading many to consider this form of technology in opposition to social experience. However, I suggest technology plays a significant role in enculturation within Irish traditional music, and technology can never be completely separated from socio-cultural processes.

Technology creates a unique paradox which complexly affects how music

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<sup>1</sup> (Chanan 1995, 2002; Deschênes 1998; Drucker 1970; Gracyk 1997; Lave and Wenger 1991; Lysloff 2003; McCarthy 1999; McLuhan 1962, 1964; Pea and Brown 1993; Rheingold 1993; Rice 1994; Tomasi 2007; Turino 2008; Volman and ten Dam 2007; Wilson and Peterson 2002; Wenger 1998; Wright 1992).

is learned and experienced. Because music can now be listened to in seclusion, listeners and performers can be separated by great distances. Yet, technology also allows us to hear musicians separated by time and distance, seemingly bringing musicians 'closer' together. Technology has affected modern social life so considerably that conceptions of 'community' have changed. Communities were once local and often defined by geographic location and small populations. Due to technological developments in communications and transportation, our modern world is now comprised of diverse local, national, and global communities. Global communities lack definite geographic borders and include large numbers of people dispersed throughout the world. Drucker is one of many scholars who discuss the changing conceptualizations of community, wrought by technological advancements in our society:

Old wisdom – old long before the Greeks – held that a community was limited to the area through which news could easily travel from sunrise to sunset. This gave a 'community' a diameter of some fifty miles or so. ...the victory of technology over distance is, perhaps, the most significant of all the gifts modern technology has brought man. Today the whole earth has become a local community if measured by the old yardstick of one day's travel (1970:75).<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, the modern world seems more localized and closely connected. Technology can induce a sense of community across large geographic borders. McLuhan's 'global village' (1962) refers precisely to this phenomenon. Chanan argues that since music from all corners of the globe is now 'available everywhere at the touch of a button', music is no longer limited to 'traditional concepts of community' (1995:9). Musical communities and identities are no longer constrained by social, political, national, or geographical borders (Chanan 1995; Lysloff 2003; Shepherd 2003). Within the traditional music literature, Ahern also suggests that the concept of 'neighbour' has changed due to technological influences:

New tunes are still learned through a highly efficient grapevine, but these days, the concept of 'neighbour' has been expanded considerably. Tim Browne, a merchant sailor on board ship in the South Atlantic, learns a new reel from a tape recorded by a friend of his at a session in Kinsale. A fiddle player in Munich learns a hornpipe

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<sup>2</sup> See also (Chanan 1995; McLuhan 1962, 1964; Ong 1982:136; Wenger 1998:131).

from a fellow member of the electronic community via the internet (1999:16).

While the use of technology is socially situated, technology can create a physical, social, or emotional separation between listeners and performers. Malm states:

Before the advent of music technology all music was performed live and could be heard only within a limited space. The introduction of music technology brings an increasing distance between music makers and audience (1992:359).

Music technology has changed musical experience by simultaneously bringing music into our private spaces, while also separating music from its original context (Bohlman 1988:125; Chanan 1995:18; Firth 2003:93). Some fear that this separation may lead to passive listening. For instance, during the 1950s, music educators in England were suspicious ‘about the role of the gramophone in the classroom. Would a concession to the mechanical reproduction of music further instil a passive, uncritical approach taking pupils away from active participation?’ (Finney 2011:18). Malm also states:

The shift from live-music to various forms of media-disseminated situations also brings a shift in audience attitudes from active, participating listening to passive hearing (1992:359).

Dancing, singing, and music-making were participatory forms of entertainment, but now many peoples’ musical experiences are based on being entertained by others. Malm is primarily concerned that musical consumerism will replace live, active participation, creating a population of passive listeners. He does not argue that mass media inherently causes listening skills to diminish. I suggest that the effect technology has on listening practices is complex, and does not simply breed passive listeners. For instance, during live sessions, traditional musicians can listen purposefully, attentively, or passively.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, they can listen to commercial recordings in the same varieties of ways.

Despite these fears, many are convinced that live music-making will

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<sup>3</sup> Traditional musicians purposely listen in a session when attempting to learn a new tune, for instance. When a musician leaves the session table to chat with other patrons of the pub they are engaging in distracted listening. Green uses and discusses the terms ‘distracted’, ‘attentive’, and ‘purposeful listening’ in her research on how popular musicians learn (2002, 2008).



always remain a significant musical experience. Turino discusses one reason why live music-making remains attractive:

Even now when many people's main experience with music is via recordings – the sound alone – I think many still harbor the old idea that music has something to do with people, communication, and direct connection and there is a desire for a human aura (2008:63).

As Turino illustrates, no matter how much technology pervades our musical experience, music continues to be associated with physical, live music events. Consequently, some consider live music-making a true, authentic, or real experience, while music via mass media is seen as lacking something crucial to musical experience. However, Lysloff disagrees that using technology is some sort of inauthentic version of real musical experiences. He argues:

I view technology not simply as the intrusion of scientific hardware on "authentic" human experience but as a cultural phenomenon that permeates and informs almost every aspect of human existence-including forms of musical knowledge and practice (Lysloff 2003:238).

From this perspective, in this chapter I explore how traditional musicians use technology. The use of technology is not viewed here as an inauthentic or untraditional learning method, but rather as a valid practice which is situated in the current musical culture and social environment.

Some scholars view technology as an extension of humanity and human consciousness. Tomasi suggests that over the centuries, the use of technology has become a part of us:

...[a] technological device can reach such a degree of familiarity that it becomes indistinguishable from our psychophysical personality. In this sense, we experience technology not as instrumentation, but in intimacy (Tomasi 2007:411).

From this perspective the use of technology is a significant part of being human and is not an unauthentic or inhuman experience. Tomasi's view that technologies can become embodied, a part of who we are, correlates with Gardner's theory of distributed intelligence. Gardner views technology as an extension of human intelligence.<sup>4</sup> He suggests that:

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<sup>4</sup> Pea and Brown similarly argue that 'tools and representational media that culture provides to support, extend, and reorganize mental functioning' (1993:vii). For a further discussion see

...much of everyday intelligence can be located in the human and non-human resources with which individuals work... Typically these resources are thought of as non-human artefacts, such as books, notebooks, computer files, and the like. And it is true that in a literate world, much of which the productive individual depends inheres in these materials (Gardner 1991:3).

The development and use of technology are socio-culturally mediated processes. Tomasi argues that the success or failure of new technological advances is wholly dependent on socio-cultural and economic situations, and members of society either consciously or unconsciously perpetuate technological innovations. Conversely, when a new gadget is deemed useless or unhelpful, the technology falls by the wayside:

Technology requires more than a smart inventor to work out. Among the many factors affecting the degree of success or failure in any relationship with artefacts is its capacity to fit in an already established context, just like the right piece of a puzzle in the right place (Tomasi 2007:424).

People create, use, and manipulate technology, and in turn technology alters aspects of society. However, technology only becomes meaningful through human action. This highlights that the use of technology is a socially situated practice, which needs to be investigated alongside other cultural phenomena.

### Technology, Learning, and Education

I open the discussion with an exploration of some germane literature and briefly introduce some general educational implications of technology. The educational implications of specific types of technology are highlighted later in this chapter. New forms of technology are constantly introduced into formal and informal educational settings. The rate at which tools are integrated into schools depend on a number of different social, cultural, and economic factors determined at the local, national, and international level.<sup>5</sup> Two major issues within the field of education are the use technology to enhance teaching methods, and the promotion of technology literacy. Educators have a responsibility to prepare their students for the modern world, and this includes guiding and teaching students to use new

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(Gardner 1983, 1990, 1991; McLuhan 1962, 1964; Moore 1992; Tomasi 2007).

<sup>5</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to comment on the use of technology throughout the diverse musical cultures in the world. For a discussion see (Campbell 1991; Green 2002, 2008; Netti 1992; Neuman 1990; Rice 1994).

emerging technologies. Recognizing this, many scholars urge schools to implement proactive policies on technology education (Forest 1995; Moore 1992; Peters 1992; Volman and ten Dam 2007; Webster 2002). Peters argues:

Corporate America has become dependent on computers for its very operation. Consequently, schools are expected to become learning environments that reflect the application of technology to a growing number of occupations, disciplines, and careers (1992:22).

Within music education, scholars and teachers frequently highlight the importance for music students to gain an understanding of music technology. For instance, Forest states:

Music educators must prepare students to be the musicians of the next century. It's important that students be technologically literate in music as well as in other areas (1995:35).

Children now predominantly experience music through interacting with technology and media. Webster suggests that schoolchildren today 'are unaware of a world without computers, personal digital assistants, portable CD and MPG3 players, digital keyboards, and the Internet with its connection to vast amounts of information. Music is everywhere in these media' (2002:38). When we consider children's prior musical experiences in this way, technology can be a practical way for music educators to connect with their students. The use of technology in music classrooms can be motivational to many students, since using technology may seem relevant to their social lives. Teaching and learning methods ought to reflect that technology plays a significant role in students' musical lives.

Educators can use technology to teach in new, efficient, and engaging ways. Within the music education literature, there is much discourse on using technology as a way of teaching music theory and composition.<sup>6</sup> Bissell, for instance, discusses software programmes which aid students' ear training, composition, improvisation, and notational reading skills:

With notation software, such as *Finale*, *Encore*, or *MusicTime*, teachers can create their own theory and composition exercises. Notated rhythms, pitch and melody exercises, and melodies (used as models for

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<sup>6</sup> See (Arias 1998; Beckstead 2001; Bissell 1998; Moore 1992; Peters 1992; Sanders 1992; Waters 1990; Webster 2002; Willman 1992; Wright 1992).

composition) can be tailored for specific classes  
1998:37).

Beckstead laments that software is mostly used in music classrooms as a timesaving device, rather than expanding creative possibilities for composition students (2001:48). While software programmes provide a fast and convenient way to notate music, Beckstead argues technology should be used to nurture creative, artistic skills in the classroom. This illustrates that technological innovations do not simply lead to more effective learning experiences; ultimately, technology becomes educationally beneficial through creative or effective use and implementation. It takes human ingenuity to reap the educational advantages technology can provide learners.

In addition to music education literature, many anthropologists and ethnomusicologists explore how technology affects learning and enculturation processes. Nettl discusses the role technology can play in transmission practices:

...records, radio and eventually films and television have been important sources of transmission in the musical cultures of the world. Only in the early 1960s did ethnomusicologists begin to show much interest in the role of media in societies (1992:382).

Ethnomusicologists now acknowledge that technology is a significant part of culture which warrants investigation. Several ethnographers explore the significant role media and technology has in modern musical life.<sup>7</sup> For instance, Rice's ethnography highlights changes to learning and enculturation processes within Bulgarian music culture (Rice 1994). Rice details how an older generation of Bulgarian musicians learned during music and religious celebrations, but many of these events were banned under communist rule. He discusses how Bulgarian musicians embraced the radio and commercial recordings as new sources of learning and inspiration:

...the media provided not just a new method for learning music, but a new kind of family whose prestige and presence in the home provided a new social setting for exposure to music. It replaced mother, father, siblings, uncles, and aunts as a source of inspiration and the sounds to be imitated (1994:227).

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<sup>7</sup> I discuss these ethnographies in more depth throughout this chapter (Berliner 1993, 1994; Cranitch 2006; Fairbairn 1993; Firth 1998, 2003; Green 2002, 2005a, 2008; Hamilton 1996; Neuman 1990; Nettl; 1992, 2005; McCarthy 1990, 1999b, 1999; O'Shea 2005, 2008; Rice 1994; Turino 2008; Veblen 1991).

Rice highlights how the media significantly affects transmission practices and offered Bulgarian musicians a new type of social experience.

Educational and developmental scholars often highlight that using technology has educational limitations as well as advantages. Music educators generally acknowledge that exposure to music is essential to musical development. The convenience of media and phonographic technology can increase listening practices and exposure to music, and in this way, fosters the learning process. However, Gordon discourages the overuse of technology, especially during early developmental stages. He states:

A parent knows intuitively that playing recordings of someone speaking for the child is not nearly as beneficial as the child hearing live speech. Analogously, being exposed to music through the media will not be as efficient as introducing children in a personal manner to the music of their culture (1999:43).

In Gordon's view, social interaction is one of the most important factors during musical development (1997, 1998, 1999). He suggests that over relying on audio recordings prohibits socio-musical interactions between children and adults, since live music-making can become limited. However, Gordon and supporters of his Music Learning Theory (Bluestine 2000; Valerio et al 1998), also urge parents to expose their children to a variety of rhythmic metres, tonalities, and musical styles from around the world. Realistically, parents cannot perform multiple types of world music, and therefore, audio and video recordings of musical performances are useful to introduce children to the diverse music-making around the world (Gracyk 1997). This is not to suggest that Gordon's theories are contradictory; this discussion highlights that technology can affect learning, development, and enculturation in multidimensional ways.

### Technology and Irish Traditional Music

In this section, I only briefly explore the literature, as I review much of the literature elsewhere in this chapter. I also discuss some of my general research findings about the ways Irish traditional musicians use technology.

Within the literature, several scholars investigate, debate, and explore the effects of technology on Irish traditional music and its culture from numerous perspectives. Some comment on how technology affects repertoire and style (Breathnach 1996; Hamilton 1978; Keegan 1992, 2006; McNamara and Woods

1997; O'Connor 2001; Ó Riada 1982; O'Shea 2008), and others investigate changes to transmission and cultural practices (Crantich 2006; Fairbairn 1993; Hamilton 1996; Hast and Scott 2004; Kearney 2009; McCarthy 1990, 1999; Veblen 1991). One common concern is that by canonizing particular versions of tunes, print and phonographic technology can lead to standardization. Veblen suggests that technology can, 'freeze a tune in time and allow definitive versions to exist, but which all transitory versions may be measured' (1991:182).<sup>8</sup>

There has yet to be a major study or dissertation focusing solely on the educational implications of the use of technology within Irish traditional music culture, although numerous scholars have commented on the subject.<sup>9</sup> Two prominent education researchers, McCarthy (1990, 1999) and Veblen (1991), discuss the media and technology, but the influence of technology on transmission practices is not the focus of their research. While this dissertation contributes an initial exploration into the role of technology during the enculturation process, further investigation is needed.

All twenty of my interviewees discussed using technology to experience, listen, and learn Irish traditional music. My interviewees sometimes used technology to purposefully learn new repertoire and techniques, and they were also unconsciously influenced by listening to music via various forms of media. My research indicates that using notation and audio recordings is a commonplace learning experience, while learning on the internet is less so. I suggest that the affect technology has on musical enculturation depends on the type and frequency of learning practices experienced by the individual learner. My field research suggests that the use of technology is a significant and widespread practice within contemporary Irish traditional music culture. Due to this pervasiveness, investigations of learning or enculturation processes should explore how musicians use technology. As McCarthy suggests, 'it behoves us to look closely at the media used to pass on music at any given time and how their presence transformed the content and process of transmission' (1999:26).

Although using technology is a common learning experience, many of my interviewees still prefer learning directly from other musicians.<sup>10</sup> Several

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<sup>8</sup> See also Cranitch (2006:31), Hamilton (1978:37), and Veblen (1991:174)

<sup>9</sup> However, Francis Ward is currently conducting PhD research at the University of Limerick on the 'Effect of New Technologies on the Transmission of Irish Traditional Music'.

<sup>10</sup> (Liz Doherty, Hammy Hamilton, Geraldine O'Callaghan, Connie O'Connell, Seamus Sands, interviews). Veblen also found that 'although everyone used equipment, few commentators

interviewees valued and emphasize the importance of meeting, chatting, and listening to other musicians face-to-face. Connie O'Connell feels that when compared to learning directly from another traditional musician, learning via radio or television is 'a bit artificial':

I think that the media is not helping traditional music a lot... I think that meeting a person, in person, talking to them, sitting down playing music with them, chatting to him. That is not the same as listening to him on the radio, looking at him on television. People are taking that music, getting that music, and I think it's a bit artificial to be honest with you (O'Connell, interview).

Liz Doherty suggests that when learners rely on media, and do not have personal contact with other musicians (particularly older, more experienced musicians), they can miss out on a 'key piece of information':

People are gaining access to the music through different recordings or through the internet or whatever and maybe not having that personal contact. They're not sitting down with an older person who you just know through that one experience. And you realize from that personal contact that this is something you can't learn overnight. That's where the key piece of information is being lost (Doherty, interview).

While repertoire and style is easily transmitted via media, learners do not always gain an understanding of the social context or history of Irish traditional music through media sources. While some interviewees have concerns over the effectiveness of some forms of technology, all twenty describe numerous experiences using forms of technology to learn and listen to Irish traditional music.

Learning directly from older traditional musicians is often considered the most authentic and effective mode of transmission. Hamilton suggests that musicians who learn 'in the oral tradition, and not from books or records' are usually held in high esteem (1978:43). However, O'Shea argues that while Irish traditional musicians often value 'authentic' face-to-face interactions, 'personal recording devices and internet technology play an equally significant role in the formation of 'Irish' identities and understandings of Irish traditional music'

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seemed comfortable with the idea of it. Noel Hill, professional musician, described modern students acquiring music through books or "the hi-fi system of the front living room" without full realization of where the music comes from or the context in which it was played' (1991:156).

(2005:3). While this dissertation does not aim to explore the authenticity of learning practices, this issue emerged during my fieldwork. The interview data reveals mixed opinions about the authenticity and effectiveness of using technology to learn Irish traditional music. While interviewees did not commonly describe using technology to listen and learn as ‘untraditional’ or ‘inauthentic’ experiences, many prefer and value learning in live settings.

Compared to other aspects of culture, such as religious practices, technology changes rapidly (Nettl 2005:276). A review of music education articles reveals how quickly new technologies become outdated. Writing in 2002, Webster predicted that DVD technology would be a groundbreaking educational resource and he discussed how computers were finally becoming affordable at only \$1,000 (2002:43). These innovations seem like ancient history; laptops are now available for as little as \$300 in the United States. Considering this rate of change, research in this chapter is sure to become out-dated within one or two years. This is especially true of the discussion on emerging technologies, such as iPhone Apps.<sup>11</sup> Apple, along with countless other companies, constantly launch new generations of gadgets, making old devices obsolete. While this research may quickly become outdated, it provides a unique snapshot of how traditional musicians used technology in the late-20<sup>th</sup> and early-21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

## Written Sources

This section explores the diverse ways traditional musicians use written sources during the learning and enculturation process. Although all twenty interviewees primarily learned aurally, the majority also had multiple experiences using written sources, including ABC and staff notation, traditional music collections, and instrumental tutors. While some interviewees’ experiences were brief and casual, others describe frequent and meaningful experiences using written sources. Consequently, the role written sources play in the enculturation of traditional musicians is complex, and viewing the learning of Irish traditional music as an entirely aural process does not address these complexities. The influence of written sources on musical development depends on how, why and

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<sup>11</sup> While many Irish traditional music scholars comment on written sources and phonography, very few have yet to discuss new emerging technologies. Although this chapter aims to address this gap in the literature, more research is needed in the future.



how frequently the learner used these resources. In this section, I explore how and why these sources are often used, and how this affects music enculturation.

Print technology is an appropriate place to begin our discussion.<sup>12</sup>

Bohlman states that printing is ‘the first technological media to influence folk music’ (1988:65), and Ong considers it one of the first technological innovations to affect human consciousness (1982:82). Printed collections of Irish traditional music emerge in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, but did not become widely used by traditional musicians until the 1920s (Vallely 1999:258). Irish traditional music is primarily transmitted aurally, both historically and currently. Indeed, aural learning is a defining characteristic of Irish traditional music.<sup>13</sup> Due to the significance of aurality within Irish traditional music culture, perhaps it is easy to overlook the role written sources can play in the learning and enculturation process. However, Kearney suggests that ‘transcription and notation perform an increasingly prominent role in the transmission and dissemination of Irish traditional music’ (2009:194-5). Cranitch also argues that written sources have ‘played an important part in the transmission of the Irish tradition, although the perception among many players may well be to the contrary’ (2006:200). Cranitch calls for a more nuanced and multi-dimensional view of the role of written sources within Irish traditional music (2006:197).

It is misleading to suggest that older generations of Irish traditional musicians learned only through aural transmission. Many traditional musicians in the past have engaged with and learned from written sources, including notation and collections.<sup>14</sup> Breathnach argues that the ‘mode of visual transmission has a long history’ (1986:2) and that literacy ‘among traditional players, in Ireland at any rate, is, and always has been, much greater than many suppose’ (1996:123). Some of my interviewees also suggest that older generations of traditional musicians used notation. James Duggan states that ‘a lot of older players learned

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<sup>12</sup> In his study of the role of commercial recordings in the development of Irish traditional music, Hamilton also begins with a discussion of written sources (Hamilton 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Several scholars’ definition of Irish traditional music includes a statement that it is an aurally transmitted form of music. O’Connor suggests that ‘There are several definitions of the term “traditional music”, all of which bear connotations of oral transmission’ (2001:3). For examples see (Breathnach 1986: 1; Foy 1999:49; Glackin 1992:34; Hast and Scott 2004:16; Ó Canainn 1993:1; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008:8; Ó Riada 1982:19).

<sup>14</sup> For instance, Pádraig O’Keeffe ‘learned tunes from books and other sources’ (Cranitch 2006:154). Mac Aoidh also states how Tarlach Mac Suibhne (1818-1916), An Píobaire Mór, ‘possessed a copy of ‘O’Farrell’s Collection of National Music’ for Union Pipes’ and professed great respect for the music contained in it’ (1994:41). For more examples see also (Doherty 2005:12; O’Connor 2001:66; Vallely, Piggott, and Nutan 1998:54).

by ear, but equally there was an awful lot of them that could read music. We often tend to think that they couldn't read music... I guess it varied. Different people had different ways. Some people didn't learn by ear' (Duggan, interview). Martin Hayes also suggests he knew many older musicians who were able to read music well:

The vast majority of it was learned by ear, by listening originally, and that is how I learned. But, having said that now, plenty of the musicians I knew, and the older musicians in particular, actually were good readers of music too (Hayes, interview).

The interview data suggests that the use of written sources plays a role in the learning process, but often an ancillary role. For instance, the interviewees place more of an emphasis on learning in sessions, summer schools, extra-curricular tuition, family, and by listening and playing along to commercial recordings. While my interviewees value and frequently participate in face-to-face and aural learning practices, the majority of the participants also describe several learning experiences using written sources. Some interviewees use written sources frequently and believed that this experience provided them with a deeper understanding of Irish traditional music. Other interviewees only used these resources casually in order to further investigate repertoire they learned aurally. According to my field research traditional musicians tend to use written sources in conjunction with listening and other aural learning practices. This correlates with Waldron and Veblen's finding that amateur adult traditional musicians use notation 'in support of some type of aural strategy, for example, liltin' or picking up a tune from a CD' (2009:69).

I begin the discussion by exploring the interviewees' experiences using notation during weekly tuition, workshops, and at home as a memory and practice aid. Following this, I discuss other commonly used written sources, including collections of Irish traditional music and instrumental tutors. I conclude with a discussion of some concerns regarding how written sources are used during learning and enculturation processes.

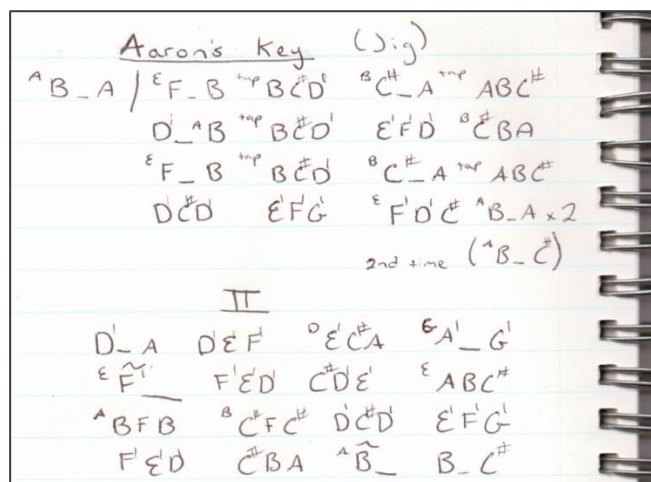
## Notation

While all interviewees had some experience using notation, their experiences differ significantly in terms of frequency, and also in how these sources were

used. As young learners, some interviewees used notation as a memory aid or instructional tool during weekly tuition. As adults, interviewees also described using notation in order to check their aural versions of tunes. Since the interviewees' narratives differ from one another so considerably, it is difficult to generalize how notation affects the enculturation process. However, as I argue below, notation is often used by traditional musicians alongside aural learning practices, and this can foster musical development and enculturation in meaningful ways.

The two most common types of notation used by Irish traditional musicians are staff and ABC notation. Many of my interviewees had experiences with both of these notational systems at some point during the learning process. ABC notation is a simple system of representing melodies by using alphabetic letters. Williams suggests that ABC notation 'was originally developed in North America as a method for computerized notation of Western dance music (not specifically Irish); single-line melodies that would normally use one staff' (2010:217). Many learners and teachers prefer ABC notation since it can be used by novices without a great deal of instruction or training (see Image 8). At the Douglas CCÉ Branch, many students use a CCÉ tune book, *Seinn Port 112 Great Session Tunes*, which provides repertoire in staff notation with ABC notation written underneath (Kearney n.d.) (see Image 9). Some traditional musicians, such as Pádraig O'Keeffe, have devised and used their own notation or tablature systems (Cranitch 2003:7, 2006:195; Hanifin 1995:14; Kearney 2009:346; O'Shea 2005: 76, 2008:163; Williams 2010:218).

**Image 8: Example of handwritten ABC notation, Aaron's Key**



**Image 9: Example of staff and ABC notation from the CCÉ tune book, *Seinn Port 112 Great Session Tunes*, ‘The Miller of Glanmire’ (Kearney n.d.:13)**

My fieldwork observations and interview data suggests that the use of notation is a common experience particularly during the early stages of the learning process. As mentioned earlier, several interviewees used notation during their weekly classes, summer schools, and workshops. For example, during her childhood, Liz Doherty learned some of her first fiddle tunes during classes in which the teacher, Dinny McLaughlin, used ABC notation as an instructional tool. Liz describes the central role ABC notation played during these weekly group classes:

[Dinny] would stand at the board and he would have written out the first part of the tune in letters. So you had your ‘DEFDD’... And he would point out the notes with his fiddle bow and everyone would play D. Then he would point out A, and everyone would play A. So we would get the phrase together literally note by note. First the whistles would play D, then the fiddles would play D then everyone would play it. So, it was kind of a laborious process, but he was a very entertaining teacher as well, so it never really felt like hard work (Doherty, interview).

Liz adds that Dinny's pupils generally copied the tunes off the board in order to practice at home (Doherty, interview). In Liz's experience, ABC notation operated as both an instructional tool and memory aid.

Several of my interviewees progressed from using notation during the early stages of the learning process, to primarily using aural learning sometime during their teenage years. For instance, Aoife Granville states that she belongs to a generation of musicians who commonly learned through ABC notation as beginners. Aoife suggests that aural learning can be difficult for many novices, and using ABC notation can be a practical way to ease beginners into playing and learning Irish traditional music:

Time wise, learning by ear wasn't really practical I suppose. We didn't learn by ear until we started going to workshops in the summer... Most of the people I know learned from the ABC system... I think that's very normal for my generation anyway. There's kind of an idea maybe that everyone here learns by ear, but we don't... It gets easier for teenagers, but starting off it's too difficult and you don't want to scare them or put them under too much pressure (Granville, interview).

Aural learning can be intimidating, and ABC notation can act as a scaffold until young traditional musicians begin to learn aurally with more confidence. Liz Doherty also began to learn aurally during adolescence. She states, 'I didn't really start to learn by ear, which some people would argue is the traditional way to learn, until I was sixteen or seventeen. But that is my first preference now, to learn by ear' (Doherty, interview). Geraldine O'Callaghan also learned her first tunes via notation, but eventually became more involved with aural learning in her teens:

My own experience with learning, I suppose, a lot of it was notation-based initially and as I progressed as a musician I depended more and more on my ear. I would hazard a guess that at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of my repertoire was learned by ear, opposed to directly from notation (O'Callaghan, interview).

In addition to my participants, adult traditional musicians in Canada also have a tendency to rely on notation as novices, but progress to using a combination of aural and visual learning practices as they 'become more adept aural learners' (Waldron and Veblen 2009:68).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See also (Waldron 2009a:60).

