



MONASH University

Musical style in uilleann piping: a study of possibility
and meaning

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the concept of musical style as it pertains to the tradition of the uilleann pipes (Irish bagpipes). In discussing and understanding their practice and that of others, uilleann pipers draw on the concept of style in a variety of ways which range from taxonomic classification to impressionistic description. Many of these appear vague, if not contradictory, to those unfamiliar with the tradition. While there is substantial overlap between the concept of style in uilleann piping and the broader field of Irish traditional music, the practice and community of uilleann piping presents some intriguing points of difference. This research investigates these correspondences and tensions and their role in shaping practice and discourse amongst uilleann pipers.

The thesis is centred around five case studies of prominent contemporary uilleann pipers, derived from semi-structured ethnographic interviews and musical analysis of selections from their recorded output. It also draws on relevant theories from a wide variety of literature from the fields of ethnomusicology, musicology, anthropology, and cultural studies to contextualise and further examine these findings. While their musical practices cover a wide range of approaches to the instrument, the way in which these pipers speak about and understand musical style establish a nuanced and sophisticated discourse around the concept. The understanding of musical style which emerges is one which cannot be confined to a purely sonic or musicological realm. Rather, it exists between musicians, instruments, communities, identities, geographies, and histories. In doing so, musical style facilitates negotiation between these seemingly disparate realities and expression of otherwise intangible affects and experiences. It allows uilleann pipers to assert individual agency against constraining external forces, while simultaneously situating them as a part of a broader context which provides meaning to their actions.

Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Matthew Scott Horsley

9 November 2021

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This thesis was written on Indigenous land, primarily the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation and the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. Sovereignty was never ceded and it remains, as it always was, Aboriginal land. I acknowledge their Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to any First Nations people reading this.

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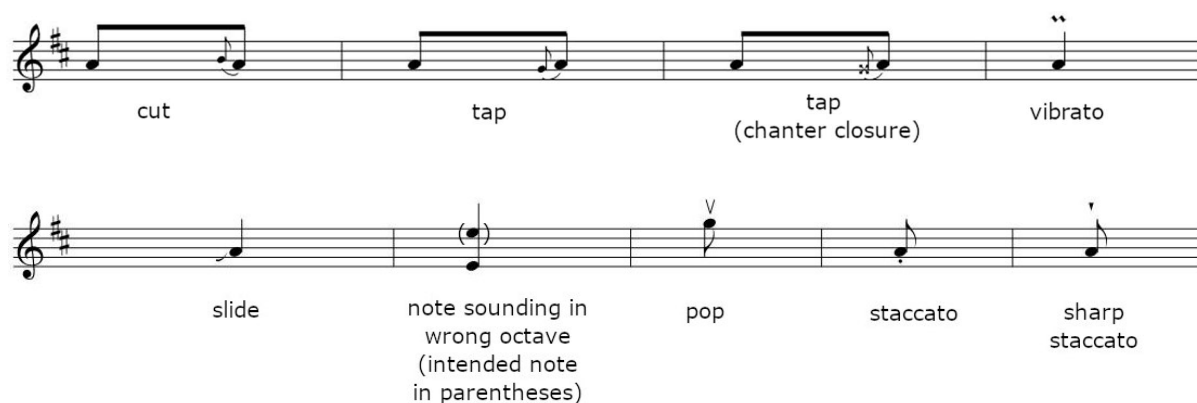
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Legend for transcriptions



- For descriptions of the above, refer to Appendix A, section C (p. 190).
- Other methods have been used to depict microtonality and microrhythm where appropriate, so staff notation should be treated as an approximation in these regards.
- Legato is presumed unless indicated otherwise.
- The two degrees of staccato noted above apply between the marked note and the following note. Where appropriate, conventional rests have also been used for long chanter closures.
- Regulators have only been transcribed in sections where their use is relevant to the discussion.
- Slow airs have been notated without metre, with durations rendered proportionally and bar lines corresponding to phrasing.
- Pitch graphs without attribution are derived from recordings of the author's playing.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

A. An introduction to musical style

In 2014 I travelled to Ireland to further my study of the uilleann pipes with Mikie Smyth. Mikie's profound generosity, patience, and musical insight ensured that the experience was of immeasurable value. Upon my return to Australia, I sometimes found myself asked what the most valuable thing I had learned in Ireland was. I found it a difficult question, not because I was unsure of the answer but because I felt the answer was laughable. As it happened, I was quite certain that the single most valuable lesson I learned was not even one that Mikie had taught me.

From the very beginning of our contact, Mikie had strongly encouraged me to complement his tuition with a wider range of musical experiences. As a result I planned a number of short trips to experience traditional music around the country and enrolled in two summer schools, the Scoil Samhradh Willie Clancy and the Scoil Acla. It was at the second of these that I found myself in a repurposed schoolroom on Achill Island in West Mayo with the renowned piper Mick O'Brien. The thunderbolt struck when Mick showed me a different way to play two consecutive back Ds.

The back D is so called because it is sounded by lifting the thumb from its hole on the back of the chanter. It is a note that is generally considered to possess limited opportunities for expression. The hole's position as the uppermost on the chanter renders the idiomatic grace note techniques of cutting and tapping impossible. Without these options for articulation, playing two consecutive back Ds necessitates closing all of the chanter's holes to produce a silence between them. In this case, and in similar passages in other tunes, I had been rapidly swiping the thumb across the hole, making contact only briefly and thereby generating two full length Ds with the briefest possible separation between them. After I had played a particular phrase, Mick indicated I should approach the gesture differently, cutting the first note short and then holding the second for its full duration. The difference was immense. A slight rhythmic hiccup that propelled the music forward. A momentarily delayed gratification; the first note choked off before the listener can properly luxuriate in it, then the second allowed to ring out in resolution. A sound that seemed to carry the musical DNA of the pipers of yesteryear. A simple flick of the thumb that elevated the mundane to the transcendent that day on Achill.

Furthermore, as I discovered practising back at my hostel, it was multi-purpose. Practically any two consecutive Ds in any tune could benefit from the same treatment. I also experimented with how dramatically the first note was shortened, from a subtle elegant colouring to a sudden ear-catching jolt. Not only that, a similar gesture could be applied to other repeated notes. Even considering the greater variety of possibilities on those notes, it was still a very welcome addition to the arsenal.

Two Ds. But how could I describe that as the most important thing that I learnt? Could there not have been some profound philosophical insight or some spiritual epiphany that I could relate? Were the secrets of the Irish tradition really so banal and mechanical? And had I really travelled to the other side of the world (at the Australian government's expense no less) just to be told that I could sometimes play one note a little shorter? So I brushed the uncomfortable question aside, wondering to myself if there was perhaps a deeper lesson hiding behind the two Ds.

I have not spoken about this experience often but I am convinced it would resonate with other Irish traditional musicians. Perhaps they remembered learning similar gestures on their instruments and the effect that they had. They would certainly be familiar with the immense effect that such a minute musical decision could have. If I played them the two different versions of the passage, I feel that they would say Mick's approach was better; 'more musical', 'more colourful', 'more piperly', 'more Irish'.

When such musical devices are discussed by musicians, the term 'style' is often invoked. Style is a concept of vital and immediate importance to Irish traditional musicians. Smith (1997, 434) describes it as 'the most important category for informed listening of players and aficionados of Irish dance music', while Sommers Smith (1997, 121) contends that 'it is often not the tune itself that is of interest, but rather the style through which the player makes the music personal and immediate'. In this case, one gesture was stylistically preferable to the other. For a beginner, even more important than learning the vast repertoire of traditional tunes is learning to play with the correct (or perhaps *a* correct) style. To play an Irish tune from notation, as classically trained musicians sometimes attempt, but with no understanding of style may not even qualify as Irish traditional music for the knowledgeable listener. Style can also attract an indirect article, as one style amongst many; the piper Séamus Ennis had a style, East Clare has a style.

There have been numerous attempts to define this flexible and often amorphous concept of musical style from a wide variety of perspectives. This will be explored further in the following chapters. For now, let us bear just one in mind, from the first research to focus exclusively on the concept of style in Irish traditional music: 'style is the composite form of the distinctive features that identify an individual's musical performance' (McCullough 1977, 97). Whether or not this definition is entirely satisfactory, it is sufficient to enter into a discussion.

The following sections of this chapter (1B and 1C) will provide a brief overview of some of the most common ways in which musical style is conceptualised and discussed amongst uilleann pipers, serving to contextualise the ethnography, analysis, and discussion which comprise the majority of this thesis. For the reader less familiar with the uilleann piping tradition or Irish traditional music more broadly, an appendix of technical information (Appendix A) is provided. This contains discussions on the history and organology of the uilleann pipes and descriptions of specialist terminology used by uilleann pipers and other Irish traditional musicians. It may be read in full before proceeding or consulted as a glossary as unfamiliar terms and concepts arise.

B. Style in uilleann piping

1. *Style and content*

It is received wisdom in general parlance that style finds a counterpart in content. This dichotomy possesses some value in this research but the distinction between the two in Irish traditional music is more complicated than one might initially imagine. Firstly, we must disabuse ourselves of the notion inherited from Western art music that performance style can be contrasted to some fixed text. In the performance of a Beethoven piano sonata, for instance, it is natural to locate content in the notated score and style in the extra-textual decisions a pianist makes in playing it. In Irish traditional music, however, no such score exists in written or oral form. As Carson (1998, 2) ponders, 'can we ever fully know a tune, or only variants of it, temporary delineations of the possible?'. A skilled player is not spontaneously departing from a pre-learned composition, but instead assembling a unique creative mosaic from internalised musical cells. Their rendition will be recognisable as a certain tune by its similarities to other renditions of that tune and evaluated compared to them according to its distinctive features. Even if a fixed text (notated or aural) forms a part of the learning process, it will be quickly set aside by the skilled musician in favour of a more organic and embodied approach to realising its musical potential. The tune itself only exists as a kind

of Platonic form, giving substance and identity to its many actualisations and yet only knowable through them.

Secondly, speaking of the tune as 'content' as opposed to 'style' requires a further clarification. While Smith (1997) defines style in Irish traditional music as excluding the repertoire and the instruments themselves, the exact nature of that separation must be once again examined more closely. The tunes themselves may not be considered a part of musical style, but the criteria by which a player selects them most certainly are. One of the most distinctive features of the Sliabh Luachra regional style, for instance, is a preponderance of polkas and slides, tune types played much more rarely in other areas. A description of the piping style of Leo Rowsome would be similarly likely to make mention of his fondness for patriotic marches and song airs. In addition, instrument selection can also be considered a feature of musical style. A unique and distinctive instrument, such as Séamus Ennis' antique Coyne set of pipes or Cormac Begley's use of bass and baritone concertinas, can come to define a player's sound and approach to the music. Buckley (1979) notes additional, rarely discussed considerations that must also be considered constituents of musical style, including a player's dress and bearing when performing.

Where then can the line be drawn between style and content in Irish traditional music? An insight can be found in Meyer's work on compositional style in Western art music. He defines style as 'a replication of patterning ... that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints' (Meyer 1989, 3). In Meyer's account, style is a matter of individual choice, although he is quick to clarify that many of these choices often operate at an unconscious level. Likewise, we can begin to see style in Irish traditional music as a matter of choice, and content as that which is necessarily present. The international organisation of uilleann pipers, Na Píobairí Uilleann's series of *Piper's Choice* DVDs (eg. NPU 2007) echoes this dichotomy in speaking of 'processes of choice and necessity that bring great music into existence'.

This naturally begs the question of what is necessary to Irish traditional music. Answers, even among experts, will vary considerably. A fixed canon of repertoire? An arsenal of instrumental techniques? Certain discrete melodic patterns? A particular sensibility? Perhaps, as the famous judicial ruling on obscenity goes, one simply knows it when one sees it. It follows that there could be as many understandings of style as there are musicians and listeners. This distinction may seem unsatisfactory and frustrating to a scientific point of view, but we must remember style is first and foremost a category in practitioners' discourse and not a tool of musicological analysis. In remaining

‘flexible and context-sensitive’ (McCullough 1977, 97), it rises above the technicalities and allows productive interaction between interlocutors with fundamentally different outlooks on the music.

With this in mind, it is worth visiting some existing concepts of style in the uilleann piping tradition. These will not only introduce terminology and ways of thinking which arise frequently in the ethnographic portion of this research, but also provide a practical demonstration of some of the many ways in which the concept of style is deployed.

2. Open and tight piping

The notion of a dichotomy between tight and open piping holds the status of received wisdom in the uilleann piping community. The concept is deeply ingrained in both the discourse of pipers and the pedagogy of the instrument. The distinction refers to the degree of separation between notes, with tight (or closed) piping involving closing all the holes of the chanter to generate a silence between notes. In open piping, on the other hand, at least one hole remains open and the notes are allowed to slur into one another. The Italianate terms *staccato* and *legato* are also in common usage to refer to these different effects. While one might reasonably assume that the opposite of tight piping would be loose piping, such a usage would typically be considered pejorative. Andy Conroy, an exponent of an extremely tight piping style, was known to dismiss other pipers as being ‘loose as bran’, for instance (Hegarty and Browne 2009, 5).

The same distinction can be applied to a given fingering. In this case a tight fingering is one in which the minimum number of fingers are raised, facilitating the rapid closures required for *staccato* playing, while an open fingering is one in which more fingers are raised than necessary. An open fingering may additionally involve the chanter being lifted from the player’s leg, leaving the bell of the chanter open and thereby ensuring a continuous sound until the chanter is replaced on the leg. Tutor books such as Leo Rowsome’s (1936) and Heather Clarke’s (2005) commonly provide alternative fingering charts for tight and open fingerings, and practising both tight and open scales and other exercises is well established in pedagogy.

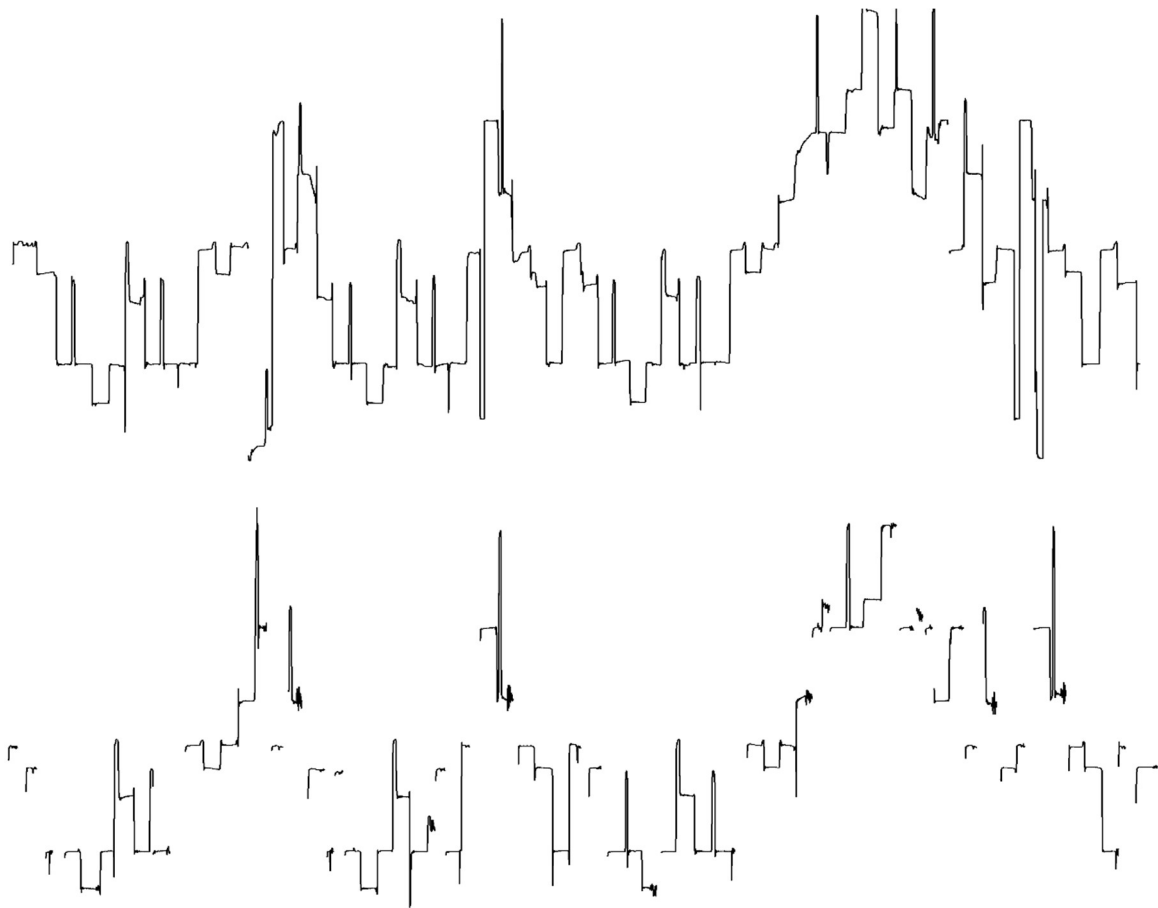


Figure 1.1 – pitch graph demonstrating an open (top) and a tight (bottom) approach to the same tune

This technical (and relatively unambiguous) description is often extrapolated to refer to a piper's overall style. Since an adherence to either tight or open fingering at all times is a technical impossibility (Moylan cited in Harper and McSherry 2015, 165), pipers will necessarily use a mixture of the two. A simple binary categorisation is therefore no longer viable and a spectrum between tight and open playing begins to present itself. A style comprising primarily tight fingerings can be described as a tight style (and the piper as a tight piper), and likewise for an open style. A significant amount of ambiguity can be generated by these related but different usages of the same terminology.

