

BOOK REVIEWS

The Musical Traditions of Northern Ireland and Its Diaspora. David Cooper. 2009. Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate. xv, 202pp, black and white illustrations, musical examples, tables, bibliography, index. Cloth, and paper.

The Irishness of Irish Music. John O'Flynn. 2009. Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate. xv, 256 pp, black and white illustrations, figures, tables, bibliography, select discography, filmography, index. Cloth.

BY ANDREA HARRIS AND KALEY MASON

Scholarly interest in the music of Ireland grew significantly from the early 1990s through the first decade of the New Millennium. This expansion of music scholarship paralleled wider cultural, political and economic changes, including the emergence of Celtic music as a prominent subgenre of world music: a robust period of economic growth in the Republic of Ireland (the Celtic Tiger); and the landmark 1998 Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in Northern Ireland, which established a power-sharing arrangement between Protestant and Catholic political parties and de-escalated the sectarian violence known as the “troubles.” It is against this historical backdrop that we believe research on music unfolded along two main lines of inquiry. While some scholars examined Irish intersections with modern Celtic imaginaries and global markets (Stokes and Bohlman 2003), others focused more specifically on the social contexts, creative practices, individual lives, repertoires, and histories

of Irish traditional music (Feldman 2002; Hast and Scott 2004; O’Shea 2008). In 2009, however, Ashgate published two monographs that altered the contours of the discourse: one by bringing Northern Irish musicians to the fore and one by addressing popular music. David Cooper’s *The Musical Traditions of Northern Ireland and its Diaspora* considers the impact of “the troubles” on dominant histories of Irish music, while John O’Flynn’s *The Irishness of Irish Music* examines musical meaning across traditional, classical, and popular music scenes in the Republic of Ireland. The timing of these publications and their complementary contributions to the field make them ideal to review together.

Officially part of the United Kingdom but sharing land, history and culture with the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland has been the site of violent ethno-religious conflict through most of the 20th century. During this period, musical practices that were previously part of a shared musical heritage were regularly mobilized as a vehicle for territorial expression (Radford 2001). David Cooper invites us to move beyond the frequently assumed binary of “aboriginal Catholic Gaelic-speaking Celts” versus “planted Protestant Anglophone Anglo-Saxons” in music scholarship (10), questioning the ways musical forms have been deployed to mark ethno-religious boundaries. He begins by sketching a broad history of the region, from Ptolemy’s *Geographia* to the 2007 restoration of the 1998 Belfast Agreement, followed by a discussion of the secular and sacred sources of musical traditions, including a substantial section

on the region's mixed linguistic heritage in which he analyses the poetic structure of Irish Gaelic poetry. He then describes musical forms, instruments, and practices in Chapter 3, before bringing the life histories and collections of several key song and tune collectors from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries into focus in Chapter 4. In the final chapter, Cooper shifts his gaze to the music of the Northern Irish Diaspora in North America, drawing on immigration records and pointing to stylistic evidence of Ulster-Scots contributions to bluegrass and country music. Incorporating frequent transcriptions, ballad texts, and tables, Cooper's work is firmly grounded in the music itself. In asking to whom traditional music in Northern Ireland belongs, he opens up a discursive space that has long existed in practice, arguing that it is the very heterogeneity of expressive culture that makes the music of the region so rich.

O'Flynn, on the other hand, is less interested in the question of "whose music?" and more concerned with what people think Irish music consists of. In the first two chapters, he reviews the current state of scholarship, highlighting theoretical frameworks that have been used to conceptualize Irish music. He then examines institutional attitudes toward music in the Republic, pointing out how opera is generously supported while "traditional arts" receive significantly less government funding, and popular musics are conspicuously absent from cultural policy concerns altogether (47). These discussions set up his exploration of what Irish *listeners* perceive to be Irish: Is it style, genre, nationality? Chapter 4 introduces the empirically-grounded

approach that characterizes the rest of the book, which is based primarily on interviews he conducted between 1999 and 2001 at various traditional, popular and classical music venues. He notes that many of the themes for Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 "emerge from issues raised by the interview respondents themselves" (20), including nationalism, societal changes, perceptions of stylistic features in the music, and cultural authenticity.