In addition to an instructional device, notation is often used within the Irish traditional music community as a memory aid.<sup>16</sup> Niall Vallely initially learned by using a combination of aural and visual learning. During weekly tuition, Niall's parents usually taught tunes by ear, but then often distributed staff notation to the students as a 'memory guide' (Vallely, interview). Michael O'Sullivan also used notation passed out in class in order to recall the aural version of repertoire. Michael did not use notation prescriptively, but as a general description and reminder of the 'bare bones' of the tune. This allowed Michael to incorporate his own musical ideas, style, and tempo while practicing at home. He states:

You learned the tune [in class] and the notes would be back-up at home to remind you what it sounded like basically. That's how I used to deal with it. You would use the notes as the train-tracks; you would have your own starts and stops on the way. You would have your own style, your own speed. So, the notes were just guides (O'Sullivan, interview).

While ABC notation provides a simple and convenient way to signify the pitches of melodies, other aspects of traditional music style, such as rhythmic nuances and ornamentations, are not well represented. As Waldron suggests, all current forms of notation 'can only indicate the notes to be played; it cannot communicate rhythmic subtleties or stylistic elements' (2006b:6-7). Consequently, learners who use notation generally developed and hone their rhythmic abilities and stylistic nuances aurally. In such cases, using ABC notation to recall the melody of a tune can be considered both a visual and an aural learning practice. Liz Doherty feels that learning 'by the letters' during weekly tuition was a type of aural learning. Liz states:

Even though we were learning by the letters we were actually learning by ear. It was just kind of a support along the way, we were learning the notes as a guide, but Dinny was playing it, and we were playing it back and we were all making the sounds together (Doherty, interview).

Helen Gubbins suggests that while her teacher taught tunes by writing ABC notation on the chalkboard, she primarily 'picked up' the tunes from hearing it played in the class:

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<sup>16</sup> For further discussion of notation as a memory aid see (Breathnach 1986:8; Cranitch 2006:199; Hast and Scott 2004:61; Keegan 1996; Vallely 1999:258; Veblen 1991).

I would actually pick up a tune from hearing it, but I read the notes anyway because that's what everybody else did. So I'm not really sure how much I learned from the notes really (Gubbins, interview).

In this way, in many traditional music classes and workshops, notation is often used alongside and in conjunction with listening and aural learning.

Throughout my fieldwork, I observed a combination of aural and visual learning practices in summer schools, festival workshops, and weekly Comhaltas classes. At *Cruinniú na bhFliúit*, some teachers taught entirely aurally, while others taught aurally and then wrote ABC notation on a blackboard for students to copy. In workshops aimed at teenagers and adult learners, I observed many tutors teaching tunes aurally, but providing notation as a memory aid. Teachers at *Cruinniú na bhFliúit* and the Douglas CCÉ emphasize the importance of listening and learning by ear. Teachers encourage students to bring along audio recording devices, and many students record their teachers demonstrating repertoire slowly in order to listen and play along to at home. Many students leave their Irish traditional music classes and workshops with both aural (audio recordings) and visual aids (notation), and can continue to practice at home using this combination of resources.

Instead of using notation as an instructional tool or memory aid, some interviewees use notation and written sources as a way to research tunes they already have learned aurally. Connie O'Connell explains how he uses notation to research his established repertoire, not to 'learn' new repertoire:

I have an awful lot of books and I delve into them and keep looking for different sources and different versions of the tune. I don't learn the tune, I'd know the tune. I'd only be looking for something I already knew and I wanted to learn more about. That's the main use I'd make out of notation... I would use it for research, not learning purposes; for research and personal knowledge... There might be controversy over the middle of a tune, and I'd would see what a person has written (O'Connell, interview).

Connie believes that notation is helpful to research versions of tunes and to resolve discrepancies in difficult or contentious passages of a tune. When Connie researches different versions of tunes in various collections, he gains a deeper understanding of the piece of repertoire. Helen Gubbins also described how she uses notation to check tunes she learned aurally:

I generally learn by ear, but it's a mixture. I usually hear it by ear first, and then when I want to perfect it, I'll look it up in a written source. Then, I just compare my aural version to the printed version just to make sure that I'm sticking to a particular version, instead of mixing between two different versions and making up one fuzzy version in the end (Gubbins, interview).

This is another example of how the use of notation is often used in conjunction with aural learning practices within the Irish traditional music community.

## Collections

Music collections begin to influence Irish traditional music culture beginning in 1726 with the publication of Neale's *A Collection of the Most Celebrated Irish Tunes* (Breathnach 1996:103; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008:54). The first collection of Irish traditional music to be collected directly from traditional musicians, however, was Bunting's collection of *Ancient Irish Music*, published in 1796 (Breathnach 1996:104).<sup>17</sup> Bunting's work acted as a model for other collectors of Irish traditional music, including Petrie, Joyce, and Goodman. However, collectors prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Bunting and Petrie, were not traditional musicians; Bunting and Petrie's collections were intended for middle-class musicians and antiquarians interested in Irish melodies (O'Connor 2001:65).<sup>18</sup> As Ó hAllmhuráin suggests, 'Bunting's work was transcribed for ears that were more acquainted with the music of Handel and Mozart than the harp compositions of Gaelic Ireland' (2008:73). It was not until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the publication of O'Neill's collection, that notation begins to affect the learning practices of Irish traditional musicians (Ó Canainn 1993:9).

For some traditional musicians, written collections of traditional music are important sources of inspiration and knowledge. However, some traditional musicians rarely, if ever, learn from or use these sources. Therefore, the influence collections can have on musical development and enculturation depends on if the learner has access to and an interest in using these sources. Connie O'Connell is one of my participants who values music collections. He suggests that traditional

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<sup>17</sup> For information on Bunting see (Carolan 1997:55; Cranitch 2006:198; Hamilton 1996:58-9; Hast and Scott 2004:24; Mac Aoidh 1994:83; McCarthy 1999:40; C. Moloney 1999:46-48; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008; Williams 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Since my aim is to focus on my interviewees' learning experiences, I only briefly discuss the history of Irish traditional music collections here. For a history of traditional music collections see (Breathnach 1986, 1996; Cranitch 2006:198; Hamilton 1996:53-72; Hast and Scott 2004; Kearney 2009:194-208; Ni Chonghaile 2010; O'Connor 2001; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008).



musicians should be more conscientious about the history of their own music, including the activities and works of famous Irish traditional music collectors:

People don't know enough about collectors in this country. They're not putting enough emphasis on collections, or collectors Francis O'Neill and Goodman, Breathnach, Petrie... If you go into classical music, everybody knows Mozart. Everyone knows the date he was born, where he was born, how he lived, nearly what he had for breakfast in the morning. Whereas traditional musicians seem to have this idea that they just sit down and play a tune, and if you ask them where it came from, they haven't a fecking clue (O'Connell, interview).

In Connie's view, traditional music collections, and the lives of the collectors, are noteworthy aspects of Irish traditional music history and culture. Only a couple of interviewees suggested that tune collections are underappreciated by learners of Irish traditional music. In addition to Connie, Seamus Sands also commented that some traditional musicians neglect written sources of Irish traditional music, but Seamus values such resources (Sands, interview).

Francis O'Neill's collection, *The Dance Music of Ireland: O'Neill's 1001* (O'Neill 1907), is referred to as the 'most important' (Hast and Scott 2004:61), 'most notable' (Mac Aoidh 1994:91), and 'the authoritative text for players' (O'Shea 2005:53).<sup>19</sup> O'Neill's remains the most commonly used written collection of Irish traditional music. The collection is so influential that many traditional musicians and commentators referred to it simply as 'the book' (McNamara and Woods 1997:31; O'Connor 2001:65) or the 'bible' (Breathnach 1996:117; Ó Canainn 1996:67). As Chicago's Chief of Police, O'Neill was in a unique position to collect hundreds of dance tunes from the influx of Irish musicians who immigrated to the city at the turn of the century.<sup>20</sup> O'Neill, a traditional flute player originally from West Cork, amassed the largest printed collection of Irish dance music in history. O'Neill's first collection (1903) contains '1,850 pieces, including 625 airs, 74 tunes attributed to Carolan, 50 marches, and the stupendous total of 1,100 dance tunes... Bunting's three volumes did not contain a dozen dance tunes, and the complete Petrie collection less than 300' (Breathnach 1996:117). While the collection is respected for the

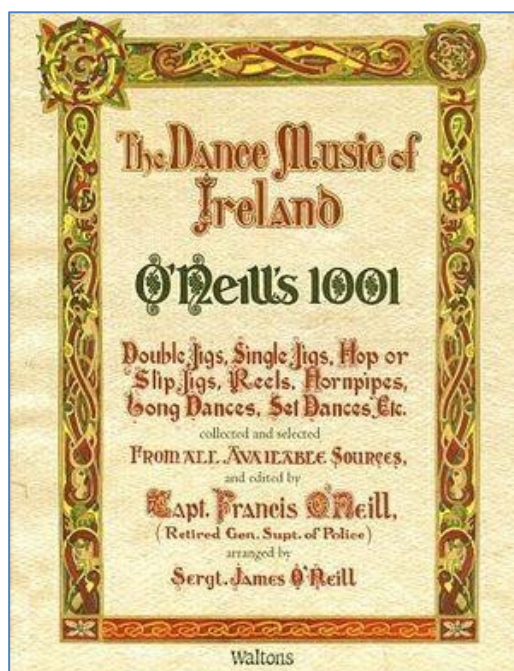
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<sup>19</sup> This collection is also commonly referred to as 'O'Neill's' or simply as 'the 1001'.

<sup>20</sup> For more information about O'Neill's life and work see (Carolan 2008, 1997; Skerrett and Lesch 2008; Williams 2010).

sheer amount of repertoire, the value of O'Neill's collection lies in its relevance amongst Irish traditional musicians. Vallely states it was the first collection 'to be actually done by one of the people, for the people, so to speak' (2004b:27), and O'Neill's was the first collection to significantly impact traditional musicians' learning practices.

**Image 10: Cover of *The Dance Music of Ireland: O'Neill's 1001***



Of all the traditional music collections, interviewees most often discussed using *O'Neill's 1001* during the learning process. As a young fiddle player, Seamus Sands received O'Neill's from a family member. In Seamus's experience, O'Neill's collection was a particularly helpful resource when used in conjunction with listening practices. Seamus describes how he listened in sessions, made note of tunes that he liked, and then referenced the tunes at home using O'Neill's collection:

In my early years, what worked for me was a combination of books and I'd go along to a session or something. I'd hear the tune and maybe a name, and I'd go back then to the book. For example, when I was fifteen, I got O'Neill, and it was a family present from some family musician. The ability to go back to a whole bunch of books, to figure out the tune from the written music and then put my own influence on it; That was probably my favourite way to do it... You get the bare bones off a book, and then you take your own bits and pieces add that to it (Sands, interview).

Seamus's narrative illustrates multiple influences, including family connections, written sources, and participating in live music-making, and Seamus believes this combination of practices was an effective way to learn.

Several scholars and musicians suggest that notation in O'Neill's collection provides the 'bare bones' of a tune, which provides musicians the freedom to interpret the tune in their own style. O'Shea argues that O'Neill's collection was intended to be used by 'musicians already familiar with Irish dance music' and used as a way to introduce the 'bare bone' of a tune which musicians will then interpret in their own way (2005:53-4).<sup>21</sup> Because musicians need to interpret the notated versions of tunes, written sources are often most effective when used alongside listening and aural learning practices. Without frequently listening to the rhythmic and stylistic nuances of Irish traditional music, learners are unlikely to develop the creative ability to interpret the notated melodies in an appropriate style.

My interviewees also discussed using other collections, such as Breathnach's *Ceol Rince na hÉireann* (1963, 1976), Goodman's manuscripts (Shields 1998), and *The Petrie Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland* (Cooper 2003). John Reid brought Breathnach's collection (1963) to the interview and showed me markings he made during the initial stages of the learning process. Rather than using *Ceol Rince na hÉireann* to gain new repertoire, John discusses how he now uses the book to remind himself of tunes he learned aurally:

I learn by ear. You can learn a tune, but then lose it. So it's going to be somewhere inside of your head, but you mightn't play it for 20 years. But if you have the book at least you have some chance. So this is why it's good to have down the notes (Reid, interview).

Interviewees also use more recent publications, particularly collections of tunes by traditional music composers. Liz Doherty discusses her experience using Liz Carroll's tune book:

[Liz Carroll's] compositions are amazing, and with the publication of the book recently, I've been shamed into knowing I actually haven't been playing them correctly

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<sup>21</sup> O'Connor also states that the 'melody is only a framework, a skeleton that gets its flesh and character from the musicians who play it. This will be different each time it is played' (2001:8). See also (Waldron 2009a:60; Veblen 1991:237).

at all! I'm going to have to sit down and start from scratch again (Doherty, interview).

Helen Gubbins also mentioned that she enjoys playing Ed Reavy tunes, and luckily 'they are all written down. It's a really accessible book, so I like flipping through it' (Gubbins, interview). Collections of compositions by particular Irish traditional musicians, such as Junior Crehan (Crotty n.d), Ed Reavy (1996), and Brendan Tonra (Tonra and Kisiel 2000), have become popular in recent decades. Collections of session tunes, such as *100 Essential Irish Session Tunes* (Mallinson 1995b), have also recently become popular.<sup>22</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 3, CCÉ has published three volumes of session tune books, *Foinn Seisiún*. These books organize tunes into sets, which can be useful for beginners who hope to join their local session. Kearney suggests that these session tune books have largely 'replaced' older collections, such as O'Neill's (1907) and Breathnach's (1963, 1976) (Kearney 2009:197).

Even though many traditional musicians may not use collections, these sources can still play a subtle role during the learning process. It would be unusual to meet a traditional musician who has never heard of O'Neill's collection. Even if a traditional musician does not use collections, these written sources are commonly discussed at sessions and other musical events. In this way, being aware of the existence of collections is part of gaining a basic understanding of Irish traditional music history and culture. Additionally, traditional music collections can influence musicians who only learn aurally. Several scholars argue that traditional musicians often learn repertoire aurally from other musicians who have acquired repertoire from written collections (Carolan 1997:56-7; Cranitch 2006:201; Vallely 2008:120).

### Instrumental Tutors

Instrumental tutors published by traditional music teachers and performers are now popular learning resources in traditional music circles. While ABC and staff notation can be used as an instructional tool or memory aid, instrumental tutors fulfil a different function. By explicitly addressing elements of style from different perspectives, instrumental tutors can help learners to understand instrumental techniques and approaches to style. For instance, the *Irish Fiddle*

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<sup>22</sup> For more examples of session tune collections, see (Cranitch 2000; Kearney n.d.; Mallinson 1995a, 1997).

*Book* (Cranitch 2001) and *Timber: The Flute Tutor* (Vallely 1987) address specific techniques, style, and ornamentations on the fiddle and flute, respectively. Many instrumental tutors also include a selection of tunes, so learners can practice techniques in the context of a particular tune. Irish traditional music tutor books are relatively new learning sources, and for this reason, they begin to influence learning practices after the 1970s. Hammy Hamilton learned the flute before these resources were available, and therefore describes having to rely on a network of traditional musicians in order to learn technique and aspects of style:

There are a lot of tutors now-a-days where you can see rolls, and it's written down and explained. But in my day there wasn't. I must have asked other players at some stage, like "How are you doing a roll?" Because I think the initial thing is most people mistake a roll for a bit of vibrato or something (Hamilton, interview).

I suggest that tutors can be particularly helpful resources for learners who may be shy to ask experienced players for advice, or for learners who may not live near other traditional musicians. As Hammy suggests, initially, it may be difficult to understand and learn rolls and other ornamentations by ear. Some guidance is useful, and instrumental tutors aim to guide learners to develop an understanding and a technical proficiency of stylistic nuances.

A few of my interviewees have published their own instrumental tutors, and they include audio or video recordings within the book.<sup>23</sup> Mary Bergin suggests that some learners find the rhythm and pulse of Irish traditional music 'elusive'. She also suggests that the 'lift' can only be felt and achieved through listening (Bergin, interview). For this reason, Mary feels it is essential that her tin whistle tutor includes an audio CD. This is a popular trend, as instrumental tutors commonly include aural examples alongside written descriptions of techniques and notation. In his fiddle tutor, Matt Cranitch writes about his included CD in this way:

This CD is an invaluable aid to learning, because you can hear how the music and ornamentation should sound. Furthermore, playing along with the recording will help with rhythm and intonation (2001:6).

Writers of instrumental tutors often encourage learners to use listening practices

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<sup>23</sup> See (Cranitch 2001, Hamilton 1990, Ó Gráda 2011). Mary Bergin also has a tutor in press.

alongside their written sources.

While instrumental tutors are a relatively new resource, there is a tradition of teachers notating ornamentations and bowings to aid their students' musical development. Matt Cranitch states that Pádraig O'Keeffe 'was a trained teacher and obviously thought a lot about the whole pedagogic thing. And this is evident particularly in the meticulous way in which he marked the bowing and so on' (Cranitch, interview). Matt describes how Pádraig notated 'difficult concepts, like rolls' for his pupils to practice (Cranitch, interview).<sup>24</sup> Additionally, from my own learning experiences, I have often observed flute teachers marking ABC or staff notation to show students where to breathe. This helps to illustrate how to vary a tune by breathing in different places during a series of repetitions.

### Some Concerns

In this section, I explore some of the challenges associated with learning Irish traditional music using written sources. Although the majority of interviewees used written sources at some stage during the learning process, many have concerns about learners who rely too much on visual aids. Many interviewees believe that aural learning is a more practical or effective learning strategy. While most of my interviewees state that they can read notation, many choose not to depend on written sources. While Tomás Ó Canainn is a proficient reader, he states:

I never used notation as a learning device a lot. Ok, if I wanted to learn a tune and somebody scribbled it out, I could read it, but in general I wouldn't be looking toward notation for picking up stuff  
(Ó Canainn, interview).

Tomás considers aural learning convenient and efficient (Ó Canainn, interview). Similarly, Connie O'Connell also suggests that he can read staff notation, but prefers to learn aurally:

Obviously, I can read music and I can write it, but I would say that the amount of tunes that I have taken from written form would only be about six per cent maybe, really small. But having said that I would delve into all the books in the world (O'Connell, interview).

While Connie uses written sources, he emphasizes that his entire repertoire is

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<sup>24</sup> See also Matt's research on Pádraig O'Keeffe's teaching methodologies (Cranitch 2006).

minimally influenced by written sources.

Several scholars of folk, jazz, popular, and classical music suggest that current notation systems fail to accurately represent musical sounds. Chanan, for instance, argues that ‘no system of notation can ever be complete; there will always be elements that escape notation because of their subtlety and their spontaneous and elusive nature’ (1995:10).<sup>25</sup> Irish traditional music scholars also frequently discuss the inadequacies of visual representations, and suggest that there are limitations when trying to learn and play music using notation (Breathnach 1986:8-9; Peoples 1994:13; Smith 1999:207; Waldron 2006b:6-7). Francis O’Neill acknowledges that it is beyond the scope of musical notation to ‘illustrate the wealth of graces, turns, and trills, which adorn the performance of capable Irish pipers and fiddlers, skilful both in execution and improvisation’ (O’Neill in Carolan 1997:43). Within Irish traditional music culture, many practitioners and scholars highlight the limitations of learning via written sources, and emphasize the importance of listening in order to absorb, understand, imitate, and perform stylistic nuances.

Many of my interviewees suggest that subtle aspects of Irish traditional music cannot be learned through written sources alone, but are developed throughout prolonged listening practices. Interviewees felt that notation is merely a guide, ‘skeleton’, or the ‘bare bones’ of what traditional music-making should embody. For this reason, some suggest that when learners depend on written sources, they may struggle to learn the more elusive qualities of Irish traditional music performance, such as rhythmic nuances, feeling, inflections, variations, and creative interpretation. For instance, Liz Doherty suggests that when learning primarily from written sources, novices may have difficulty learning the subtleties of Irish traditional music:

If somebody has to learn from the book alone, without ever hearing the music, it would be difficult, because what’s on the page is very flat. Unless you’re hearing the nuances of it, it doesn’t really bring that energy across, or the lift, life and the subtlety... Playing the notes in isolation? I have come across people who have tried to learn from that alone, and it’s probably the least successful way of learning (Doherty, interview).

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<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Campbell argues that ‘[n]o musical notation has yet been capable of expressing in a visual way precisely the way the music should sound’ (1991:106). See also (Berliner 1994:302; Green 2008:7).

Liz also suggests that notation should not be taken literally, as melodies are approximations which need to be creatively interpreted by musicians. She states that ‘the notes that are written aren’t always the notes that are played anyway, and you certainly wouldn’t play it that way every time’ (interview). My interviewees value the ability to creatively interpret melodies, and this interpretation is usually accomplished through personal experimentation and by listening to other musicians’ versions and interpretations. When novices use notation prescriptively and play the notation without adding or interpreting the melody, little is being accomplished to progress their musical creativity.

Other interviewees suggest that written sources do not help learners to develop a sense of intonation, feeling, or style. Lisa O’Sullivan states that ‘intonation, feeling and phrasing’ are learned better aurally than visually, and she believes that learning by ear is ‘far more important and a better way to learn, because you lose a lot of feeling through just learning by notation’ (O’Sullivan, interview). Traditional musicians often learn intonation tacitly through listening and experimentation. During tuition, workshops, and other learning contexts, teachers and mentors generally do not instruct students how to play in tune. Michael O’Sullivan also states that there is ‘no doubt you would pick up the style of your teacher if you were taught by ear. If you’re taught by notes, it’s diluted then... It’s very hard to get the feeling of the tune by just the notes’ (O’Sullivan, interview). From many interviewees’ viewpoints, aural learning allows traditional musicians to simultaneously absorb and imitate intonation, rhythm, melody, technique, and other stylistic inflections.

Interviewees also suggest that written sources do not readily transmit or represent the rhythm, pulse, or the emphasis of Irish traditional music. Mary Bergin suggests that staff notation is particularly problematic in that it does not accurately reflect the ‘internal rhythm’ of Irish traditional music. She explains:

Traditional music is not played as it is written in staff notation at all. It actually has no bearing on the internal rhythm anyway. I find that if you use staff notation, especially for jigs, it’s just even and not representative of the true rhythm. So I just use the ABC notation... If you’re a staff reader, you’re going to interpret the notes with the same beat all the time, so I try to get people away from that and give them a new format (Bergin, interview).

Mary feels that by providing pupils ABC rather than staff notation, they are more



likely to interpret the rhythm in the ‘traditional’ way. One of the reasons Mary gives for this suggestion is that there is a risk that when reading staff notation, learners will interpret and play Irish tunes using a ‘classical’ sense of pulse and style (Bergin, interview). As John Reid suggests, some readers of staff notation may play Irish melodies ‘classically’ because they play the rhythm with equal stress and duration as it is notated.

If you were to look at it and read off the notes, and never heard it before, there's a danger that it will be played classical, because every crotchet or quaver is given a certain length. It's not going to sound the same. It's all down to pure listening (Reid, interview).<sup>26</sup>

Learners with experience playing classical music may feel comfortable learning through staff notation. However, learners who use staff notation prescriptively may struggle to play with the proper rhythmic inflection.

Furthermore, several interviewees indicate that they often find it difficult to remember repertoire they have acquired through written sources. For instance, while Niall Vallely enjoys flipping through *O'Neill's 1001* and *Ceol Rince na hÉireann*, he feels that it is challenging to memorize tunes through notation. Niall compares this to aural methods and suggests that ‘If you learn it from a tape, you’d have it in your head straight away’ (Vallely, interview). Additionally, while Hammy Hamilton is able to read staff notation, he feels that he easily forgets tunes learned via notation:

I was always able to read music. When I started getting involved in traditional music, unlike lots of people, immediately all the written collections were available to me as a source. But I always found tunes that I learned from music didn’t stay in my head. You’d have it for a while, but then forget it very quickly (Hamilton, interview).

In her ethnographic study of adult learners of Celtic music, many of Waldron’s participants also suggested that it was more difficult to remember tunes learned visually (2009a:59). According to my interviewees, aural learning seems to be a more efficient way to retain large amounts of repertoire in one’s memory.

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<sup>26</sup> Within the literature, Breathnach also comments on how staff notation only provides visually equal quavers, which does not display the ‘subtle deviation which give life and colour to the performance of a good player. Only by constantly listening can this rhythmic quality be attained’ (1986:8-9).

Within Irish traditional music culture, written sources are not used in performance contexts, and are used exclusively during practice or informal music-making in private. In this way, learners who are dependent on written sources may find it difficult to fit into performance contexts where other participants are playing and learning aurally. For instance, they may feel uncomfortable in a session without notation as a crutch, and will more than likely feel out of place if they are the only musician to bring notated music into the session circle. In order to fully participate in musical activities within the traditional music community, it is in learners' best interest to play and learn by ear, and to commit tunes to memory.

The limitations and advantages of using written sources during the learning process are complex and numerous. As mentioned earlier, Seamus Sands experienced a combination of aural and visual learning practices while learning fiddle. As a teenager, he enjoyed participating in sessions, listening to commercial recordings, and exploring tunes in O'Neill's 1001. While Seamus enjoyed using written sources during the learning processes, he values learning directly from other traditional musicians much more. He suggests that written sources cannot replace or compare to playing and socializing with other traditional musicians. Seamus discusses an experience during his life that he found educationally influential:

I played for a time with Paddy Mills and I would remember him and the nice funny things associated with him. To me, that's much more important than the notes that you can see in a book. Anybody with a bit of classical training can pick up reels, or Breandán Breathnach's *Ceol na hÉireann*. There are thousands of tunes and you can play through them all, but that's only half of the picture (Sands, interview).

Seamus emphasizes that learning the pitches of a tune is merely the beginning of the learning process.

Since written sources are often used in private settings, one might assume that these resources do not involve social interactions. However, there are numerous social implications to consider when discussing the role of written sources in learning and enculturation processes. For instance, a group of friends may exchange notation in order to learn similar repertoire or rehearse in a céilí band together. Parents also may pass on O'Neill's 1001 or other written sources to their children. Additionally, Cranitch suggests that Pádraig O'Keeffe's

manuscripts were so important to some musicians in the Sliabh Luachra area that 'learning a tunes from Pádraig's notated manuscripts, even long after his death' was still considered to be 'learning from him' (Cranitch 2006:188). In this way, written sources can involve concrete social connections and memories, and play a role in musical enculturation.

In this section, I have explored the ways traditional musicians use and experience written sources during the learning process. My research suggests that traditional musicians use written sources in diverse ways. The frequency at which these resources are used also depends primarily on the stage of the learning process and learners' personal interest in written sources. Because the types of written sources serve different functions, written sources can affect learning processes in distinct ways. According to my interviewees, many traditional music teachers use ABC notation as an instructional tool in order to gradually introduce novices to music-making and aural learning practices. Notation is also commonly used as a memory aid. More experienced traditional musicians tend to use written collections as a way of researching repertoire they have acquired aurally. Several of my interviewees use collections to check their versions, seek out different versions, or explore new repertoire they wish to learn. I also discussed how instrumental tutors can help learners to understand, practice, and develop instrumental techniques and styles.

I suggest that the effect written sources have on musical enculturation partly depends on the individual's learning style. Germli defines an individual's learning style as 'the way that person begins to process, internalize, and concentrate on new material' (1996:24). Some learners naturally gravitate towards visual learning, and for such learners, written sources can aid them until they feel comfortable learning Irish traditional music aurally. Helen Gubbins suggests it is important for traditional music teachers to accommodate people with different learning styles:

Certain people learn more visually than aurally. I guess you always want to work on the aural thing, but at the end of the day, if somebody really comes on in leaps and bounds because they have the notes to take home with them, why would you restrict that at all? I really try to push the aural thing, but I try and just respect people's knowledge of how they learn best, and give them the notes, especially when they're beginning. And then at measured intervals I take away the crutches (Gubbins, interview).

While Helen values aural learning and tries to encourage her students to listen as much as possible, she suggests that a combination of visual and aural learning practices can provide meaningful educational experiences – particularly to visual learners.

Whether or not written sources are educationally effective also depends on how well these sources are used. The use of notation does not inherently stunt a learner's ability to creatively interpret repertoire. I have argued that when learners depend on and use notation prescriptively, their ability to creatively interpret tunes may languish. However, the development of creativity is impeded by the learners' incorrect approach and use of the sources; creativity is not impeded by the written sources themselves. This is similar to Lord's suggestion that 'song books spoil the oral character of the tradition only when the singer believes that they are the way in which the song should be presented...they can spoil a tradition only when the singers themselves have already been spoiled by a concept of a fixed text' (2000:79). My interviewees used notation in conjunction with listening practices, which is a more effective use of written sources. Within the Irish traditional music community, visual and aural learning are often interconnected processes, which complement, rather than oppose, one another.