Further confusion arises from the fact that these stylistic descriptions do not always describe what they purport to. They have acquired nuances of meaning beyond the explicit description of fingering technique that bear investigation. Historically, the dichotomy functioned as a signifier of social class and carried with it accompanying prejudices. Tight piping was associated with the upper classes, particularly in Dublin, and open piping with the Traveller community. For example, Paddy Keenan makes extensive use of tight effects as well as very open passages and considers himself as playing in

both open and tight styles (Ring 1992) but is most commonly referred to as one of the foremost exponents of an open style, probably due to his strong public identification as a Traveller.

3. *Traveller style*

A related but distinct stylistic classification that has continued currency amongst uilleann pipers is that of 'Traveller style', referencing the rich contributions of members of the Irish Traveller (Mincéir) community to traditional music and uilleann piping in particular.* While the most commonly cited exponent of a Traveller style is undoubtedly Johnny Doran, the term is often applied to pipers of earlier and later eras, such as John and James Cash, Jem Byrne, Paddy Keenan, Finbar Furey, John Rooney and Mickey Dunne.

The analyst hoping for a comprehensive and delimiting list of features of Traveller style will be disappointed. The music of Traveller pipers is not uniform or monolithic, with even the Doran brothers demonstrating notably different approaches. Nevertheless, some common traits have been identified including fast tempos, widespread use of open fingering, dense regulator accompaniment, adventurous melodic variations, and microtonal colourings obtained by removing the chanter from the leg (Tuohy and Ó hAodha 2008). Certain repertoire, such as the jig *Coppers and Brass* or the slow air *Sliabh na mBan*, can also be closely associated with this style. Adjectives such as 'flowing', 'wild', and 'free' are often applied to the music of Traveller pipers.

It has been speculated that these traits arose as a result of the livelihood that many Traveller pipers made busking at regional fairs and football matches. The use of open chanter fingerings generated more volume to compete with a noisy outdoor environment, while other features were selected as the most ear-catching and attractive to a general audience. Dunne further suggests that a tendency toward constant melodic variation may have arisen as a means to alleviate the tedium of constant repetition that many buskers experience. In contrast, settled pipers who did not have to rely on performing for a livelihood could develop a less exuberant style that appealed more to a select audience educated in its nuance. Others take a more metaphorical approach, describing these musical traits as reflective of Traveller identity. Martin Nolan (in Fegan 2014), for instance, relates Johnny Doran's melodic variations to an unplanned journey through country lanes while Pat Mitchell (2003) uses the analogy of sulky racing, a common Traveller pastime, to describe his headlong,

* For further information on the marginalisation and racism experienced by Irish Travellers, see MacLaughlin (1995), Helleiner (2003), and Joyce (2015).

embodied, and spontaneous approach.

At times, Traveller style has been placed in opposition to a presumed 'gentleman style' or 'parlour style' associated with the upper classes and dating back to the early history of the instrument, featuring tighter technique and slower tempos. References to 'gentleman style' are much less frequently encountered nowadays, probably largely due to the class and gender prejudices inherent in the term. Even without such an obvious counterpoint, however, discourse surrounding the Traveller style still carries strong associations of the subaltern. Tuohy and Ó hAodha (2008) describe Traveller piping practice as a subculture that defines itself in opposition to prevailing cultural narratives, while O'Connell (in Fegan 2014) speculates that 'the reason Travellers sound like they do is pain, and years along the road'. In addition to the prejudice of the general public, Traveller musicians have historically been ignored or marginalised by the musical establishment. For instance, the first commercially available recording of a Traveller musician was not released until the mid-1960s (ibid.).

While certain aspects of Traveller culture have been guarded from outsiders, the music of Traveller musicians has rarely been subject to formal restrictions. Johnny Doran provided extensive advice in piping to non-Travellers including Willie Clancy, and his predecessors John and James Cash had a close and longstanding musical friendship with the settled Rowsome family. As recordings became more commonplace, the music of Traveller pipers could spread without these personal relationships, most clearly illustrated by the fame achieved by Paddy Keenan and Finbar Furey in the 1970s. Indeed, the extraordinary charisma and virtuosity of these musicians have ensured that their musical approaches are some of the most frequently imitated today. A natural result of this dissemination is that musical features of many Traveller pipers can increasingly be heard from non-Travellers. Especially when coupled with the marginalisation and prejudice faced by Travellers, this naturally raises questions of cultural appropriation and fetishisation.* Whether the concept of a Traveller style as a distinct entity will survive these demographic changes remains to be seen, but for now its prominence within piping discourse (not to mention its aural presence) remains unchallenged.

* While this cannot be comprehensively addressed within the scope of this thesis (and the voices of Travellers should have pre-eminence in this regard), the broader reflections on culture, identity, and musical style contained in the following chapters have clear application to issues such as these.

4. Regional and individual styles

The notion of regional style is without doubt the most familiar application of the term ‘style’ within the Irish traditional music community. According to this concept, features including repertoire, techniques, tempo, intonation, instrument choice, and phrasing are or have been associated with certain localities, creating what have been described as ‘islands of tradition’ (Feldman and O’Doherty 1979, 17). Discussions of regional style are particularly associated with the fiddle tradition which recognises a number of regional styles, particularly along the western seaboard: Sliabh Luachra, West Clare, East Clare, East Galway, Sligo and Donegal.

In the uilleann piping tradition, however, we encounter at least some resistance to this concept. Valley (1997) argues that piping practice ‘dismisses or bypasses the concept of regional style’, ‘rendering variance mostly personal’. He attributes this to the expense and complicated nature of the instrument encouraging a higher degree of technical expertise amongst pipers, and prompting pipers to incorporate ‘idiosyncrasies of former local styles as piping ‘technique’” (ibid., 110). Breathnach is in agreement, suggesting that formerly distinct regional styles of piping have faded and that now ‘players usually follow the style of the player who most impressed them when they were learning to play’ (Breathnach 1977, 91). This seems to raise the prominence of individual styles above regional and communal stylistic concepts. Nevertheless, one does encounter frequent mentions of regional piping styles, including those of West Clare (Small 1977), Wexford (Tuohy and Ó hAodha 2008) and Ulster (Harper and McSherry 2015).

In any case, a clear separation between individual style and regional style quickly becomes more problematic than one might initially imagine. A charismatic musician can significantly influence the music of their locality, especially if they are also active in teaching other musicians in the area (Kearney 2010; Keegan 1997). According to Byrne (2019, p.c), the piper John McSherry has had such a major influence on a generation of Belfast pipers since the 1990s that his playing has begun to eclipse a stylistic diversity that has long existed in the region. Despite having learned the instrument in his native Belfast from highly respected local pipers Tom Clarke and Robbie Hannan, he recalls his own music being described (somewhat disparagingly) as ‘Dublin style’ for varying too much from the perceived normative Belfast approach of McSherry and his disciples.

In this sense, locality, community and individuality are virtually inseparable when it comes to musical style. Sommers Smith (1997, 121) speaks of the history of Irish traditional music as ‘a series of interconnected stylistic lineages, traceable to different locales and master players within these locales’. And yet, returning to the concept of style as choice, there is a sense in which the individual is fundamental to the whole edifice. Style is ‘selected by listeners and imitated by players who enjoy it’ (ibid.), and so it is at the individual’s discretion how to engage and whether to engage with the local, communal and other lineages that they inherit or come into contact with. Likewise, when McCullough (1977, 97) describes style as ‘identify[ing] an individual’s musical performance’, it emphasises this process of choice as the first cause of style, preceding whichever descriptive stylistic identifications we later seek to apply in our efforts to understand it.

C. Social context and aesthetics

We must consider two separate concerns here: the place of the uilleann pipes within the Irish musical tradition and that of Irish musical practice in broader social contexts. It must also be noted that there can be no monolithic cultural perception of the pipes; everyone who plays, hears, or otherwise encounters the instrument will experience it and understand it in a different way. Nevertheless, we can identify some commonalities that are worth addressing.

1. *Irish traditional music*

Irish traditional music exists today as an active musical subculture with practitioners and enthusiasts around the world. While some participants may be motivated by a perceived ancestral connection to the music, a great many musicians with no Irish ethnic heritage find just as much meaning in it. In fact, there are thriving Irish musical communities in locations such as Japan where Irish ethnicity is extremely uncommon. The organisation Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ), founded in 1951 and dedicated to the promotion of Irish traditional music, maintains branches around the world but the majority of musical activity worldwide occurs outside of its auspices or those of any other institution.*

* See Stoebel (2015) and Kearney (2013) for a fuller account of the historical and contemporary role of CCÉ in Irish traditional music practice.

A brief caveat regarding the term 'Irish traditional music' is important here. Two of the three elements of this nomenclature can be (and frequently are) contested, but it remains the overwhelmingly preferred term by practitioners of the music. In using the term, I am deferring to a normative and commonly understood use of language and not attempting to make judgements about what is Irish or what is traditional. While there can be some contestation around the margins of what can be considered Irish traditional music, the musical practices I am considering fall comfortably within the mainstream.

At the heart of Irish musical community is the session (occasionally seen Gaelicised as *seisiún*). A session is an informal gathering of musicians which can take place in either a private residence or a public place, most commonly a pub. Each session is a unique entity with its own cohort of musicians, repertoire, unspoken rules of etiquette, and interpersonal dynamics. Some sessions may have a nominated leader while others operate non-hierarchically, some may be open to all comers while others maintain an 'invitation only' policy, some may be specifically aimed at beginners by focusing on a limited repertoire and slower tempos, some may intersperse instrumental tunes with songs, some may be friendly to non-Irish repertoire, some may be financially remunerated and so on.* As well as these organised and scheduled events, sessions will often form spontaneously when musicians find themselves together, especially at festivals.

Musicians may additionally engage in more professional performative activities, such as pub gigs, festivals, weddings, and funerals, either in bands or as solo musicians. These can range from exclusive performances for an audience familiar with Irish traditional music to those aimed at the general public. Skilled musicians may teach students privately, alongside more informal mentorships and observational learning. Significantly, the vast majority of Irish traditional musicians, either in Ireland or abroad, do not derive their main income from musical activities (Hamilton 2013).

One aspect of Irish traditional music culture that is worthy of note is the significant impact and prominence of recordings. This is by no means a new phenomenon, as attested by the flourishing market for Irish 78rpm records in the 1920s (O'Connell 2013). Indeed, it is quite rare to encounter an Irish traditional musician nowadays without a substantial collection of recordings, whether in mp3, CD, or vinyl formats, and new and old recordings alike are a frequent topic of enthusiastic discussion

* See Kaul (2009) and O'Shea (2008) for a fuller account of session culture.

amongst musicians. As well as the commercial market, unlicensed or pirated recordings are often disseminated amongst musicians. Amongst pipers, collections of informal or field recordings of renowned figures such as Willie Clancy and Séamus Ennis (often significantly outweighing their commercially available output) are commonly distributed in digital form.

The actual practice of musicians may not differ significantly in the diaspora to within Ireland itself. In both cases, traditional musicians are likely to find themselves performing the same repertoire of tunes on the same instruments, listening to the same recordings, participating in sessions, and perhaps performing professionally or teaching students. A musician can attend sessions anywhere in the world and find themselves welcomed as part of the community and able to have a relatively similar musical experience to what they had at home. Even practices which previously operated at the local level are beginning to globalise (Spencer 2010a), a trend which has only accelerated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Musicians are able to take online lessons from international teachers, for instance, and recordings can be disseminated on digital platforms without hardcopy replication and printing.

Nevertheless, some local differences continue to play a significant part in the practice of traditional music. Despite attempts to adjust the format to digital platforms, sessions fundamentally remain an in-person activity with a regular location and set of participants. They will also typically maintain a unique selection out of the tens of thousands of tunes in circulation as their core repertoire. In fact, it is commonplace to find two sessions in the same city, perhaps even with a number of musicians in common, which have significantly different repertoires. Sessions form loosely bounded networks of musicians, regularly interacting with one another as individuals move between them, or when a festival or other gathering exerts a gravitational pull on musicians from a broader geographical area. Irish traditional music could be visualised as a complex ecosystem with millions of individuals linked in various social networks at the local level, while also connected to other more distant networks through narratives of emigration, globalisation and travel.

The main difference between musical practice in Ireland and other countries is perhaps one of quantity rather than quality. Within Ireland, there are simply more musicians, playing in more sessions and festivals, making more recordings, and teaching more students. This naturally leads to an increased visibility of the music and achieves a critical mass which allows certain specialist institutions to flourish in a way they could not elsewhere in the world.

Within Ireland, traditional music is a mainstream participatory activity for children, often taking the place occupied by Western art music elsewhere as the backbone of formal musical education. A strong competitive aspect is integral here, with CCÉ's system of *fleadhanna ceoil* (singular *fleadh cheoil* or commonly *fleadh*) allowing musicians to compete on different instruments in different age brackets from the local level to the annual All-Ireland Fleadh. Winning the All-Ireland is a driving aspiration for many musically talented children and their parents. While the senior division is open to all ages, the vast majority of competitors are in their late teens or early twenties. CCÉ also organises *fleadhanna* in the diaspora by which musicians can qualify for the All-Ireland but these tend to attract lesser levels of participation.

Tertiary institutions offering degrees in traditional musical performance have grown in stature in Ireland, and to a limited extent worldwide, in the past two decades, the most prominent being the University of Limerick's Irish World Academy of Music and Dance (IWAMD).^{*} Even within Ireland, however, musicians who undertake these courses are a relatively small minority, and much of what their ultimate effect on broader musical life may be largely remains to be seen. Interestingly, while three of my five primary informants have an affiliation with IWAMD, as either graduates or current staff members, its activities were scarcely mentioned in my interviews. Nevertheless, as in any context where musical networking and pedagogy occurs, tertiary institutions provide mechanisms by which musical style can be interrogated and disseminated.