It should be clear from these summaries that Cooper and O'Flynn share a common concern with issues of identity and music. Both scholars confront the problem of cultural essentialism, and both problematize ethnicity as a primary category of difference informing how people situate themselves in relation to Others musically. Neither author views music simplistically as a vehicle for *a priori* ethnic affiliations; rather they situate music as one expressive tool among many that individuals and collectivities mobilize to perform particular kinds of identity work in response to historically specific circumstances. In Northern Ireland, the use of music to ethnicize and reinforce group boundaries resulted in distorted and in some cases false interpretations of the origins of musical traditions. Written out of history were people who cultivated regionally specific musical practices together, irrespective of ethno-religious group membership. Cooper argues for historical intervention grounded in textual sources, material evidence, and contemporary musical practice to redress this problem. For example, in Chapter 3, he points to how the recordings of the late Ulster ballad singer, Robert Cinnamond, provide evidence (tessitura and mixolydian modal-

ity) of heterogeneous as opposed to ethnic musical origins. Further, he contends that Cinnamond's "religious affiliation and cultural background cannot be determined from his repertoire, and this is a characteristic that is shared by many Ulster traditional singers" (124).

Complementing Cooper's critique of Irish musical essentialism, O'Flynn confronts ideologies of cultural nationalism and the power to include or exclude creative agents on the basis of how they measure up to hierarchies of value. Focusing on the politics of authenticity in discursive constructions of Irish music, he aims to show how cultural authorities exercise disproportionate influence over the production and circulation of ethnicized (i.e., Irish) representations of music. He shows how musical identities are constructed at multiple sites of contest, from state-sponsored competitions, festivals, and classrooms, to pubs, concert halls, popular media, and music retail outlets. Pointing out the discrepancies between common perceptions of ethnicity in music and the listening and performing activities he observed in practice, he demonstrates how dominant, institutionalized views of racialized music gained wide currency. For example, in the education arena he describes a two-tiered system in which "traditional music and classical music are valued... on broad educational and artistic/cultural grounds" while popular music "is generally not accommodated in conceptions and configurations of arts education" (55), despite the overwhelming relevance of popular music genres in social life (57). However, O'Flynn also shows how alternative voices question the conflation of conservative definitions

of traditional music with the notion of an "Irish soul," thereby balancing a critique of hegemonic practices with the lived experience of musicians, journalists, and listeners (103-112). The work of ethnicizing musical identities is thus not limited to groups or institutions: individuals also have the potential to reinforce or challenge conventional wisdom on what constitutes an indigenous musical act in Ireland.

Indeed, both authors incorporate individual points of view. For example, O'Flynn writes in a dialogic mode that registers his own participation in a lively interplay of voices. Yet despite this multi-vocal strategy, we found ourselves wanting to know more about the author and the people he interviewed, how they position themselves and how Others create identities for them. We feel he could have captured the personal dimension of ethnographic fieldwork with more compelling accounts of creative agency, life stories, and social relationships (Hutchinson 1994). Cooper, by contrast, writes in an openly reflexive vein about his Protestant Northern Irish background (2-4). His combination of biography and reflexivity is persuasive, for instance, when he records his aunt's (Ray Weir's) version of her father's (James Perry's) life story; the portrait reveals an ordinary musician who participated in a shared culture of traditional music before ethno-religious divisions became increasingly polarized (76-77). On the other hand, and unlike O'Flynn, Cooper does not describe or discuss the active participation of women in musical life, accounts which might have complicated or supported his argument in interesting ways. Moreover, neither author includes voices from be-

yond the pale of Gaelic and Anglo-Saxon whiteness, despite the arrival and transit of many people from other regions of Europe and the world since the early 1990s. How would a wider range of situated subjectivities trouble or strengthen their claims about the work music genres do?