When written sources are frequently and effectively used by musicians, such resources can play a significant role in learning and enculturation processes. However, not every traditional musician uses these sources, and none of my interviewees suggested that using written sources is an important experience one needs to go through in order to become a traditional musician. Musical enculturation can, and often does occur, without a learner using written sources. Blind musicians, for instance, of which there are many notable examples throughout Irish history, have developed their musicality entirely aurally. However, many young learners are introduced to their first Irish tunes via ABC notation, and in adulthood, traditional musicians commonly discuss written sources in sessions, workshops, festivals and everyday discourse. While written sources are commonly used, they represent a somewhat peripheral learning practice when compared to aural learning, which remains the primary mode of transmission. This is evident, in particular, since my interviewees often use written sources as a mnemonic device or as a tool to research aural versions of tunes. While more peripheral than aural learning, written sources are a part of the community of practice and play a role in many musicians' learning experiences.

## Phonographic Technology

As far back as 1878, Tomas Edison recognized the implications phonographic technology had for the field of music and education (Chanan 1995:2-3), and ever since, scholars have examined and debated such educational implications. Malm suggests:

The single technological development that has most influenced the field of music is the invention of sound recording in 1877. For the first time people had the ability to preserve, transport and reproduce at a specific time and place sound that were originally produced elsewhere (1992:350).

The purpose of this section is to explore the ways traditional musicians use various forms of phonographic technology and how this affects the enculturation process. I propose that listening to audio recordings is a social practice which is integral to the musical enculturation of Irish traditional musicians.

In this dissertation, the term phonography refers to the phenomenon of sound recording, and ‘phonographic technology’ refers to a variety of artefacts, including commercial and non-commercial audio recordings which are played and listened to by using radio, internet, vinyl record, cassette tape, CD, Mp3 players, or mobile phones. ‘*Works of phonography*’ can also be thought of as ‘sound-constructs created by the use of recording machinery’ (Brown 2000:361). Throughout this section, I explore the role commercial and non-commercial recordings plays in learning and enculturation processes. Commercial recordings are sound recordings of traditional music performances which are produced either professionally or semi-professionally, by record companies or independently, for purposes of commercial distribution. Many commercial recordings of Irish traditional music are what Turino refers to as ‘high fidelity’ works, although many traditional groups and artists also experiment with ‘studio audio art’ (2008).<sup>27</sup> In addition to commercial recordings, Irish traditional musicians, enthusiasts, and archivists commonly make their own sound recordings of Irish traditional music, which I refer to as non-commercial recordings. In the past, practitioners recorded sound by using portable tape recorders, but now, digital

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<sup>27</sup> High fidelity music refers to audio recordings which aim to represent live music performances. ‘*Studio Audio Art* is a recorded music that is patently a studio form with no suggestion or expectation that it should or even could be performed live in real time’ (Turino 2008:78). Studio audio art often features electronic music and sounds, and is considered a final musical product.

recorders, mobile and smartphones are much more common.

Within Irish traditional music culture, of all the modes of technology, phonography is the most significant in terms of learning and enculturation processes. According to my interview data and field research, using phonographic technology to listen to Irish traditional music is a pervasive musical and learning experience. Interviewees discussed listening to both commercial and non-commercial recordings in detail, which reveals diverse learning experiences. Interviewees also described both purposeful and distracted listening practices (Green 2002). The participants occasionally listened with an intention to learn, and frequently experienced unconscious learning while listening to Irish traditional music for enjoyment. The majority of my interviewees discussed listening to commercial, non-commercial recordings and radio, which influenced their repertoires, style, musical taste, and interests.

Mary Bergin was the only interviewee to suggest that phonographic technology did little to influence her musicianship. She states:

We didn't have tape recordings. I had a good ear, which was brilliant, because we had no way of hearing tunes, no records or tapes or anything. So if I heard a tune at a session all through my teens, I needed to come home with it in my head... So, I was pretty quick at picking up tunes through necessity (Bergin, interview).

In general, Mary learned Irish traditional music 'mostly through people, definitely face-to-face' (Bergin, interview), so the impact of phonographic technology is limited in terms of her musical enculturation. However, as a recording artist herself, one could argue that Mary is affected by listening to her own audio recordings, as well as casually hearing music via media, such as radio.

The role phonographic technology plays during the enculturation process depends on a number of factors, including the frequency of listening practices. The type of listening which a musician engages in also plays a role in determining the impact phonographic technology can have on musical enculturation. Did learners aim to gain new repertoire or stylistic nuances by using phonographic technology? How often did they listen purposefully, attentively, or distractedly? What effect does listening merely for enjoyment have on enculturation? Phonographic technology affects musical enculturation in complex ways; as a learning practice, listening to and playing along with recorded music has numerous advantages as well as limitations. As Turino states:

...many scholars have studied the processes and social effects of recording technologies from different vantage points and have decried and celebrated recorded music from a variety of ideological positions (2008:67).

Throughout this section, I explore both the educational limitations and advantages of using phonographic technology to learn Irish traditional music.

I suggest that the particular formats of recorded sound can affect the musical and educational experience. The experience of using radio, LPs, 78s, cassettes, CDs, or Mp3 technologies differ slightly, resulting in differing learning processes. Trying to learn a tune by listening to it once on the radio may be challenging, if not impossible for some learners. In contrast, CDs can be played, paused, and repeated, which aids aural learning processes. Traditional musicians often develop creative ways of using technology to meet their own needs. For instance, Seamus Sands describes how he physically manipulated 78 recordings with his finger in order to slow down fiddle recordings. This allowed him to repeatedly listen to stylistic nuances:

I certainly think some of the fiddle players would have been influences. So, for example, the first trad record I remember buying was Kevin Burke's 'If the Cap Fits.' I remember slowing that down on an old radiogram so I could hear what he was doing with his fingers (Sands, interview).

This is a relatively common practice amongst traditional musicians who used 78 recordings in the past (O'Shea 2008:29). Musicians now engage with digital music on their computers, on the internet, and mobile devices, such as mp3 players and smartphones. With innovations and smaller gadgets, listening to Irish traditional music has become more convenient and accessible.

### Commercial Recordings

According to the interview data, commercial recordings are the most commonly used type of phonographic technology by traditional musicians. In this section, I begin with a discussion of the ways my interviewees acquired new repertoire by listening and playing along to commercial recordings. Following this, I explore how commercial recordings affect the learning of techniques and aspects of style. I conclude by considering the role commercial recordings play during musical enculturation.

Commercial recordings have significantly affected transmission practices

in Irish traditional music since the early 1920s.<sup>28</sup> While the first Irish traditional musician was recorded on cylinder in 1898 (Ó hAllmhuráin 2008:105), commercial recordings did not significantly influence learning practices until after the War of Independence (1919-1921) when gramophones and radios became common in Irish households (Ó hAllmhuráin 2008:123). Commercial recordings are currently listened to using many formats, including on the radio and internet. While some argue that the non-commercial side of traditional music-making ‘is the lifeblood, the “cultural glue” that holds the whole system together’ (McCann 2001:91), commercialism, in many forms, plays a role in Irish traditional music culture. As Sommers Smith argues, ‘distrust of the commercial must be balanced with the realization that commercial recordings are now by far the most significant means by which the music is transmitted’ (2001:118). This highlights the significant influence of commercial recordings, and suggests that within Irish traditional music, commercialism and non-commercialism feature in learning and enculturation processes.<sup>29</sup>

Nettl urges ethnomusicologists to ‘see aural tradition in the context of the many types of transmission available’ and suggests that ‘Learning aurally from a series of live performances is different from the repeated hearing of a recording’ (2005:293). While Irish traditional music was once primarily transmitted aurally in live settings, currently aural learning also occurs through listening to audio recordings. In contrast to aural learning in live settings, commercial recordings can be listened to repetitively and in the privacy of one’s own home. I suggest learning by listening to commercial recordings involves self-directed and informal learning process; the learner controls what to listen to, how often, and when to pause, rewind, or replay. Cormac De Frein suggests that commercial recordings allow him to control the learning process, by proceeding at his own pace:

I like doing my own thing... On a CD, you’re on your own. With your laptop, you can stop it, shift it forward or back or just mess around yourself. I kind of prefer that. If I want to get a few new tunes, I would prefer to go off and get it on my own (De Frein, interview).

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<sup>28</sup> For a history of the role commercial recordings within traditional music, see (Hamilton 1996; Kearney 2009; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008; Vallyely 1999:403-4; Veblen 1991).

<sup>29</sup> Hamilton explores commercialism in his study of the role of commercial recordings in the development of Irish traditional music (1996), and his research significantly informs my discussion here.



Because the learning takes place in private, peer-pressure and performance pressures are less of an issue compared to other learning contexts, such as traditional music sessions or group tuition. As Green suggests, popular musicians often consider commercial recordings ‘less threatening to work with’ (2008:55) compared to learning in live music-making contexts. This is ironic, she suggests, since playing along to a commercial recording is ‘inflexible’; Unlike musicians in live settings, sound recordings cannot slow down or in any way respond to a learner playing along with the performance (Green 2008:55). In essence, recordings have no sympathy for the novice musician who wishes to participate musically.

### **Repertoire**

The majority of my interviewees discussed the ways they acquired new repertoire by listening to and playing along with commercial recordings - a self-directed process which involves listening, imitation, trial and error, and experimentation. My interviewees’ listening practices were often purposeful. For instance, Hammy Hamilton details how he consciously learned a tune by listening to a Seamus Ennis recording:

The first tune I was ever conscious of learning, it was a tune called the Blackthorn Stick, a jig. I learned that off a Seamus Ennis recording. He was playing the whistle and that’s how I learned that tune. I basically sat down and just figured it out from listening to the recording (Hamilton, interview).

However, Hammy only learned the basic ‘framework’ of the Blackthorn Stick by listening to the recording. Hammy discusses how he played the tune for a friend and realized that he did not acquire (let alone perceive) Seamus Ennis’s ornamentations:

I played it [The Blackthorn Stick] for a friend of mine, and he said ‘Yeah, that’s all very well, but you’re not playing any of the decorations.’ And I said, ‘Decorations? What decorations?’ Funny enough, he wasn’t a musician but he was a fan of music. In fairness he could hear what I couldn’t hear at that stage. I was only playing the framework of the tune really (Hamilton, interview).

In this example, Hammy acquired new repertoire by listening to a recording, and following this, he gained awareness about stylistic subtleties through a social

interaction. In meeting his friend, Hammy discussed learning the tune from Seamus Ennis's recording. Upon playing it and receiving feedback, Hammy discovers that he has not imitated the ornamentations of the tune. It is only after this awareness that Hammy was able to listen out for the decorations. This was a significant learning moment; learners can only imitate sounds which are heard and understood (this understanding can and often does occur tacitly). This highlights two important points about learning aurally from commercial recordings. First, listeners' aural perceptions and previous experiences ultimately determine what is learned; how a novice hears a tune can differ significantly to how an experienced traditional musician might hear the same recording. Second, some learning experiences using commercial recordings often involve related and meaningful social interactions, as Hammy's narrative illustrates. I further explore the social implications of commercial recordings later on in this section.

Several interviewees also indicated that they unconsciously or 'subconsciously' learned tunes by repeatedly listening to commercial recordings. For instance, when asked how she prefers to learn new tunes, Lisa O'Sullivan states:

I try to listen as much as I can at home when I'm just paddling around doing housework... I've actually started putting a 'to learn' section in my iTunes playlist – which is full! I'm up to F or G. So that's my new technique. If you keep it on play, they really do enter. I think I even learn them subconsciously (O'Sullivan, interview).

Lisa suggests that she no longer sits down to consciously learn new tunes, but instead acquires new repertoire by repeatedly listening to commercial recordings until the point which the tunes seep into her consciousness. Once this occurs, Lisa states that she can usually play these tunes in a session context relatively accurately after the first or second repeat of the tune (O'Sullivan, interview). I have also experienced this phenomenon on a number of occasions. During a session in Sin É, for example, I once became quite excited as another musician started playing a jig from my favourite Dervish album, *Spirit* (2003). I had never played or practiced the tune before, but knew the tune's structure and tacitly knew that it was in the key of A minor. Caught up in the excitement of the session and melody, I began to play quietly along to the tune and was pleasantly surprised how well I could play the tune on the second repeat (Fieldnotes, 8 Feb 2011, Sin

É session). It should be noted, however, that learning a tune ‘unconsciously’ is only possible or likely if musicians already have the tune in their aural memories, and if they are technically proficient on their instruments to execute the patterns of the tune. In my case, I was aurally familiar with the pattern of the tune and confident that my fingers could manipulate this pattern on the flute.

## **Style**

Rice argues that the advent of phonographic technology provided oral musical cultures a ‘source more important even than musical notation for learning not only repertoire but the details of performance style’ (2003:77). My research suggests that traditional musicians can consciously and unconsciously learn new techniques and stylistic nuances through prolonged and repeated listening to commercial recordings. Commercial recordings allow musicians to listen to a diverse range of styles and interpretations of Irish traditional music. All my interviewees emphasize the importance of listening in order to develop style and personal expression. Many also suggest that listening to a variety of styles on commercial recordings aided or played a crucial role in the development of their style of playing. For instance, when asked how she thinks learners develop instrumental styles, Lisa suggests:

I think you really need to sit down and listen to your chosen instrument on a solo level and listen to varying styles, varying speeds, and techniques, and just start to know your stuff and education yourself a bit about why each style is different. I think it’s essential to start with that knowledge (O’Sullivan, interview).

Hammy Hamilton also suggests that learners gain a more comprehensive understanding of traditional flute style and playing when they listen to commercial recordings of exceptional flute players:

If you really want to understand the essence of traditional flute playing, go back and listen to some of the old players, like John McKenna and Seamus Tansey. Like, the early recordings... (Hamilton, interview).

Commercial recordings offer a convenient way to listen to a multitude of experienced practitioners, which provides insight into the diverse approaches and styles of other Irish traditional musicians. By listening to many commercial recordings, learners make conscious or tacit aesthetic decisions about the type of

musician they hope to sound like one day.

Due to the development of phonography, many traditional musicians are now influenced by a multitude of different styles. For instance, while Matt Cranitch is primarily influenced by Sliabh Luachra musicians, Matt listens to a wide variety of fiddle styles, including bluegrass and old-time fiddle playing. Matt states:

Of my favourite players I would certainly include Denis Murphy, Julia Clifford, Pádraig O’Keeffe and Paddy Cronin... But when I was growing up I listened to players as diverse as Paddy Canny and Sean McGuire and indeed many other fiddle players from outside our own Irish tradition (Cranitch, interview).

As another example, Niall Vallely suggests that in the 1970s, there was a lack of solo concertina recordings, and therefore, he listened to an eclectic mix of other instrumentalists and traditional groups. Niall believes by listening to a variety of different styles of Irish traditional music, his own playing eventually ‘kind of got convalesced into some sort of style’ (Vallely, interview).

Through repeated listening learners begin to absorb melodies, timbre, inflections, ornamentation, and variations. Sloboda discusses the importance of repeated listening in music developmental processes:

...repeated exposure increased the likelihood that subjects would notice ‘deep’ harmonic or thematic similarities between segments, as opposed to ‘surface’ features, such as speed or tessitura (1985:153).

Since commercial recordings provide opportunities for learners to repeatedly hear Irish traditional music within the privacy of their homes, listening to these sources can foster a more complete understanding of Irish traditional music. Some interviewees suggest that aspects of Irish traditional music performance, such as rhythmic and stylistic nuances, were only attainable through listening. Conal Ó Gráda suggests that while a teacher or ‘facilitator’ can expedite the learning process, learners ultimately need to absorb stylistic nuances for themselves by listening to Irish traditional music over a significant amount of time. In Conal’s experience, he spent a considerable amount of time listening to commercial recordings, which contributed to his musical development:

Listening is a huge thing. I listened for ages when I was young. I spent hours with records on the whole time,

sitting down on the floor next to them, and just absorbing how the music was played. You learn an awful lot about the character of the music that way, which cannot really be taught. I maintain that you're not really taught music, you learn it yourself. You can have a facilitator there who helps you and points you in the right direction and shows you things that might have taken you longer otherwise to figure out. But really you learn it yourself. Traditional music is about listening and listening and listening and absorbing it into your bloodstream, so it becomes almost like an accent that you take on (Ó Gráda, interview).

In Conal's experience, listening to a multitude of commercial recordings contributed to his understanding and personal exploration of Irish traditional music. If expressive elements of traditional music are not teachable, as Conal suggests, listening, self-directed learning and personal exploration are essential in order to develop a sense of individual style.

Within the literature, several traditional music scholars discuss the standardizing effect commercial recordings has on traditional music styles.<sup>30</sup> Ó hAllmhuráin discusses how James Morrison and Michael Coleman's commercial recordings standardized repertoire and techniques, particularly amongst Irish traditional fiddle players:

Their techniques and ornamentation, settings and repertoire, were imitated to the finest detail, while local tunes and settings were consigned to the elderly and the uncompromising. The movement towards standardisation which began with O'Neill's book now took another quantum leap ahead (2008:129).<sup>31</sup>

The standardization of repertoire and musical style is not a concern unique within the Irish traditional music literature; several classical musicians and scholars also have concerns about the ability of commercial recordings to standardize live performance practice (Chanan 1995:118). Because commercial recordings solidify performances and canonize particular pieces of repertoire, settings, interpretations, and variations, they can play a significant role in the standardization of musical practices.

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<sup>30</sup> A full literature review is not necessary for our purposes here. For further discussion see (Breathnach 1996:92; Cranitch 2001:121, 2006:31; Hamilton 1978:37, 1996:148; O'Connor 2001:71-2; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008:129; Ó Riada 1982:53; O'Shea 2005:70, 2008:27; Rapuano 2005; Sommers Smith 1998:141; Veblen 1991:174).

<sup>31</sup> Hammy Hamilton suggests that the versions of tunes in O'Neill's book 'never became standardized. What became far more standardized was the early 78s, because people could hear them' (Hamilton, interview).

While commercial recordings have a standardizing effect, according to my interview data, it is relatively uncommon for traditional musicians to consciously replicate the style of commercially recorded traditional musicians. According to my interviewees, experienced traditional musicians can acquire repertoire from listening to commercial recordings, but tend to interpret the tunes in their own style. Connie O'Connell discussed the recordings of the well-known Sligo-fiddle players, James Morrison and Michael Coleman. Connie suggests that instead of imitating the Sligo-style playing, many fiddle players from around Ireland learned tunes, but played in their already established fiddle styles:

A lot of musicians around the country learned tunes from the playing of Michael Coleman and all those fiddle players. And I'd say they interpreted them in their own particular way according to where they were from, where they came from (O'Connell, interview).

Cranitch also states that Pádraig O'Keeffe probably 'learned tunes from recordings of some of the Sligo-style players... he did not absorb the style of playing of these musicians. Rather he learned the tunes, but in his own individual way of playing them' (2006:219). As another example from the literature, Mac Aoidh also suggests that Donegal fiddle players absorbed Coleman and Morrison's repertoire, 'but in almost every circumstance the tunes were performed in the original Donegal style of the fiddler' (1994:48).

This suggests that influential commercial recordings, such as Coleman and Morrison's, do not simply standardize styles. While some practitioners may imitate the techniques and style from iconic commercial recordings, many traditional musicians interpret tunes on commercial recordings based on their own individual styles. As McNamara and Woods state, 'A good enough player could take Coleman's style and adapt it to his own, adding a bit here or taking away a bit there. A good player would never copy directly' (1997:22). Of course, during the early stages of musical development, learners are far more likely to directly imitate commercial recordings. Indeed, this is often necessary during the very initial stages of the learning process. However, several traditional musicians and scholars urge learners to avoid imitation without creative interpretation or introspection. In his fiddle tutor, Matt Cranitch suggests this to aspiring fiddle players:

In developing your own style of playing, particularly

when learning at first, it is often helpful to copy the playing of someone whose music is readily available, perhaps on a recording. This should not be continued longer than is necessary...slavish imitation of another's playing clearly diminishes the scope for musical creativity and self-expression, ultimately leading to a standardization of playing styles. An essential feature of the music is thereby lost (2001:121).

Mindless imitation of commercial recordings is generally viewed as a detrimental practice since it does not foster creativity and individual expression – which Cranitch suggests are 'essential features' of Irish traditional music. When learners merely imitate commercial recordings, they copy other musicians' musical thoughts, expressions, and emotions, rather than developing their own.

Some young learners have the learning disposition to analyse and learn from recordings on a more critical level, even during the early stages of the learning process. Niall Vallely discusses the significant influence Noel Hill's recordings had on young concertina players, particular when he was learning back in the 1970s. Many of his peers were keen to play and sound just like Noel, but from a young age, Niall desired to establish his own personal style, and differentiate himself from his peers and other concertina players:

I grew up in the 70s and the only records being made of concertina playing was Noel Hill. Like everybody else my age, I was kind of blown away by that... But I suppose I never fell into a thing of trying to copy everything he played. It seemed to be the trend that you'd go to the fleadh and everyone would play all the same tunes and try to play like Noel... I think I got it in my head at a pretty young age that I wanted to be somehow a bit different (Vallely, interview).

While Niall was also significantly influenced by Hill's commercial recordings, he did not gravitate towards strictly imitating one musician's style. This more than likely derives from certain aspects of Niall's personality and his thinking disposition (Tishman and Perkins 1993). While teachers can encourage learners to develop the inclination to become unique, creative musicians, this is not easily teachable.

### **Enculturation**

Within the Irish traditional music community, listening to commercial recordings has become a noteworthy part of social and musical life; it is a part of what

traditional musicians do. Hamilton discusses the role commercial recordings play within the traditional music community:

Among Irish traditional musicians there is a strong consciousness of the role of recording... all musicians have interacted with them on one or more of several levels; as performer, a listener, a critic, as a source of tunes and songs (1996:15).

I suggest that listening to commercial recordings is a significant activity with the community of practice, and plays a part in the process of becoming a traditional musician.

As explored during the introduction of this chapter, phonographic technology distances recorded music-making from its original social context.<sup>32</sup> Although one can listen to commercial recordings in private, there are numerous social implications to consider. For instance, listeners can experience an intimate, albeit one-way connection to the performers on commercial recordings. O'Shea suggests that the distance between the listener and performer creates an 'intense one-to-one relationship'. She argues:

...gramophone records and radio not only increased the distance separating musician and listener, but the musician disappeared altogether, becoming a disembodied (or 'deanimated') phantom of sound (Attali 1985). This meant a change from the face-to-face social experience of music, but paradoxically also allowed an intense one-to-one relationship between the listener and the sounds they heard (2005:72).<sup>33</sup>

I suggest that listening to commercial recordings simultaneously involves social and 'decontextualized' experiences. Although learning in private, the listener is able to imitate and hear another musician in their own home. As Vallely states, 'the home-focused, electronic products... paradoxically, return entertainment to the privacy of the home and fireside' (2008:124).

The decontextualization of sound and social context is not necessarily a negative scenario for learners of traditional music. On the contrary, phonographic technology allows us to listen to traditional music while driving to work, cleaning the kitchen, or exercising at the gym. This decontextualized experience allows for

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<sup>32</sup> In addition to the scholars I cited earlier, several traditional music scholars also discuss how phonography separates sound from its original social context (Cranitch 2006, Ó Cainann 1993, O'Shea 2005, Sommers Smith 2001, Veblen 1991).

<sup>33</sup> Chanan also describes gramophone records as 'disembodied', since the loss of physical presence removes it from the domain of living time' (1995:126).



frequent, repetitive, and convenient listening, and has the capacity to bring Irish traditional music into people's everyday lives. Geraldine O'Callaghan describes her meaningful experiences listening to Irish traditional music on a portable device:

At varying stages you're going to be influenced by CDs and music that you emulate....I remember getting a copy of Martin Hayes' first album, when I was about fourteen and was pretty much addicted to it for about a year. I use to climb a tree and sit up there listening to it... it would have actually been a tape and a Walkman (O'Callaghan, interview).

While phonography can distance the listener and performer physically, emotionally or culturally, paradoxically, it also has the capacity to link musical communities over vast distances and bring people closer together. To traditional musicians, particularly those who live outside of Ireland, commercial recordings provide a significant connection to Irish traditional music and its culture. Fairbairn states, 'Most Irish musicians accept the importance of these recordings as a source for musicians isolated from an Irish musical community' (1993:51), and Helen O'Shea – a traditional musician and scholar from Australia – comments on Paddy Canny and P.J. Hayes's album the *All-Ireland Champions*:

My first experience of musical community began with hearing this recording, a gift from a fiddle-playing friend that became the wellspring and touchstone for musical gatherings of revival players around the eastern states of Australia (O'Shea 2005:77).

This illustrates the connection between community and commercial recordings. Many people do not have access to live traditional music on a daily basis –this applies to people in Ireland, as well as abroad. Regardless of the local music scene, recordings provide a unique opportunity to connect and immerse oneself in traditional music. With immersion, learners are more likely to identify with traditional music on a socio-cultural level.

My interview data suggests that listening to commercial recordings plays a significant role during the enculturation process in numerous ways. Several interviewees feel that listening and playing along to commercial recordings are important learning experiences. Liz Doherty suggests that learners should practice and play along to CDs before participating in public sessions:

[Beginners] need to be playing along with CDs. We all grew up playing with CDs. Let's be honest, on cassettes. You put it on full blast, and you're playing with other people. And that's still to this day my favourite way of playing, blast on the CDs and play along. You're learning the nuances of the speed and the tempo, the changes between the tunes. You're learning it all for the first time, but you're doing it in private (Doherty, interview).

As Liz's narrative suggests, while learners can play along to commercial recordings alone, in private, they still enjoy the benefits of 'playing with other people'.

Traditional musicians have always learned from older, more experienced practitioners, but with the advent of phonography technology, learners can now gain inspiration from multiple generations of Irish traditional musicians. By listening to recordings, many musicians are influenced by older traditional musicians who have died perhaps years before they were even born.<sup>34</sup> For instance, Geraldine O'Callaghan feels a strong musical and social connection to musicians from the past, including Julia Clifford, as she explains:

It's old music. We're influenced by people who are no longer alive... It's probably the same for loads of traditional musicians because there's a very strong connection and awareness of the same passing on. Like, I never met Julia Clifford, but I'm very influenced by her recordings and just by her life story (O'Callaghan, interview).

Because commercial recordings enable us to hear musicians who have retired or passed away, they can seemingly transcend time, and close the gap between past and present (Gracyk 1997:146). Chanan argues that a 'recording not only conquers geographical space but bridges the distance of year which previously kept certain works from finding their audiences' (1995:95). Without phonographic technology, we would not know the music of Michael Coleman or countless other traditional musicians.

My interview data suggests that commercial recordings can foster social exchanges and connections between practitioners. For instance, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, traditional musicians commonly listen, share, and discuss commercial recordings with their family members, peers, and mentors. James Duggan

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<sup>34</sup> Berliner suggests that within jazz culture, recordings are considered 'formal educational tools', which 'enable young musicians to apprentice unilaterally with artists they may never actually meet' (1994:58).

describes how he received a number of tapes of Irish traditional music from Ann McAuliffe. James considers these influential resources:

I would have gotten a lot of tapes from Ann McAuliffe when she was teaching. I remember a tape of Padraig O'Keeffe on one side and Paddy Cronin on the other. And I remember Ann McAuliffe did a tape as well I can't remember what it was called, 'influential musicians' or something. I wore that out (Duggan, interview).

Through his relationship with Ann, James was exposed to a number of seminal recordings of Irish traditional music. James suggests that he often associates recordings with memories of Ann (Duggan, interview). Although listening to commercial recordings can be a solitary activity, this illustrates that this practice is always socially situated within the musical culture.

## Radio

Although my interview data suggests that learning directly from the radio is not nearly as common as learning from CDs or Mp3s of commercial recording, radio is a significantly distinct medium which warrants its own exploration here. Learning by listening to the radio differs considerably to learning from commercial albums. James Duggan describes how his teacher, Nicky McAuliffe, learned from the radio:

Nick was saying he might hear a tune on the radio and you would have to learn the first part of it and then it might be played again a couple of weeks later and then you'd get the second part of it. I guess recordings are great because I'd listen to a tune five or six times before I tried to play it when I was learning (Duggan, interview).

Although James states that he often listens to *Raidió na Gaeltachta*<sup>35</sup>, he does not purposefully or consciously learn new repertoire or skills through listening and playing along to Irish traditional music on radio programmes (Duggan, interview). Recognizing the difficulty in learning from the radio, James believes commercial recordings much more convenient learning resources.