A more significant institutional presence may be occupied by summer schools, which have been prominent in Ireland since the 1970s and are becoming increasingly common around the world. These see musicians from around Ireland and worldwide attend daily classes taught by renowned musicians, as well as concerts and other scheduled events. As always when Irish traditional musicians are present en masse, sessions will typically occur around the clock as a complement to the formally scheduled musical activities. In fact, many musicians will congregate at summer schools for the sole purpose of sessioning, without attending a single class or other event. The most prominent summer school is undoubtedly the Scoil Samhradh Willie Clancy, established in 1973 and held annually in the town of Miltown Malbay in West Clare. Na Píobairí Uilleann maintains a particularly strong connection with this program and oversees piping classes and concerts with a

^{*} This is in addition to institutions awarding research degrees in Irish traditional music studies or (ethno)musicology, of which a large number of graduates are practitioners.

diligence that is often the envy of other instrumentalists. Virtually all of my informants made extensive mention of Willie Week (as it has become known) and for a number it represented an integral part of their musical formation. For many overseas musicians, Willie Week is an essential musical pilgrimage that must be made at least once (O'Shea 2008).

2. *Uilleann piping*

To many, the uilleann pipes embody a sense of Irishness. While less commonly encountered in visual iconography than the harp of Gaelic antiquity, the pipes occupy an equally vital place in the Irish cultural imagination. It is common to hear enthusiasts speak of the sound of the instrument as an almost shamanic presence which possesses a uniquely Irish sensibility. O'Flynn (2009) notes that this impression is assisted by the exclusiveness of the uilleann pipes (as well as the bodhrán) to Irish music. This viewpoint seems to be shared by Na Píobairí Uilleann in their current motto, 'Sharing the Sound of Ireland'. In keeping with this association, the pipes are commonly requested for Irish funerals and increasingly used at ceremonial and state occasions.

This cultural prestige does not necessarily translate to numerical prominence, however. The relative expense and difficulty of procuring an instrument ensure that the pipes remain something of a minority pursuit within Irish traditional music circles (although a recent worldwide boom in the number of pipemakers seems to be gradually lessening this tendency). As Harper notes, 'a specialist activity will always lie a little to one side, even within its broad community' (Harper and McSherry 2015, 9). In locations further removed from Ireland or strong diasporic communities, this phenomenon can be particularly pronounced with pipers enough of a rarity to possess a quasi-mythical status.

All this contributes to a certain air of esotericism which pipers are often seen to possess, either as high priests of the tradition or eccentric cranks. O'Brien-Moran (2006) notes the frequency with which pipers have encounters with the supernatural in Irish folklore, leaving the impression that the fair folk have a peculiar attraction to the sound of the pipes (and by all accounts produce some remarkable pipers themselves!). Fellow traditional musicians are often bemused by the tendency of pipers to keep to themselves, 'a breed apart' (Harper and McSherry 2015, 9) often seemingly preferring to discuss the intricacies of piping technique, obscure historical recordings, or the arcana of reedmaking than actually playing their instruments. Those who might perhaps be termed piping

cognoscenti would see things differently. To them, uilleann piping is a unique artform requiring deep study, the aesthetics and practice of which are not always best served by communal music-making.

Vallely (1997) recounts a folktale in which a piper is bestowed a characteristically double-edged blessing by a fairy who is enamoured of his music. He is offered the choice of playing music that will always please himself, or that will always please others. He chooses the former, but soon grows weary of complaints about his awful playing, and ultimately asks the fairy to reverse the enchantment and allow him the other choice. Here he finds himself happier, never fully satisfied with his own playing, but at least immersed in a community where he and his music are valued. I believe that many pipers feel at least a little of this same tension between the aesthetic demands of the piping tradition and the social realm of the session. To borrow a concept from Keil (1985), piping exists in a state of tension between the individual striving for ‘Apollonian’ artistic perfection and the ‘Dionysian’ joys of participation in communal music making.

In its upper-class origins through to its modern aesthetics, the uilleann piping tradition inclines at least a little more towards the common understanding of an ‘art music’ than the practice of other instruments in the Irish idiom. Echoing some of the rhetoric of the Romantic artistic movement, renowned accordion player Tony MacMahon has described it as ‘a lonely and introspective art’ (O’Hare and Byrne 2008). Piping is often more institutionalised, with pipers’ clubs having been a feature of the community since the nineteenth century. This has also led to a culture of pipers’ gatherings, often known as *tionóil* (sing. *tionól*), either arranged as publicised events by such clubs or informally at the local social level. Even today, no comparable organisation to Na Píobairí Uilleann, with an international membership and a focus on the playing of a singular instrument, exists for any other instrument in the Irish tradition. Although musical tuition is becoming more formalised in general (especially within Ireland), the playing of the pipes is still more likely to involve a more formal teacher-student relationship than that of other instruments. Pipers are also more likely to remain within the confines of a relatively unchanging canon of piping repertoire associated with earlier pipers, rather than expand it by playing or composing new tunes. In these ways, the uilleann pipes are simultaneously essential and somewhat peripheral to the Irish musical tradition; exalted yet outside of the mainstream of Irish musical practice. As the following research will show, these unresolved tensions are still being grappled with by the piping community and their existence continues to inform the trajectory of the piping tradition.

The relationship between performer and instrument - one of particular significance to uilleann pipers - also goes some distance towards shaping the practice and social context of uilleann piping. Whenever two pipers meet one another, the question 'Who made your pipes?' is almost certain to follow (if not precede) the usual social formalities. This emphasis can also be observed in a glance at the online archive of Na Píobairí Uilleann which almost invariably lists the maker and pitch of the pipes along with a piper's name. All of the pipers I interviewed placed great emphasis on their choice of instrument, and in some cases gave the distinct impression that their connection with it possessed a spiritual dimension.

By far the greatest significance is placed on the decision to play a concert set or a flat set of pipes. Even among those pipers fortunate enough to possess instruments of both designs, the majority express a clear preference for one or the other. Indeed, it is quite common to hear someone identified as a 'flat piper' (although the converse 'concert piper' is rarer), implying that their choice of instrument is fundamental to their musical identity. Those favouring flat sets tend to extol their instruments' sweet sound, quiet volume, and latitude for subtle tonal colourings. Advocates of concert pitch will emphasise the bright timbre, increased projection, immediate response, and ease of playing with other musicians as favourable features of their instruments. At times, the preference is assumed to be a matter of personality, as when Tony MacMahon claims that flat pipers 'have more peace of mind' (O'Hare and Byrne 2008). The division can also lead to the denigration of instruments and musicians of the other persuasion. In my experience, flat pipers (the faction I myself belong to) are often more likely to display this kind of superior attitude, variously dismissing concert pitch players as boorish, immature, or testosterone-driven.

Often the decision is guided by the design typically played by earlier pipers. As such, pipers styling themselves after Touhey, Doran and Rowsome are often more likely to play in concert pitch, while those in the tradition of Ennis and Clancy may prefer flat sets. In particular, pipers influenced by Doran and the Traveller tradition are highly unlikely to play a flat set as their primary instrument. As well as the largely innate differences of volume, timbre, and pitch, the two designs tend to encourage different approaches which encompass a number of facets of style. For instance, the tempos chosen by pipers playing concert sets are typically faster, perhaps encouraged by the more immediate response of those instruments. Significantly, some of these distinctions can be observed when the same piper switches instruments. Mick O'Brien speaks of being 'led' by the sound of different instruments to imitate different pipers, attempt different tunes and make different musical decisions (NPU 2009b).

Far from some lofty concerns, it should be noted that pipers are often forced to be pragmatists as far as their choice of instruments goes. Even today, with an unprecedented number of pipers and pipemakers around the world, acquiring a set of pipes can be a difficult process. As well as the significant expense, most accomplished pipemakers have years-long waiting lists and are almost invariably sole traders whose productivity can be drastically affected by unforeseeable circumstances. Geoff Wooff, one of the most renowned pipemakers of the modern era, had a waiting list of over fifteen years when he stopped accepting orders. A second-hand market is active, but a prospective buyer must still often rely on serendipity to find a good-quality instrument suited to them at the right time.

Furthermore, a full set of pipes contains seven reeds which must be crafted and tuned to the instrument and regularly adjusted to ensure proper balance, tone, and intonation in response to climatic changes. Pipers must either source their reeds from an experienced reedmaker or master the complex art themselves. In either case, it is no small effort to maintain a set of pipes in good playing order, let alone several, and musical decisions must often be made according to what is available and functioning best at the time. Indeed, one of the most beloved commercial recordings of uilleann piping, Tommy Reck's *The Stone In The Field* (1977), was recorded entirely without regulators or bass drone simply because Reck did not have properly functioning reeds for them when he went into the studio. Here Reck, whose other recordings demonstrate a full and masterful use of the regulators, had to significantly modify his playing to compensate for their absence. These considerations of logistics and pragmatics are always at play in piping practice, forming an ongoing calculus that is constantly weighing what is aesthetically desired against what is practically possible.

D. Contribution to discipline knowledge

This thesis represents the most comprehensive existing study into uilleann piping style. Other research has considered this topic only briefly (eg. Buckley 1979; Mitchell 1999; 2002), as one element of a broader study of Irish musical practice (eg. Ó Canainn 1978), or been limited to studies of individual pipers (eg. Mitchell 1993; Hutchinson 1997; Mitchell and Small 1998; 2007; O'Brien Moran 2006; Tuohy and Ó hAodha 2008). As mentioned earlier, pipers are often considered (and perhaps consider themselves) as something of a world apart from mainstream practice in Irish traditional music (O'Brien Moran 2006, 45; Harper and McSherry 2015, 9), and this unique culture

offers a complementary perspective to other research into instrumental style in Irish traditional music (eg. Smith 1990; Keegan 1992; Koning 1979).

Style is a familiar concept in the vernacular of traditional Irish musicians as well as in musicological scholarship, and both these perspectives have been drawn on in this research. The purpose of this is twofold. On one hand, the theoretical and analytical approach to musical style developed by musicologists (eg. Meyer 1989) can assist in grounding the impressionistic and frequently ambiguous language that practitioners employ when discussing style. On the other hand, the musicological literature surrounding musical style can be examined in light of the vernacular discourse, allowing for reappraisal and refinement of the concept. In particular, it demonstrates the insight offered by Meyer's theories while simultaneously reflecting on their limitations. This link between the discourse of musicians and broader academic concepts of musical style is a line of enquiry largely absent in existing research into Irish traditional music (Smith 1990 being a notable exception). For this reason, this research will present points of interest to scholars and aficionados of Irish traditional music, as well as the broader discipline of (ethno)musicology.

As a result, a study into musical style need not be a narrow musicological endeavour, but can offer a new perspective into broader considerations of locality, diaspora, tradition, identity, and community. Musical style exists at the intersection of the individual and the communal, the inherited and the created, the local and the global. As such, this research presents a new perspective on contemporary anxieties around identity, community, history, and geography that are much discussed and contested in anthropology, cultural studies, philosophy, and other fields.

Finally, I consider this research to be vital to my own development as an uilleann piper and student of Irish traditional music. While the format may be different, it occupies the same realm of intensive study of uilleann piping practice that all of my informants describe in various ways. The exact effect of this research on my own personal musicianship is still to be determined but I strongly believe it is impossible to undertake any research and not end up changed by the experience, especially when the field of study overlaps with one's vocation.

E. Thesis overview

This thesis aims to address the following questions: What significance does musical style have in the musical imagination of the uilleann piping tradition? What can existing concepts and narratives of musical style tell us about uilleann piping? To what extent is musical style shaped by place, social context, identity, and aesthetic preferences? How is musical style manifested in performance practice? How can we analyse and discern differences in uilleann piping styles? How is traditional style understood in globalised settings?

The ten chapters of this thesis examine and reflect on the concept of musical style in uilleann piping from a range of perspectives. This introductory chapter has provided an outline of the problem at hand and its significance, as well as laying out an initial impression of the field of uilleann piping and relevant understandings of style which may be encountered. Chapter 2 presents a review of relevant literature on musical style, from research particular to style in Irish traditional music to broad discussions on the concept from the fields of ethnomusicology and musicology. It also introduces some broader literature which establishes a context and direction for the research, including historical references, discussion of ethnographic and ethnomusicological methodologies, and an overview of uilleann piping recordings. Finally, it presents a methodological and procedural outline of the research.

The following five chapters (3-7) are each occupied with a case study of a prominent active uilleann piper: Jimmy O'Brien Moran, Michael 'Blackie' O'Connell, Kevin Rowsome, Máire Ní Ghráda, and Joey Abarta.* Each situates these pipers within the contemporary piping community, providing

* A further clarification on "prominence" may be required here. As with the practice of virtually any musical instrument, there are communities, sub-communities and marginal figures which overlap and interact in complex and dynamic ways. Uilleann pipers at the margins should not and cannot be ignored. For instance, Eric Rigler is arguably the most famous uilleann piper in the world today due to his work on major film scores including *Braveheart* and *Titanic* but is not highly regarded as an Irish traditional musician and is therefore largely marginal to the community and practice of uilleann piping in which I locate myself as a practitioner and researcher.

The pipers whose music and reflections form the five case studies presented here are firmly within the mainstream practice of Irish traditional music played on the uilleann pipes. Furthermore, they are all highly respected within this community of practice, a community in which they openly and willingly engage. Within this broader context, they can each be seen as having their own sub-community of musical collaborators, acquaintances and fans, which will necessarily overlap considerably.

Finally, although the case study format can give the impression of separate data points, they should not be seen as disconnected in any sense; each of these pipers is well-acquainted with the others, musically and

necessary biographical details to establish their context and significance to piping today, followed by ethnographic reflections on their musical memories, activities, and philosophies. Finally, each case study chapter contains discussions and analyses of two selections of their recorded output, demonstrating how aspects of musical style are embodied and expressed through their music.

Chapters 8 and 9 isolate and synthesise relevant conceptual threads from the case studies, bringing these findings into dialogue with literature and theories from anthropology, ethnography, ethnomusicology, and musicology. Chapter 8 focuses on existing understandings of musical style from specialist and general (ethno)musicological literature and aims to integrate the specifics of uilleann piping style into these frameworks. Chapter 9 is constructed around recurring subjects arising from the case studies - identity, community, geography, history, and the instrument itself - and uses the pre-established understandings of musical style to further investigate these topics. Chapter 10 briefly speculates on what the future may hold for musical style in uilleann piping in a swiftly changing globalised and technologised environment.

personally. I first approached Máire Ní Ghráda for an interview at a session run by Blackie O'Connell, Joey Abarta speaks of his experiences in workshops run by Jimmy O'Brien-Moran, and so on. While each has their unique experiences, philosophies, and approaches to the music, this does not prevent them from interacting musically and communally.

Chapter 2 – Literature review and methodology

A. Review of relevant research materials and theory

1. *History and diaspora*

While this thesis is a study of contemporary uilleann piping practice, it must engage with history for the simple reason that Irish traditional musicians are constantly engaging with history. The traditional musician ‘sees his performance in relation to that of other musicians who have gone before him, as well as in the context of the living tradition, and he often refers to this aspect of his music’ (Ó Canainn 1978, 41). To this end, a number of historical accounts of Irish traditional music have proved vital to this research.

Dowling (2014) and Ó hAllmhuráin (2016) provide an excellent overview of this history, which can be supplemented by more targeted publications such as O’Connell and Fegan’s tracing of the musical lineages of Irish Travellers (2011), Ó hAllmhuráin’s (1999) reflection of the musical legacy of the Great Famine, and Carolan’s (1997) focus on the collections of Francis O’Neill in Chicago. Histories focused more specifically on the uilleann pipes have abounded in recent years, including Harper and McSherry’s (2015) recent overview of the history of uilleann piping, Carolan’s (2012; 2017) research into the instrument’s emergence and early exponents, and Mulcahy’s recent lectures (eg. 2018) regarding the often-forgotten history of women in uilleann piping. As a wide-ranging source of information on countless topic relating to Irish traditional music, Vallely’s landmark *Companion to Irish Traditional Music* (2011), with contributions from many of the most respected scholars and musicians in the field, should not go unmentioned.

