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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

foundation of the Gaelic League in Ireland with the staging of the Chicago World's Fair as concomitant events that paved the way for Irish dance to flourish in Chicago. Moreover, the combination of new immigrants and visiting Irish performers meant that there was a constant influx of new influences from Ireland alongside Americanized hybrid creations. Flanagan paints a familiar portrait of an immigrant population that grapples both with what it left behind and how those traditions can be made meaningful in a new place. Particularly poignant are her descriptions of immigrants' strong desires to pass those traditions along to their children in the hopes that they would retain a "genuine" part of their heritage by continuing to engage in music and dance traditions of earlier generations.

That dancing in Irish clubs would give way to more formalized *feiseanna* (competitions) throughout the United States as it did in Ireland should come as no surprise given the strident nationalistic feelings declared by many Irish immigrants in the diaspora. As Flanagan notes throughout the book, Irish dance drew heavily upon its nationalist roots in both the homeland and the diaspora until the advent of *Riverdance*, which Flanagan asserts was the point at which dance shifted from being a source of ethnic pride to an innovative art form in its own right. It is evident, from the arguments presented in these first four chapters, that continuing tradition in an "authentic" way (no stage Irish, please) was key to many of those who promoted Irish dance in Chicago, through myriad groups and events, large and small, formal and informal, that were key to sustaining and expanding Irish dance practice in these early years. By painstakingly de-

tailoring the people and events that helped to shape the Irish dance scene in Chicago, Flanagan frames its growth as part organic, part constructed, illustrating the many layers of identity that paved the way for *Riverdance* and its contemporaries.

The final chapter, "Staging New Traditions: Beyond Competition," takes us to the kind of Irish dance that most non-dancers are familiar with. Flanagan focuses on Michael Flatley, the original star of *Riverdance* and a native of Chicago (something that may come as a surprise to audience members outside the Irish dance world). In so doing, she taps into part of Irish dance's common and contemporary mythology. Although many scholarly articles have been written about the *Riverdance* phenomenon, Flanagan's decision to focus on Flatley himself, alongside Chicago's Trinity Dance Company, departs nicely from the usual discourse on contemporary Irish dance and provides a fresh angle on the struggle between tradition and innovation through the contemporizing of Irish dance and music in the late 20th century. This chapter brings full circle the significance of Chicago in the continuing narrative of Irish dance in the diaspora.

Flanagan's book is dotted with archival photos and documents: *feis* advertisements, Irish club logos, performance programs, event posters. The reproduction of these primary documents enhances the text by effectively bringing to life the people, organizations and events that are so carefully documented throughout this history. Furthermore, the two appendices — one a very brief overview of Irish dance in Ireland; the other a history of Irish dance costumes in Chicago — assist in providing additional context to those who may be new to the subject matter.

Although it is a slim volume, it is similar in size, scope, and layout to the other books in Macater's series on Irish Dance Studies – this is the fourth in the series. *Steps in Time* provides the reader with a comprehensive exploration of Irish dance in Chicago, contextualizing it within the broader world of performance and competitive Irish dance. Through this case study, Flanagan manages to illustrate the proliferation of Irishness outside of Ireland, and all its resultant nationalist, religious and cultural complications. There is not a lot in terms of deconstructing such problematic concepts as authenticity and tradition, but the book provides some perspective on how the people involved lived and embodied these concepts in a particular time and space. This book will be of great use to scholars interested not only in Irish dance, but also on diasporic studies, ethnochoreology, and American studies. To the initiate, it will provide broad strokes on the cultural significance of Irish dance; to the expert, it provides a thorough chronology of the development of Irish dance in Chicago, further cementing the importance of the diaspora in this dynamic art form. 🍀

Musical Gestures: Sound, Movement, and Meaning. Rolf Inge Godøy and Marc Leman, eds. 2010. New York: Routledge. xi, 320pp, contributors, index. Paper.

BY ARNIE COX

This collection of essays joins the recent swell of interest in the bodily basis of musical meaning. While the focus is on Western art music traditions, it of-

fers information and perspectives that may be useful for ethnomusicologists. One impetus for this collection is the editors' desire for an alternative to the largely disembodied approach to musical meaning that historically has dominated Western music theory, which commonly takes it as incidental that most music is produced by physical movements and comprehended by embodied humans. This tradition continues in part because it is not a simple matter to show precisely how embodiment matters for musical meaning. The empirical evidence discussed in this volume, particularly in the editors' contributions, helps make this connection plain, and a theory of gesture offers one way of dispelling the disembodied illusion.

The first step is to define what a musical gesture is. Basically, musical gestures are human movements that are relevant to the production and comprehension of music, including those that do not necessarily contribute directly to the sound (such as facial gestures), and including responses that go beyond auditory processing proper (such as dancing to music). Ethnomusicologists might not be especially interested in the detailed definitions and typologies offered in Part I (Chapters 1-4), but these help make the theory more explicit and robust.

The next step would be to offer a theory of how gestures are meaningful, first generally and then in the context of music, as seen to some extent in Part II (Chapters 5-7). The basic idea here is that part of how we comprehend the observed gestures of others is by imitating them, either overtly (*monkey see, monkey do*) or covertly (*monkey see, monkey imagine-do*). For me this is the most