Only a few of my interviewees indicate that they learned by listening to

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<sup>35</sup> *Raidió na Gaeltachta* is RTÉ's Irish language radio station, which transmits Irish traditional music broadcasts more frequently than the other commercial stations, like RTÉ Radio and 2FM.

the radio. For instance, Seamus Sands states that while in recent years he has not acquired a large amount of new tunes, the tunes he does pick up are acquired coincidentally from listening at traditional music sessions and to *Raidió na Gaeltachta* (Sands, interview). From a historical perspective, because Irish traditional music can now be bought in music shops, downloaded on iTunes, and streamed for free on the internet, learning directly from the radio is not nearly as influential as in past generations.

Prior to television, the radio was the most popular and influential form of media. The first broadcast transmitted on Irish national radio (2RN) was on 1 January 1923, and from the beginning, Irish traditional music ‘had a strong presence’ on air (Hamilton 1996:227). Since 1923, people have listened to live performances, field recordings, and commercial recordings of Irish traditional music on the radio. As with many new technologies, there were initial concerns over the effects radio could have on society and culture. Chanan suggests that in the 1920s, some feared that radio would stifle live music-making and amateur performances, but by the 1930s, live music performances, music-making, and the sale of sheet music were on the rise (1995:64). In Ireland, while there were some concerns over standardization, musicians and scholars have generally acknowledged radio as a positive medium in which to transmit and promote Irish traditional music. For example, Kaul acknowledges the role radio played during the revival of Irish traditional music, and suggests that in the 1950s, ‘Irish traditional music became difficult to come by... Indeed, one of the only remaining mediums for hearing traditional Irish dance music was in the form of a few radio shows’ (2009:39).<sup>36</sup> In his memoir, Ó Canainn states that it ‘would be most unchivalrous not to mention the good that Radio na Gaeltachta has done, not only for singing and music, but for the general moral of the people of every gaeltacht area in Ireland’ (1996:65).

Earlier generations of traditional musicians relied on radio as a source of entertainment, musical exposure, and education. Connie O’Connell, for instance, developed the desire to play fiddle, in part, by listening to the radio. Connie explains his attraction to the fiddle:

We had a radio at the time. We didn’t have electricity at

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<sup>36</sup> Veblen also asserts that, ‘Given the impact radio has had historically, it seems likely that contemporary broadcasting will shape future repertoire and styles’ (1991:154). Vally argues that national radio ‘made the ground ready for organised music revival’ (2004b:12).

that stage, but we had a radio that was driven by two big batteries. There was a big wet battery at the side, and there was another dry battery. You'd have to take the battery into town to get it charged. It's an awful procedure, but that was the radio we had... Seamus Ennis had programmes on the radio at that stage. Ciarán Mac Mathúna was starting. There were a couple more people collecting music at the time. It was probably listening to those programs and my interested in music. Maybe I heard fiddle music and liked it (O'Connell, interview).

With few active fiddle players in the locality, the radio was influential in Connie's introduction and enculturation into the fiddling tradition.

Although radio may seem like an obsolete medium, overall radio listenership in Ireland remains relatively high. In a recent article in the *Irish Times*, figures show that:

Ireland is still a nation of radio listeners. Some 85 per cent of adults listened to radio every weekday... An average adult listens to almost four hours of daytime radio a day. Local radio continued to perform strongly, reaching more than 40 per cent of the local adult population daily in many areas (Healy, 4 May 2012).

While these figures do not indicate listenership of Irish traditional music broadcasts, it illustrates a pattern of continued radio listenership within Irish culture and society. Firth discusses how radio has impacted our musical and day-to-day lives:

I believe that radio was the most significant twentieth-century mass medium. It was radio that transformed the use of domestic space, blurring the boundary between the public and private, idealizing the family hearth as the site of ease and entertainment, establishing the rhythm of everydayness... And it was radio (rather than film) that established the possibility of music as an ever-playing soundtrack to our lives (2003:96).

Although only a few of my interviewees describe the radio as an important educational resource, according to my field research observations and talking informally to traditional musicians, listening to Irish traditional music on radio is a relatively common experience amongst practitioners and enthusiasts. I suggest, therefore, that radio can play a role in unconscious learning processes.

## Non-Commercial Recordings

During live music-making at informal get-togethers, sessions, festivals, concerts, and workshops, traditional musicians commonly make their own recordings, and can listen to these non-commercial recordings later on in order to learn or re-experience a musical event. The practice of recording live traditional music events has been a common practice since the availability of portable tape recorders in the 1960s, and continues today with the use of digital recorders and mobile phones.<sup>37</sup> Hamilton suggests that in sessions by the mid-1970s, it was not uncommon to see the majority of musicians taping the musical event (1996:243). During my observations in sessions, I noticed that musicians occasionally, but not always, ask permission to record a session. Amongst close friends, it is not uncommon to see a musician simply take out a mobile phone to record a tune without words being exchanged. Acquaintances or visiting musicians often ask the other session participants beforehand out of courtesy. O'Shea suggests that learners are generally allowed and encouraged to record sessions since tape recorders are generally considered essential to the learning process (2005:31) – and my fieldwork observations correspond to this trend.

Like all phonographic technology, listening to non-commercial recordings inherently distances the sound and original social context. Ó Cainann states:

The availability of cheap tape-recorders has meant that a traditional player's repertoire is no longer his own. His music can now be carried away from a festival or a private session to spread its influence in totally unexpected quarters (1993:9).

However, I suggest that the 'distance' between the social context and the sound that non-commercial recordings creates is significantly different than the 'disembodiment' of commercial recordings, as discussed above (O'Shea 2005:72); when a person makes their own recordings, they were once physically present at a live musical event. When that person listens to the recording at a later time, they can re-experience past live events. They listen to the recorded music in isolation, but this type of listening can involve meaningful recollections of memories of previous socio-musical experiences.

Several of my interviewees made their own and frequently listened to

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<sup>37</sup> For a history of cassette technology see (Bradshaw 1999; Chanan 1995; Hamilton 1996; Malm 1992). During my fieldwork, I commonly observed traditional musicians recording sessions using their mobile phones. Tape recorders are now relatively rare.

non-commercial recordings throughout the learning process.<sup>38</sup> My interview data and field observations suggest that recording live music-making is a common activity. In general, interviewees born before 1980 tended to discuss how they recorded music at fleadhanna, sessions, and other musicians' houses. Interviewees born after 1980 used recording devices in this way, but also commonly recorded their teachers during summer schools and weekly classes. Their personally-made recordings served different purposes and functions depending on the learners' needs and interests. Recordings were listened to as an educational tool, for pleasure, or for both of these reasons.

My interviewees regularly discussed the various ways that personally-made, non-commercial recordings were useful throughout the learning process. First, by recording live music-making, learners are able to re-experience interactions they had with influential mentors or peers. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Seamus Sands frequently visited older fiddle players around the country, and was able to record these musical interactions. Upon returning home, Seamus listened to these recordings as a source of inspiration, pleasure, and in order to continue the learning process at home (Sands, interview). Martin Hayes also recorded traditional musicians who visited his family home, and describes this process:

I had a little tape recorder, where I taped a lot of music in the house over the years. I had a lot of visiting musicians that I had taped and listened to (Hayes, interview).

Raised in a musical household, Martin benefited from interactions with his family members and other traditional musicians who were friends of the family. Martin was able to repeatedly listen to live music-making which occurred in his home by tape recording these moments.

My interviewees also commonly recorded live music-making at sessions, concerts, gigs and, recitals. For instance, Helen Gubbins often recorded live sessions and concerts, and to Helen, these tapes were not merely a record of sound or a useful educational resource; the tapes represented a 'feeling' or 'idea', and reminded her of important social experiences she had at concerts, festivals, and summer schools. Importantly, Helen describes listening to these tapes as the

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<sup>38</sup> (Seamus Sands, Lisa O'Sullivan, Aoife Granville, Cormac De Frein, Martin Hayes, Mick Daly, Matt Cranitch, Liz Doherty, and Conal Ó Gráda, interviews).

first time she truly engaged and connected with Irish traditional music:

...being able to go to *Scoil Éigse* and record concerts - I always remember thinking, 'Wow, that was amazing, and I have it here now on tape cassette and I can listen to it over and over again all year'. I just remember working the whole year round on those precious cassettes. I would listen to recordings of those concerts over and over again. It wasn't just the particular tunes that did it. It was just everything together expressed a certain feeling and a certain idea. And I think maybe that was the first time I really engaged or connected and felt like I'd been actually touched by that music. So definitely from about age fifteen, recordings live concerts and not wanting to ever stop listening to them; Those are definitely the big influences (Gubbins, interview).

Helen thoroughly enjoyed her time attending and recording *Scoil Éigse* classes and concerts during the summer. When she listened to these non-commercial recordings throughout the year, she was able to re-experience the socio-musical moments she experienced in live settings. Her cassettes became precious to her, and Helen suggests these listening experiences corresponded to a time when she began to strongly identify with Irish traditional music. Helen engaged in a multiplicity of learning experiences – listening to recordings in private, attending summer schools, and concerts – and I suggest this multiplicity of experiences contributed to Helen's feeling of connectedness to Irish traditional music.

Many of my interviewees who learned in weekly classes often recorded their teachers playing slowly in order to learn repertoire or aspects of style. Lisa O'Sullivan suggests that she used a tape recorder during weekly music classes, and listened to the tapes at home in order to 'make sense' out of the ABC notation distributed in class (O'Sullivan, interview). Traditional music teachers often emphasize the importance of listening and encourage students to record tunes. In many classes, notation and recordings are used in conjunction as a memory aid. My fieldwork observations in weekly classes, summer school and festival workshops suggest that more often than not, students record tunes taught in class. However, whether or not students listen to these recordings outside of class is another issue entirely.

Conal Ó Gráda suggests that recording and listening to one's own playing is a useful learning practice. Because musicians often need to concentrate on their playing, they can encounter difficulties when trying to objectively evaluate their



performance in action. As Conal suggests, musicians' perceptions of their own playing can be vastly different to what an outside observer may hear. Conal states:

I use to record myself and listen back to it, and be horrified! It's a very good way to learn, because what you hear when you are playing in your head, particularly with a flute, is very different to what everyone else hears (O Gráda, interview).

By recording and listening to his own playing, Conal was able to analyse his performance, without relying on a teacher or adjudicator's evaluation. Listening to one's own playing on a recording allows for self-assessment and, therefore it can encourage critical and independent musical thinking. This is an example of how the disembodiment of recordings can present different, unique perspectives to listeners.

Some interviewees primarily made and listened to non-commercial recordings during the early stages of the learning process, but others continued this practice relatively consistently throughout their lives. For Connie O'Connell, his tape recorder played a central role in learning and enculturation processes. Because there were not many fiddle players in Connie's locality in the 1960s, Connie describes his learning experiences as 'very haphazard; just going around with a tape-recorder and picking up what I could' (O'Connell, interview). Tape recording was Connie's primary mode of learning and listening for many years, and without this experience he may not have developed into the musician he is today. Connie details his learning experiences:

The way I'd normally learn tunes was, I had a tape recorder with two big wheels in it. And I probably sat into sessions here or there, went to fleadh ceoils, went to festivals when I was young. And I brought home my tape recorder and put it going at home and just played the tunes along... Eventually, I didn't sit down and learn a tune, just turn on the tape recorder or radio while I was doing anything, reading, sitting at home, listen away, going on in the background. After a while the tune formed inside my head and I would pick up the fiddle and play it. Which to me was not very stressful; it was a pleasant way of doing it, like. And then I'd play the tune, and I might find at some part of the tune, there's something wrong there. So, I'd refer back to my tape recorder and find out that little bit and sort it out. I'd have those tunes in my head until this day (O'Connell, interview).

Connie's experiences with his tape recorder involved both purposeful and unconscious learning processes. Connie often sat down with his tape recorder in order to play along and purposefully learn new tunes. He also used his tapes as a way to check if his version of a tune was correct. However, Connie also suggests that he eventually absorbed new repertoire by listening to these tapes in a distracted fashion. Similar to many popular musicians (Green 2002), Connie considers the informal learning process of listening to recordings quite enjoyable. Indeed, Connie often listened to the tapes for entertainment, rather than educational, purposes.

Lastly, listening to non-commercial recordings can help learners to listen, absorb, understand, and practice stylistic nuances, such as ornamentations and variations. Niall Vallely discusses how he developed the ability to ornament and vary tunes. A friend of the Vallely family, Paul Davis, made a tape of concertina tunes for Niall, and Niall discusses why this tape was useful during the learning process:

There was a friend of my parents named Paul Davis... He made a tape of tunes for me. When I was listening to the tape, I remember thinking what was brilliant about it was; he'd play the tunes slowly and then he'd play them up to speed with a bit of ornamentation. And I remember thinking, 'How do you know where to put in the rolls and the wee drones and octave things and bits of ornamentations?' I remember thinking this is very impressive that you can throw them in here and there and you'd know that it just sounds right, rather than someone having to tell ya. It was a couple years later when I was actually doing it and I was thinking, how did that happen? How did I get to the point where I know how to put them in myself? (Vallely, interview).

By listening to Paul Davis's tape, Niall recognized and began to value the ability to ornament a tune independently and creatively. Because Paul played the tunes and ornaments slowly, Niall was also able to hear and imitate the nuances. As Niall suggests, a number of years after receiving Paul's tape, he realized he had gradually developed the ability to ornament tunes. Paul's tape was significantly influential; however, I also propose that Niall developed his stylistic and technical abilities by engaging in a multitude of musical experiences. Because Niall's parents are active traditional musicians and teachers, Niall had numerous and consistent opportunities to listen to, absorb, discuss, and participate in Irish traditional music from a very young age. Through his family's interest and

connections, Niall interacted with other traditional musicians, including Paul Davis, consistently throughout his life. Niall was influenced by interacting with Paul in live scenarios and by listening to Paul's playing on the tape. Niall's experience with Paul Davis illustrates that there is a strong interconnection between learning experiences involving technology and ones which involve face-to-face interactions between practitioners. It also illustrates how traditional musicians develop their musicality gradually over the years by engaging in multiple playing and learning situations.

While several interviewees discuss the advantages that recording devices provide learners, there are some challenges associated with using personally-made recordings during the learning process. For instance, it may be difficult to keep non-commercial recordings organized for ease of use; this was particularly problematic with cassette technology. For instance, Connie states that his tapes rarely (if ever) were label or catalogued according to locations, dates, tunes, or performers' names. He suggests that one tape may have contained a reel performed by two Donegal fiddle players at a fleadh, and the next sound might be a set of jigs played by an unknown flute player during a session in County Clare (O'Connell, interview). On Connie's tapes, separate unconnected performances of Irish traditional music were mixed together in a way not possible prior to the advent of phonographic technology. Unfortunately, when tapes and digital recordings of Irish traditional music are not appropriately labelled, it can be difficult (if not impossible) for learners to gain an awareness of the social and historical context in which the tunes were played. Without a labelling system, it is also time consuming to search for particular tunes or performances. However, phonographic technology now available on most smartphones and Mp3 players provide convenient and easy ways to label recordings of performances. These digital recordings can also be saved on computers for later practice and reference.

In this section, I have explored the ways phonographic technology can affect learning and enculturation processes. The interview data suggests that Irish traditional musicians often acquire new repertoire and develop technique and style through purposeful and distracted listening to commercial and non-commercial recordings. Because Irish traditional musicians value listening and aural learning practices, commercial and non-commercial recordings are significant resources within the community of practice. I have argued that listening to recordings is a musical experience with significant social implications

and connections to musical enculturation. Listening to a recording is not merely an isolated, decontextualized experience, but it is often connected to and part of social relationships between practitioners and enthusiasts.

While the interview data suggests that listening to audio recordings can profoundly affect learning and enculturation processes, aural learning in private settings can be challenging. Since physical techniques cannot be observed, novices may become frustrated while attempting to learn through entirely aural means. As discussed below, the emergence of visual recordings represents a technological advancement in this regard. Additionally, learners may not be ready to imitate the virtuosity and fast tempos which feature on so many recordings of Irish traditional music. At full performance speed, it is often challenging to master the bare bones on a tune, let alone subtleties, such as ornamentation, phrasing, and variations. While novices benefit from listening to such virtuosic performances, they may not be able to play along to their favourite commercial recordings for several years (if ever).

In light of these difficulties, several Irish traditional musicians have released CDs, which feature standard repertoire played slowly. These are useful educational resources for learners who enjoy playing and learning by ear, but may have difficulty playing along to commercial recordings. Many such educational recordings often accompany written instrumental tutors, while others, such as Seamus Creagh's *Tunes for Practice*, have been independently released. On *Tunes for Practice*, Creagh plays sixty-nine traditional tunes slowly, and his voice is an important feature, as he takes great care to introduce the tunes and their sources. Creagh plays the basic tune first, and then upon repeating the tune, he adds in variations and ornamentations. Creagh's CD provides a useful aural demonstration of stylistic nuances played in the context of standard repertoire.

## Video Recordings

There are notable similarities between the processes of learning Irish traditional music from audio recordings and learning from video recordings; Users of audio and video recordings can pause, rewind, and replay performances of Irish traditional music, and learners can aurally learn and imitate new repertoire and stylistic subtleties. As explored in this section, there are also clear distinctions

between these modes of learning. Video recordings of Irish traditional music performances are now viewed through a number of mediums, including television, DVD, and streaming on the internet. I begin the discussion with a brief historical and cultural context, and following this, I explore the role visual recordings play in learning and enculturation processes.

In contrast to phonography which has influenced the transmission of Irish traditional music since the 1920s, Ireland established its first national television network, Telefís Éireann, in late 1961.<sup>39</sup> While televisions were introduced to Ireland before the 1960s, they were not yet common in households at this stage. Although traditional music was featured during the early days of RTÉ, video recordings did not begin to play a significant role in the learning of Irish traditional music until televisions became cheaper and programming of Irish traditional music more frequent and consistent. In the early 60s, the national broadcasting authority, Radio Éireann, merged with Telefís Éireann to become RTÉ (Raidió Teilifís Éireann). President Eamon de Valera addressed the nation during the inaugural broadcast on 31 December 1961. In his address, de Valera is optimistic about the positive educational implications of this new medium, but also highlights fears about the power of television:

I hope the service will provide for you all sources of recreation and pleasure but also information, instruction and knowledge. I must admit that sometimes when I think of television and radio and their immense power, I feel somewhat afraid. Like atomic energy it can be used for incalculable good but it can also do irreparable harm. Never before was there in the hands of men an instrument so powerful to influence the thoughts and actions of the multitude... (de Valera, quoted in RTÉ's archive, [www.rte.ie](http://www.rte.ie), [Accessed 23 January 2012]).

As some traditional musicians and scholars suggest, jazz and popular music began to dominate listening practices in Ireland due to the influence of new media, including television and radio, and this contributed to a decline in Irish traditional music-making during the 1930s, 40s, and early 1950s.<sup>40</sup> For instance, Tommy Peoples states:

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<sup>39</sup> To put this into perspective, BBC Northern Ireland began broadcasting in 1953, and the American Broadcasting Company first aired in 1948. Campbell suggests that television influenced a young generation of jazz musicians from the late-1940s onwards (1991:181).

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion, see (Hast and Scott 2004; Mac Aoidh 1994; McNamara and Woods 1997; Tansey 2008).

Music and song played an important part in the social life of the area of Donegal, in which I grew up, even into the 1960s. It was the principle form of entertainment, but sadly it declined with the advent of the radio and television (1994:7).

Television has irrevocably changed Irish culture and musical practices. However, the low ebb of music-making, from approximately the 1930s until the early 1950s, occurred decades before television entered Irish homes. The passing of the Dance Halls Act of 1935 was far more detrimental to Irish traditional music than television.<sup>41</sup> On the contrary, Ó hAllmhuráin suggests that television played a role during the 1960s revival of folk and traditional music:

Television had been a vital factor in sparking the ballad boom in the 1960s. Nowhere was this more evident than in the United States where the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem had created a phenomenal audience for Irish ballads (2008:151).

During the 1960s, Irish traditional music broadcast on television contributed towards a public awareness and appreciation of traditional music. Television provided groups such as Ceoltóirí Chualann and the Clancy Brothers a performance outlet and national recognition.

My interview data suggests that learning by watching television programmes or DVDs of Irish traditional music is a relatively uncommon learning experience. James Duggan was the only interviewee that discussed watching videos of Irish traditional music. While James was influenced by watching videos, he acknowledges that this is not a typical experience amongst most traditional musicians:

I use to record any Irish music that use to come on. It kind of started because the fleadhhs were on the TV, so they were recorded, partly because it was in Listowel, but also part because it was just music. I use to watch those, so they were an unusual influence. And the programme, *Come West Along the Road* and all those TG4 awards,<sup>42</sup> any music that was on TV (interview).

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<sup>41</sup> Numerous scholars of Irish traditional music comment on the impact this legislation had on Irish traditional music. For instance, Brennan states that ‘the Public Dance Hall Act (1935). This law had the effect, whether intentionally or not, of effectively killing the house dances which had formerly been an indispensable part of life in rural Ireland’ (2004:103). For further discussion of the significant impact of the Dance Hall Act of 1935 on Irish traditional music and dance, see (Brennan 2004; Cranitch 2006; Fleming 2004; Hast and Scott 2004; Kaul 2009; Kearns and Taylor 2003; O’Connor 2001; Ó hAllmhuráin 2008; O’Shea 2005; Williams 2010).

<sup>42</sup> Established in 1996, TG4 is RTÉ’s Irish-language channel, which often features Irish traditional music, dance, and song as part of their normal programming. Williams suggests that TG4

James did not sit in front of the television in order to consciously learn new tunes or repertoire; instead, James taped and watched these videos because of his general interest in Irish traditional music.

The lack of discourse about television and videos within my interview data seems to indicate that video recordings play a limited role in musical enculturation and learning. However, my fieldwork observations suggest that many traditional musicians casually watch videos of Irish traditional music on television. (And as I discuss later in this chapter, performances of Irish traditional music are now commonly posted, viewed, and shared on the internet). As one example, at a Cork Folk Festival concert, Conal Ó Gráda performed a set of polkas, including the ‘Church Street Polka.’ Conal introduced the tune and stated that he learned it via a television programme featuring the playing of the Murphy brothers (Fieldnotes, 1 October 2009).<sup>43</sup> During my field research, I also commonly discussed traditional music programmes, such as *Come West Along the Road* and *Geantraí*, with other musicians. These programmes are quite popular within the traditional music community, and viewers of such programmes listen, observe, and can gain historical and cultural information about Irish traditional music. Although traditional musicians rarely sit down to watch television programmes in order to learn, I propose that watching such videos can affect unconscious, informal, and social learning processes. Viewers of traditional music programmes can unconsciously absorb visual and aural cues of traditional music performance and culture. As Ó Canainn suggests, television ‘showed the traditional musician in action and certainly inspired learners to imitate him’ (1993:9).

One of the major advantages of learning from video recordings is that learners are able to observe and hear exceptional examples of traditional music performances from the comfort and privacy of their homes. This combination of aural and visual learning is only possible during live music-making and by viewing videos of past music-making. Gracyk argues that audio recordings ‘deprive us of the opportunity to coordinate the sounds with the human gestures in which they originate’ (1997:146), and Berliner suggest that the inability ‘to see performers and their instruments poses numerous other problems for aspiring

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frequently broadcasts *sean-nós* dancing, which ‘has helped to further heighten the popularity of the style’ (2010:224).

<sup>43</sup> The brothers, John and Pip Murphy, are well-known mouthorgan players from Co. Wexford.

musicians trying to reconstruct the playing techniques of recording artists’ (1994:106). Within my interview data, Connie O’Connell discusses the importance of observations during the learning process and indicates that learning directly from audio tapes is somewhat challenging. For instance, Connie states he repeatedly listened to Denis Murphy on tape recordings, but his observations of Denis’s bowing was limited to the occasional, live interaction. As a result, Connie feels that learning repertoire was a simple process, but developing fiddle technique was ‘very slow and difficult’:

I went to Denis Murphy on different occasions and I was watching him playing and doing different things with the bow. The bow is where all the playing comes in really. So, I was watching him and trying to bring home with me a certain amount of that. You can’t bring it home in a tape recorder. You have to see it and know how he was getting a certain sound... The only thing I found very slow and difficult was technique (O’Connell, interview).

By watching videos recordings of Irish traditional music, learners can observe and absorb physical, visual, and aural aspects of Irish traditional music performances.<sup>44</sup> Since learners can observe instrumental techniques, such as fiddle bowing, video sources can be particularly beneficial to particular instrumentalists. While bowing is easily observable, concertina fingerings, for instance, are more difficult to observe because of the physical layout of the instrument.

Video recordings provide educational opportunities and a connection to the community of practice, especially for learners who do not live near experienced Irish traditional musicians. Mac Aoidh discusses the education potential of video technology thusly:

Video tape classes, pitched at different levels, offers the ideal solution for remote learning whether the pupil is in Arranmore or Akron, Ohio (1999:111).

However, Mac Aoidh is careful to emphasize the importance of being connected to a network of practitioners in live music-making and social contexts. He adds that videos can never ‘replace the learning experience of seeing, listening to and talking with a genuine player in the tradition’ (1999:111). Additionally, Hamilton

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<sup>44</sup> Social and cultural norms, such as dress, mannerisms, and social interactions between performers and audience members, can also be viewed.



suggests that video tutors impact the transmission of Irish traditional music, although more so in countries outside of Ireland (1996:240-1). In recent years, numerous tutorial videos have become available on websites, such as YouTube. While some YouTube videos may be of questionable quality, video tutorials available on the Online Academy of Irish Music (OAIM, [www.oaim.ie](http://www.oaim.ie)) feature qualified and reputable traditional musicians and teachers as online tutors. OAIM also features live video chat capabilities – a recent development with significant implications for the future.

When compared to listening to audio recordings, I suggest that recorded and live streaming videos on the internet allow learners to experience and observe Irish traditional music in a more holistic way. Why, then, is listening to audio recordings a far more common learning experience within the traditional music community? This may be due to the convenience and practicality of listening to audio recordings; we are able to listen to sound recordings while driving, exercising, cooking, cleaning, and so forth. Watching videos of traditional music performances, on the other hand, involves a more focused effort on the part of the learner. In the past, television was the only medium in which to view performance of Irish traditional music, and the learner needed to be sitting in front of the television at the time of the original airing. However, viewing videos of Irish traditional music has become much more convenient in recent years. The advent of DVR technology also allows viewers to record, pause, rewind, and replay television programmes of Irish traditional music. Streaming videos on the internet has also increased the ease of accessing videos of Irish traditional music. As explored further in the next section, these new innovations have significant educational implications. Within Irish traditional music culture, watching videos online is becoming a much more frequent, common, and opportune learning activity.

In 1999, McCarthy suggested that the transmission of Irish traditional music is no longer ‘limited to classrooms and informal instructional settings. Music is frequently learned through instructional materials such as recordings and videotapes... In effect, such media of communication have transformed the landscape of music learning’ (1999:172). This new ‘landscape of music learning’, much of which still needs to be explored, is ever-changing. While I have outlined some basic issues about the role video recordings play in the transmission of Irish traditional music, more research is needed in the future. With the advent of

smartphones and tablets, learning by watching video recordings may one day become as prevalent as learning aurally via audio recordings. Learners who view videos of Irish traditional music are able to aurally learn tunes, and also benefit from the ability to observe subtleties of instrumental technique, style, and expression.

## Internet

The internet has affected how people communicate, research, and access news, information, and entertainment, and for this reason, internet usage has numerous and significant educational, social, and cultural implications.<sup>45</sup> As the internet becomes a part of our social reality, ethnographers have increasingly explored how people use the internet. Wilson and Peterson state that the internet is ‘worthy of the attention of anthropological researchers’ (2002:449), and Lysloff argues that ‘How and why people find meaning in their use of the Internet should be as important as textual analysis for anthropologists to study’ (2003:234).<sup>46</sup> The internet is a relatively inexpensive musical and educational resource; once learners have access to a computer and an internet connection, a plethora of educational resources becomes available. Although distributed learning is both accessible and affordable, ‘unease about its quality persists, probably with justification’ (Fletcher, Tobias and Wisner 2007:99). For this reason, Reilly suggests that perhaps more than ‘any other area of information gathering, within the Internet it is the user who must sift through a number of sites to determine their reliability as legitimate sources of information’ (2003:187). The internet has an almost unlimited amount of educational potential. However, in order for this potential to become reality, the learner (and teachers) must navigate and effectively use these sources. In this section, I explore the role of the internet within the traditional music community, and suggest that using the internet is a unique social practice.