Irish history and contemporary Irish culture have been marked by ongoing emigration and an extensive diaspora. This has resulted in the sounds of Irish traditional music percolating outside of Ireland and generating vibrant musical subcultures in many countries around the world. In some cases, this reflects patterns in Irish emigration, with strong musical communities in the traditional diasporic centres of Great Britain, the USA, Canada, and Australia. Recent decades, however, have seen explosions of interest in Irish traditional music uncorrelated with the movements of Irish emigrants as evidenced by Irish musical communities throughout Europe, Japan, and South America, leading Dillane (2013, 7) to suggest that it has ‘post-ethnic’ characteristics. This phenomenon

suggests the existence of what might be termed a 'cultural diaspora' (Cohen 2008) facilitated and mediated by technological developments and forces of globalisation, and challenging traditional oral lineages of transmission. It should be emphasised that these musical movements are reciprocal; while musicians in the diaspora often cultivate and maintain musical ties to the motherland, those within Ireland have also long been aware of and receptive to international trends in their music. For this reason, although a comprehensive documentation of diasporic musical trends is not a primary aim of the present study, it must acknowledge their significance to the living musical tradition. To this end, studies of the Irish musical diaspora have been consulted, as well as research from the broader field of diaspora studies.

Research specific to diasporic Irish music traditions includes Reg Hall's (2016) comprehensive study of Irish traditional music in London, Smith's (1997; 2003) work on Irish music and musicians in Australia, Moloney's (1992) overview of Irish music in the USA, McCullough's (1978) more specific ethnographic focus on Chicago musicians, Spencer's (2010b) and O'Connell's (2013) discussions of the trans-Atlantic impact of Irish-American 78rpm recordings, and Williams' (2006) encounters with Irish traditional musicians in Japan. Broader perspectives include Appadurai's extensive scholarship which investigates communities in globalised and virtual spaces. He conceptualises 'diasporic public spheres', which are described as 'the crucibles of a post-national political order' (Appadurai 1996, 23) and the forces that shape them.

2. Musical style in broad perspective

The concept of musical style is fundamental to this research and will be considered from a number of viewpoints, including those encountered in the broader musicological and ethnomusicological literature, and those specific to scholars and practitioners of Irish traditional music. Musical style is a concept frequently encountered in musicological literature, where it is typically applied to the distinguishing characteristics of the music of a particular composer, group of composers, period or locality. While the term is often used reflexively without further clarification in these studies, a very comprehensive account comes from Leonard Meyer (1989). His discussion is primarily informed by textual analysis of examples drawn from the Western art music canon but its foundations have undoubted relevance to this project. Seeing 'style is a replication of patterning ... that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints' (ibid., 3), he gives thought to the nature of these choices and constraints, and outlines a complementary method of stylistic analysis. As his argument develops, Meyer links style to history and ideology, presenting the hypothesis that musical styles are shaped by the dominant paradigms of their historical and cultural context.

There are several difficulties in applying Meyer's definition and theories to the present study. While the preliminary sections of his book acknowledge style as something that can be spoken about in a wide variety of musical and non-musical contexts, he very quickly pivots to the notion of compositional style within the Western art music tradition. This narrow focus leaves little room for other manifestations of musical style, including that of performance. In applying his theories to the practice of uilleann pipers, they must be refocused from a textual tradition of composition to an oral tradition of interpretation and performance. Another issue to be considered is Meyer's tendency to focus on linear processes. He sees style as intimately linked to syntax, which is concerned with dynamics of momentum and closure. On this basis he argues that music arises out of a causal chain of decisions, each of which is informed by its antecedents and a suite of pre-established stylistic possibilities for what might follow. This viewpoint seems targeted to the through-composed nature of Western art music and may not adequately account for the cyclic structures and embodied processes of Irish traditional music. Scholars including Keil (1966) and Shepherd (1977) have expressed similar concerns with Meyer's earlier work, arguing that Meyer's emphasis on the individual listener ignores important social dimensions of musical practice and prioritises cognitive processes over embodied participation.

Feld (1988) presents one of the most considered treatments of style from an ethnomusicological perspective. He synthesises writings of style from a number of scholars (Meyer among them) and applies them to 'dulugu ganalan', an aesthetic concept and 'style statement' of the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea. Feld's work is of particular import in its ability to relate abstract and theoretical concepts of style to not only perceived meanings, but also to the social life of a community. As such, it represents an exemplary model for the current research, supported by its wide-ranging connections to scholarship in a variety of fields.

Keil (1985) has also considered musical style by drawing on twin examples of 'people's music', blues and polka in the USA. Writing from a Marxist perspective, Keil analyses style as a reflection of class forces and sets out eight axioms that describe the emergence of stylistic features in these musics in relation to cultural and industrial developments of the twentieth century. Smith (1990) has considered a number of these aspects of Keil's research with regard to Irish traditional music, and provided some considered analysis as to whether this music corresponds to Keil's notion of 'proletarian music'. This research will consider some of the same questions, while focusing on the complex and sometimes contradictory class associations bound up in the uilleann piping tradition.

The concept of musical style has been the subject of an ongoing and complex discussion in the literature and oral narratives of Hindustani music. This body of knowledge alerts us to the connections between professional identity, geography, and musical style in traditional and contemporary contexts. Erdman (2007), Grimes (2007), McNeil (2007; 2018), and others have shown how the social and musical organisation of the gharana system highlights deep connections between hereditary practitioner castes and communities and the formation and transmission of distinct musical styles. In their studies of the musical style of tabla gharanas, Kippen (1988), Shepherd (1976), and Mukadam (2013) have brought to light the subtle yet important differences between hereditary and non-hereditary expressions of musical style, which have direct bearing on expressions of musical lineage in the Irish musical tradition. Ethnomusicological scholarship on the hereditary musical traditions of West Africa, particularly Charry (2000) and Hale (2007), presents further intriguing parallels

Musical style is a concept that can describe both the musical approach of an individual relative to their community and that of one community relative to others. Scholars have theorised 'communities of practice' to examine such structures and interactions in the context of a rapidly globalising world where communities are no longer necessarily geographically bounded. Communities of practice were first conceptualised by Lave and Wenger (1992) in their study of the social dimensions of learning. In their model of 'legitimate peripheral participation', a community of practice is a means by which learners of a given activity can interact with more experienced practitioners and gradually progress towards full participation in the community. Related research includes the concept of 'enskilment', an embodied and communal process by which an individual attains a particular skillset, developed in Palsson's (1994) study of Icelandic fishing communities.

These theories have been applied in the musical domain by scholars including Kenny, Magowan, and Shelemay. Kenny (2016) approaches the concept from a pedagogical perspective, studying the structure, processes, interactions, and values that constitute three different communities of musical practice in Limerick. Magowan (2012) draws on and develops the theory of enskilment in showing how understandings of ecology, cosmology, and society are embodied and maintained through Yolngu song tradition. Shelemay (2011) interrogates the notion of community, considering processes of descent, dissent, and affinity by which musical communities can be formed. Spencer (2010a) focuses specifically on the uilleann piping tradition, considering the ways in which uilleann pipers have utilised technological resources to transmit information outside of traditional oral lineages of transmission and create an overarching worldwide community. While this focus on technology is not

a primary theme of my research, Spencer accurately frames it as a vital element of contemporary uilleann piping practice and examines inherited notions of tradition and authenticity in light of modern technological developments.

3. Style in Irish traditional music

As has already been indicated, style is a vital and ubiquitous concept amongst Irish traditional musicians. As such, the topic of style has received treatment from a wide variety of perspectives in both academic and vernacular reflections on Irish traditional music. An insightful article by McCullough (1977) is among the earliest research to focus on style in Irish traditional music. Defining style as ‘the composite form of the distinctive features that identify an individual’s musical performance’, (McCullough 1977, 85) he goes on to identify a number of stylistic ‘variables’ across several instruments with the support of transcribed examples. Additionally, McCullough provides some brief comments on the processes by which styles can change and develop, also acknowledging a social dimension. By his own admission, McCullough is unable to deal with such a significant topic in a brief article, but it provides an insightful introduction. However, its formal analytical perspective can tell the reader comparatively little about how Irish traditional musicians conceive of style and how audiences respond to it. Keegan (2010) has written an account of the ‘parameters’ of style, arising out of devices he uses to help students contextualise and analyse their own practice. It can be seen as an extension of McCullough’s earlier article, identifying thirteen parameters of style (as opposed to McCullough’s four) and providing illustrations and transcriptions of each of them. Keegan emphasises that the terminology he uses throughout is not an external analytical imposition but instead is almost entirely drawn from the ways in which traditional musicians describe their own practice.

Although he is disinclined to invoke the term ‘style’, similar approaches can be found in Micheál Ó Súilleabháin’s well-known article on creativity in Irish traditional music (1990). His formal analysis considers which aspects of performance and repertoire can be considered as fixed and which are varied and moulded by performers. Similarly, Grasso (2011) relies on extensive transcriptions and analysis to develop a model of melodic variation amongst Irish traditional musicians. While the scope of his work is undoubtedly impressive, his determination to generalise to players of all instruments renders his model unable to consider the significance of instrument choice and design as a determinant of style (see Ó Canainn 1978; Smith 1990; Keegan 1997) and only able to address individual approaches to a limited extent. Additionally, both Ó Súilleabhain and Grasso’s tendency

towards textual musicological analysis, at least in these writings, leaves little room to consider the social context and implications of their findings.

Ó Canainn (1978) provides a different perspective in his overview of Irish traditional music, in which the uilleann pipes occupy a prominent position. He discusses style as a historical process and investigates its intersection with instrumental technique in more detail. He also makes more effort to ground his research in the community of Irish traditional musicians by means of three case studies of musicians (with Paddy Keenan representing the uilleann pipes), including interviews, transcriptions and analysis. A similar perspective is taken in Smith's comprehensive account of style on the Irish button accordion in the twentieth century (1990), supported with ethnographic evidence and musical analysis. Central to his research are the ways in which accordion playing styles have acquired distinct social meanings for musicians and audiences in Ireland and Australia. In Smith's analysis, style can be seen as a product of both historical and social currents and the experience and identity of individuals. He further argues that the instrument itself and its perceived limitations are important generative factors in musical style. As a study of musical style which focuses on a particular instrumental tradition and synthesises ethnographic evidence with musical analysis, it represents an invaluable model for the current research.

Further research by Keegan (1997) takes a different approach by exploring the 'verbal context' of style, grounding its observations in the discourse of Irish traditional musicians. Significantly, it begins by outlining five separate yet interrelated 'conceptual categories' that style is said to encompass in the Irish traditional idiom. Keegan provides a discussion of these categories, dwelling particularly on that of the regional 'dialect', and the ways in which musicians speak about it. He also takes pains to emphasise that vernacular concepts of style are descriptive rather than prescriptive, responding to the musical act rather than guiding it. While the paper is quite brief, it provides a sound theoretical foundation for the specific meaning that style has to Irish traditional musicians and presents significant parallels to Meyer's categorisation of style which will be explored in greater detail. Keegan's MA thesis (1992) offers further exploration of these theories with ethnographic evidence and case studies of traditional flute playing. A complementary approach can also be discerned in the work of Ó Súilleabháin (2007) who focuses on the eclectic language used by the inventive Dublin fiddler Tommy Potts to describe his musicianship. When combined with his earlier research on Potts (1987; 1990), which incorporates traditional musicological analysis and ethnographic interviews, Ó Súilleabháin's work presents a compelling and multi-faceted portrait of individual musical style.

a. Regional style

The concept of regional style is the most familiar application of the term 'style' in Irish musical discourse (Keegan 1997, 119). As such, it holds an ongoing fascination for Irish traditional musicians and scholars alike and has been the subject of considerable emphasis in the literature. The composer and musicologist Seán Ó Riada was arguably the first scholar to comprehensively investigate the notion of regional style. In his 1962 radio series *Our Musical Heritage*, later collated as a book, he gives attention to the distinct musical practices of a number of regions in the west of Ireland. Ó Riada's rhetoric is opinionated and frequently jingoistic, reflecting a belief that musical and cultural purity must be defended against foreign and modernising influences. This gives rise to an anxiety that once vibrant and distinct regional styles are being eroded and diluted by increasing musical homogenisation brought about by technological developments and cultural shifts, including the proliferation of recordings and the availability of travel. A similar refrain is frequently encountered in both scholarly and vernacular discourse, including Feldman and O'Doherty (1979), Tansey (1996), Fairbairn (1994) and O'Connor (1991). Browne (1997) is more measured, tempering his concern for the loss of regional styles with optimism about the newfound ability of musicians to draw from a wide range of musical styles, rather than automatically acquiring the style of their own locality.

Critical re-evaluations of regional style are increasingly found in the literature. These perspectives question either the importance attached to conceptions of regional style or the motivations of those advancing them. Valley (1997) warns against a fetishisation of the concept of regional style, and suggests that the majority of musicians play with a 'hybrid' style formed by diverse influences, shifting to accommodate the musical voices with which it comes into contact. Corcoran (1997) presents a complementary perspective, arguing that studies of regionality in Irish traditional music rely on romanticised stereotypes of an isolated, pre-modern Ireland occupied by 'noble peasant' musicians, glossing over the complexities of social, economic, and political history and elevating the music of rural Irish-speaking communities over that of urban Anglophones.

O'Shea (2008) lays out one of the most comprehensive pictures of regional style, invoking a range of ethnomusicological and anthropological scholarship, as well as her own ethnographic research. She provides a case study of the music of East Clare, documenting the conceptual evolution of an 'East Clare style'. Ultimately, the picture of regional style that she presents is of a construction that incorporates elements of locality, sociality, identity, and ideology, and is frequently manipulated in the interest of political and economic forces. O'Shea's arguments resonate strongly with the findings

of Kaul's (2013) ethnographic investigation into the intersection of Irish traditional music and the tourist economy in the West Clare village of Doolin.

The politicisation of regionality has also been considered briefly by Mac Aoidh (1997) and Hastings (1997) in discussions of the music of Donegal and the Northern Irish fife and tradition respectively. Sommers Smith draws on a range of historical evidence to speculate on the origin of regional styles. While most other scholarship has assumed that differing regional approaches have always been a part of the music, Sommers Smith (1997) argues that they arose in the mid-nineteenth century out of an increased rural isolation that developed in the aftermath of the Great Famine. While the historical aspect of this research could be considered in more depth, its implications strongly challenge the prevailing fetishisation of regional style as a timeless expression of musical authenticity.

Daithí Kearney is a prolific contemporary voice in Irish traditional music scholarship who has presented a balanced and nuanced perspective on regional style across a range of writings (2007; 2009; 2013). Kearney's work is characterised by a particular interest in the notion of cultural geography and the ways in which music, landscape and identity intersect in Irish traditional music. In a sense his scholarship presents a balance between the nationalism of Ó Riada and the cynicism of more recent voices; critical of the commodification and politicisation of regionality while remaining respectful of its importance to cultural identity.

b. Style in uilleann piping

Studies of style specific to the uilleann piping tradition are rarer. The most comprehensive account is presented in Hutchinson's dissertation (1997) which is centred on the author's ethnographic interviews with the Irish-Canadian piper Chris Langan. Musical style is one of the most prominent topics of discussion and Hutchinson considers not only its audible manifestations (assisted by detailed transcriptions) but also its relationship to tradition, community, identity, and memory. Despite its focus on one uilleann piper's individual stylistic approach, it parallels my study both in its balance of ethnography and musical analysis and in its consideration of the social meanings of musical decisions.

Two articles by Mitchell (1999; 2002) consider the approach of uilleann pipers to rhythmic and metric parameters. Their brevity, however, limits them to generalisations without any room for the complexities of differing styles within the tradition. Mitchell and Small's well-produced books of

transcriptions of the piping of Willie Clancy (1993), Patsy Touhey (1998) and Séamus Ennis (2007) redress this balance somewhat with brief commentaries on the styles of individual pipers. Ring's (1992) study of Paddy Keenan's music occupies a similar realm, while also providing some ethnographic insights. Buckley (1979) has also considered stylistic issues surrounding the uilleann piping tradition. The article is brief and contains a few factual errors but contributes two noteworthy ideas which deserve deeper consideration. Firstly, it acknowledges a relationship between style and performance context that is often ignored elsewhere in the literature. Buckley also considers style as something arising out of the instrument's limitations, a concept which finds resonance in the works of Ó Canainn (1976), Keegan (1997), and Smith (1990).