For both authors, genre categories play an active role in establishing a sense of stability for Irish musical identities in an increasingly mobile world. O'Flynn explores the social construction of "Irishness" across genres while Cooper zeroes in on how musical categories have been used to reinforce the sectarian divide. O'Flynn blurs the boundaries between popular, traditional, and classical musics, and in the process brings other genres, including country, pop/dance, rock, and hip-hop (88), into the discourse. Also blurring genre lines, Cooper demonstrates how collections, styles, and even songs that have long been considered sectarian are actually closely related and even sometimes drawn from the same sources (53). For example, he notes, "Paradoxically, Loyalist and Republican flute bands may seem almost indistinguishable (in performance style if not repertoire) at their opposite political extremes" (91). In addition to fife and flute bands, Cooper discusses piping and fiddling traditions in Northern Ireland as well as how Nationalist melodies found their way into Loyalist songs, giving the example of the melody for "Erin Go Bragh" [Ireland Forever] in the Orange song, "The Relief of the City" (56-57). Both authors question the influence of binaries on the classification of musical experience by showing how musicians make creative choices that both under-

mine and underline genre distinctions that separate classical from traditional (O'Flynn 2009:94-99), or Protestant Anglo-Irish from Catholic Gaelic. Going further, Cooper unsettles the very rootedness of musical categories in Northern Ireland by pointing to cross-migrations of Gaelic-speaking Presbyterian Scots to underscore the historical and contemporary importance of movements of people in the genealogy of any musical tradition (12).

In fact both books open new vistas for research on the interrelatedness of identities, genres, and movement. Their impact on the field comes at a time when Europe is struggling to come to terms with fluid, blocked, and coerced mobilities. Immigrants, migrant workers, refugees, traveling people, foreign students, and tourists – all of these actors bring racial imaginations to bear on how music genres are socially constructed and understood, as well as how they can be used for political gain. Meanwhile, Ireland faces formidable challenges to its sovereignty and quality of life in the aftermath of the global economic crash. Offering critical insights from historical and sociological vantage points, Cooper and O'Flynn give us important frames of reference to grasp the significance of these contemporary dynamics for Irish music studies. To close, we recommend these books to readers with some knowledge of historical contexts and musical styles in Ireland, for they go beyond introductions to build on previous scholarship in an ongoing effervescent conversation about music and music-makers of Ireland. 🍀

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Steps in Time: The History of Irish Dance in Chicago. Kathleen M. Flanagan. 2009. Madison, Wisconsin: Macater Press, 2009. 144pp, black and white photographs, notes, index. Paper.

BY KRISTIN HARRIS WALSH

Ever since *Riverdance* burst onto the global stage in the 1990s, there has been an explosion of Irish dance performance worldwide. Ten to fifteen years later, the

same can be said for scholarly treatises on Irish dance. Although writing about Irish dance has a long history, it is likely that, just as *Riverdance* made Irish dance popular to watch and perform, its success spurred interest in writing about Irish dance as well. One of the latest voices is that of American dancer and multidisciplinary scholar, Kathleen Flanagan.

Flanagan started earning her Irish dance chops during her childhood in Chicago, eventually becoming an Irish dance teacher registered with the prestigious Irish Dancing Commission in Ireland, the preeminent institution for competitive Irish dance worldwide. As she notes in her preface, her lifelong love for dance and her academic interests merged beginning in 1992, shortly before the *Riverdance* phenomenon. The result is *Steps in Time*, which encompasses a broad sweep of historical data from the late 19th century until today.

The book is divided into five chapters, each of which denoting an historical time period while also engaging in a thematic approach to the chronology. Chapters 1 and 2, "First Steps: The Formation of Irish Dancing Clubs and Schools, 1893-1909" and "Keeping Time: Early Performances, Competitions, and Feiseanna, 1910-1929" respectively, focus on the early days of Irish dance in Chicago and the various factors contributing to its development. Chapter 3, "Step About: Chicago Promotes National Connections, 1930-1952" and Chapter 4, "New Steps: Expanding the Boundaries, 1953-1989," explore the relationship that Irish dance in Chicago forged in relation both to the USA as a whole and to Ireland and abroad.

Flanagan deftly weaves together the