Throughout much of the discussion I primarily draw on relevant literature and my fieldwork observations. While I also discuss data gathered through interviewing, my participants rarely discussed engaging with online sources in

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<sup>45</sup> While there are also legal, ethnical, economic, and political implications, in this dissertation, I focus primarily on educational, socio-cultural, and musical issues.

<sup>46</sup> See also (Nettl 2005:453).

order to learn Irish traditional music. The lack of information within the interview data may lead to the conclusion that the internet does not play a significant role in learning processes. However, because the participants of this study are all experienced, adult traditional musicians, it is perhaps unsurprising that they did not discuss online learning and listening practices in any detail. A study of children and teenagers' current learning experiences may result in an entirely different perspective on the matter. My fieldwork observations also suggest that contemporary traditional musicians are increasingly engaging in various online activities, and as this trend continues, the internet may become a major learning resource for a new generation of Irish traditional musicians.

In Chapter 2, I proposed that interacting with a network of practitioners is an integral part of the enculturation process within Irish traditional music culture. Because online activities are not based on face-to-face social and musical interactions, some may consider using the internet as a less than ideal or even a problematic learning method. While there are certainly challenges and limitations to learning Irish traditional music online, using the internet involves an array of complex socio-cultural issues which warrant exploration here. For instance, traditional musicians who may not live near other practitioners can watch videos of Irish traditional music and discuss relevant issues with other musicians on discussion boards. I argue that websites that allow practitioners to interact with one another can be a significantly influential social force within a community of practice.

Within the literature and everyday discourse, online communications and activities are occasionally viewed in opposition to 'real' exchanges and experiences in face-to-face settings. For instance, although Sommers Smith recognizes that online forums can perform 'many of the functions of what has been termed a musical community' (2001:122), she also argues that novices need 'personal contact, conversation, and encouragement that only an actual community, "real sharing by real people in real space," can provide (2001:124). Since 2001, many anthropologists and ethnomusicologists have subscribed to the view that online communities 'are as "real" (or imagined) as those off line' (Lysloff 2003:236). Indeed, Wilson and Peterson suggest that the 'the distinction of real and imagined or virtual community is not a useful one' (2002:456-7). Waldron also comments on this shift in conceptualization, suggesting that:

Once an area of debate, there is now general consensus among media and social science researchers that online communities represent community in the traditional sense of the term, albeit with some important epistemological differences (2011:32).<sup>47</sup>

While different to face-to-face communications and relationships, online interactions can be influential socio-cultural processes. Throughout the thesis, I discuss ‘distributed’ rather than ‘virtual’ communities. This terminology is influenced by Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, who state:

“Distributed” is the preferred term over “virtual” or “online” because, as is the case for “distance education” initiatives, these communities generally connect in many ways – including face-to-face – although they may rely primarily on “virtual” communications...The term “distributed” also helps to highlight the multiple dimensions of distance to bridge (2002:249).

Within the Irish traditional music literature, no major study has focused solely on the role the internet plays in the transmission or development of Irish traditional music. However, there are a number of relevant articles on the subject, which I reference frequently throughout this section. Several traditional music scholars have commented and researched IRTRAD (<https://listserv.heanet.ie/cgi-bin/wa?A0=IRTRAD-L>) from a number of perspectives. Sommers Smith describes IRTRAD as the ‘premier discussion group for Irish traditional music on the Internet’ (2001:121).<sup>48</sup> In her ethnography of Irish traditional music sessions, Rapuano uses a questionnaire on the IRTRAD website to develop more formalised research questions (2005:26). Waldron and Veblen (2008) also explore various internet mediums that IRTRAD members use for online learning purposes. Kearns and Taylor suggest that the organisers of the Willie Clancy Summer School use IRTRAD in order to monitor ‘the attitudes and opinions of the contemporary global Irish music community’ (2003:149).

As discussed in more detail later, Waldron explores the informal music learning processes which take place within online communities (Waldron 2009b; 2011, Waldron and Veblen 2008). Waldron has shown that online

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<sup>47</sup> See also (Kruse 2012). As part of my online fieldwork, I asked members of [thesession](#) if they thought [thesession](#) constituted a ‘community’. A vibrant debate emerged, reflecting many diverse views. Some believed [thesession](#) was a community, while others considered it a sub-community within the larger ‘Irish traditional music community’. A handful of members rejected the notion it was a community at all.

<sup>48</sup> While IRTRAD is still an active discussion board, since the rise in popularity of other websites, such as [thesession](#), its ‘premier’ status is not as clear as it was in 2001.

communications on Old-time music forums exhibit many of the characteristics of communities of practice, including joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire (Waldron 2009b:104). She highlights that through this engagement, information about practicing and learning Old-time music is passed from user to user.

In a recent article, using autoethnographic techniques, Kruse documents how he learned the mandolin purely through online engagement over the course of nine months (Kruse 2012). Kruse documents the ‘rewards’ and ‘challenges’ of learning solely through videos posted on YouTube and Mandolin Café ([www.mandolincafe.com](http://www.mandolincafe.com)). The aspect of online learning Kruse found most rewarding was ‘the immediate and virtually limitless accessibility of information. Online instructional videos and website discussion threads were available for viewing at any time and were conveniently retrievable within seconds’ (2012:302). He suggests the most challenging aspect of learning online was the isolated nature of the process, and this isolation occurred profoundly since Kruse was not a part of any offline folk music community (2012:302).<sup>49</sup>

Within the education and music education literature, research on the educational implications of the internet is abundant.<sup>50</sup> From an educationalist’s perspective, computer-based learning fosters learning processes which are ‘self-directed and exploratory in nature’ (Moore 1992:31-2), and learning experiences which are typically tailored to ‘learners’ needs and capabilities’ (Fletcher, Tobias, and Wisher 2007:98). Throughout this section, I reference several learning theories in order to explore the educational implications of engaging in various online activities. According to my field research, substantial portions of learning activities which occur on traditional music websites are informal in nature. While purposeful learning also occurs during online tutorials, for example, browsing online often involves unconscious learning processes.

My fieldwork observations suggest that a significant amount of online activity is happening within the Irish traditional music community. In recent years, Irish traditional musicians and enthusiasts have launched websites





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<sup>49</sup> Because Kruse’s research focuses solely on his own learning experiences, these limitations and advantages are based on his own perceptions. Kruse acknowledges that his perceptions of learning online ‘may not be transferable to a larger population. Other individuals might draw different conclusions or encounter alternative pathways’ (2012:301).





<sup>50</sup> A full literature review is not necessary for our purposes here. For a literature review from the field of education, see Fletcher, Tobias and Wisher (2007). Waldron (2009b) also provides a literature review of music education research.

dedicated to the subject of Irish traditional music – its repertoire, history, practice, and culture (see Table 6). The table below highlights some websites commonly used by traditional musicians, and for what primary purposes.

**Table 6: Some websites used by Irish traditional musicians<sup>51</sup>**

Website:	Background Information and Features:
 <b>COMHALTAS</b> <a href="http://www.comhaltas.ie">www.comhaltas.ie</a> Official website of CCÉ	Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann's official website provides information about CCÉ's history, philosophy, purpose, branches, events, classes, competitions, and exams. The website features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual and audio material from CCÉ archives</li> <li>• Notation and other educational materials</li> <li>• Online shop featuring CCÉ publications</li> <li>• Links to other websites</li> <li>• Newsletters and press releases</li> </ul>
 <b>na píobairí uilleann</b> <a href="http://www.pipers.ie">www.pipers.ie</a> Official website of Na Píobairí Uilleann	Na Píobairí Uilleann's official website provides information about their history, philosophy, purpose, and events. The website features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'NPU-TV' – Live streaming and video archives</li> <li>• Educational resources</li> <li>• Online shop</li> <li>• Information about pipe and reed making, other matters of interest</li> <li>• News and press releases</li> </ul>
 <b>ITMA</b> Irish Traditional Music Archive Taisce Cheol Dúchais Éireann <a href="http://www.itma.ie">www.itma.ie</a>	The Irish Traditional Music Archive's official website provides information about their history, philosophy, purpose, and news. The website features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catalogue and database searches</li> <li>• Online digital library (audio, visual, print, photograph collections)</li> <li>• Online shop</li> </ul>
 <a href="https://listserv.heanet.ie/cgi-bin/wa?A0=IRTRAD-L">https://listserv.heanet.ie/cgi-bin/wa?A0=IRTRAD-L</a> IRTRAD	IRTRAD was established December 1992, and is powered by LISERV (email list manager) to provide 'Information Service' and a 'forum for discussion'. The website features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion boards with the ability to search the archive for specific topics</li> <li>• Newsletters announcing events, publications, recordings, current research, news, etc.</li> <li>• Lists of instrument makers, live music, Irish traditional music societies and organizations</li> </ul>

<sup>51</sup> All quotes in this table are taken from the homepage of each corresponding website [accessed 7 September 2012]. This is an overview of commonly used websites and is not intended as an extensive list. Other websites include: [www.uilleannobsession.com](http://www.uilleannobsession.com), [www.ragandbone.ie](http://www.ragandbone.ie), [www.irish-music.net](http://www.irish-music.net), and [www.mudcat.org](http://www.mudcat.org).

 <p><a href="http://www.chiffandfipple.com">www.chiffandfipple.com</a></p> <p>Chiff &amp; Fipple</p>	<p>Chiff &amp; Fipple was established around 1996 by Dale Wisely, and is the ‘ultimate guide to the instrument known as the tinwhistle, pennywhistle, Irish whistle, or just plain whistle’. While Chiff &amp; Fipple’s visual interface seems out-dated and disorganized, this is an entertaining, informal website, with many jokes and tongue and cheek postings. The website also features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion and message boards</li> <li>• Advice and educational materials for beginners</li> <li>• Monthly Newsletters</li> <li>• Links to other websites of interest</li> <li>• 9801 registered users (25 January 2012).</li> </ul>
 <p><a href="http://www.thesession.org">www.thesession.org</a></p> <p>thesession</p>	<p><a href="http://www.thesession.org">www.thesession.org</a> was established in June 2001 by Jeremy Keith. ‘The exchange of tunes is what keeps traditional Irish music alive. This website is one way of passing on jigs, reels and other dance tunes’. The website features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Database of tunes (ABC and Staff notation), with corresponding comments including information about commercial recordings</li> <li>• List of events and live music sessions</li> <li>• Discussion board</li> <li>• Links to other websites of interest</li> <li>• Monthly Newsletters</li> <li>• 72,594 members (25 Jan 2012)</li> </ul>
 <p><a href="http://www.tradconnect.com">www.tradconnect.com</a></p> <p>TradConnect</p>	<p>TradConnect was established in April 2011 by Tony Lawless, and is ‘a new social forum for Irish traditional musicians. It brings together musicians from across the globe providing a place where you can talk about, and share your music with other like-minded musicians’. TradConnect is a social media site for Irish traditional musicians and enthusiasts. With a modern interface, it is user-friendly, and rapidly growing in popularity. The website features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Videos of Irish traditional music</li> <li>• Discussion boards, including album reviews</li> <li>• Groups of specific interest (e.g. Cork TradConnect)</li> <li>• Month Newsletters</li> <li>• Member profiles, member map, ability to post own videos</li> <li>• Real-time chat with other members</li> <li>• List of events and festivals</li> <li>• 1,579 members (25 Jan 2012)</li> </ul>
 <p><a href="http://www.oaim.ie">www.oaim.ie</a></p> <p>Online Academy of Irish Music</p>	<p>The Online Academy of Irish Music was established in October 2010. It is an ‘online Irish music school dedicated to providing high quality Irish music tuition... We aspire to create a 'classroom setting' in our chat forums where contact can be made with fellow students and the class tutor.’ The website features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private online lessons and instrumental courses</li> <li>• ‘Tune bank’ of archived repertoire</li> <li>• Chat capabilities with other students and tutors</li> <li>• Free sample lessons</li> </ul>

<p>Online Academy of Irish Music (continued)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct feedback from experienced traditional musicians and teachers</li> </ul> <p>Many features are restricted to members at a cost of €19.95 per month.</p>
 <p><a href="http://www.livetrad.com">www.livetrad.com</a></p> <p>LiveTrad</p>	<p>LiveTrad was established in March 2010, and provides ‘webcast live from venues all over Ireland, from niche festivals, major events, and typical pub sessions’. The website has great video resources and an attractive modern interface. It also features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streams live traditional performances</li> <li>• Podcasts</li> <li>• Video archive of old performances</li> <li>• Extensive and updated list of traditional music festivals and events</li> </ul>
 <p><a href="http://www.tunepal.org">www.tunepal.org</a></p> <p>Tunepal</p>	<p>Tunepal was established in 2009 by Bryan Duggan, and is a ‘query-by-playing search engine for traditional tunes’. Since 28 February 2013, Tunepal’s online search engine has been used 82,085 times. Tunepal was also launched as a smartphone app, which has since been used 317,775 times. Tunepal’s website features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aural and textual search engine for traditional tunes</li> <li>• User can play a tune to inquire about the name and view notation</li> <li>• Free to use online</li> <li>• Available as a smartphone app for \$4.99 on iTunes</li> </ul>
 <p><a href="http://www.facebook.com">www.facebook.com</a></p> <p>Facebook</p>	<p>Facebook was established in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. ‘Facebook’s mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected...’ Facebook is the leading social networking site and commonly used by traditional musicians in their everyday lives. Many traditional musicians have their own personal accounts, while many performing groups, organizations, festivals, and summer schools have created Facebook pages as a way to promote concerts and events.</p>
 <p><a href="http://www.youtube.com">www.youtube.com</a></p> <p>YouTube</p>	<p>‘Founded in February 2005, YouTube allows billions of people to discover, watch and share originally-created videos. YouTube provides a forum for people to connect, inform, and inspire others across the globe’. There are thousands of professional and amateur videos of Irish traditional music on YouTube, which practitioners and enthusiasts can view, listen, save, share, and comment on. Traditional musicians also commonly post their own videos or tutorials.</p>

Some of these websites are specifically geared towards traditional music practitioners and enthusiasts. Other websites that I have listed, such as YouTube,



are commonly used by traditional musicians. These various websites have diverse aims, purposes, features, and uses. Some promote the transmission of traditional music through online tune databases, while others are designed as social networking sites. All of the major Irish traditional music organisations, clubs, summer schools, and festivals now have their own websites and/or Facebook pages. Social networking sites, such as Facebook and TradConnect, allow traditional musicians to keep abreast of upcoming gigs, festivals, and other events in the traditional music community. This type of online communication is a relatively new social practice within the community of practice, but it is becoming influential in terms of promoting Irish traditional music. The majority of my interviewees, and many well-known Irish traditional musicians, are members of Facebook; some communicate through personal accounts, while others have established fan or group pages.

Although I visited numerous websites in order to gain a broad understanding of online activities within the Irish traditional music community, I primarily conducted my internet fieldwork on [www.thesession.org](http://www.thesession.org) and [www.tradconnect.com](http://www.tradconnect.com).<sup>52</sup> My field research mainly involved documenting my own experiences and learning processes. Thesession and TradConnect share several features; membership is free on both websites, and both provide information about upcoming traditional music sessions and events. Members are also able to communicate on discussion boards or through private messages.<sup>53</sup> TradConnect and thesession also have distinct features and characteristics (some of which are more educational than others). In the discussion below, I explore the educational and social implications of using different features on thesession and TradConnect.

Online and offline communities are not disparate, but often overlap in meaningful ways. Internet users who interact, communicate, and connect on thesession and TradConnect occasionally also connect in live, face-to-face music-making contexts. The main example of this is the session listing (or the session database) available on both thesession and TradConnect. Visitors to either website can search by location in order to discover if there is a session going on

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<sup>52</sup> Throughout the dissertation, I refer to these websites as thesession and TradConnect. Similar to YouTube and Facebook, TradConnect is branded with a distinct capitalization.

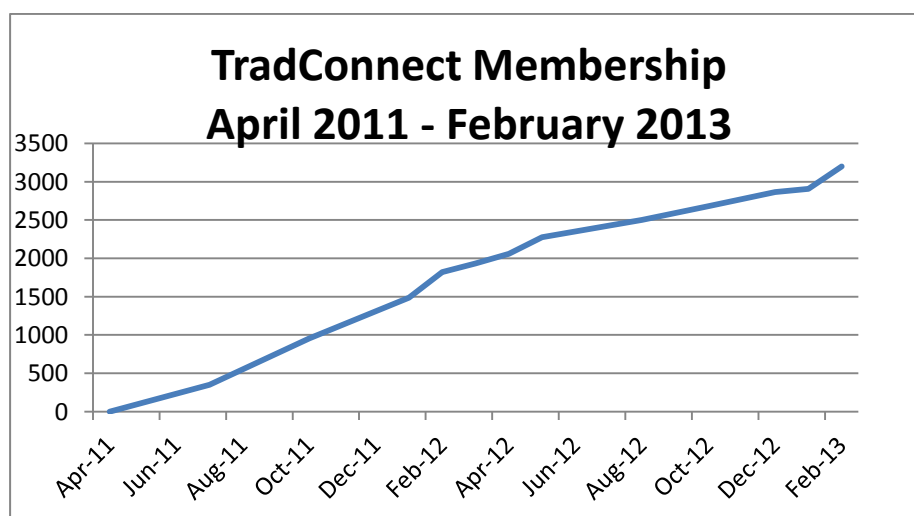
<sup>53</sup> On both websites, members can choose if other members are allowed to contact them directly. If they choose to remain private, they only communicate with others on the public discussion boards, if at all. TradConnect has also introduced a 'chat' feature, where members can correspond in real-time.

in their area.<sup>54</sup> They can then meet up with other traditional musicians in live settings. The founder of thesession, Jeremy Keith believes that the ‘best outcome of the site is that it plays a direct part in people meeting up in "the real world" to play some tunes together’ (Keith, e-mail communication). Additionally, TradConnect was designed as a social networking site for traditional musicians, and explicitly encourages users to make connections with other traditional musicians in their area. Tony Lawless, the founder of TradConnect, posts this philosophy on the website’s homepage:

...the aim of the site is to connect musicians, no matter what their level, with other musicians in their area... Whether it is New York, Dublin, London or wherever you live, there are other people in your town and even on your street learning Irish traditional music as well. So why not get together with them to play, practice, socialise and even start your own session? ([www.tradconnect.com](http://www.tradconnect.com), accessed 25 January 2012).

The communications and interactions between members of thesession and TradConnect are a relatively new type of social practice. TradConnect members can become ‘friends’, either by making new online connections to other traditional musicians or by adding musical acquaintances they know offline. Through word-of-mouth and self-promotion on Facebook, TradConnect’s popularity and membership numbers has steadily increased since its establishment in April 2011 (See Table 7).

**Table 7: TradConnect Membership from April 2011 – February 2013<sup>55</sup>**



<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, this list is often outdated, therefore users of these websites are encouraged to contact the pub before visiting a listed session.

<sup>55</sup> Information on this table was gathered during my field research on [www.tradconnect.com](http://www.tradconnect.com).

Waldron's internet fieldwork, which focuses on bluegrass and old-time music culture and the Banjo Hangout website ([www.banjohangout.org](http://www.banjohangout.org)), also suggests that there is a meaningful overlap between online and offline musical communities (Waldron 2011). Waldron argues that online ethnographers need to 'grasp the contextually situated relationship of the online community to its offline counterpart' (2011:35). Waldron provides several examples of the interconnections between the on and offline musical communities, and she argues the integration between the two communities 'is evident everywhere on and around the site [Banjo Hangout] in the form of forum posts, hyperlinks to YouTube videos, other related websites, and blogs' (Waldron 2011:52). Throughout this section, I explore many features of the TradConnect and thesession which, similarly, exhibit overlaps between the online and offline Irish traditional music communities.

Often referred to as 'the mustard' because of its distinctive colouring (see Image 11), thesession hosts an extensive online database of tunes, and this is perhaps one of the most useful educational resources on the website. Indeed, the few interviewees who discussed using the internet, commented on using thesession's database in order to reference the notation of tunes.<sup>56</sup> With close to 12,000 tunes,<sup>57</sup> thesession's tune database is a unique contribution which is not available on other websites, and can benefit traditional musicians in several ways. First, users can search tunes by name, and gain access to the ABC and staff notation of tunes they wish to learn. Learners can also browse by tune type (e.g. jigs, reels, etc.) and by key (e.g. A major, D dorian). Members of thesession can also save tunes to their 'tunebook' for ease of reference at a later time; this is a useful feature that allows learners to keep track of tunes they hope to learn. Users of thesession can also browse the most commonly saved tunes, which can provide novices with a basic insight into which pieces of repertoire are common amongst practitioners.<sup>58</sup> By learning the most popular and common tunes, novices may gradually develop the repertoire and skills necessary to participate in sessions.

<sup>56</sup> (Cormac De Frein, Helen Gubbins, Ciara Ní Fearghal, interview).

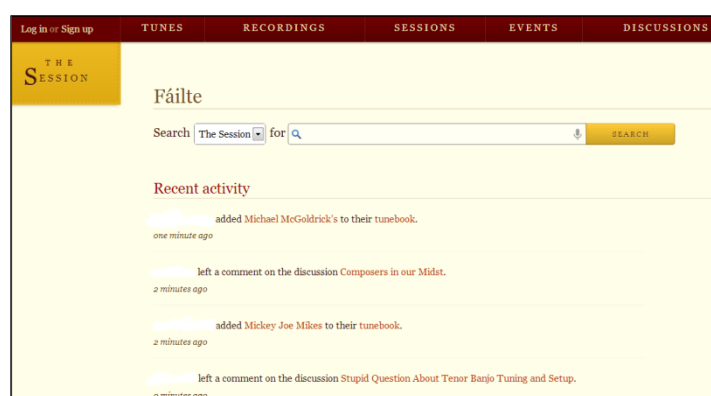
<sup>57</sup> The database does not include slow airs. Compared to O'Neill's collection, the figure of 12,000 tunes seems staggering. However, thesession's database includes several duplicates of tunes, and tunes from outside the standard Irish traditional music repertoire. Members also are able to add their own recent compositions.

<sup>58</sup> See (<http://thesession.org/tunes/popular>). As of 28 February 2013, 'Drowsy Maggie' is the most saved tune, at 3,386 times, followed by The Kesh Jig at 2,955 times.

**Image 11: Old Interface of [www.thesession.org](http://www.thesession.org) (2001-2012)**

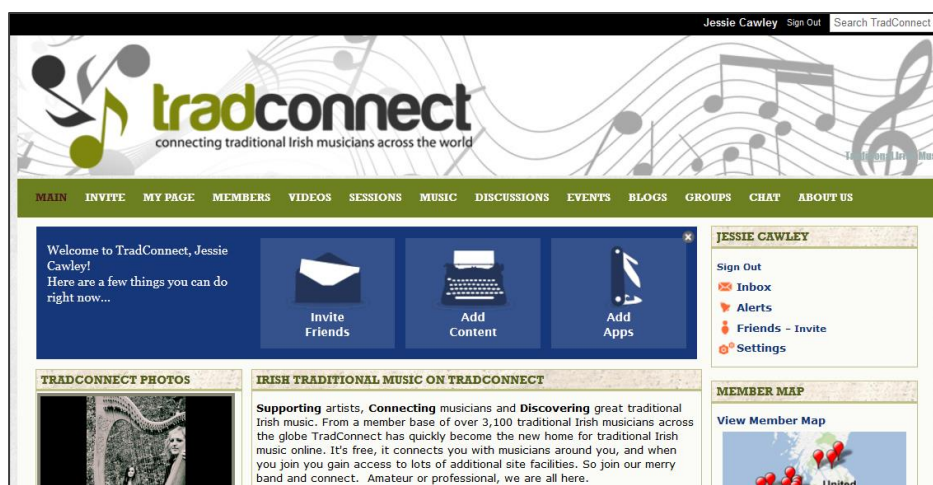


**Image 12: New Interface of [www.thesession.org](http://www.thesession.org) (December 2012-present)**



While thesession's online database is a good reference for practicing repertoire, it does not provide learning experiences which enhance learners' understanding of nuances of style or creative expression. For this reason, online written sources are best and most effectively used in conjunction with listening practices. Significantly, none of the twenty interviewees suggested that they learned new repertoire online. Instead, some used the database to check their aural versions of tunes. The tune database on thesession is useful in other ways as well. In my own learning experience, I have used the database to research basic background information about particular tunes. The database provides information about repertoire, including alternative names and commercial recordings of tunes. Members of thesession often post comments about the history of the tune, including musicians and composers who are associated with the tune.

**Image 13: Interface of TradConnect**



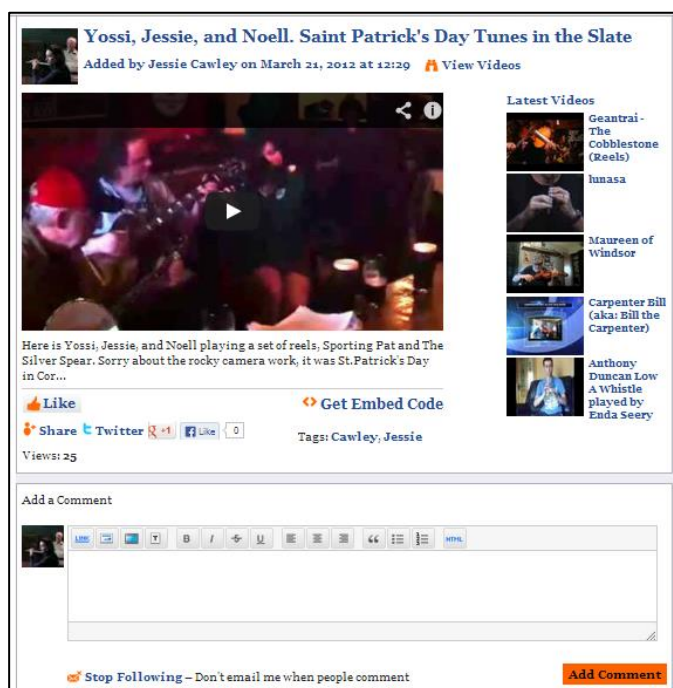
While TradConnect lacks a tune database, the website provides access to video recordings of Irish traditional music performances. TradConnect users can browse over a thousand videos, and search by keyword, artist, tune, or instrument. While many of these videos are merely embedded YouTube videos, TradConnect users do not have to navigate to YouTube in order to save or leave comments about videos of Irish traditional music. They are able to comment directly underneath the videos, which enables a discussion between other TradConnect members (see Image 14).<sup>59</sup> Videos on TradConnect's website are particularly useful for newcomers, since browsing YouTube for quality videos of Irish traditional music performances can be challenging; For instance, when a novice searches YouTube for 'Irish traditional music' or 'Irish music', they may have to sift through thousands of unrelated or amateur videos before they find anything of interest. Without a basic knowledge of what to search for – the name of a tune or an artist, for example – novices may find YouTube's video library difficult to navigate. In comparison, on TradConnect, novices can browse quality videos of Irish traditional music and comment on these performances with other practitioners and enthusiasts.

Members of the thesession often post YouTube links, but unlike TradConnect, thesession lacks a dedicated video section. For this reason, members of thesession may find it difficult to browse or search videos of Irish traditional music on the website. YouTube videos are generally posted and

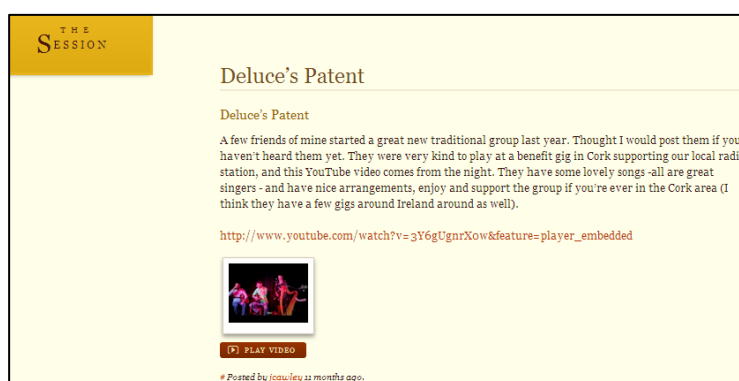
<sup>59</sup> When TradConnect members comment on videos, they are posting comments to other traditional music practitioners and enthusiasts. This type of communication differs from comments posted on YouTube, which can be viewed by the general population.

viewed within thesession's discussion boards. Until recently, in order to watch videos, members of thesession needed to click on a link, which would redirect them away from thesession to YouTube. Jeremy Keith has recently upgraded many features of thesession, and now when members click on links, they are able to view video content without having to leave the website (see Image 15). This new feature allows members to comment directly underneath the videos on thesession's website, thus enabling discourse about the content or performance.