Tuohy and Ó hAodha (2008) provide an outline of the music of the early 20th century uilleann piper Johnny Doran. Drawing on the work of the cultural theorist Dick Hebdige and anthropological research on Irish Traveller communities, they analyse Doran's musical style as an expression of his Traveller culture. Their study also begins to unpick some of the ambiguities surrounding the frequently referenced 'Traveller style' of uilleann piping. It concludes by considering ways in which Doran's legacy is celebrated and perpetuated at the annual Johnny Doran Festival in Co. Wicklow. While the authors touch on some unique and significant points, the brevity of the study does not allow for a full consideration of the topic, and the theoretical and ethnographic elements are not fully integrated. Further resources related to the piping traditions of Irish Travellers have abounded in recent years, thanks to a documentary (Fegan 2014), book (Fegan and O'Connell 2011), and DVD (NPU 2009a).

O'Brien Moran (2006) has produced a detailed study of the musical style of the pre-Famine uilleann piper Paddy Conneely. This differs somewhat from the usual accounts of piping style since, in the absence of recordings, O'Brien Moran must extrapolate stylistic details from transcriptions of Conneely's music produced by various folklorists. Despite its specific historical focus, it presents interesting observations about uilleann piping in the social life of Ireland and style as a general phenomenon. Smyth (2010) and Power (2016) have presented respective lecture-demonstrations on the life and music of mid-century uilleann pipers Andy Conroy and Tommy Kearney. Alongside more biographical and anecdotal material, both reference the notions of piping style and the personal styles of these musicians. They also briefly touch on important concepts of stylistic transmission and change when they discuss how these pipers have influenced their own personal style and approach to music.

An invaluable addition to the discourse surrounding uilleann piping has come in the form of Na Píobairí Uilleann's series of Piper's Choice DVD recordings (eg. NPU 2008; 2009). Currently numbering thirteen volumes, each features three pipers performing a selection of music interspersed with interviews. These recordings provide access to a wide range of voices speaking directly to a knowledgeable audience about a wide range of topics related to piping and traditional music. While not presented as a central theme, style and its implications underscore a significant part of the dialogue. Additional insights into piping style and its transmission can be found in a number of tutor books published throughout the instrument's history. The most significant of these are O'Farrell (c. 1804), Touhey (in O'Neill 2009), Rowsome (1936), Ennis (1998) and Clarke (2005).

Additionally, since this research investigates concepts and terminology used generally by a majority of Irish traditional musicians, the discourse of musicians is a valuable object of study. My own experiences and observations, derived from my involvement in Irish traditional music communities, both in-person and online have proven vital to supplement and contextualise my ethnographic interviews.

4. Style, affect, and meaning

A common thread amongst a number of different accounts of musical style is its relationship to meaning. For Meyer (1989, 9), style 'constitutes the universe of discourse within which musical meanings arise'. Similarly, Smith (1990, 51) describes style as a 'bearer of meaning', while McCullough (1977, 97) observes that it can 'invest [a] performance with communicative values'.

Again, Meyer has provided us with a detailed theorisation in his earlier *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (1956). Meyer's theories, grounded in Gestalt psychology, present meaning (emotional and intellectual) as arising from internal formal relationships in music. The perception of these relationships generates emotional reactions in the listener who has been conditioned to appreciate them by repeated exposure. While he distinguishes between such direct emotional meanings, and the 'objectified' intellectual meanings perceived by listeners trained in music theory, Meyer believes that they stem equally from the 'embodied meaning' present in the music. Meyer's understanding of embodied meaning is fundamentally linear. He concludes that 'a musical event ... has meaning because it points to and makes us expect another musical event' (ibid., 35). This chain of expectations, whether gratified, delayed, or rejected, is central to Meyer's analysis. An internalised set of expectations and probabilities that arises from extensive listening is what he terms 'style'. As mentioned earlier, Meyer never concerns himself with musical traditions outside of Western art

music, and one of the aims of this research will be to determine which elements of his work are applicable to Irish traditional music.

Another exploration of affect comes from an early work by Henebry (1928). Henebry's writing is discursive and opinionated, arguing strongly for what he terms 'human music'. He does not shy away from locating affect in specific musical gestures, and particularly associates it with untempered pitch systems and microtonal variation. For instance, he enumerates nine distinct pitch values for the note C (which he takes pains to inform us are not exhaustive) that are to be used in different melodic contexts (ibid., 59-60). Keegan (2012) uses an ethnographic method to account for meaning and affect in Irish traditional music. His research centres around the reactions and impressions of musicians from a variety of backgrounds to a number of audio extracts. He analyses the language of his informants according to a variety of schema to shed light on ways in which language is used to reflect on music, contextualising his work within the fields of contemporary linguistics and semiotics.

The majority of other accounts of meaning and affect in Irish traditional music come from the perspective of practitioner or audience (if this distinction is drawn to all) rather than theorist, and are typically subjective and impressionistic. A number of these come in the form of memoirs which contextualise music as part of the social life of a community, including Byrne (1989) and Tunney (1979). Others, such as Carson (1998), MacMahon (1999) and Tansey (1999) focus more specifically on the musical experience and its personal meaning to the authors. These voices, complemented by my ethnographic research, will represent a vital counterbalance to the analytic viewpoint presented elsewhere and help to connect my research to contemporary and historical musical traditions.

5. *Recordings*

The wealth of uilleann piping recordings available, whether commercial, archival, or unofficial, provide an invaluable record of stylistic trends and lineages, and represent the primary means by which pipers encounter and assimilate stylistic approaches today. A brief history (differing from the history of the uilleann pipes themselves which is included in the appendix) is supplied here to familiarise the reader with the available resources, and to contextualise later mentions of these pipers and recordings.

The earliest audio recording of the uilleann pipes is an 1898 wax cylinder of the blind Kerry piper Mici 'Cumba' Ó Súilleabháin performing fragments of an old descriptive piece *Gol Na mBan San Ar*. This was followed in the first years of the 20th century by cylinders of the pipers Martin Reilly and the

Traveller Jem Byrne. While the recording quality of the era and subsequent deterioration of the cylinders makes some of the content hard to discern, these recordings present a compelling glimpse into piping practice of the time. Nor are they pure historical curiosities; when the great Willie Clancy first heard the cylinder recording of Ó Súilleabháin, he remarked that 'if he had heard such piping in his youth, he would have spent his life trying to make all his music sound like it' (cited in Harper and McSherry 2015, 352).

Meanwhile in the USA, and particularly the Irish diasporic centres of Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, and New York City, a burgeoning recording industry capitalised on the popularity of Irish emigrant musicians on the vaudeville circuit. The earliest recordings of Irish-American pipers are cylinders of Bernard Delaney (from 1898 - 1905) and his brother Denis 'Dinny' Delaney (1898). The Galway-born New York piper Patsy Touhey was without doubt the most prolific piper of the era, leaving a legacy of over 100 recorded items. This output, coupled with Touhey's technical innovations and remarkable virtuosity, mark him out as one of the most significant and influential uilleann pipers in the history of the instrument. A collection of Touhey's recordings remastered and produced by Na Píobairí Uilleann (2005) presents a detailed retrospective of his career. Many of these other cylinders can be accessed at Anderson (2021) or the NPU (www.pipers.ie) and ITMA (www.itma.ie) websites.

Touhey's stature can at times seem to overshadow his American contemporaries and followers but cylinder recordings of Sergeant James Early, and 78s from Patrick Fitzpatrick, Michael Gallagher, Martin Beirne, Tom Ennis, Michael Carney, and Tom Busby help to fill out our understanding of early 20th century American uilleann piping. A significant portion of their output can be found in various online repositories (www.archive.org, www.pipers.ie, www.itma.ie) with occasional cuts included in later compilations (The Wheels of the World 1976, Oldtime Records 2009). Together with Touhey's, these recordings provide a picture of a vibrant school of early 20th century American piping demonstrating significant stylistic commonalities while also presenting opportunities for individual expression. This American tradition was largely in decline by the 1930s, as the economic hardships of the Great Depression and the wartime years took their toll on the entertainment industry. In recent decades, pipers such as Tom Busby, Seán McKiernan (NPU 2014) and Joey Abarta (2013) have sought to emulate the style of this early American heyday.

The absence of a significant recording industry in Ireland until later decades meant that pipers in Ireland in the early twentieth century were less well-documented than their American counterparts.

The exceptions largely come from Irish musicians who were recorded in London, including pipers William Andrew and Liam Walsh whose music is well represented online (Irish Traditional Music Archive). Recordings from Ireland begin appearing in earnest in the 1940s. One of the most revered and prolific of these mid-century figures was Séamus Ennis, an uilleann piper, singer, storyteller and folklorist. Ennis saw himself as the recipient of a tradition of piping associated with the Dublin upper classes, citing the approach of his father James Ennis as his primary influence. His recorded output includes a number of commercial releases (Ennis 1958; 1972; 1973; 1974; 1978; 2000) and later compilations of a number of archival and unofficial recordings (Ennis 1997 is the most comprehensive) from 1940 until his death in 1982. Ennis' later recordings are sometimes considered substandard (often attributed to the adverse effects of alcoholism) but even in the absence of the technical polish of his earlier work, they demonstrate significant musical insight and wisdom.

Ennis' frequent rival in the public eye was Leo Rowsome of Wexford, a representative of the third generation of a dynasty of legendary pipers and pipemakers. Rowsome's influence on the history of uilleann piping is difficult to overstate. Not only was he a prolific teacher whose list of students is a virtual rollcall of renowned pipers of the era and a familiar voice as a radio broadcaster and public advocate for the instrument, but the instruments he made are among the most frequently emulated by later pipemakers. Rowsome's playing shows remarkable facility, with exuberant open chanter playing and driving foursquare regulator accompaniment. His recorded output consists of two LPs (Rowsome 1993; 2000), a compilation of home recordings (Rowsome 2017) and various early cuts.

Another immensely significant document from the 1940s is the recordings made of the Traveller piper Johnny Doran in 1947 by the Irish Folklore Commission and rereleased by Na Píobairí Uilleann (Doran 2003). Doran managed to remould a rich tradition of piping passed down through the Traveller community into his own unique and inimitable style. The Doran family also had close musical connections to the Rowsomes with both piping lineages tracing themselves back to the legendary John Cash. The ten selections Johnny Doran recorded for this session are phenomenally virtuosic, representing one of the cornerstones of the recorded history of the uilleann pipes and a vital source of inspiration for later pipers in what has become known as the Traveller style.

The 1940s also saw the emergence of another highly influential piper in the Clare-born Willie Clancy. Clancy's expressive style can be hard to define, evolving significantly over the years as he sought out different models and mentors, but drew heavily on Johnny and Felix Doran, Leo Rowsome and Séamus Ennis. He was also able to inherit some of the musical legacy of Garrett Barry, a West Clare

piper who was never recorded and died before Clancy's birth, but whose music was transmitted through Willie's father Gilbert Clancy. Clancy was less frequently commercially recorded during his lifetime than his contemporaries Rowsome and Ennis but a number of excellent compilations have been drawn from various sources (Clancy 1980; 1983; 1994; 2010).

A less well-known addition to the recorded history of 1940s piping was the eccentric Richard Lewis O'Mealy of Belfast who recorded ten selections in 1943, available online (Anderson 2021). The lack of significant documentation of Northern pipers at the time leaves the question open as to whether O'Mealy's approach was entirely personal or representative of a broader trend. Opportunities for recording were to expand even more from the 1950s onwards. The following decades, arguably up to the present day, demonstrate the profound influence of these formative figures (especially Touhey, Doran, Ennis, Rowsome, and Clancy), while also generating some decidedly original stylists. As the number of recorded pipers increased, and continues to increase so markedly, it becomes impossible to be fully encyclopaedic in this brief historical account. Nevertheless, the most significant figures and stylistic trends will be touched on here. In many cases they are grouped into loose stylistic 'camps' of influence from earlier pipers. This is a contestable and potentially controversial classification, and relatively little should be read into it beyond the need to organise the information in some coherent way.

A significant figure to emerge in the 1950s was Tommy Reck of Dublin. Reck's style was tight, but lacking the flamboyant flourishes of his fellow Dubliner Séamus Ennis, and instead focusing on effectively deployed variations and a masterfully controlled rhythmic feel. His only recorded album, *The Stone in the Field* (Reck 1977), presents an interesting study, compared to other available recordings of Reck (Na Píobairí Uilleann Archive). Another Dubliner worthy of mention is the eccentric Andy Conroy, whose later years were spent developing and mastering an utterly unique style of piping. In Conroy's approach, the melody of the tune is often submerged under a torrent of interpolated staccato notes, although at his best Conroy's rhythmic feel remains vibrant and strong amidst the virtuosic accretions. Conroy was not heavily recorded (with the majority of his extant recordings available in NPU's online archive). While a few later pipers, including his students Séamus Meehan and Mikie Smyth (2006), have acknowledged the influence of his style, he perhaps represents the epitome of a unique personal piping style.

A significant innovator in recent decades has been Robbie Hannan (1990), whose muscular and virtuosic style has influenced a number of others including Seán Potts, Eliot Grasso and Fionntan

Byrne. Acknowledging a stylistic debt to Reck, Ennis, and Clancy, Hannan is also believed to have been strongly influenced by the Donegal fiddle tradition. In a different vein, Brian McNamara of Leitrim has developed a personal and elegant approach to closed-style piping seemingly primarily influenced by members of his immediate family (McNamara Family 1998; McNamara 2000; 2004). Mick O'Brien's (1996; NPU 2009b) controlled and thoughtful approach to the instrument speaks to the diverse influences of his family and the rich Dublin musical milieu.

Ennis' musicality and charisma has made him an iconic figure amongst uilleann pipers. As such, his music has proved fertile ground for subsequent generations to explore. His protégé Neil Mulligan's approach and repertoire arguably steers closest to the model provided by Ennis, as demonstrated in his three albums (Mulligan 1997; 1999; 2003). Liam O'Flynn (best represented in O'Flynn 1988; 1991; 1995), who inherited Ennis' antique instrument, also models certain aspects of his playing after Ennis although he also acknowledges a debt to his other teacher Leo Rowsome. Dicky Deegan has achieved a distinctive and somewhat eccentric personal style by amplifying and developing some of Ennis' unique stylistic features (Deegan 1989; 1999). In more recent years, David Power has also incorporated much of Ennis' legacy in his playing (Power 2005; 2007; 2014).

Although Leo Rowsome's popularity and influence at the time were unquestioned, elements of his style are often considered less fashionable nowadays than that of many of his contemporaries. His immediate descendants, including his son Leon and grandson Kevin, undoubtedly retain much of his stylistic legacy (Rowsome 1999). Other modern pipers such as Gay McKeon (1997; McKeon, McKeon and McKeon 2005), Eoin Ó Riabhigh (2000), and Máire Ní Ghráda (NPU 2014) have also acknowledged Rowsome as a significant influence on their work.

Stylistic connections to Johnny Doran are strongly discernible in the Traveller community. Any discussion of Doran's legacy must begin with his younger brother Felix. His style shows certain similarities to that of his brother while also presenting some intriguing points of differentiation, most notably passages of very tight playing (Doran 1976). Finbar Furey, whose approach adopted elements from Felix Doran and Leo Rowsome, produced several albums of virtuosic piping music (Furey 1969; 1974) in the late 1960s and early 1970s before achieving stardom as a singer and songwriter. Paddy Keenan's recorded output (best represented in Keenan 1975; 1983) owes a strong stylistic debt to Johnny Doran that becomes clear listening to his wild tempos and variations, although his virtuosic tight chanter work suggests influences further afield. Keenan in particular achieved fame as a piper with the Bothy Band and was an inspirational figure for many modern

pipers. Modern Traveller pipers, including Mickey Dunne (1994) and John Rooney have adopted many elements from the Dorans and their stylistic descendants. Others not of Traveller stock, such as Blackie O'Connell (O'Connell and O'Donohue 2014), Leo Rickard (2001), Martin Nolan (1991), and Davy Spillane (1987) have also been inspired stylistically by their work.

Willie Clancy's unique musical legacy, assisted by his outgoing and generous nature, assured his place as a significant musical influence to later generations. Ronán Browne's playing strongly resembles Clancy's although his use of the regulators can sometimes be more individual (Browne 2001). Jimmy O'Brien Moran often favours Clancy, although the influence of Ennis is also palpable, as is his ongoing interest and research into nineteenth century piping practices (O'Brien Moran 1996; 2013). A West Clare connection is also evident in the piping of Tommy McCarthy (1997) and his daughter Marion (The McCarthys 2002), with the Limerick piper and fluter Louise Mulcahy's music (2014) also suggesting the influence of Clancy at times.

While the uilleann pipes have often been considered primarily a soloist's instrument, numerous examples of combinations with other instruments can be found. The most common duo instrumentation is undoubtedly the pipes and fiddle, a combination which can be heard going back to early recordings by Stack and Mullaney and regularly through to the present day (eg. Glackin and Keenan 1978; O'Brien and Ó Raghallaigh 2003; 2011; Glackin and Hannan 2005; Browne and O'Loughlin 1988, 2002, 2015; Gill and Smith 2012). Other duo combinations, coupling the pipes with flute (Crawford and Vallely 2009), concertina (Hayes and Laban 2006; McNamara and Collins 2008), or accordion (Carberry and McGovern 2014) are also encountered, as are various trio possibilities (Burke, Cooney and Corcoran 1986; O'Brien, Mayock and Ní Bhriain 2012; 2021). Recordings where the uilleann pipes can be heard with an accompanying instrument (including a number of those mentioned above), typically the guitar or bouzouki, begin to appear with increasing frequency around the middle of the 20th century.

Recordings that feature the uilleann pipes in a larger ensemble setting also become commonplace in the second half of the twentieth century. The earliest of these are Paddy Keenan's work with The Bothy Band, Paddy Moloney with The Chieftains and Liam O'Flynn with Planxty, all of whom were hugely influential in the mid-century revival of traditional music. More recent examples are Davy Spillane with Moving Hearts, John McSherry with Lunasa and later projects, and Ronán Browne with Cran. While this study focuses primarily on solo uilleann piping, these along with other examples will also feature as a vital part of the contemporary practice of uilleann pipers.

B. Research methodology

The following research is interdisciplinary in its approach, combining methods and theories from ethnography, anthropology, ethnomusicology, and musicology. This multifaceted approach is designed to 'triangulate' the research findings (Yin 1994, 92), providing a means to more accurately test hypotheses, and establishing connections between theoretical concerns and the living musical tradition.

1. *Ethnography/anthropology*

This research follows a contemporary tendency in anthropology and ethnomusicology towards the study of communities and practices in which the researcher is already a participant. As an active member of the worldwide uilleann piping community, I share certain knowledge and experiences with my informants. On the other hand, I am an adult learner of the uilleann pipes, from Australia, to whose upbringing Irish culture was largely peripheral. These features all act to differentiate my experiences and identity from many of my informants, as does the basic fact of my undertaking this research amongst a community whose members can often be sceptical and disdainful of academic approaches to music. At the same time, any assumption of a monolithic culture amongst Irish musicians must be resisted (Vallely 1997), and the case studies which follow effectively demonstrate the diversity of experiences amongst even uilleann pipers at the highest level.

Relevant ethnomusicological research undertaken by an 'insider ethnographer' includes Cottrell's (2004) enquiry into the community of freelance classical musicians in London and Milosavjevic's (2013) study of piobaireachd in New Zealand, both of which give due consideration to the methodological implications of the researcher's status. Stock and Chiener (2008) likewise provide an excellent theoretical overview of undertaking 'fieldwork at home' including a discussion of simultaneous intersecting emic and etic elements in their research. Herndon (1993) is similarly critical of the notion of a straightforward insider/outsider binary in ethnography.

Any ethnographic investigation that deals with music must also acknowledge the highly subjective and individual nature of musical experience and practice. A highly influential example of scholarship of this kind comes from Feld (1982), who draws on fields as diverse as linguistics and avian taxonomy to illuminate the intersection of musical practice and cosmology amongst the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea. Mora (2005) has similarly considered evocations of the mystical and natural worlds in the music of the T'Boli of the Philippines. Parallels can also be found in Stoller's compelling account of

his sojourn among the sorcerers of the Songhay in Niger (Stoller and Olkes 1987), noteworthy for its willingness to embrace spiritual and embodied experiences. Stoller's more theoretical writings (1989; 2010) similarly promote this kind of 'sensuous scholarship' as an antidote to a rationalist and reductionist ethnographic outlook which runs the risk of overlooking vital experiential data.

On a related note, Biehl and Locke (2010), in the context of their fieldwork in Brazil and Bosnia-Herzegovina, call for an approach to ethnography which considers the unfinished and plastic nature of human experience. They challenge a 'relentless drive to theorise' that characterises the discipline of anthropology, risking 'caricaturing complex realities, neglecting key realms of experience, and missing lived ironies and singularities that might complicate and enrich analytics' (Biehl and Locke 2010, 319). Central to their argument is Gilles Deleuze's thought. While a full study of Deleuze's oeuvre is beyond the scope of this research, his interviews and shorter writings (Deleuze 1995) have been consulted. While not primarily ethnographic in its focus, Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) trenchant analysis of the concept of identity has proven vital to this research, especially as it relates to the classification of self and others into stylistic communities and the fluid and contingent nature of selfhood. In breaking apart the multivalent term 'identity' into several rich clusters of significations, they are able to gain much-needed conceptual traction on this nebulous but vital concept.

Ethnographic enquiry is becoming increasingly common amongst scholars of Irish traditional music and models can be found in Hutchinson (1997), Ó Súilleabháin (2007), Tuohy and Ó hAodha (2008), Cowdery (1990), Williams and Ó Laoire (2011), Keegan (2012), Smith (1990), and Slominski (2020). The studies demonstrate how the vernacular language of Irish traditional musicians can provide profound insights into the mechanics and aesthetics of the music. Of these, Hutchinson's work demonstrates a particular relevance to the current research, in its ability to craft a compelling ethnographic portrait, and to consistently connect extraordinarily wide-ranging interview topics to the specifics of musical practice. Slominski's (2020) recent book, addressing understandings and experiences of race, gender, and sexuality in Irish traditional music, has proven equally vital. Combining historical research and ethnography, it brings urgent attention to voices who have been silenced and delegitimised, advocating for more inclusive musical communities and narratives. Furthermore, in its centring of the individual experience of musicians, it deals directly with many of the same questions of meaning which occupy this study.

The anthropologist Henry Glassie's work (1980) also deserves special mention for its comprehensive discussion of social life in a small rural community in County Fermanagh. While his focus is primarily on traditional song and other forms of vocal performance, instrumental music features regularly in his account. His discussion of music (both vocal and instrumental) is expertly contextualised and provides an invaluable resource for understanding the social and individual context of traditional music in Ireland. Glassie and Hutchinson (1997) are also noteworthy for developing a visual layout in their interview transcriptions to present the distinctive rhythm and emphasis of their informants' speech as a vital part of their ethnographic data.

2. Ethnomusicology/musicology

Distinguishing my research from a great deal of ethnographic scholarship is a strong emphasis on musical analysis. This is designed to ground the opinions expressed by my informants in the embodied practice of uilleann piping, locating sonic manifestations of musical style. This suggests an affinity with an array of musicological and ethnomusicological scholarship, in both an Irish context and the broader literature.

Strong interrogations of the role of analysis in ethnomusicological scholarship can be found in Solis (2012) and Blum (1992). Solis argues convincingly that while music theory and analysis have frequently been applied by ethnomusicologists to impose an alien and ethnocentric framework on non-Western musical practice, they need not be discarded altogether in contemporary scholarship. He calls for analytical imperatives that are derived from the tradition being studied and cognisant of its political and social context. Blum's essay functions primarily as a comprehensive overview of significant works of ethnomusicological analysis since the dawn of the discipline. In the process, however, he is able to produce astute observations about analytical methodologies, culminating in an entreaty to remember that 'musical analysis is a discipline that we learn, above all, from musicians' (Blum 1992, 213). These vital reminders of the potential and limitations of analytical thinking have been central to the development and undertaking of this research.

Meyer (1989) also lays out a method of stylistic analysis. While it is chiefly concerned with compositional style in Western art music and is presented with a clear textual basis, some of it can be generalised to apply to this research. In Meyer's method, the analyst identifies common traits in different samples of a particular style, observes their frequencies, and develops hypotheses to explain why certain traits coexist and complement one another. Meyer suggests that these

hypotheses should consider history and ideology as motivating forces for musical decision-making. Unfortunately, he provides little guidance as to how, if at all, these hypotheses can be tested. In this regard at least, I have the advantage over the historical musicologist of being able to discuss my findings with my informants to establish congruences and tensions between ethnographic and analytical research methods.

While many analytical studies of Irish traditional music have focused on a textual melodic analysis (eg. Henebry 1928; Fleischmann 1998; Cowdery 1990) which bears limited relevance to the subject in question, a number of scholars have presented analyses of individual musicians or performances. Works by Feldman and O'Doherty (1979), Ó Canainn (1978), McCullough (1977), Mitchell (1976), Mitchell and Small (1998; 2007), Ó Súilleabháin (1990), Grasso (2011), O'Brien Moran (2006), Hutchinson (1997) and Keegan (2010) all provide examples of this, and find resonance with a strong emphasis on critical listening and imitation within traditional pedagogy (Keegan 2010). Although they do not present a fully fleshed-out method of analysis, observation of their work presents a number of principles and areas of focus that, in keeping with Solis' and Blum's emphasis on analysis coming from within the tradition, will be considered in this research. These include identification of certain musical gestures idiomatic of a particular musician or musicians, comparison across repetitions and different performances of the same tune, and an awareness of the mechanics and ergonomics of the instrument informing musical decisions. Of these studies, Smith and Hutchinson provide the most comprehensive and thoughtful musical analysis and serve as an excellent analytical model for the current research.

C. Procedure

This research is centred around detailed case studies of five contemporary uilleann pipers: Jimmy O'Brien Moran, Michael 'Blackie' O'Connell, Kevin Rowsome, Máire Ní Ghrada, and Joey Abarta. These pipers have been selected according to a number of concerns. All of them are active performers and highly respected figures in the uilleann piping community. Additionally, they all have a substantial body of formally and informally recorded material to draw on for analysis. Most pertinently for this study, they represent a diverse range of approaches to uilleann piping, including players of flat and concert pitch pipes, open and closed approaches to fingering, and stylistic influences collectively covering many of the major figures of piping history. In order to partially account for the diversity of the uilleann piping community, they also include a female musician (still a relative rarity in the uilleann piping community) as well as a musician from outside Ireland in their

number. It is vital, however, to view them not as statistical information but as active subjects in their own musical narratives. Their stories and their music are first and foremost theirs, not anodyne data for theorisation (see Biehl and Locke 2010).

The case studies are based around extended ethnographic interviews with these pipers and analysis of selections of their recorded output. The majority of these interviews were conducted in-person in Ireland, except where geographical restrictions rendered this impossible. They were semi-structured, ensuring common topics that facilitate comparisons between subjects while also providing sufficient freedom for the interview to focus on areas that generated the most thoughtful responses and possessed the most relevance to their individual perspectives. Areas of emphasis included how the informant describes their style and that of others, whether they identify as part of a stylistic community, how they conceive of the role of style in their personal practice, and how style guides their appreciation of uilleann piping more generally. Additional interviews were conducted with further uilleann pipers, pipemakers, scholars, Irish traditional musicians, and other people involved with the music, to broaden the ethnographic aspect of this study and incorporate a wider range of viewpoints. Not all of these have been directly cited in this thesis, but they have informed this undertaking in rich and powerful ways.

Two recorded musical selections have been analysed in each case study. Where possible, priority was given to recordings that are publicly available, allowing the reader access to them. While most of these pipers perform regularly in a variety of settings, solo playing was deemed the format in which stylistic practice could be most fully expressed and appreciated. Therefore, while the ethnographic material often covers ensemble and communal musical expression, the analysed selections are all unaccompanied solo recordings. The selection of items to be analysed, as well as the analysis itself, were significantly guided by the interview responses. In several cases, recordings analysed were referenced directly in the interview and in other cases naturally presented themselves from a consideration of its themes. Similarly, salient features of style as suggested by the informants were given due weight in the analysis.

These analyses do not aim for objectivity or comprehensiveness (which I suspect is illusory in any case). I have selected features for discussion that presented themselves to my ear as noteworthy, guided by my interviews with these pipers and my personal involvement in the piping tradition. A different analyst would naturally select entirely details for their consideration (and I would welcome it) but I do not necessarily see this as a methodological flaw. In a similar vein, Ó Súilleabháin (2007,

258-260) notes that, in his analyses of the Dublin fiddler Tommy Potts' music, his 'decisions as to which aspects of his [Potts'] style to focus on' were 'directly in conflict' with Breathnach's and MacMahon's work on Potts. In doing so he makes a provocative case that his own position was supported by ethnography while Breathnach and MacMahon were motivated by ideology. While one may reasonably disagree with Ó Súilleabháin's conclusions here, his stated ambition - 'to get as near as possible to Potts's [sic] musical thought through my own intuitive feeling tempered by his verbal and musical reactions to that feeling expressed musically and verbally to me' - is one that is profoundly in concord with the current research. Blacking similarly argues that subjectivity has a vital place in musical analysis:

One solution is to use subjectivity rather than try to push it aside. In studying man, the observer can relate to other people's ways of thinking and acting in a way that no physicist can relate to the particles he accelerates; and so subjectivity might well be included in analyses and used consciously as a research tool. (Blacking 1977, 11)

In any case, I encourage the reader to seek out the recordings I discuss and embrace the all-important work of listening and experiencing for themselves.

Finally, while it cannot be described as a separate element of this research, my own experience from over ten years of immersion in the uilleann piping tradition and the Irish traditional musical community has naturally (and unavoidably) informed the research. This experience and knowledge not only provides vital background information, including a first-hand understanding of piping technique and the mechanics of the instrument, but also establishes a common conceptual and cultural framework in which the ethnographic fieldwork has been grounded.

D. A note on notation and transcription

Written notation has had a place in Irish traditional musical life for centuries and yet in many ways still remains a marginal force in the tradition. The earliest traditional melody preserved in notation is often dated to the early 17th century (Vallely 2011, 763) with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries seeing the assembly of a number of significant collections of Irish tunes, including Neal (1724, available at www.itma.ie), Bunting (1830, available at www.itma.ie) and Petrie (1855, published as Cooper 2002). By far the most influential amongst the community of Irish traditional musicians, however, has been O'Neill's *The Dance Music of Ireland* (1911), known simply as 'the book' in some circles. Focusing primarily on the dance music played by his diasporic compatriots

rather than the songs and aristocratic harp repertoire favoured by most earlier collectors, O'Neill's collection has become a mainstay of Irish musical life. Reaching a narrower readership but equally noteworthy is Breathnach's five volumes of *Ceol Rince na hÉireann* (Breathnach 1963; 1976; 1985; 1996; 1999), the latter two published posthumously, which collected thousands of tunes from musicians across Ireland with copious scholarly notes on their provenance and interrelationships.

As well as these collections, whose purpose is to preserve and transmit repertoire, we can find another kind of transcription. The purpose of these is to detail a more specific musical approach, potentially including nuances of instrumental technique, pitch, articulation, and rhythm, as seen in publications of *Na Píobairí Uilleann* (eg. Moylan 2012), three books by Mitchell and Small (Mitchell 1993; Mitchell and Small 1998; 2007), and self-transcriptions produced by Séamus Ennis (reproduced in Ennis 1998). These are objects of study, intended for an audience versed in uilleann piping and wishing to gain a deeper understanding of the style of particular pipers.