**Image 14: Video content and comments field on TradConnect**



**Image 15: Video content on thesession**



The establishment and continued development of YouTube has seemingly limitless social, musical, and educational implications. The website provides learners across the world with free access to an enormous library of musical

performances and educational materials. Before YouTube was established in 2005, videos were not readily viewed or shared on Irish traditional music websites. Traditional musicians now share, view, and post videos on YouTube, and on social networking sites, such as Facebook.<sup>60</sup> This has dramatically increased the viewership of Irish traditional music video recordings.

Rudolph and Frankel (2009) provide music teachers with practical suggestions about how to use YouTube as a pedagogical tool in the music classroom. Amongst the many benefits of using YouTube for educational purposes, they suggest that the website provides ‘a free and easy way for students to begin to develop models they can emulate. Often students do not have experience listening to jazz. YouTube is a great way to get them started’ (2009:160). They also suggest that because students are connected to the world in new ways, educators need to embrace YouTube (Rudolph and Frankel 2009:14). Waldron (2011) argues that YouTube is not merely a resource for learners to view content, but rather, YouTube provides an online space for practitioners of informal, participatory music cultures to engage with one another. She explores how YouTube functions both as a participatory culture, and acts as a vehicle for engagement within participatory music cultures:

While an example of a global community of participatory culture itself, YouTube serves important participatory functions in online music communities like the Banjo Hangout. YouTube videos are of particular interest because they serve a dual purpose; their most apparent and pragmatic function being useful straightforward music teaching and learning aids. However, YouTube videos also act as vehicles of agency to promote and engage participatory culture through discourse in online community, thus also fulfilling a significant teaching role, albeit in a more nuanced manner than as a direct but informal music learning resource (Waldron 2011:34-5).

Rudolph and Frankel also argue that ‘YouTube is designed to be more than just a place to view videos. It can also be a community for you and your students’ (2009:36). Because YouTube acts as an informal, participatory community, there are significant and numerous implications regarding informal and social learning processes.

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<sup>60</sup> On Facebook, I saw a friend post a YouTube video of Julia Clifford playing a slow air, and was particularly inspired to try to play along on my fiddle (Fieldnotes, 12 December 2011). [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWDzITNz7Tc>, accessed 28 Feb 2013]. This is video of Julia originally aired on the television programme *Come West Along the Road*.



In 2001, Sommers Smith argued that the internet does not significantly affect the transmission of Irish traditional music because the learning process ‘requires personal listening: only close and prolonged listening allows a learner to grasp the forms, rhythms, and nuances of the music’ (2001:123). Between the 1990s and 2005, posting on discussion boards was the main online activity within traditional music circles. Now that users can watch traditional music performances on websites, such as TradConnect, LiveTrad, and YouTube, the internet has the potential to significantly alter transmission and learning practices within the Irish traditional music community. (Many learners of Irish traditional music have already experienced a shift in learning practices). Once a learner has access to a computer and internet access, they can repeatedly listen and view streaming videos of traditional music-making, free of charge; this has obvious and profound implications for the learning process.

On online forums, traditional music enthusiasts and practitioners often engage in various discussions and exchange information. Engaging in online forums can be particularly meaningful for learners who are self-taught or who may not live near other practitioners. Experienced practitioners are able to discuss historical, cultural, or philosophical issues, such as changes to traditional music culture. The lively discussion board on thesession is one of the website’s most characteristic features, and members post about various issues, including:

- Inquiries about the names of tunes (generally by posting YouTube links)
- Instrumental techniques and learning practices
- The general direction of Irish traditional music and its culture
- Discussion of performances and YouTube videos
- Discussions about traditional musicians, upcoming events, recordings, festivals
- Tributes to recently ill or deceased musicians, singers, dancers, and enthusiasts
- Equipment and instruments for sale (or lost/stolen)
- Announcement of new publications, commercial recordings, websites, schools, etc.

To the outside observer, the discussion boards appear to be the most active area of the website. However, as Jeremy Keith suggests, the ‘silent majority’ of people using thesession more commonly engage with the tune database, rather than the active discussion boards:



The discussion section looks like the busiest, but I think there's a silent majority using thesession as source of tunes who aren't interested in online discussion... Having access to the sheet music in the tunes section is probably the most valuable education resource. I don't think the discussions section is generally that useful as an educational resource although there are occasionally some useful comments (Keith, e-mail communication).

While discussion can be educationally beneficial, this significantly depends on the particular thread and the quality of the comments posted by the members.

Discussion boards are also a feature of TradConnect, but they are not nearly as active as boards on thesession. Both websites provide the ability to search the boards by topic and keywords. Anyone with internet access can view the discussion boards on thesession and TradConnect, but one has to become a member (by creating a username) in order to post a discussion or leave comments. Since TradConnect is designed as a social networking site, members tend to create usernames which coincide with their identities in everyday life.<sup>61</sup> In contrast, a greater proportion of members of thesession post under pseudonyms, such as 'fiddle4life'.<sup>62</sup>

The discussion boards on thesession exhibits a diversity of interests and opinions about Irish traditional music, both as a practice and a culture. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder argue that distributed communities 'usually have a greater diversity of viewpoints, needs, interests, priorities, and expectations than local groups', but there are 'fewer opportunities to negotiate those issues' (2002:120). With multiple opinions but few opportunities for face-to-face negotiation, debates on thesession can often become heated. Jeremy Keith occasionally suspends members (at his own discretion) for profanities or impoliteness. Conflicts and discrepancies are not an indication of weakness within a community. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder also argue that the 'best communities welcome strong personalities and encourage disagreements and debates. Controversy is part of what makes a community vital, effective and productive' (2002:10). Vibrant communities are not necessarily conflict-free,

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<sup>61</sup> However, some usernames are nicknames or shortened versions of users' actual names. My TradConnect username is 'Jessie Cawley, and my username on thesession is 'jcawley'.

<sup>62</sup> Jeremy Keith encourages members to post under their actual names, rather than pseudonyms, but this is not a requirement of membership. Some members of thesession post comments using their actual identities. Waldron suggests 'It is commonly assumed that people participating in online environments do so under radically altered identities. This assumption, however, is only valid in web communities whose members' on and offline lives never cross' (2009b:107). While members of thesession can and often do meet in live settings, some post under pseudonyms.

since members can use conflict ‘to deepen their relationships and their learning’ (2002:37). In fact, controversies ‘stir the pot’ and can lead to more interest and discourse on online discussion boards (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002:132).

On discussion boards, members of thesession occasionally post YouTube videos of their own playing for advice and criticism. Although this can be a useful exercise, it is not for the fainthearted. During my fieldwork, while I observed several examples of members providing encouragement and constructive criticism, I also observed blunt or generally negative posts. Additionally, some members who respond to posts can lack expertise in Irish traditional music or the particular instrument in question (although some commentators can be quite knowledgeable or expert practitioners). Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder suggest that in distributed communities, members commonly solicit advice from the general population. However, this is relatively uncommon in local communities, where members tend to approach ‘trusted members’ for feedback (2002:121). While learners of Irish traditional music need feedback in order to progress, they may find it more beneficial to seek advice from trusted peers and mentors. While trusting and personal relationships are frequently established within distributed communities, according to Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, these types of relationships can be more difficult to establish and sustain since members often have less opportunities for contact (2002:121).

This section explored some important educational implications of engaging with online activities and resources. Perhaps the most significant educational consequence is the ability to watch and listen to performances of Irish traditional music from the convenience of one’s own home. I suggest that watching steaming videos on the internet may be a significant learning experience for some Irish traditional musicians at present, and perhaps will be for many more in the near future. While my interviewees did not discuss the learning of technique or repertoire by watching steaming videos in detail, this may be due to the fact that I only posed broad questions about the role of the internet during the music learning process. My interviewees may have watched and been influenced by videos, but did not think to mention such informal learning experiences. However, during my internet fieldwork, I observed many traditional musicians (of all ages) posting and discussing YouTube videos on various social

networking sites. During sessions and festivals, learners and musicians also commonly discuss YouTube videos. Throughout this section, I also discussed the role of social networking sites, such as Facebook and TradConnect, and how many traditional musicians now communicate and access information about Irish traditional music events, including sessions, concerts, festivals, and summer schools. On TradConnect, online members are able to connect and interact during offline music-making sessions, and this has significant implications for socio-musical life within the Irish traditional music community. Because of the complexities and ever-changing nature of the internet, more research is needed to explore the ways Irish traditional musicians use the internet, and how this affects music learning and enculturation processes.

## Emerging Technologies

In this section, I discuss some emerging technologies which are beginning to play a role in the learning of Irish traditional music. According to my field observations, the use of smartphones and apps is increasing exponentially, and these experiences have the potential to provide new and interesting ways of learning Irish traditional music.<sup>63</sup>

During my field research in traditional music sessions, I frequently observed Irish traditional musicians of all ages using their mobile or smartphones to record the live music. Although one might assume that smartphone technology may have more of an impact on a younger generation of players, my observations suggest that adult musicians are also adopting such innovations. Since the emergence of smartphones, people are able to digitally record hours of music without microphones or other equipment. These sound recordings can be labelled, organized, and saved onto a personal computer for easy access at later stages of the learning process.

Musicians often manipulate technology to meet their needs. For instance, Aoife Granville discusses how she uses her mobile phone in order to internalize new repertoire:

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<sup>63</sup> Smartphones, including iPhones and Android phones, are mobile phones with additional computational capabilities. They also preform the functions of other gadgets, including personal digital assistants (PDAs), portable audio-video players, and digital cameras.

I constantly have stuff recorded in my phone from sessions. I don't learn half of them, but I like learning by ear. I usually learn whatever tune I recorded in the session. I set it to my alarm and usually by the time I snooze fifty times, it's usually in my head (Granville, interview)

Interestingly, by programming the alarm clock on her phone, Aoife slowly absorbs new tunes through repeated listening. Aoife also raises the issues that although traditional musicians commonly record session tunes on their phones, many of these recordings can go unheard and unlearned. Therefore, the efficacy of using phonographic technology as an educational tool depends on how the learner engages and follows up with these recordings.

Smartphones also have note-taking capabilities, which, in my own experiences, are quite useful during the learning process. Years ago, I would write down the names of tunes on loose napkins or scraps of paper, but now I have a running list of tunes to explore which I have saved on my iPhone. Cormac De Frein also discusses saving the names of tunes in mobile phones for later practice:

You might be at a session, and someone plays a tune that you like, so you get the name off them and put it in your phone, so you can look that up online then (De Frein, interview).

With the advent of smartphones, new software applications – referred to as apps – have also emerged as educational tools (and devices for entertainment purposes). However, before I explore this innovation, it must be acknowledged that particular software programmes for personal computers have also played a modest, often subtle, role in the transmission of Irish traditional music. For instance, iTunes allows listeners to organize their collections of Irish traditional music into playlists for easy access. iTunes, and other digital libraries, also make it easy to search by tune, artist, or album.

Within my interview data and fieldnotes, the software programme the ‘Amazing Slow Downer’ was referenced on a number of occasions. As the name suggests, the Amazing Slow Downer (ASD), slows the speed of sound recordings without altering the pitch. Developed by Roni Music, ASD is designed in order to help musicians (of all genres) to learn aurally.<sup>64</sup> Considering the speed and stylistic nuances of Irish traditional music, some learners may initially find aural learning challenging or intimidating. By using ASD, learners can listen to slower

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<sup>64</sup> The Amazing Slow Downer is available for download at [www.ronimusic.com](http://www.ronimusic.com).

versions of tunes, play along to their favourite commercial recordings, and gradually gain confidence by exercising their aural abilities. Learners can also use ASD to gradually increase the speed to a more appropriate dance tempo. A few interviewees suggest this programme could benefit learners of Irish traditional music.<sup>65</sup> However, Hammy raises some questions about the Amazing Slow Downer. He contrasts this new technology with the way traditional music was transmitted in the past:

Before sound recording, if you wanted to get a tune, every time it was played you had to remember it as well as you possibly could. So it was a question of sort of seeking out people that were playing those tunes... That's a completely different thing to the slower-downer. You can record someone who's playing at an awful pace and slow it down to hear exactly what they're doing and playing along with it... People now can analyse things down to the last note, and they will learn it exactly the same way their hero did (Hamilton, interview).

Although ASD allows listeners to hear subtitles, such as bowing and ornamentation, Hammy suggests this level of analysis may cause learners to imitate every stylistic subtlety of their musical 'heroes'; this level of detailed imitation does little to aid learners' to develop the capacity to creatively and independently interpret melodies. This raises the question if the ASD merely helps learners imitate musical style and technique of other musicians or if it can also help with the development of creativity and personal expression. Learners who use the ASD in order to replicate their favourite musicians exactly may not move beyond the stage of imitation, particularly if they do not put time and effort into their own interpretation of a tune. However, learners can also use the ASD to learn subtleties and techniques from up-tempo commercial recordings and then at a later time, use these expressive skills in order to embellish other melodies. When musicians use the ASD in this way, technology can play a direct role in the development of creative interpretation. Therefore, the learning outcome depends on each learner's intention and learning objectives. The effectiveness of technology as a learning aid is closely connected to how well the learner uses the tool, rather than the efficacy of the type of technology itself.

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<sup>65</sup> (Matt Cranitch, Hammy Hamilton, Seamus Sands, interviews). During a session in the Corner House, Matt Cranitch showed me the app on his iPhone, and stated that although he didn't use it, many of his students found it quite useful (fieldnotes, 3 Feb 2012).

Many software programmes have been redesigned as smartphone apps, and the Amazing Slow Downer is one such example.<sup>66</sup> Within traditional music circles, apps have recently increased in popularity and use. Instrumental tuners are one example of an app commonly used by traditional musicians. There are several free versions of tuner apps, while more advanced versions can cost around a few Euro.

To Irish traditional musicians and enthusiasts, perhaps the most innovative and promising app is Tunepal, developed by Bryan Duggan. Duggan, a traditional flute player with a background in computer science, developed music information retrieval software – MATT2 and TANSEY – specifically designed for Irish traditional music (Duggan 2009). Duggan launched the website, [www.tunepal.org](http://www.tunepal.org), in 2009, followed by the app in 2010. Since then, he has continued to update and improve the software.<sup>67</sup> Tunepal is a programme which enables traditional musicians to search tune databases. Duggan explains:

Tunes can be retrieved by typing in a title or by playing a twelve second extract from the tune on a traditional instrument. Tunepal can be used *in situ* in traditional music sessions, classes and concerts (2010:1).

Using Tunepal, learners can play an already known tune to discover its name, notation, and other background information. They can also retrieve this information when listening in live situations, such as concerts and sessions. Essentially, Tunepal connects sounds which are played in live contexts to pre-existing collections of Irish traditional music; the three main sources of which are the database on [thesession.org](http://thesession.org), O'Neill's 1001 (1907), and Breathnach's *Ceol Rince na hÉireann* (1963, 1976). Drawing on these three collections, Tunepal operates on a corpus of 3,290 tunes (Duggan 2010:3). Tunepal is free to use online, and costs \$4.99 to download as an app.<sup>68</sup> Tunepal is currently the highest rated, most downloaded, and most sophisticated traditional music app available.<sup>69</sup>

Although my interviewees did not discuss using Tunepal in order to learn,

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<sup>66</sup> The app is available through the iTunes store (<http://itunes.apple.com/app/amazing-slow-downer/id308998718?mt=>).

<sup>67</sup> Duggan keeps an online blog about the project, and frequently publicizing news and improvements to Tunepal. See (<http://tunepal.wordpress.com>).

<sup>68</sup> An internet connection is required for the app to work on a smartphone. The Tunepal app is available through the iTunes store (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/tunepal/id356935033?mt=8&ign-mpt=uo%3D6>).

<sup>69</sup> User ratings and other such information is available to the public on the iTunes apps store. See (<http://itunes.apple.com/ie/app/tunepal/id356935033?mt=8>, accessed 8 September 2012).

some comment on the implications this innovation has for the transmission process. For example, Geraldine O’Callaghan states of Tunepal:

I was made aware of this piece of technology recently and I’m completely in awe of it... Two months ago, I was trying to come up with a name of a tune, and I had to make two phone calls to get the name of the tune. I eventually got it from a man seventy-seven years of age, living in a cottage in Rockchapel. So, It’s just a different landscape now, it’s hard to imagine (O’Callaghan, interview).

When asked if she thought the change of ‘landscape’ was negative, Geraldine replied:

No, not at all! It’s fantastic. Obviously I love traditional music and I love the fact that it’s so accessible to me now. I’m able to listen to any music I want to, any hour of the day or night online (interview).

If she used TunePal, Geraldine may have been able to access the name of the tune more quickly and efficiently. However, in doing so, she would have missed the opportunity to talk with an older practitioner. This raises meaningful questions to ponder in the future; what do learners gain by using seemingly ‘more efficient’ technological resources? What, if anything, is not nurtured in the process of using such learning aids?

Several other traditional music apps are also available for download. For instance, TradTunes, developed in 2009 by Stuart Woolley, provides ABC notation of 850 traditional tunes. Unlike Tunepal, TradTunes is not a retrieval system, so users can only browse or search repertoire by name. In this way, TradTunes is not useful to a learner who may have a tune in their mind, and wishes to discover the name or research the tune further. However, TradTunes is helpful in other ways; If a musician cannot recall how a tune begins (which is a relatively common occurrence), they can use TradTunes to reference the first few notes, which may trigger their aural memory of the tune.<sup>70</sup>

While TradTunes and Tunepal are intended for users with some previous knowledge and experience of Irish traditional music, other apps are marketed towards novices. In 2011, Marion Martin and Mairéad Hickey launched an educational app called Irish Fiddler, which features video lessons with Hickey

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<sup>70</sup> Tunepal also serves this function.

demonstrating repertoire and fiddle techniques.<sup>71</sup> Other similar apps are available for other traditional instruments, including the ‘Irish Flute’ and ‘Irish Music Tutor’ apps. Other apps serve a purely entertainment purposes, such as the ‘Uilleann – Irish Bagpipes Chanter and Drones’ app, which allows users to ‘play’ the pipes, by hitting the regulators on the screen.

Smartphone technology, including digital phonography and apps, are beginning to play an increasing role in the transmission of Irish traditional music. As these new emerging technologies enter the community of practice, traditional musicians’ learning experiences will continue to change in unexpected ways. For this reason, more research is needed to explore how using such innovations can affect learning and enculturation processes.

## Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I have argued that using technology is a social practice which can play a significant role in learning and enculturation processes. I explored the ways traditional musicians engage with written sources, phonographic technology, video recordings, the internet, and other technologies, and discussed some corresponding educational and social implications. I propose that these experiences provide additional opportunities to learn Irish traditional music. Within the interview data, several interviewees discuss how various forms of technology provide new ways to ‘immerse’ one’s self into Irish traditional music. Seamus Sands discusses the impact phonographic technology has had on transmission, culture, and practice:

[Sound recording] has brought the music to a much wider audience... Back in the day, you had to go immerse yourself in a small village, and you could only learn from the local guy down the road. I think it has also exposed people to many diverse styles, and then you can pick and choose what suits you (Sands, interview).

Technology influences how and what Irish traditional musicians learn. As Seamus suggests, traditional musicians can now learn and imitate diverse styles of playing. Broadly speaking, by providing convenient access to resources,

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<sup>71</sup> See (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/irish-fiddler/id488114759?mt=8>, accessed 8 September 2012).



technology has increased the public's access to traditional music. As Geraldine O'Callaghan states, 'It's just so accessible now. The technology revolution happened in our time' (interview).

Within the Irish traditional music community, some forms of technology play a more central role in learning and enculturation processes than others. Written sources are often used as a secondary source. This is evident in how my interviewees used notation to check their aural versions of tunes. While notation plays a role in the acquisition of repertoire and instrumental tutors provides insight into techniques, my interviewees emphasize that they primarily acquired their repertoire and instrumental skills aurally. My research suggests that phonographic technology plays a much more dominant role in the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians. Several interviewees became immersed in Irish traditional music and learned stylistic nuances through listening, absorbing, and imitating commercial and non-commercial recordings.

Throughout the chapter, I discussed the various challenges and advantages of using technology during the learning process. Paradoxically, while technology has made traditional music more accessible, learners may experience 'information overload' (Toffler 1970). Geraldine O'Callaghan discusses the amount of resources available today compared to the 1980s:

Even when we were learning, it [recordings of Irish traditional music] was so difficult to come by and it was such a rarity that you nearly appreciated it all more because you couldn't go online, download a track and learn a tune... I think that the learning process now is very different. Today, there's a kind of an overload of information, but there isn't so much of the cultural, social aspect of it. You can't teach that, it's an experience (O'Callaghan, interview).

With the advent of traditional music websites, thesession's massive tune database, YouTube, and iTunes, learners have more access to videos, commercial recordings and information about Irish traditional music than ever before. While technology can easily accelerate the learning process, I suggest that enculturation – the process of learning one's own culture – is not so easily accelerated. Indeed, because enculturation is an on-going, lifelong process, it by definition cannot be fast-tracked. As Geraldine suggests above, cultural and social understanding is largely achieved through experience.

Several of my interviewees also emphasized that engaging with

technology cannot replace social and music interactions with a community of practitioners. Seamus Sands values experiencing Irish traditional music in its original social context:

If you're learning tunes through downloads and so on, but you've never had a chance to sit down in front of some of the old guys that the music has come through and experienced them in their own environments; I think people are possibly missing something (Sands, interview).

Additionally, Martin Hayes discusses the process of becoming a musician and stresses the importance of connecting to a community of practitioners:

I doubt it would be possible to learn the whole thing from a DVD, for example. I think sooner or later you have to involve yourself with some collection of musicians that you play with, or musicians that you at least can discuss it with. You need some little bit of community to make it work. I think it would be impossible to do in isolation (Hayes, interview).

Lastly, the technologies I have discussed in this chapter are not inherently effective or ineffective educational tools. The educational efficacy of these tools depends on how well the learner utilizes these tools. As Drucker argues:

...technology is not, as our grandparents believed, the magic wand that can make all human problems and limitation disappear. We now know that technological potential is, indeed, even greater than they thought. But we have also learned that technology, as a creature of man, is as problematical, as ambivalent, and as capable of good or evil, as is its creator (1970:67).

I argue that the educational potential of technology is maximized when used in conjunction with other essential learning experiences, such as interacting with other Irish traditional musicians. As Wenger suggests, using technology to gain information and to connect to a community of practice 'can actually be disempowering, overwhelming, and alienating... Access to information without negotiability serves only to intensify the alienating effects of non-participation'(1998:220). When novices use technology as a primary means of learning, they can gain information. However, without engaging with other members of the community of practice, they have no way to negotiate this meaning within a meaningful socio-musical context. I propose that when learners engage in a variety of learning experiences – in live settings with peers and

mentors and by engaging with different forms of technology – learners have more opportunities to negotiate cultural, social, and musical meaning and develop their identities as Irish traditional musicians.

## Chapter 5

### Patterns of Enculturation in Irish Traditional Music Culture

Enculturation within Irish traditional music culture is a complex and long-term process which involves numerous informal, non-formal, and formal learning experiences. Over the years, traditional musicians engage in various learning and music-making activities, and each experience provides specific opportunities for musical and socio-cultural development. By drawing on my field research and interviews with twenty traditional musicians, I have detailed common learning experiences within traditional music culture. More importantly, this descriptive analysis allowed me to search for patterns of enculturation, providing insight into the process of becoming a traditional musician. Throughout the dissertation, I provided examples of how particular learning experiences foster enculturation and I have outlined some challenges and limitations of engaging in each learning practice. When we consider the diverse opinions about the effectiveness of each learning experience, investigating transmission, learning, and developmental processes becomes an even more complex endeavour. In this final chapter, I begin by summarizing the discussion thus far and suggesting new avenues for research in the future. I conclude with an exploration of some significant patterns of enculturation within Irish traditional music culture.

This dissertation is the first major study within the field of Irish traditional music to focus solely on learning and enculturation processes from the perspective of the learner. By focusing on adult professional and semi-professional musicians, the thesis presents a specific perspective of the learning process. Other scholars may expand on issues raised here and explore how novices, intermediate, and amateur musicians experience musical enculturation. Considering the complex issues associated with musical enculturation, it was also necessary to focus on traditional musicians born in Ireland. However, the Irish traditional music community of practice is international, and more research is needed in the future to explore the enculturation of traditional musicians outside of Ireland. While the scope of this thesis is specific, it provides an initial exploration of musical enculturation within Irish traditional music culture.

## Summary

One of the aims of my research was to outline some effective learning activities that Irish traditional musicians engage with throughout the course of their musical development and enculturation. In Chapters 2, 3, and 4, I not only highlight the benefits of each learning experience, but also some of the challenges learners may face when engaging with these learning practices. Below I summarize the major learning practices that I have detailed throughout the thesis, and how these positively influenced the interviewees' musical progression from novices to skilled musicians.

In Chapter 2, I discussed socio-musical interactions between peers, mentors, and family members, and explored learning processes which occur during informal musical and social contexts, including get-togethers in houses, traditional music sessions, and other live music events. Many interviewees, described interactions with other musicians as primary influences in terms of their musical development. I emphasized that learning Irish traditional music is a socially situated process, and discussed the role of peers and mentors. I proposed that Irish traditional music is a community of practice, and from this perspective, learning is conceived as a process in which novices gradually move from a peripheral position to a more central position within the community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). This process of becoming an active member of the community of practice involves the acquisition of repertoire and technical skills, as well as learning and embodying cultural, social, and historical aspects of Irish traditional music.

My research suggests that the role played by family in the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians is complex. The interview data suggests that it is relatively uncommon to learn a traditional instrument directly and primarily from one's parents. In contrast, musical interactions with siblings and members of the extended family are much more commonplace. A significant theme emerges within Chapter 2, which is that traditional musicians often learn by interacting with friends and family members of a similar age, not merely by imitating an older, more experienced group of practitioners. Many interviewees highlight how playing and learning music alongside their siblings and cousins, for example, were important moments during their musical enculturation. My investigation also suggests that family members who are not active musicians, singers, or

dancers often play a role in the enculturation process by providing encouragement and motivation. Many interviewees discussed listening to Irish traditional music together with their family members, and these experiences provided an informal introduction to Irish traditional music. I have argued that through listening practices and engaging with Irish traditional music as enthusiasts, parents and family members of all musical backgrounds can enrich their children's musical environment. While many exceptional traditional musicians gain their knowledge, love, and skill directly from family members, my research indicates that this is not a prerequisite for musical achievement within Irish traditional music. This challenges a common assumption that exceptional traditional musicians usually descend from a long line of musicians.

Irish traditional music sessions also affect enculturation and learning processes in complex ways. I have discussed the ways traditional musicians absorb and learn repertoire and techniques through prolonged listening and observing in sessions. I also argued that the social interactions inherent during sessions can foster enculturation. During sessions, connecting to a community of practitioners through shared music-making, and chatting to other musicians in between the music can lead to meaningful cultural and social understanding. My research shows that in order to significantly influence enculturation and learning processes, a learner needs to attend sessions on a relatively consistent basis over an extended period of time. Without repetitive participation, learners are unlikely to become familiar with the repertoire and social norms of the session. Additionally, some scholars and interviewees suggest that features of the typical pub session are not conducive to the learning of traditional music. Pubs are often noisy and cramped, and some novice musicians may feel unwelcome within the session circle or experience performance anxieties. The variety of opinions about the effectiveness of learning in session situations illustrates a significant point; one learner may consider participating in sessions motivating and effective learning experience, while another may find it frustrating or unhelpful. Sessions are not inherently positive or negative spaces for learning. I argue that the effectiveness of the learning experience is dependent on the individual's personality and the quality and types of social interactions which occur in the session.

In Chapter 3, I discussed common learning experiences in organized settings, such as schools, traditional music organizations, summer schools, and

festivals. While these contexts are more organized, many learning processes which occur in these settings often retain characteristics of informal music learning. Aural learning and imitation still plays a central role, while formal assessments and examinations are uncommon in these settings. Many of the learning contexts discussed in Chapter 3 emerged during and after the 1950s, and were established in a conscious effort to revive and promote Irish traditional music. Attending weekly classes, summer schools, and festivals are common learning experiences, particularly amongst traditional musicians born after the 1970s. Because Irish traditional music is primarily transmitted outside of the formal education system, extra-curricular tuition and activities play a significant role in learning and enculturation processes. Organizations, such as Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and pipers' clubs, provide weekly tuition and other activities throughout the year. In addition to the transmission of skills and repertoire, social connections made in traditional music organizations can nurture learners' musical enculturation.

Summer schools and workshops at festivals are common sites for the learning of repertoire, techniques, and other aspects of traditional music culture. My interviewees' narratives and field observations suggest that enculturation at these events occur by engaging in music-making and socializing during informal and ancillary activities, in addition to participating in structured classes. Some traditional music summer schools, such as Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, have a festival-like atmosphere, as they host numerous concerts, recitals, gigs, céilithe, sessions, and other informal music-making activities. Many of my interviewees made meaningful connections to other practitioners and described these events as memorable and motivational.

Although the philosophy of CCÉ's Fleadh Cheoil places an emphasis on raising standards through structured competitions, many interviewees suggested that informal, non-competitive music-making was the most enjoyable and memorable experience at the Fleadh Cheoil na Éireann. In the section on CCÉ competitions, I explored the varying opinions my interviewees have about the effectiveness and necessity of competition as a way of transmitting and promoting Irish traditional music. Weighting all the evidence and opinions, I concluded that competition is a highly effective way to motivate some learners of Irish traditional music, but not all. Considering this, I propose that non-competitive solo and group recitals should play a more central role in festivals

like the Fleadh Cheoil, but do not advocate completely eliminating competitions.

In Chapter 4, I explored the many ways traditional musicians use technology and how this affects learning and enculturation processes. Due to the pervasiveness of technology in modern culture, I suggest that use of technology plays a significant role in the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians. While not all traditional musician use technology as a way to consciously learn or hone their skills, technology has become a part of traditional musicians' day-to-day experience. Historically, written sources are the first technological innovation to impact the transmission of Irish traditional music. Because traditional musicians use written sources in various ways and some more than others, the influence of written sources on the transmission of Irish traditional music and its culture is difficult to generalize. Some interviewees described relatively consistent and regular experiences using written sources, while others used them rarely or only during the early stages of the learning process. ABC notation is often used in conjunction with aural learning in many traditional music classes and workshops. In class situations, notation occasionally functions as an instructional tool, or more commonly, as a memory aid for later practice. Many of my interviewees suggest that notation is a useful aid to ease children into aural learning. Some interviewees also use written collections as a way to research tunes that they have already learned aurally. By using notation in this way, musicians can research different versions or check for possible discrepancies. Instrumental tutor books are also useful resources for musicians, especially in terms of learning instrumental techniques.

Of all the forms of technology, phonographic technology is the most frequently used by Irish traditional musicians. By listening to commercial and non-commercial recordings, traditional musicians can absorb, imitate, and assimilate repertoire and stylistic nuances. My research also suggests that listening to commercial recordings has significant social implications and ultimately affects the enculturation of traditional musicians. I have also argued that video recordings have enormous education potential as learners can hear and observe traditional music-making in action. While video recordings have played less of a role in musical enculturation historically, with the emergence of websites, such as YouTube, many videos of Irish traditional music performances are now circulated amongst traditional musicians and enthusiasts. Links to these videos are often posted and shared on social networking sites, including



Facebook and TradConnect. Because of the rapid rate of change within the technology sector, more research is needed on the role the internet and new emerging technologies, such as smartphone apps, plays in musical enculturation. There are also numerous implications for teachers of Irish traditional music; perhaps new forms of technology and media can be used within and outside of the classroom to enrich pupils' experience. This could also be investigated by future researchers of music education.

Although Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are organized based on broad types of learning, many of the learning practices discussed throughout the thesis overlap in meaningful ways. When my interviewees described a memory of learning Irish traditional music, they often discussed more than one learning practice simultaneously. For example, many attended summer schools alongside their siblings, and forms of technology are often used within institutional and informal contexts, such as workshops and sessions. This highlights the fact that traditional musicians often use a multiplicity of approaches and methodologies throughout the learning process. My research indicates that it is this multiplicity of practices which leads to socially situated and effective learning experiences.

## Patterns of Musical Enculturation

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I explore some overarching patterns of enculturation within Irish traditional music culture. I begin the discussion by exploring some general research findings and presenting some broad patterns of enculturation. Following this, I explore two significant patterns of enculturation which I have identified as part of my ethnographic research into learning processes; all my interviewees experienced longevity of participation in music-making, and I propose that this longevity is essential to the process of musical enculturation. I conclude by arguing that engaging in multiple learning and musical contexts play an integral role in the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians.

After gathering, organizing, and analysing the interview data, I asked, what (if anything) do all of these traditional musicians have in common in terms of their learning experiences? Are there any learning practices, activities, or experiences that every participant went through during their journey of becoming

a traditional musician? The twenty interviewees differed by age, family musical background, location, and instrument played. They described diverse learning experiences and opinions about the effectiveness of each learning practice. Considering these diverse narratives, I anticipated that general patterns of enculturation would be difficult to discern. However, some significant patterns of musical enculturation emerged.

In search of overarching patterns of enculturation, I asked interviewees if they thought that any experiences or particular activities were essential in order to develop as a traditional musician. Many interviewees suggested that listening and interacting with other musicians are essential experiences during the learning process. For instance, Tomás Ó Canainn suggests that it is helpful to associate with musicians, as this provides a model for imitation. He states:

Obviously, it makes it a lot easier if you associate with traditional musicians, and you make somebody or some people or system your model (Ó Canainn, interview).

Aoife Granville also believes that ‘it’s really important to have someone or a network of people’ in order to develop musically (Granville, interview). Several interviewees suggested that a learner’s musical environment and social circle plays a role in learning and enculturation processes. Other than listening and interaction with other practitioners, there is little evidence within the interview data to suggest there are strict rules and procedures to follow in order to become a traditional musician; many of my interviewees highlighted the diversity of practice in Irish traditional music around the world, and suggested that individuals find their own pathways to become traditional musicians. Interviewees also frequently rejected ideas that learners needed to be born into a musical family or needed to take lessons from a well-known teacher.

The ethnomusicological literature provides examples of musical cultures which have well-established traditions of teaching and learning activities, and clearly defined cultural beliefs of the process of becoming a musician. Within North Indian classical music culture, the guru-shishya relationship is considered crucial to the enculturation process. In his ethnography, Neuman discusses the common cultural belief that ‘there are three elements required to become a performer of art music in India: (1) one’s will or discipline, (2) one’s teacher or perhaps – more properly – one’s guide, and (3) one’s spiritual status’ (1990:30). Within North Indian Classical Music culture, learners must have guru, and

through this relationship, they develop the spiritual devotion and discipline required in order to become a musician. As another example, the process of becoming a musician within Afghani culture is strongly connected to Afghani's conceptions of the roles hereditary families and gender play within their society (Baily 1988a; Baily and Doubleday 1990). Afghani boys from hereditary musical families are expected to become musicians, while non-hereditary musicians and girls are often discouraged from music-making (Baily and Doubleday 1990:91-2).<sup>72</sup> The musical cultures of Afghanistan and North India have well-defined belief systems of enculturation processes. Within the Irish traditional music community, cultural beliefs are equally ingrained in the enculturation process. However, according to my interview data, enculturation within Irish traditional music culture appears to be a relatively diverse and pliable process. The enculturation process can be viewed as flexible, since there is no apparent consensus amongst my interviewees about any activity that learners *must* engage with in order to develop as Irish traditional musicians. Other than listening, my research found no evidence that there is one culturally defined way in which to become a traditional musician. There are numerous learning activities available for musicians to engage in throughout their enculturation, and learners can choose activities based on their personal background and preference.

### Longevity of Participation

All of my interviewees experienced longevity of participation within Irish traditional music. They each have played traditional music for more than ten years and over a significant portion of their lifetimes. Longevity does not imply that interviewees' participation was completely stable over the years. Indeed, some interviewees reported that their interest waned slightly during their teenage years (Lisa O'Sullivan, Michael O'Sullivan, and John Reid, interviews). Although enthusiasm fluctuated throughout the enculturation process, no interviewee stopped playing traditional music for any significant amount of time. I suggest that when individuals develop a passionate interest in Irish traditional music, they are more likely to experience long-term participation in music-making and begin to identify with Irish traditional music and its culture.

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<sup>72</sup> Baily and Doubleday suggest that Afghani women musicians are often viewed as prostitutes (1990:89-90), and as girls 'approached puberty, music making was discouraged; it was necessary to become responsible, modest and hardworking' (1990:92).

Interviewees commonly spoke of their love for Irish traditional music and their close connections to other practitioners. For instance, when I asked Mick Daly why he had continued playing traditional music for so many years, he replied:

Cause I love it... Because of friendship I've formed with Dave [Hennessey] and Matt [Cranitch]... From that point of view, it was just a case of you just play music with your friends... So there are just a bunch of people I hung out with over the years and that's why I suppose I got immersed in it (Daly, interview).

Within the interview data, themes of enjoyment, fun, and passion are common, while themes of hard work, sacrifice, or dedication are infrequent.<sup>73</sup> Musicians tend to participate over the long-term because they experience musical and social enjoyment, rather than because they feel some obligation to traditional music, culture, family, or society at large.

Every interviewee experienced prolonged participation, regardless of their family's musical background. As I argued in Chapter 2, children do not need to be born in a musical household to develop into accomplished and expressive traditional musicians. Parents who are musicians, dancers, singers, enthusiasts, or non-musicians can listen and watch Irish traditional music alongside their children, which enriches their children's musical experience. Early exposure to music is a major factor in developmental and enculturation processes, and this exposure can occur in numerous ways. Children who have active music-makers as parents benefit from observing and hearing live music-making on a regular basis. These children also absorb the musical syntax from an early age. My research suggests that early exposure is also possible – and in my interviewees' experiences, common – in households where parents are not instrumentalists. Regardless of family musical background, most interviewees started playing in early childhood. Mick Daly and Hammy Hamilton are the only interviewees who learned Irish traditional music later in life. Mick and Hammy started playing traditional music in their early twenties, and have been active traditional musicians ever since.<sup>74</sup>

From a cultural perspective, long-term participation within a musical

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<sup>73</sup> Martin Hayes's statement above is a good example of this type of narrative.

<sup>74</sup> Although Mick and Hammy did not play Irish traditional music as children, they had other musical experiences during childhood and adolescence. Mick Daly was influenced by the folk music movement, and initially learned how to play Bob Dylan and Joan Baez songs on guitar. Hammy Hamilton had musical experiences singing and playing classical music in school.

culture is an integral part of the enculturation process. Learning one's own culture, as Merriam states, is a 'never-ending process continuing throughout the life span of the individual' (1964:146). Because change is an inevitable process within all cultures, musicians continuously adapt to these cultural changes and their identities are ever evolving. From an education viewpoint, long-term participation is important because novices require a considerable amount of time and repetition in order to master musical skills. Sloboda discusses the connection between repeated engagement in activity and the development of skill:

People generally become skilled at some task by being presented with repeated opportunities to engage in elements of the task. The sheer amount of time that a person has spent actually doing an activity is one of the best predictors of level of skill (1985:216).

Weisberg also argues that personal style and artistic innovation develops due to the 'long-standing interest of the artists and thought processes' (1986:115).

It takes a significant amount of time to listen to, absorb, and assimilate the syntax and subtleties of Irish traditional music style and expression. For instance, hearing and comprehending ornamentation does not come instantly, but develops gradually overtime. As Hammy Hamilton suggests, it is easy for novices to 'mistake a roll for a bit of vibrato or something' (interview). For this reason, learners are able to imitate, experiment, and recreate ornaments on their instrument only after the absorption stage.<sup>75</sup> Musicians develop their own sense of style and personal expression after an elongated time listening to, absorbing, imitating, and creatively interpreting Irish traditional music. As the old adage suggests, it takes twenty-one years to master the uilleann pipes; seven years learning, seven years practicing, and seven years playing. Some interviewees highlighted the long period of time it takes to learn Irish traditional music. Liz Doherty started to learn the fiddle at age nine, but she was nearly eighteen years of age before she felt 'ready' to participate in sessions. Liz contrasts this to some learners who feel Irish music is simple and can be learned quite quickly:

I started when I was nine... but I was about seventeen or eighteen before I felt ready for sessions... I was learning for a long time, and it absolutely dumbfounds me when I hear people say in a session, 'Oh, I've been playing

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<sup>75</sup> Although novices can imitate rolls without absorbing and understanding such subtleties, the results are usually not successful until they become more familiarized with the syntax of Irish traditional music.

Irish music six months.’ If you go back to the old saying that seven years is how long it takes you to learn, when did we lose sight of that? It should be seven years, not seven minutes. There is definitely a real sense out there that you can learn [Irish traditional music] really easily, really quickly and we can be experts... This is not something you learn overnight (Doherty, interview).

While one can learn the notes of a jig relatively quickly, it takes a considerable amount of time and effort to develop the expressive and subtle solo skills that are characteristic and intrinsic to Irish traditional music.

According to my interview data, traditional musicians spend a considerable amount of time engaging with Irish traditional music in private, which improves their skills and develops their musical expression. But interestingly, this engagement at home is often considered ‘playing’, rather than a separate preparatory activity for later music-making. In discussing how one develops as a traditional musician, my interviewees generally placed a greater emphasis on ‘playing’, rather than ‘practicing’. For instance, Martin Hayes discusses how his learning process was fueled by his enthusiasm to play. Martin suggests that he ‘played’ so often, that he did not feel the need to ‘practice’:

The way I learned was very haphazard and very relaxed, and there was absolutely nothing formal at all about it. My learning was driven by my own enthusiasm for it, and my own desire to play. Nobody pushed me, nobody said when or where. I use to play in the mornings before I’d have breakfast, I’d play in the evening before dinner... I just wanted to play because I just liked playing... I never felt like I had to even practice. All I ever did was play. But I mean, in playing I also aspired to make the expression of the music more real, to do it with a better tone, to be able to summon the syncopation of the rhythm when I needed (Hayes, interview).

While Martin feels that he played with goals and aspirations of improving, he considers his music-making at home ‘playing’, not ‘practicing’. If we accept the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition that practice is the ‘repeated execution of a skill in order to acquire or maintain proficiency’, we can assert that Martin ‘practiced’. Regardless of this definition, the distinctions that Martin makes between playing and practicing illustrate a meaningful cultural pattern; my interviewees value informal music-making and informal learning experiences. Regardless if we label it playing or practicing, it takes a significant amount of time to engage with one’s instrument and Irish traditional music in order to

develop as a musician.

If long-term participation is crucial for musical enculturation, then there are significant implications for the teaching and learning of Irish traditional music. Primarily, I suggest that learning experiences which nurture prolonged participation and enjoyment can play an influential role in musical enculturation. Within the Irish traditional music community, musical enjoyment, rather than innate musical talent, seems to be a key indicator that a learner will participate in music-making for a prolonged period of time and begin to identify themselves as a traditional musician.

### Multiple Learning Experiences

Engaging in a multiplicity of learning and performance contexts is one of the most significant patterns of musical enculturation revealed in this study. As illustrated throughout the dissertation, traditional musicians learn repertoire, skills, and aspects of their culture by participating in various learning and performance activities in numerous settings throughout their lives. During the early stages of my field research, it seemed that the enculturation process was unique to each musician. The interviewees' diverse backgrounds and narratives suggested that the musicians had their own learning preferences, opinions, and found their own pathways into Irish traditional music. Because they learned in so many different ways, I initially assumed clear patterns of enculturation were unlikely to emerge. However, it gradually became clear that this multiplicity of learning experiences is, itself, a significant pattern of musical enculturation.

Engaging in multiple learning and performance contexts fosters the enculturation of Irish traditional musicians in several ways. On a basic level, engaging in multiple learning and performance contexts increases frequency of participation. Learners who attend classes, sessions, concerts, fleadhanna, summer school, and access traditional music through technology, experience traditional music frequently throughout the year. In contrast, learners who only engage in one or two activities do not have this rich learning and musical experience. Frequent listening and musical experiences allow learners to absorb Irish traditional music, and increases the likelihood that novices may begin to feel that Irish traditional music is a part of their everyday lives. When participation becomes a regular part of life, learners are far more likely to identify themselves as 'traditional musicians'.

As emphasized throughout the dissertation, each learning experience provides a set of specific educational benefits, as well as challenges. Therefore, traditional musicians who learn and participate in multiple contexts often have especially rich learning experiences, because the diverse learning experiences often complement one another. In Chapter 2, I suggest that learners who frequently attend sessions grow accustomed to social and cultural norms. However, some traditional musicians feel that the, sometimes noisy, fast-paced environment is not suitable for learning the more subtle aspects of style, such as ornamentations and variations. Many of my interviewees suggest that listening to commercial recordings and attending classes and workshops are more effective ways to learn how to play ornaments. Novices may find it challenging to learn ornamentations by ear in session situations. However, this challenge can be overcome if the learner also participates in other activities, such as listening to commercial recordings or attending classes.

As another example, learning aurally by playing along to commercial recordings can be a convenient and enjoyable way to learn Irish traditional music in the privacy of one's home. However, novices may be intimidated by aural learning or find this method too challenging initially. Intermediate or advanced musicians with the technical ability to play along to the tempos and play by ear may find this method more enjoyable and suitable. However, when learning aurally from commercial recordings, musicians are unable to observe physical movements or pose questions to more experienced musicians. In contrast, session participants can observe music-making in action and discuss a range of issues with other practitioners. This highlights how participation in multiple learning experiences can complement each other and provide a more complete understanding of Irish traditional music culture.

My research also suggests that a multitude of learning practices fosters enculturation because it provides learners with a variety of modes of engagement. Educational options are highly important, especially when we consider learners' diverse levels of ability, learning styles, and preferences. When learners dislike one learning method, they can continue to progress musically by engaging in other learning experiences that better suits their needs. My interviewees expressed diverse learning preferences and opinions about the effectiveness of each learning experience. When a traditional musician considers a learning experience ineffective or inappropriate, there are other avenues open to them.



They may withdraw from one experience and begin to engage with another learning method or practice. Some interviewees, for example, highlighted the difficulty they experienced when trying to learn during traditional music sessions. If musicians do not feel comfortable in pub sessions, they may choose, instead, to play informally at home with peers, or join a beginners' session at the local CCÉ branch. Novices who have difficulty learning aurally can use a combination of listening practices and written sources in order to progress to the next stage of development. Musicians who may be overwhelmed by the crowds at the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann may choose to attend and play at smaller, more intimate festivals, such as the Baltimore Fiddle Fair or Cruinniú na bhFliúit.

If engaging in multiple learning scenarios is central to musical enculturation, learners should be encouraged to experience the many different learning and performances contexts within the traditional music community. Over the generations, parents, teachers, and organizers of traditional music institutions have done precisely this. When learners engage in rich and diverse learning and musical practices, they will be able to find the most suitable and enjoyable activity for their own musical development. As this study illustrates, musical and social enjoyment is key to longevity of participation, and longevity of participation is an integral part of the process of becoming an Irish traditional musician.

Currently, Irish traditional music is a thriving community of practice. Throughout the year, more festivals, organizations, workshops, and performance opportunities are available to learners of Irish traditional music than ever before. The vitality of the community has created new and diverse learning and performance contexts. In turn, these new opportunities for engagement contribute to the health of the community. Since the revival of the 1950s and 60s, Irish traditional music has entered into a cycle of renewal, and this intensified and perpetuated a growing interest in Irish traditional music. My research suggests that the diverse learning opportunities now available foster musical enculturation and contribute to the vitality of the community of practice.

## Appendix A

### Glossary

Below you will find a glossary of some common terms used within Irish traditional music discourse and throughout this dissertation. This table is intended for quick references, and only provides a basic definition of each term. As in the rest of the thesis, Irish words are printed in italics.

barn dance	‘A form of ‘round the hall’ social dance most popular up to the 1950s. It was generally performed to hornpipe time (4/4)’ (Vallely 1999:25). ‘The barn dance in Donegal has the unusual title of the ‘german.’”(Mac Aoidh 1994:110).
<i>Cairdeas na bhFidhléirí</i>	‘A development organization formed in the early 1980s with the aim of promoting the Donegal fiddle tradition’ (Mac Aoidh 1999b:49).
<i>cathaoirleach</i>	Irish for ‘Chairman’
<i>an Chuallacht</i>	Irish for ‘the fellowship’. This is the name of UCC’s Irish Language Society.
<i>ceol</i>	Irish for ‘music’, generally instrumental music
<i>céilí</i>	Irish for ‘Irish dancing evening’
<i>céilithe</i>	Plural of céilí
<i>craic</i>	Irish word meaning ‘fun’ or ‘good times’
cran	‘Another characteristic device used by pipers is the ‘cran.’ This consists of a series of repeated notes, with grace notes interpolated in between, usually on the two lowest notes, D and E. It is most commonly used in reels or other fast-moving pieces’ (Ó Riada 1982: 43).
cut	‘A form of ornamentation of melody which involves separating two like notes by momentarily playing the higher note’ (Vallely 1999:98).
double stopping	‘A technique employed for ornamentation purposes, which involves the simultaneous sounding of more than one pitch (usually two), particularly at phrase endings. Originally associated with fiddle playing... it is now popular with accordion and concertina players’ (Doherty 1999:109).
<i>feis</i>	‘Literally ‘entertainment for the night’, but in relation to music an abbreviation for ‘feis cheoil’, ‘music festival involving competition’” (Vallely 1999:121).
<i>fleadh</i>	Literally means ‘festival’ or ‘feast’. When used in English, a ‘fleadh’ often refers to CCÉ music festivals which involve competitions.

<i>fleadhanna</i>	Plural of <i>fleadh</i>
<i>Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann</i>	All-Ireland Music Festival, put on annually by CCÉ. This festival involves competitions in music, dance, and singing, and is often referred to simply as the ‘Fleadh’ or ‘Fleadh Cheoil’.
<i>gaelscoil</i>	A school which teaches pupils through the medium of the Irish language.
<i>gaeltacht</i>	Areas in which Irish ( <i>Gaeilge</i> ) is the predominant language.
glottal stopping	A throat technique traditional flute players use to emphasize and articulate phrases, pulses, or particular note.
hornpipes	‘The typical accented rhythm of the hornpipe as it is danced in Ireland nowadays was not developed until the late 1760s. It has been suggested that the hornpipe dance as we know it was imported here from England stage towards the end of the eighteenth century’ (Brennan 2004:22).
jig	‘Jigs come in three types: single, double, and slip. Single jigs are also called slides’ (Williams 2010:146). Double jigs are in 6/8 time, single jigs in 6/8 or 12/8 time, and slip jigs (and hop jigs) are in 9/8 time. See also slides.
<i>meitheal</i>	Irish for ‘Working together’. This is also the name of a CCÉ outreach programme and summer school.
<i>Na Píobairí Uilleann</i>	Literally means ‘(‘the uilleann pipers’). A body representing and composed of uilleann pipe players’ (Vallely 1999:299).
<i>Oireachtas, An t-</i>	‘Annual competitive, celebratory and social festival run by Conradh na Gaeilge to celebrate the arts among the Irish-speaking community and within the Irish language movement. Begun in 1897, as part of this it promotes competitions in music and song’ (Vallely 1999:279).
ornament	‘A general label applied to specific techniques involved in traditional music performance. Irish traditional music depends largely on individual creativity; thus a single player may never play a given tune in exactly the same way twice... One way in which this individuality and fluidity is maintained is through the use of ornaments, and the process of ornamenting a tune’ (Doherty 1999:290). ‘...the most common forms or ornamentation, being known variously as grace notes, cuts and half rolls within the tradition’ (Keegan 1992:37-8). See also pat, cut, cran, double stopping, roll, and trebling.
pat	‘A form of ornamentation which involves playing the note below the main melody note. Sometimes called ‘tip’’ (Vallely 1999:294).
polka	Generally an upbeat dance in 2/4 time. Within Irish traditional music, polkas are most common in Sliabh Luachra and parts of Connaught.

<i>Raidió na Gaeltachta</i>	RTÉ's Irish language radio station, which transmits Irish traditional music broadcasts more frequently than the other commercial stations.
reels	'Among traditional musicians, the reel is undoubtedly the most popular type of tune. At concerts and particularly sessions, reels far out-number the other dance tunes' (Cranitch 2001:81). Reels are in '4/4 time, with an even emphasis on each beat in the bar. The tempo is fast and this type of tune is probably the commonest to be heard in sessions' (Hamilton 1978:1).
roll	Rolls 'are considered the most important of ornaments amongst flute players in the Irish tradition' (Keegan 1992:38). 'Very like the cran, but employed on other notes, is another common piper's ornament, the roll. The roll usually goes down or dips down to a note lower than the note being ornamented, although this is not essential' (Ó Riada 1982: 43).
<i>Scoil Éigse</i>	CCÉ's week-long traditional music summer school. Held annually the week before the Fleadh Cheoil na Éireann.
<i>Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy</i>	The Willie Clancy Summer School takes place every July in Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare.
<i>sean-nós</i>	'Literally 'old style', refers most often to style of song. Also indicates freer, old style of solo step-dance' (Vallely 1999:336).
slides	'The slide is a tune type associated with the jig family, in particular the single jig. A slide is in effect a fast single jig. It is in 6/8 or 12/8 time and the predominant rhythm involves the alternation of crotchets and quavers creating the feeling of long and short' (Doherty 1999:201).
trebling	A type of bowing ornamentation consisting of a fast triplet 'done so quickly and with so little bow movement that it is barely perceptible in performance: one merely hears the marked rhythmic lift that it gives to the music' (Ó Canainn 1993:94).
<i>uilleann pipes</i>	Bagpipes native to Ireland. Uilleann literally translates to 'elbow'.

## Appendix B

### Interviews and Personal Communications

#### Interviews with Irish traditional musicians:

The table below provides basic information about the twenty traditional musicians who took part in this study. This is for easy reference and the table is organized chronologically from the first interview I conducted to the last. Following this table, I have also provided more written descriptions of each interviewee. This appendix concludes with a list of my personal communications with various organizers, including pub managers, and organizers of summer schools, festivals, and websites.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Instrument(s)</u>	<u>Year of birth</u>	<u>Home County</u>	<u>Interviewed</u> <sup>1</sup>	<u>Duration of interview</u>
Seamus Sands	Fiddle, whistle	1963	Newry, Down	2/2/2010	45 min.
Conal Ó Gráda	Flute, whistle, pipes	1961	Cork City	27/4/2010	34 min.
Cormac De Frein	Flute, whistle, piano	1980	Dún Laoghaire, Dublin	12/5/2010 18/5/2010	15 min. 20 min.
Aoife Granville	Flute, fiddle, whistle, fife, piano (F. horn)	1979	Dingle, Kerry	20/5/2010	30 min.
John Reid	Pipes, whistle	1971	Inch, Clare	26/7/2010	34 min.
Lisa O'Sullivan	Fiddle, whistle	1975	Freemount, Cork	4/8/2010	34 min.
Mick Daly	Guitar, 5-string Banjo, mandolin	1950	Cork City	28/9/2010	35 min.
Michael O'Sullivan	Banjo, whistle, céilí band drums	1978	Freemount, Cork	10/11/2010	30 min.
James Duggan	Fiddle, whistle, flute.	1989	Listowel, Kerry	11/11/2010	65 min.
Ciara Ní Fhearghail	Whistle, button accordion	1991	An Rinn, Waterford	23/11/2010	21 min.
Tomás Ó Canainn	Pipes, whistle, accordion	1930	Derry City	8/12/2010	39 min

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<sup>1</sup> I conducted the majority of my interviews in pubs before traditional music sessions. Other interviews took place in cafés after UCC's traditional music concert series, and two took place in kitchens since it was more convenient for the participants.

### Interviews with Irish traditional musicians, continued:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Instrument(s)</u>	<u>Year of Birth</u>	<u>Home County</u>	<u>Interviewed</u>	<u>Duration of interview</u>
Connie O'Connell	Fiddle	1943	Kilnamartra, Cork	11/1/2011	65 min.
Matt Cranitch	Fiddle, piano	1948	Rathduff, Cork	1/2/2011	43 min.
Martin Hayes	Fiddle, banjo	1962	Maghera, Feakle, Clare	4/2/2011	35 min.
Niall Vallely	Concertina (whistle, pipes, trumpet)	1970	Armagh, Co. Armagh	7/2/2011	57 min
Helen Gubbins	Button accordion, whistle, piano, guitar	1983	Lisnagry, Limerick	17/2/2011	64 min.
Liz Doherty	Fiddle, whistle	1970	Buncrana, Donegal	18/2/2011	48 min.
Hammy Hamilton	Flute, whistle, (guitar, banjo)	1953	Belfast, Antrim	18/3/2011	63 min.
Geraldine O'Callahan	Fiddle, whistle, concertina, piano	1982	Freemount, Cork	3/5/2011 10/5/2011	33 min. 13 min.
Mary Bergin	Whistle, fiddle	1949	Shankill, Dublin	20/5/2011	55 min.