Nevertheless, many musicians today see no particular need to cultivate the ability to read staff notation and it remains an optional adjunct to the much more vital skill of learning by ear. Even some of these musicians untrained in Western staff notation see value in the technology of musical notation, however. The Sliabh Luachra master musician Pádraig O'Keefe (1887-1963) devised his own personal tablature systems for both fiddle and accordion with which he disseminated tunes to his students and fellow musicians (see Cranitch 2006, 238-285). Another alternative form of notation which has gained prominence in the digital world is ABC notation, invented by the UK scholar and musician Chris Walshaw and made public in 1993, which enables tunes to be represented in a few lines of text, and collections of thousands of tunes to occupy less than a megabyte. This simplicity is its greatest asset, allowing for rapid sharing of tunes, easy online communication about their details, and facility in editing and transposition. A more recent development made possible by this technology is the application Tunepal, which takes a brief recording of the user playing a fragment of a tune on any instrument and instantly searches tens of thousands of ABC-notated tunes for the closest match (see Duggan and O'Shea 2011). These ABC text files can be easily converted into Western staff notation but many musicians (whether literate in staff notation or not) are able to read them quite fluently without. It is increasingly common to find musicians notating tunes in this way for students, fellow musicians or as a personal memory aid.

Whichever method of visual representation (if any) is favoured, Irish traditional musicians are virtually unanimous on the necessity of a deep understanding of the music, its rhythms,

articulations, tonality, and instrumental techniques to correctly reproduce the music from a notated form (Smith 1990, 12; Vallely 2011, 491-493). It is quite common for Irish musicians to mock attempts by classical musicians (including some veritable superstars of the genre) to play Irish tunes learned from notation without a necessary understanding of appropriate performance practice. Such performances are almost always immediately identifiable as wrong or inauthentic in some sense, a little like an unconvincing accent from an actor.

Notation, therefore, is recognised for its utility to the transmission and recollection of Irish traditional music but never used exclusively or uncritically. It is in this spirit that I have tried to use it in this research. Where it serves a clear purpose it has been included, but it remains a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Alternative forms of visual representation have also been adopted, especially in situations where the focus is on elements which traditional staff notation often struggles to represent. In depicting or referring to pitches, I have followed the universal uilleann piping convention of referring to the lowest note of the chanter as D, regardless of the sounding pitch of the specific instrument.

(Ethno)musicologists of a certain inclination may be surprised or disappointed by the lack of full transcriptions of the recordings that I discuss and analyse. Nevertheless, I feel that this is unnecessary at best and counterproductive at worst. The objects of study are recordings not transcriptions of them. Furthermore, full transcriptions can sometimes give the impression that specific details may be averaged out over time - a matter of 'brute facts' (Meyer 1989, 11). In a music whose aesthetic heart so often lies in minute nuance, such an approach is limited; unable to see the trees for the forest, so to speak. Somewhat different concerns apply to the use of spectrograms and other visualisations of sonic data. As Marian-Bălaşa (2005, 21) argues, 'computers and cognitive studies have definitely proved that musical hearing transforms and selects what is acoustically emitted, and cultural studies have proved the acoustic studies almost futile'. I do not wish to suggest that the quantitative representation and measurement of sound is without value (in fact, I have used it several times in this research) but as an end in itself, it can 'increase the distance or rather estrangement between, on the one hand, people conceiving, performing, and enjoying the music performed, and on the other hand, people who study it' (Marian-Bălaşa 2005, 21).

The closely related issue of representing spoken words in written text is one which has vexed a great many ethnographers. A variety of ingenious experiments in conveying emphasis, volume, intonation and pacing have been attempted throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Glassie's

method (1982) of rendering the speech he heard in Ballymenone, Co. Fermanagh in the 1970s, adopted in large part by Hutchinson (1997), is particularly noteworthy in this context.

Throughout this research, I have taken a largely opposite tack when quoting from my interviews. No amount of faithfulness in transcription can convey all the information of the spoken word (as I suspect even the notational maximalists will agree) to say nothing of the rich communicative potential of non-verbal expression. Nevertheless, readers of fiction are practised in reading flat text and imagining it proceeding from the mouth of a character, unconsciously imbuing it with accent, cadence, and timbre. On the other hand, the stylised nature of Glassie's maximalist transcriptions lies well outside any reader's experience, at least superficially possessing more in common with certain kinds of postmodern poetry. Less can be more, in other words, and it is in this spirit I ask the reader to engage with my informants' words as they appear on the page. They are deeply imperfect but nevertheless functional substitutes for the richness of spoken communication. On the other hand, I have resisted any inclination to bowdlerise the interviews by editing out 'um's, 'you know's, or moments where the informant trails off to begin again in a different way. These are artifacts of speech which are easily represented on the page and have their place in generating meaning and connection.

Chapter 3 – Jimmy O’Brien Moran

‘I would hope that I’m playing a musical style, that’s my ambition. And not out of some kind of a sense of principle, but we’re playing music - that’s what we’re supposed to be doing!’

The biographic and ethnographic material, as well all quotations in this chapter (except where indicated), have been taken from a recorded interview with Jimmy O’Brien Moran conducted on 11 July 2018.

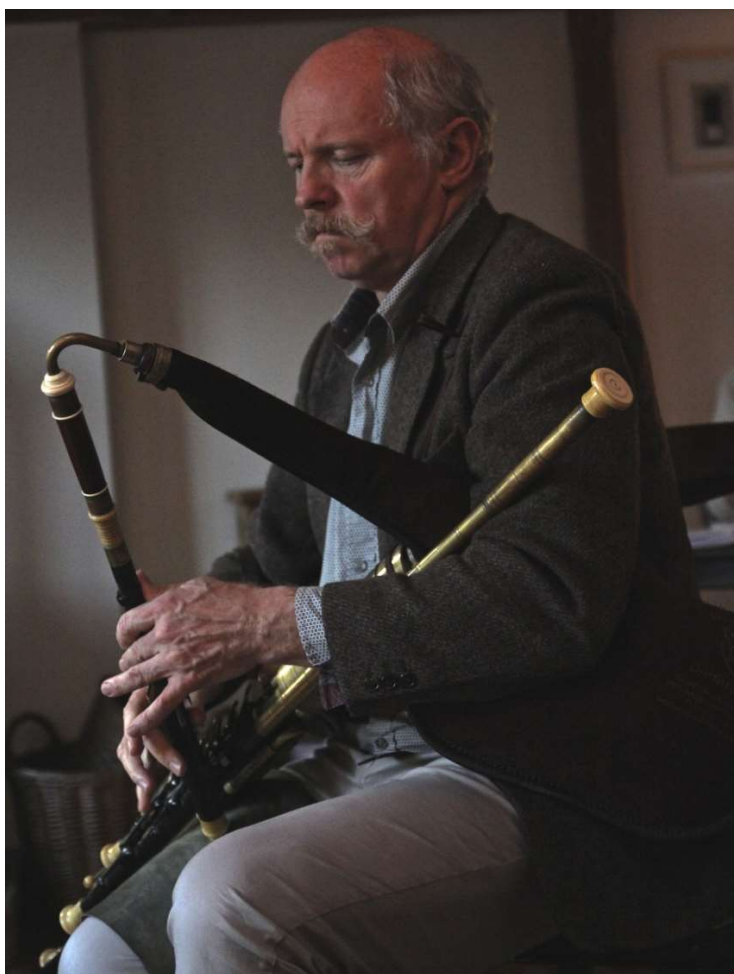


Figure 3.1 – Photo of Jimmy O’Brien Moran. Photograph by James O’Brien Moran.

A. Introduction

Jimmy O’Brien Moran (b. 1957) has been described as a ‘piper’s piper’ (Anderson 1998, 20), whose music is primarily targeted at and appealing to an audience already immersed in the aesthetics and tradition of uilleann piping. The majority of his musical activities fall within the arguably less accessible context of solo piping, giving other instrumentalists and less specialist listeners fewer opportunities to engage with his music. Indeed, I have been surprised in the past by how often non-

pipers, even those with a considerable knowledge of the Irish traditional music community, are unaware of him. Jimmy's diligence in capturing the sound of pipers from generations past (especially Willie Clancy and Séamus Ennis) has earned him a reputation as a piping historicist, enhanced more recently by his interpretations of music associated with the pre-Famine Galway piper Paddy Conneely. Jimmy's music is intimately associated with a magnificent antique set of pipes made by the pipemaker Colgan in the 1820s, adding a further layer of historical meaning to his piping.

Jimmy was a natural candidate for inclusion in this research and featured in even the earliest stages of my fieldwork planning. As well as the depth of historical knowledge and musical understanding I hear in his piping, I had been struck by the depth of his scholarship (O'Brien Moran 2006) and his ability to communicate meaningfully about his approach to piping (NPU 2009b). Our 50-minute interview takes place during the Scoil Samhradh Willie Clancy, where Jimmy has been a stalwart teacher since the 1970s. We sit behind the West Clare Resource Centre which acts as the hub of the week's piping activities, with the sounds of a piping class audible in the background. Later that night I am invited to dinner at the pipemaker Derrick Gleeson's house, along with Jimmy and several other renowned pipers and pipemakers. As we sit outside on the warm summer evening, Jimmy straps on the Colgan set and plays the slow air *An Buachaill Caol Dubh*. Hearing their unmistakable sound in such an intimate setting is an unforgettable experience.

B. Biography and ethnography

Born in Tramore, Co. Waterford in 1957, Jimmy was only peripherally aware of traditional music growing up in the 60s and early 70s, until a friend played him a recording of the group Planxty at age 14. Immediately transfixed by the sound of Liam O'Flynn's pipes ('a Eureka moment'), Jimmy knew that he had found the instrument for him. Without even knowing the name of the instrument (looking at the instruments mentioned in the sleeve notes, Jimmy initially hoped he was hearing the rather 'exclusive-sounding' hurdy-gurdy!), he began a journey of discovery into the world of uilleann piping.

Growing up outside of the piping community and lacking the resources available to beginners today, Jimmy's approach to learning the instrument was unorthodox. A constant companion in this early stage was Séamus Ennis' LP *The Pure Drop*, one of the few piping recordings he was able to get his hands on:

I listened to that record several times a day every day for about two or three years. I just loved it, there was no penance involved.... I kind of never looked back. And the funny thing was, by the time I actually got a practice set.... I could actually begin on the first note of that LP and go all the way through in my head and I knew every note and nuance. I didn't know how he was doing them. So when I eventually came to the Willie Clancy Week in 1975, I'd been playing for six weeks and I was put in the advanced class!

Aside from classes at the annual Scoil Samhradh Willie Clancy with Pat Mitchell and Liam O'Flynn, Jimmy had little formal tuition. He did however forge a musical camaraderie with the US-born piper Seán McKiernan, 'a huge eye-opener for me because he was the guy I could actually talk to'. While Séamus Ennis' recordings remained influential, McKiernan's idol Willie Clancy began to eclipse him:

Seán McKiernan actually went down this path of Willie Clancy and it was a path that... it was some of Willie's directions. And when I first heard him, I just fell completely in love with it, you know. And he opened a lot of doors for me for Willie, even though Willie never specifically taught him anything.

I had a few forays into Ennis, I do enjoy Ennis' piping as well. I think Willie was actually the more musical. Ennis was a better technician but a very clever and good musician too. And Ennis was much more structured than Willie. I mean, Willie didn't know where he was going to go. ... If he wasn't spontaneous, he sounds spontaneous. And I think he was, cos he used to mess things up technically a little bit, but they're the mistakes you want to copy, you know.

Another major epiphany occurred in 1977 when visiting his friend Mal Whyte. Mal was restoring a number of sets of pipes belonging to the Clare piper and collector Seán Reid, and Jimmy came across 'this big, thick, chunky chanter' he later discovered was made by the Irish pipemaker Colgan around 1820:

I played that chanter.... and the sound of it was absolutely magnificent and I spend about four or five hours playing that, er, set-up in Mal's little... it was a toilet with a kind of a terraza floor or whatever it is, a marbly kind of a floor and the acoustics were fantastic. And I was lost, I was gone, I was playing everything I knew! And again and again and again, and completely, er, caught up in it. And I said to Mal, "Oh my God, what is this? This is fantastic." And he says, "Wait till you see the rest of the set is there too!"

Seán Reid loaned the Colgan set to Jimmy, later formalised as a lifelong loan maintained by a trust to a deserving piper. It is virtually impossible to imagine Jimmy's music without the Colgan set. In his

words, 'it is what I consider my piping sound to be, that's, that's where I'm happy, you know. That's what I do as far as I'm concerned'.

Jimmy was somewhat less musically active in the 1980s, but subsequent decades have seen an increase in public performances and the release of two albums of solo piping. On the first of these, *Seán Reid's Favourite* (1996), Jimmy plays the Colgan set pitched in B as well as a concert pitch set. 'I don't know why in a way', he muses, 'I suppose I do know why actually. I was looking for Willie Clancy's sound... Particularly I wanted to play *Dark Lochnagar* on it and that was really, I think, my motivation for using that chanter in the first place'. By using both instruments Jimmy was able to imitate both Clancy's early recordings on an antique Coyne set in B and his later output on a concert pitch Rowsome set. This deep respect for the integrity of his source material is clearly audible on the album.

A more recent development in Jimmy's musical career has been his keen interest in the music of Paddy Conneely, a pre-Famine piper from Galway. Conneely's music was extensively transcribed by folklorists of the day but has almost entirely disappeared from the oral tradition. Jimmy completed a doctoral research project into Conneely's repertoire and in 2013 released an album of his own interpretations of Conneely's music *Take Me Tender*. He reflects on the differences between the two recordings:

I suppose it [*Seán Reid's Favourite*] was also a CD of pretty much my favourite tracks at the time, my favourite tunes that I, you know, liked to play. Whereas *Take Me Tender* which was relatively recently... It was actually trying to make music from transcriptions, so it was very much a creative process. It wasn't me trying to recreate what Paddy Conneely might have played, you know... Often the transcription takes the music out of it and you get left with bare melody, pitches and rhythm. So I was racking my brains.... So then, you know the famous T-shirt, "WWJD? What would Jesus do?". Well, there was someone going round here [at the Willie Clancy Summer School] with one of those a couple of years ago, "WWWD? What would Willie do?" And it struck me, what do I think Willie would have done? And as soon as I started thinking like that, portals opened and I couldn't believe, I got this sense of creativity that came over me.... I thought it would have been too false to try and recreate Paddy Conneely's piping so all I could do was make my own music out of it, you know?

In very different ways, both recordings bear the fingerprints of Willie Clancy, a piper who had died before Jimmy took up the pipes. Through meticulous study of Clancy's recordings and a friendship with his disciple Seán McKiernan, Jimmy has been able to inherit much of Clancy's musical legacy.

Joking that he is old enough to be opinionated, Jimmy is unfazed that some might see his approach to the music as outdated and conservative:

People talk about “oh, purists!” or whatever. But you know there’s a validity in playing what you love, and that applies to them as well as to the people who want to play what has gone on before... I mean, I own a saxophone so if I want to vent myself on some, you know, chromatic stuff or strange chords, I can do it that way. But I’m not interested in playing “jazz” on the pipes you know. I’m interested in playing, you know, say Willie Clancy’s music or whatever, that sort of thing.

While it might not be the sort of modernising innovation Jimmy is referring to here, his work in recovering and performing Conneely’s music has undoubtedly expanded the scope of piping repertoire and practice. He acknowledges a sense of pride whenever he hears other musicians taking up Conneely’s tunes, seeing it almost as a counterbalance to less traditionally grounded new compositions - ‘There’s kind of a sense that you’ve actually reintroduced stuff back to the tradition cos there’s an awful lot of awful stuff being composed!’