### Further background information about the participating musicians:

**Mary Bergin** (b. 1949) is a tin whistle player from Shankill, Co. Dublin. Born into a musical family, Mary started learning the whistle at the age of nine, and is now acknowledged as one of the most accomplished tin whistle players of her generation. She performed and recorded with the group Dordan, and has released two remarkable solo albums, *Feadóga Stáin* (1979) and *Feadóga Stáin 2* (1993). In 2000, Mary won TG4's Gradam Ceoil award for Musician of the Year. Several years ago, Mary moved to An Spidéal, Co. Galway, where she now teaches locally. Mary has also recently released a tin whistle tutor (see [www.maryberginwhistle.com/tutor.html](http://www.maryberginwhistle.com/tutor.html)).

**Matt Cranitch** (b.1948) is a teacher, author, lecturer, researcher, and fiddle player from Rathduff, Co. Cork. He originally studied and worked as an engineer, but later returned to university to study music in third level. Matt comes from a family active in music-making, in both classical and Irish traditional music. Over the years, Matt has been involved with several music groups, including Na Filí, Sliabh Notes, and Any-old Time. In addition to releasing commercial recordings

with these groups, Matt has also recorded with Jackie Daly, and released a solo album in 1988 entitled *Give it Shtick*. Matt's research focuses on the Sliabh Luachra fiddle tradition (Cranitch 2006), and he has written an exceptional fiddle tutor book (Cranitch 2001). Matt also teaches master classes at various summer music schools and festivals in Ireland and around the world.

**Mick Daly** (b. 1950) is a singer, guitar and banjo player from Cork City. Mick has performed with several Irish traditional music, folk, and old time music groups, including Any Old Time, The Lee Valley String Band, The Mary Black Band, Scullion, and Four Men and a Dog. Mick regularly leads and plays sessions in the Corner House pub.

**Cormac De Frein** (b. 1980) is a flute player from Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin. Cormac originally moved to Cork City to work as an engineer, but retrained and is now working as a secondary school teacher. Cormac leads many sessions in Cork City and is well-known in the area for his powerful, driving flute playing.

**Liz Doherty** (b. 1970) is a fiddle player, lecturer, teacher, and researcher from Buncrana, Co. Donegal. She has recorded and toured with Nomos, Fiddlesticks, the Bumblebees, and Riverdance. Her research interests include the Cape Breton and Nova Scotia fiddle traditions. Liz is currently a lecturer of Irish traditional music at the University of Ulster.

**James Duggan** (b. 1989) is a teacher and fiddle player from Listowel, Co. Kerry. James graduated from University College Cork as a student of English and Irish. James teaches at the Douglas CCÉ branch and enjoys playing in sessions on a regular basis.

**Aoife Granville** is a teacher, researcher, and flute and fiddle player from Dingle, Co. Kerry. Her PhD thesis explores Dingle's wren tradition (Granville 2012). She teaches at several summer schools and workshops throughout the year, and released a solo album in 2006 entitled *Sráid Eoin Shuffle*.

**Helen Gubbins** (b. 1983) is an accordion, whistle, and piano player from Lisnagry, Co. Limerick. She studied music at undergraduate and graduate levels

at University College Cork. She has also toured with various groups, including Five Mile Chase, Owenabue Valley Group, and The Irish Rambling House. In 2010, she released a duet album with Tim Langen, entitled *Boys of 25 and the Connaught Heifers*.

**Hammy Hamilton** (b. 1953) is a teacher, scholar, composer, and flute player from Belfast, Co. Antrim. After moving to the area several decades ago, Hammy now lives and makes flutes in his workshop in Cúil Aodha, Co. Cork. Along with other locals, Hammy helped to establish and organize *Cruinniú na bhFliúit*. In addition to interviewing Hammy about his learning experiences, I also interviewed him about the history, organization, and philosophy of *Cruinniú na bhFliúit*. Hammy Hamilton is also an ethnomusicologist, who has researched Irish traditional music sessions as a socio-cultural phenomenon (Hamilton 1978), and the role of commercial recordings within traditional music culture (Hamilton 1996). He has also produced a comprehensive handbook for traditional flute playing and maintenance (Hamilton 1990), and an instructional DVD is available on Hammy's website, [www.hamiltonflutes.com](http://www.hamiltonflutes.com).<sup>2</sup> Hammy has recorded in a solo capacity (*Money Musk*, 1990), as well with Con O'Driscoll and Seamus Creagh on the 2005 album, *It's No Secret*.

**Martin Hayes** (b. 1962) is fiddle player and teacher from Maghera, Co. Clare. Raised in a musical household near Feakle, Martin is known as one of the most masterful and expressive fiddle players within contemporary Irish traditional music. He currently lives in Connecticut, USA, but often tours Ireland and around the world with guitarist, Dennis Cahill. Martin and Dennis have collaborated on albums, such as *Welcome Here Again* (2008), *Live in Seattle* (1999), and the *Lonesome Touch* (1997). Martin has also released two solo albums, *Martin Hayes* (1993) and *Under the Moon* (1995). Martin won TG4's Gradam Ceoil award for Musician of the Year in 2008. Martin Hayes also teaches many workshops at summer schools, festivals, and other events throughout the year.

**Ciara Ní Fhearghail** (b.1990) is a whistle and button accordion player from An Rinn, Co. Waterford. I met Ciara at the Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, and was

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<sup>2</sup> This website is also a good source of information about Hammy's workshop, flutes, and *Cruinniú na bhFliúit*.



introduced to her by her brother, Caoimhín Ó Fearghail, who I met playing sessions in Cork City. Ciara studied Irish at University College Cork.

**Geraldine O’Callaghan** (b.1982) is a well-respected exponent of the Sliabh Luachra style of fiddle playing from Freemount, Co. Cork, where she learned her music from west Limerick native, Con Herbert. Her style is heavily influenced by the seminal recordings of Pádraig O’ Keeffe, Julia Clifford and Denis Murphy. Further afield, influence was derived from fiddlers such as Kathleen Collins and brothers MacDara and Félim Ó Raghallaigh. Geraldine has a first class honours B.Mus degree from UCC, where she received the Dónal Gleeson award for outstanding performance. She also has a Masters degree in Ethnomusicology from the University of Limerick and is currently undertaking Ph.D. research in the School of Music and Theatre at UCC. Geraldine is a member of two All-Ireland winning Senior Céilí Bands; the Allow Céilí Band (2007) and the Shannon Vale (2011). Also a classically trained pianist, she is well sought after as a teacher on both instruments, appearing annually at summer schools such as Scoil Éigse. She has featured on eight commercial recordings and has appeared on numerous productions with Forefront Productions, RTÉ, TG4 and Raidió na Gaeltachta.

**Connie O’Connell** (b. 1943) is a composer, teacher, and fiddle player from Kilnamatra, Co. Cork. Connie is primarily influenced by Sliabh Luachra musicians, including Pádraig O’Keeffe and Johnny O’Leary. Connie’s solo album released in 2000, *Ceol Cill Na Martra (Music (from Cill na Martra)*, is a wonderful example of Sliabh Luachra fiddle playing.

**Tomás Ó Canainn** (b. 1930) is an author, lecturer, composer, singer, piper, and accordion player originally from Derry. He has taught, played music in lived in Cork for over forty years. In addition to his publications on Irish traditional music and its culture (Ó Canainn 1993), Tomás has written an intriguing memoir about his musical life and travels (Ó Canainn 1996). With a love and passion for the Irish language, Tomás has written three Irish masses which are still regularly performed near his home in Glanmire, Co. Cork. Tomás has also performed and recorded with numerous musical groups over the years, including the Liverpool Céilí Band and Na Filí.

**Conal Ó Gráda** (b. 1961) is a well-known flute player, composer, and teacher from Cork City. His two solo albums, *Top of Coom* (1990) and *Cnoc Buí* (2009), display a strong and distinct style of flute playing. Conal has also recorded and performed with the Raw Bar Collective, alongside Benny McCarthy and Dave Sheridan. Conal helped to establish, organize, and teaches at *Cruinniú na bhFliúit*. Conal has also recently released a useful handbook about traditional flute techniques and style (Ó Gráda 2011).

**Lisa O’Sullivan** is a fiddle player from Freemount, Co. Cork. She works as an artist, educator, and part-time professional musician in the Cork City area. Alongside her brother, Michael O’Sullivan, Lisa is a founding member of the group, the Céilí All-Stars.

**Michael O’Sullivan** is a banjo player from Freemount, Co. Cork. Michael is a founding member and frequently performs with the Céilí All-Stars.

**John Reid** (b. 1970) was born into a well-known musical family in Inch, Co. Clare. Many of John’s family are pipers and dancers. John has lived and worked in Cork for several years as an engineer and professional musician. He currently works on his land and makes uilleann pipes.

**Seamus Sands** (b. 1963) is a fiddle player from Newry, Co. Down. He has lived, raised his family, and worked as an engineer in Cork for more than twenty years. Seamus has recently learned how to make fiddles, apprenticing and working under the tutelage of Jeremie Legrand. Seamus also released an album in 2013 with the flute player Dermot Rafferty entitled *The Green Bunch of Joy: Traditional Music from Armagh and Down*. On a personal note, when I first decided to learn the fiddle, Seamus was extremely encouraging and helpful. On several occasions, Seamus invited me over to his house for tea, food, and to play and learn new fiddle tunes. He provided excellent advice and direction on how to get started learning the fiddle, and recorded many interesting tunes for me to learn at home. His passion for traditional music and fiddle playing is infectious.

**Niall Vallely** (b. 1970) is a concertina player and teacher from Armagh, and is well-known for his innovative and creative work as a musician and composer. He

has a distinct contemporary style, developed from eclectic musical influences. Niall has recorded and toured with his groups, Nomos and Buille, and released a solo album in 1999 entitled, *Beyond Words*.

Personal Communications with pub managers, and organizers of  
summer schools, festivals, and websites:

<u>Organizer:</u>	<u>Event/Organization:</u>	<u>Communication type:</u>	<u>Dates:</u>
Jeremy Keith	<a href="http://www.thesession.org">www.thesession.org</a> , founder and administrator	E-mail communications	2009-2012
John Rynne	Ennis Trad Fest, organizer	E-mail communication	29/11/2010
Barry Cogan	Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann Douglas Branch, <i>Cathaoirleach</i>	Personal interview	21/3/2011
Hammy Hamilton	<i>Cruinniú na bhFliúit</i> founder, organizer, and teacher	Personal interview	18/3/2011
Harry Hughes	Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, administrator and director	e-mail and phone communications	2010-2013
Siobhán Ní Chonaráin	CCÉ Scoil Eigse organizer and education officer	Personal interview and E-mail communications	2011-2013
Fearghal MacGobhann	Corner House pub owner and manager	Personal interview	9/8/2011
Aidan O'Halloran	<i>Sin É</i> , pub manager	Personal interview	08/12/11
Tony Lawless	<a href="http://www.tradconnect.com">www.tradconnect.com</a> , founder and administrator	E-mail communications	2011-2012
Dale Wisely	<a href="http://www.chiffandfipple.com">www.chiffandfipple.com</a> , founder and administrator	E-mail communications	2011-2012

## Appendix C

### Fieldwork Locations and Experiences

This appendix provides some further background information about my various fieldwork experiences. I briefly discuss music-making in Cork City, and my fieldwork experiences in sessions and the Douglas CCÉ branch. I conclude with some details of my internet fieldwork.

**Table 1: Fieldwork Sites**

Fieldwork Sites:	
Sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sin É</i>: Cork City pub with regular weekly sessions on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Friday nights (Apr. 2009 – Dec. 2011).</li> <li>• The Corner House: Cork City pub with regular weekly sessions on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and the first Friday of month (Apr. 2009 – Dec. 2011).</li> <li>• Informal observations at: pub, house, and festival sessions in Cork and throughout Ireland.</li> </ul>
Summer School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willie Clancy Summer School: Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare (July 2010).</li> </ul>
Festivals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Cruinniú na bhFliúit</i> (The Flute Meeting): Ballyvourney, Co. Cork (Apr. 2010).</li> <li>• Ennis Trad Festival: Ennis, Co. Clare (Nov. 2010).</li> <li>• Munster Fleadh: Ballincollig, Co. Cork (July 2011).</li> <li>• Fleadh Cheoil na Éireann, Co. Cavan (Aug. 2011).</li> <li>• Informal observations at the Cork Folk Festival, Baltimore Fiddle Fair, Ballincollig Winter Festival, and Galway Arts Festival (June 2009 – Dec. 2011).</li> </ul>
Weekly Classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann: Douglas Branch, Co. Cork (Mar. – Dec. 2011).</li> </ul>
Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.thesession.org">www.thesession.org</a> (Apr. 2009 – July 2012).</li> <li>• <a href="http://www.tradconnect.com">www.tradconnect.com</a> ( Oct. 2011– July 2012).</li> <li>• Informal observations on: Facebook, YouTube, <a href="http://www.livetrad.com">www.livetrad.com</a>, <a href="http://www.oaim.ie">www.oaim.ie</a>, <a href="http://www.comhaltas.ie">www.comhaltas.ie</a>, <a href="http://www.chiffandfipple.com">www.chiffandfipple.com</a>, and <a href="http://www.mudcat.org">www.mudcat.org</a>.</li> </ul>

## Music in Cork City

Cork City is a vibrant urban area of Ireland with a diverse music scene. Seven nights a week, visitors and locals have opportunities to attend live music gigs and concerts, including jazz, rock, pop, classical, folk, and Irish traditional music. In many local clubs, pubs, and bars, one can also often hear diverse groups playing an eclectic mix of music, or experimenting with fusions of different genres.

The Irish traditional music community in Cork City is vibrant, and numerous concerts and sessions take place on a regular basis. Cork City has also been ‘a centre for excellence in step dancing’ for many decades (Brennan 2004:38). According to my interviewee, Tomás Ó Canainn, instrumental Irish traditional music has grown tremendously since the revival. He states:

Strangely there was very little Irish music in Cork at that time, in 1961 or so. Because I remember after coming away from the vibrant Irish music scene in Liverpool, coming to Cork was a big disappointment, but then gradually we formed a Comhaltas branch and all here and things became very good eventually in Cork (Ó Canainn, interview).

Since the 1960s, Irish traditional music in Cork City has changed significantly, and for the better.

## Sessions

Numerous regular weekly sessions occur in dozens of pubs in the Cork City area. Some pubs host weekly sessions all around the year, such as Sin É, the Corner House, LV, Gables, Charlies, An Bróg, Spailpín Fánach, An Réalt Derg<sup>3</sup>, and the Long Valley. Countless other venues host sessions during the tourist summer season or for special occasions. During my fieldwork, I attended sessions in dozens of establishments, but primarily conducted observations in Sin É and the Corner House.

## **Sin É**

Sin É is a pub located at 8 Coburg Street in Cork City centre, just north of the river Lee. Sin É has hosted weekly pub session for several decades. I interviewed

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<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, An Réalt Derg, formally the Gateway, is now closed. During my fieldwork, I participated and enjoyed many great sessions in this venue, particularly when playing alongside Michael and Lisa O’Sullivan.

Aiden O'Halloran, Sin É's pub manager, about the history of the pub and the relationship between the music and the business (see also Rixon 2009). Aiden has worked in Sin É for more than a decade, and managed the pub for more than five years. Aiden states that his relationship with the music and the pub is a 'labour of love', and that he often hangs out in Sin É when he is not working (O'Halloran, interview). Aiden also sings frequently at Sin É during sessions and on other occasions. Aiden suggests that because the sessions are 'open', Sin É attracts an international mix of visitors and musicians (O'Halloran, interview).

Currently, Sin É hosts regular sessions three nights a week, on Sunday (7-11:30PM), Tuesday (9:30PM-midnight), and Friday nights (7-midnight). The pub employs two or three musicians to stabilize the session, and different musicians host the session depending on the night of the week. Sessions in Sin É can involve anywhere between three and approximately a dozen musicians. Because Sin É is narrow and small, sessions can be quite cramped and crowded.

**Sin É, Coburg Street, Cork City**



**Photograph by author**

Most Tuesdays during my fieldwork, I played sessions in Sin É alongside some of my interviewees, including Seamus Sands and Conal Ó Gráda, as well as several other visiting and local musicians. These sessions were primarily comprised of 'standard' Irish dance tunes, but Conal and Seamus also have more obscure tunes in their repertoire.<sup>4</sup> On occasion, Conal would also play a few of

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<sup>4</sup> Polkas, slides, and marches were also commonly played during this Tuesday session. Around the world, reels and jigs are the 'standard' tunes played in sessions. Seamus learned many

his own compositions along with Seamus.<sup>5</sup>

I also attended sessions in Sin É on Fridays and Sundays. These sessions usually had different musical leaders. In my experience, Friday evening sessions in Sin É are generally dominated by jigs and reels.<sup>6</sup> It is much more likely to hear songs and hornpipes played in Sin É on a Tuesday, rather than a Friday. In Sin É, the repertoire on Sundays is generally much more varied. Although Irish traditional music dominated the evening, it would not be uncommon to also hear old-time, bluegrass, Scottish, or other folk music (depending on which musicians showed up to the session).

In my own learning experiences in Sin É, the Tuesday evening sessions were perhaps the best opportunity to learn new tunes; Seamus and Conal are very encouraging and welcoming session leaders, and the pub is usually much quieter on Tuesday nights. Friday and Sunday evenings in Sin É are often quite cramped, loud, and rowdy as the pub fills with musicians and drinkers. On Tuesday evenings, while there usually is a good crowd of listeners, most of the patrons either listened politely or talk quietly in darkened corners of the pub.

### **Corner House**

Also located on Coburg Street, the Corner House pub has hosted regular Irish traditional music sessions for nearly twenty years. Fearghal MacGobhann bought the pub in 1994, and the Corner House has been a family run establishment ever since. Music has played an important role in the pub right from the beginning. Before buying the Corner House, Fearghal co-owned and ran the Spailpín Fánach in the late 1980s and early 90s.<sup>7</sup> In opening the Spailpín Fánach and the Corner House, Fearghal aimed to establish a ‘county pub’ in the city centre. Fearghal

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marches from playing sessions and with other musicians in Ulster. Seamus has also lived in Co. Cork for more than twenty years, and has absorbed much of the local repertoire of polkas and slides. Conal is well-known for his playing of polkas and slides, and commonly starts sets of these tune types.

<sup>5</sup> In order to be inclusive of the other musicians, Seamus and Conal usually only played a couple sets of more obscure or original tunes throughout the night. After hearing Conal’s newly composed tunes each week, Seamus eventually learned these compositions and played along with Conal in the session. Most of the other musicians would just listening during the more obscure tunes.

<sup>6</sup> Polkas and slides are also commonly played in Sin É, depending on who is leading and playing in the session.

<sup>7</sup> After Fearghal sold the Spailpín Fánach, the new owners retained the pub as a venue for Irish traditional music sessions. The Spailpín is another pub in Cork City with a long history of music-making, and remains a popular place for traditional musicians to play tunes.

believes that focusing on music helped to establish this type of atmosphere in his pub (MacGobhann, interview). Although Fearghal is a businessman, he is also an enthusiast of Irish traditional music. Fearghal grew up listening to music in County Sligo, and he discusses his reasons for hosting music in his pub so frequently throughout the years:

I get entertained by some of the best I've known and I've been subjected to some great music... I suppose at the end of the day we are a business, but from my perspective, I decided to take a shot working for myself principally because pub trade never gave great pay or decent working conditions. So I found myself compelled to create my own perfect working environment, and a huge facet of that is being entertained while I'm at work by great music and great people. And fortunately, there are enough people around who enjoy the same kind of atmosphere to make it work (MacGobhann, interview).

The Corner House is a very popular venue amongst Irish traditional musicians living in Cork City. Several of my interviewees, including Mick Daly, Matt Cranitch and Geraldine O'Callaghan, have played in the Corner House for many years. Niall Vallely and Liz Doherty also played in the Corner House many nights, particularly during their time as UCC students. The pub was so influential that Niall Vallely named one of his original composition – Coburg Street Nights – after the Corner House.<sup>8</sup>

**The Corner House, Coburg Street, Cork City**



**Photograph by author**

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<sup>8</sup> Available on the album, *Buille 2* (2009).



The Corner house hosts traditional music sessions every Tuesday and Wednesday evening from 9:30-midnight, and every first Friday of the month from approximately 5:30-8:30PM. Fearghal suggests that the first Friday session is particular popular amongst musical families, since children and young teens are no longer allowed in pubs after 9PM (MacGobhann, interview). In addition to Irish traditional music, the pub also hosts other live music events, including blues, old-time, and bluegrass music.

Fearghal employs three traditional musicians to lead the sessions on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday nights. Aidan Coffey, Mick Daly and Geraldine O'Callaghan lead the Tuesday session, while Johnny McCarthy, Con Fada Ó Drisceoil, and Pat Ahern (members of the Four Star Trio) lead the Wednesday night session. Con and Pat also lead the first Friday sessions along with Matt Cranitch. Sliabh Luachra repertoire is often played in the Corner House, particularly on Fridays. The Corner House is more spacious than Sin É, and the first Friday sessions can host upwards to twenty traditional musicians. The first Friday sessions are particularly lively, and often comprised of more the a dozen musicians (mostly fiddle, banjo, and accordion players).

### Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann - Douglas Branch (Craobh na Dúglaise)

In 1997, a group of families established a CCÉ branch in Douglas. Aislinn and Barry Cogan are the founding members, as well as volunteers and organizers.<sup>9</sup> In Gaelscoil na Dúglaise (An tAthair Tadhg Ó Murchú)<sup>10</sup>, the Douglas CCÉ branch holds sessions and weekly classes in tin whistle, flute, fiddle, accordion, concertina, banjo, mandolin, bodhrán, harp, piano, singing, drums, céilí band, and grupa Cheoil. The branch provides a variety of activities for children, teens, and adults alike. Some members participate in more formal activities, including preparing for CCÉ's competitions and *Scrúdu Ceol Tíre* (S.C.T.) exams. The branch also encourages and hosts informal music-making, such as concerts, sessions, and céilithe.

During my fieldwork, I enrolled in an adult fiddle class, and learned several tunes through a combination of aural and visual learning. In class, my *modus operandi* was primarily to observe and listen to the teacher. Since I was

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<sup>9</sup> Barry is the current, while Aislinn was the branch's first Cathaoirleach.

<sup>10</sup> This is a *Gaelscoil* (an Irish language-medium school) in Douglas, Co. Cork.

already familiar with Irish traditional music and many of the tunes taught in class, I took the opportunity to observe basic fiddle techniques, such as how to hold the bow correctly and how to execute cuts. At the end of class, using my iPhone I recorded the teacher playing the tune in order to practice at home. I also purchased the CCÉ tune book, *Seinn Port 112 Great Session Tunes* (Kearney n.d.), used by many of the Douglas CCÉ members. (This is not the regular CCÉ tune book, *Foinn Seisiún*, but a local publication). In my fiddle class, we learned approximately one tune a week and I generally used the book as a reminder of which tunes to practice. While I referenced the book often, I primarily learned and practiced aurally. Other students used the book during class in order to learn the tune the teacher demonstrated.

### Internet Field Research

As part of fieldwork, I often browsed the various topics posted on [www.thesession.org](http://www.thesession.org). I also created my own forums where people were free to post their opinions about my various research questions. Every discussion board started with a brief introduction of myself and research interest. I also explicitly stated my intentions to use the statements as a part of my PhD research. These forums were intended to be informal discussions, and people were welcome to contribute as much or as little as desired. As a result of these discussion boards, several members e-mailed me directly in order to volunteer more elongated, private answers. These discussion boards provided useful background information about the types of learning activities that occur on [thesession](http://www.thesession.org). I also gained first-hand experience about the style of discourses that occur on [thesession](http://www.thesession.org)'s discussion boards.

## Discussion boards on [www.thesession.org](http://www.thesession.org)

### Discussion Board #1 - *General questions about members' experiences*

Original post by researcher: 22 May 2009

Discussed until: 26 May 2009

- What do you get out of websites like [www.thesession.org](http://www.thesession.org)?
- What is your favourite feature of this website?
- Do you consider the internet a primary source of learning? Why or why not?
- Besides the internet, what method do you use most often while learning Irish traditional music?

Total Responses: 14

Total Responses Analysed: 14

### Discussion Board #2 – *Questions of 'community'*

Original post by researcher: 21 April 2011

Discussed until: 24 April 2011

- Do you consider [www.thesession.org](http://www.thesession.org) a 'community'? Why or why not?

Total Responses: 164

Total Responses Analysed: 70<sup>11</sup>

### Discussion Board #3 – *Benefits and limitations of using [www.thesession.org](http://www.thesession.org) as an educational tool*

Original post by researcher: 1 August 2011

Discussed until: 4 August 2011

- In your personal experience and opinion, what are the educational benefits of [www.thesession.org](http://www.thesession.org)?
- What (if any) are some problems you have encountered while trying to learn Irish traditional music online?

Total Responses: 88

Total Responses Analysed: 63<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Only some of the comments were usable for analysis; Of the 164 total responses, 15 of the posts were my own responses, 15 comments were excluded because members indicated that they did not want their comments used in the study. Additionally, 64 comments did not refer to the original topic. Ultimately, while this was an interesting part of my field research on [thesession](http://www.thesession.org), I determined that this area of research was slightly beyond the scope this thesis.

<sup>12</sup> Of the 88 total responses, 5 responses were my own posts and 20 statements were not related to the original post.

## Appendix D

### Interview Questions

The italics below indicate the primary questions asked to all interviewees. The twenty interviewees were encouraged and allowed to discuss matters at length without interruption. Back-up questions (which I have listed below in parentheses) were asked if the interviewees needed clarification or sought more detail. In my experience, these auxiliary questions were often not necessary; interviewees often responded to my primary questions in such detail that the back-up questions were superfluous. This questionnaire was not given to interviewees before, during, or after our meetings; rather I carried a copy along with me in order to keep myself focused and to help to guide the conversation. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed at a later time.

#### **General questions of individual learning experiences:**

- *In general, what do you consider the greatest influences to your musicianship?* (How have these experiences/relationships/influences helped your ability to play music?)
- *When did you begin start learning your first instrument?* (What was the process? Prior to this, had you much exposure to Irish traditional music? How did you first get interested in traditional music?)

#### **Musicality:**

- *Who are some of your favourite traditional musicians? What makes these players stand out from others?* (Are there skills are very exceptional? How is it possible to learn or develop these skills? Do you model your own playing around these skills? What does it mean to be ‘musical’ within traditional Irish music?)

#### **Specifics about learning processes:**

- *In which way, or ways, did you learn your first tunes?* (Do you still learn in this way? Why do you enjoy this method/find it effective? Are there any other sources for your tunes?)
- *In which way, or ways, did you develop you playing technique?* (How did

you learn to physically play the music? Do you still do this to progress your playing ability?)

- *How did you develop other important elements like ornamentation? How about style?*

### **Exploring opinions:**

- *Do you think there is a 'traditional' way of learning Irish music? (Are their ways of learning that do not transmit 'the tradition' well?)*
- *In your opinion are there some processes required in order to understand and play traditional music? Is there anything required in order to become a traditional musician? (Clarification: Other cultures have rules or procedures about becoming a musician).*
- *Do you think it is important to know about the music you are playing? (Clarification: which county it came from, who if anyone composed it, history behind the name, etc).*
- *Would you say you have learned Irish music in a disciplined or organized way? (Do you practice regularly at home? Why or why not?)*
- *Do you find Irish music difficult to learn? (If yes, what is difficult? Are there strategies to learn this?)*

### **Other questions<sup>13</sup>:**

- *Have you ever taken music lessons? (If so, for how long? Did you find them useful? Why did you stop?)*
- *Has notation played a role in your musical development? (If so, How?)*
- *Was Irish traditional music taught in your school? (If, so elaborate).*
- *Have festivals played a role in your musical development?*
- *What are your thoughts on learning in sessions? (Have you ever attended specifically in order to learn? What is learned in sessions? Does playing in sessions affect you playing?)*

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<sup>13</sup> Many of these questions were not necessary to ask during the interview, as these precise issues emerged naturally within the interviewees' responses to my initial questions above.

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