For Jimmy, style is something that is consciously selected from a range of possibilities, a process best guided by knowledge and discernment:

I began, as I said, years ago with Pat Mitchell and, er, he was all about playing staccato and tight and this and that. And of course I learned a lot of that stuff and it was great, it was useful because I think like any musician, like any instrument, you should master that instrument, you should be able to play everything but then you should choose what you use to put into your performances. And I find myself now, er, playing much more open but no shortage of, you know, staccato. I would hope that I’m playing a musical style, that’s my ambition. And not out of some kind of a sense of principle, but we’re playing music, that’s what we’re supposed to be doing. So... and when I’m teaching I say to people, you know, you have to develop your own confidence in your own judgment, having listened enough to everybody. Because that’s very important, it’s not that you go off and forge some new thing. You have to remember too, not everybody’s into the same thing, you know. So not everybody’s starting from where I started and going where I want to go.

It’s a bit like the sweet shop that you go in and you pick two or three of these and two or three of these and that’s your style ultimately, you know, that you actually pick up stuff and you bring in things that you like, you know?

C. Dark Lochnagar

It is clear when Jimmy speaks of the slow air *Dark Lochnagar* that he has a special affection for it. He recalls one of the most unexpected accolades his playing has ever received, when his recording of the air was selected by the actor Ewan McGregor as his favourite track on any recording on BBC Radio's *Desert Island Discs* program.

Dark Lochnagar has something of a convoluted provenance. It originates with an 1807 poem by Lord Byron expressing nostalgia for his childhood in the wild and majestic Scottish Highlands. At least three melodies have been supplied to fit Byron's lyric, including a setting by Beethoven, but the most enduring has proven to be a melody attributed to either the English composer Sir Henry Rowley Bishop or the Scottish harper and composer Isabella Mary Scott (later Gibson). This latter melody is the one used for the renditions of *Dark Lochnagar* sung by iconic Scottish singers Calum Kennedy and The Corries, as well as being applied to the Irish rebel song *James Connolly*.

The tune played by Clancy (reissued on Clancy 2010), however, appears to be based on a completely different melody, quite possibly one specific to the locality of West Clare. The music historian Ó Hallmhuráin (2016, 108) suggests that Scottish material such as this song could have been brought to the region by Scottish sappers completing a land survey in the 1830s. The lyric's numerous references to the Battle of Culloden may have aided its integration into a song tradition that had already embraced a great many Jacobite songs. A 1973 field recording of *Dark Lochnagar* sung by the singer Paddy McNerny in the town of Cree provides the strongest evidence for the existence of this unique regional melody (Clare County Library 2012). Although McNerny's pitch can be wayward and his melody somewhat inconsistent from verse to verse, it is discernible as closely related to a waltz tune also known as *Dark Lochnagar* played on the whistle by another West Clareman and a friend of Clancy's, Micho Russell (Russell 2015). While Clancy's version is all but impossible to connect to the words themselves, it appears to follow the broad outlines of this melody. Mirroring a number of other slow airs in the uilleann piping tradition (and bearing a relationship to the Scottish *piobaireachd* tradition), it has become a complex and stylised pipers' showpiece in which the phrases of the song have been elongated and ornamented until they are almost unrecognisable.

With this in mind, *Dark Lochnagar* embodies a fascinating tension between the local and the migrant, the written and the oral, the personal and the communal. It is a song that has come from far away and remains full of unfamiliar place names, yet has been adopted and adapted into a

unique form in West Clare's local song tradition. A lyric and melody published for a cosmopolitan and educated audience has been absorbed into an oral tradition in rural Ireland. Conversely, Clancy (or an unknown musical predecessor) took a simple tune from a communal repertoire and crafted it into a complex and unique personal expression, in turn becoming a part of a repertoire to be imitated and reworked by future generations.

Jimmy's recording of the air is most striking for its extreme faithfulness to Clancy's own recording. Indeed, a highly detailed transcription of Clancy's rendition produced by Jimmy himself (O'Brien Moran 2003) would serve quite well as a transcription of his own recording. As he indicated, he was motivated to use a concert pitch set of pipes on this recording specifically to imitate the tone and nuances of the Taylor set that Clancy was playing at the time. This kind of faithful imitation is not unusual in Irish traditional music, co-existing with more creative and personal renditions as different but equally valid expressions of the tradition. In the case of *Dark Lochnagar*, what has occurred is a form of canonisation. Clancy's personal interpretation of the air has become a part of the repertoire, a tune in its own right. In this case, a lack of other recordings of the air has ensured that Clancy remains the source for all later interpretations. These can vary from the literal, such as Jimmy's, to more substantial departures from Clancy's setting such as recordings by pipers Brian McNamara (2000) and Robbie Hannan (1990).

Both Jimmy's and Clancy's recordings of *Dark Lochnagar* follow the same form (AABAAB), allowing for clear quantitative comparison between the two. Jimmy's recording is significantly longer at 4'21" to Clancy's 3'23". However, this reduced tempo is not distributed evenly across the recording. Instead, Jimmy tends to hold long notes for even longer while proceeding through the more active melodic gestures at a similar pace to Clancy. This has the effect of creating greater definition between the two kinds of material and establishing a clearer sense of the air's modal architecture. There is an impression of poise and forethought that contrasts strongly with Clancy's more impetuous playing. This is most noticeable towards the end of each part when Clancy tends to shorten his durations as if anxious to proceed to the next strain while Jimmy maintains his more deliberate pace, often closing his chanter to provide brief silences that further delay the expected return to the cadential note D. A parallel comparison of both musicians indicates these features clearly (see Figure 3.2).

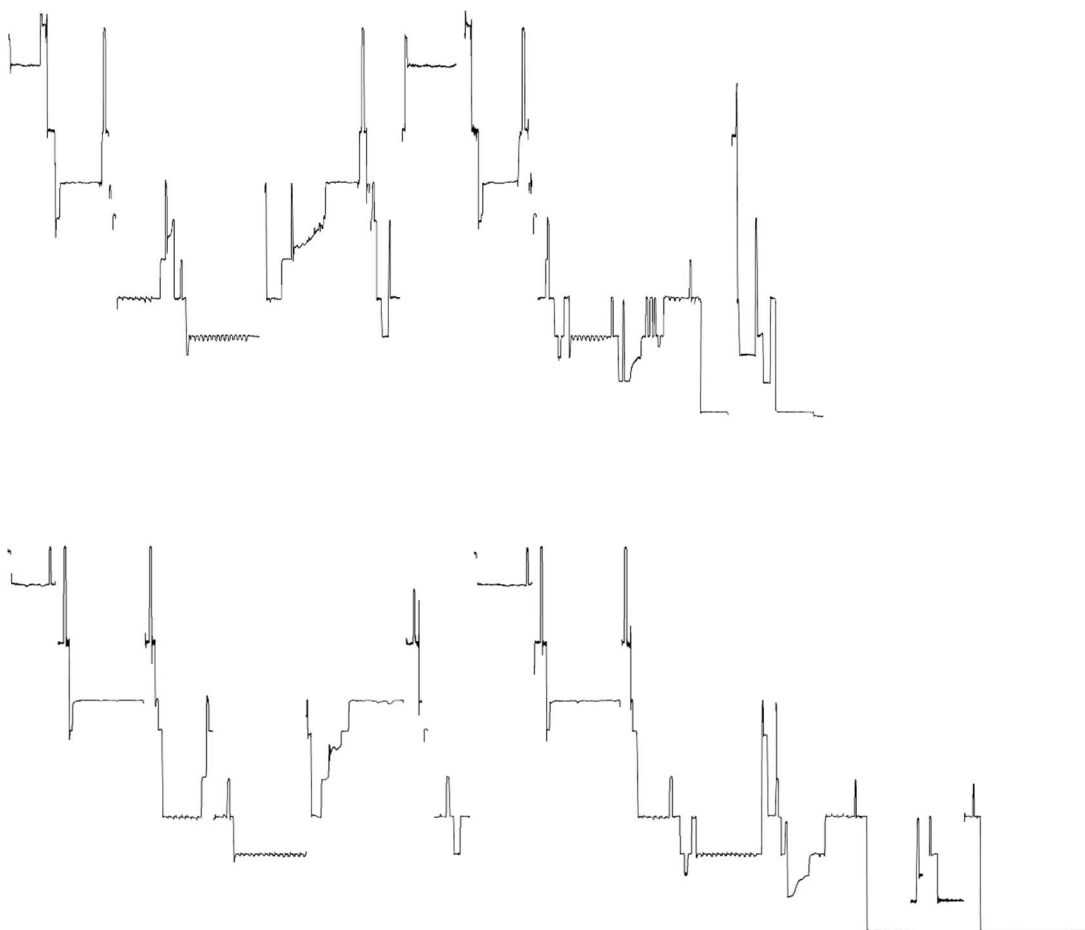


Figure 3.2 - pitch graph comparison of the first A section of Dark Lochnagar: Clancy 0'00'' - 0'25.5'' (top), O'Brien Moran 0'00'' - 0'33.8'' (bottom)

Paradoxically, it is this clear similarity between the two recordings that draws attention to the points of disagreement between the two, inviting the listener to play 'spot the difference'. Jimmy draws particular attention to one feature where he has deviated from his source:

There is one thing that I did that I really liked, I remember saying "wow!". It was actually that slow air, *Dark Lochnagar*, and the thing was, Willie always did that lovely little trill thing [sings a phrase]. And I was going to put it in and I didn't put it in and then it came around for the next time and I didn't, and I didn't, and I didn't. And eventually, at the last one, I put it in and I put in an extra... an extra trill on it. And it kind of came out by accident, so it wasn't a master plan and a masterstroke. And when it finished, when I listened back to it... Wow! Because it actually... the effect of it was delayed. We were waiting for that, if you know Willie's version. And eventually, boom! Nearly too much, you know?

In fact, while Jimmy only includes the trill at the ending of the final B section, this is the only point where Clancy does not play it (see Figure 3.3). The omission of such a striking expressive device on the final phrase of the performance, where a listener might naturally expect the greatest level of

elaboration, provides an unexpected starkness to mark the conclusion. Jimmy essentially inverts Clancy's structure, while maintaining the same logic of emphasising the final phrase. He also omits the florid melismatic gesture that immediately precedes this point in Clancy's recording, perhaps balancing out the inclusion of the trill. As he notes, these decisions have a special resonance for listeners familiar with Clancy's playing of the air. There is a sense of double meaning here; beyond the immediate expressive affect of the gesture accessible to any listener, there is a reference to the history of the tune, a wink at those in the know.

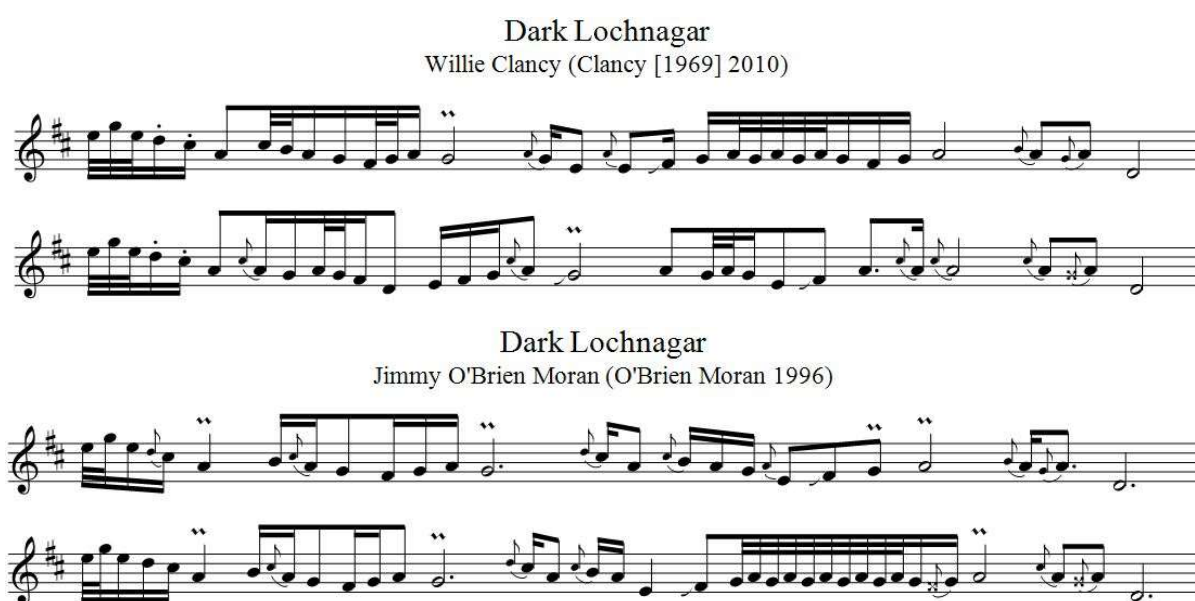


Figure 3.3 – equivalent excerpts from *Dark Lochnagar*: Clancy (from first A section, 0'18"- 0'24", from final B section, 3'08- 3'15"), O'Brien Moran (from first A section, 0'21"- 0'30", from final B section, 4'01"- 4'16")

There is a seeming tension in Jimmy praising Clancy's spontaneity on one hand and recording a near facsimile of one of his most beloved tunes on the other. The two recordings may be startlingly similar on a sonic level but they are underpinned by very different musical processes and philosophies. Jimmy notes, however, that his affinity with Clancy's piping has gradually shifted from attempts at literal replication to a more symbolic inspiration:

I used to be very much trying to be a Willie clone and Ken [McLeod, pipemaker and scholar] says to me [here Jimmy switches to a Belfast accent] "Jimmy! I have a tape of you from 1979 and you were brilliant! What happened?" And what happened was I grew up, you know, and in a way I certainly miss that Clancy stuff and I occasionally try to recapture it, you know, but I think I've become too self-conscious in a way. I don't know. I have and I haven't. But as I said, I like to think that I'm actually playing music primarily rather than anything else. But Willie has been certainly a huge influence and a great help to me in the "WWWD?" stakes....

Since Jimmy jokingly conflates Willie Clancy and Jesus of Nazareth, it is perhaps fitting that he served his period of discipleship with the master (or at least his recordings) before receiving a great commission to go forth and spread the good news to the nations. He can now apply the musical lessons he has learnt from his meticulous study of Clancy to new musical horizons.

D. The Humours of Glendart/The Wearied Lad

This set of two jigs is one of my favourite tracks on Jimmy's recording of the music of Paddy Conneely, *Take Me Tender* (O'Brien Moran 2013). They provide a study of Jimmy's synthesis of Clancy's musical legacy and this early repertoire into his own approach. Both tunes were transcribed from Conneely's playing by his patron Lord Rossmore and subsequently published by the collector Petrie (Cooper 2002). As Jimmy emphasised, despite meticulous research (O'Brien Moran 2006) he was unable to arrive at a full picture of Conneely's piping style from the transcriptions of folklorists and other contemporary evidence. Instead, he has approached this material through his own lens, which naturally incorporates the influence of Willie Clancy and others.

The first tune is a version of a very common jig, also known as *East at Glendart*, perhaps best known today from a recording by Planxty (1979) and one of the very few tunes on the album which would be likely to be recognised by a casual listener of Irish traditional music. It has the feel of a 'pipers' version', where a setting of the tune has been devised to incorporate more characteristic piping colours. The converse, however, is also very possible; that it was originally a piece of piping repertoire that has since developed into a more neutral, 'session-friendly' form. On the other hand, the 4-part jig *The Wearied Lad* is largely unknown today but does bear some similarities to another long piping jig, *The Gold Ring*. There may also be a relationship with another jig called *An Buachaill Dreóite*, a more or less direct translation of the same title into Irish.

In interpreting this music and in keeping with his 'WWWD?' philosophy, Jimmy has made a number of decisions that deviate from the Rossmore transcriptions. The most significant is his transposition of *The Humours of Glendart*, given in F in the transcription, to the key of D. This is a relatively obvious decision for the piper, giving prominence to the characteristic hard D note, placing the tune in correspondence with the drone pitch of D, and generally making it more idiomatic and fluent for the instrument. As such, it is quite likely that Jimmy's choice of key matches Conneely's original playing before an editorial adjustment. Another departure from the transcription occurs in the first

part of *The Wearied Lad* (1'17" to 1'24", see Figure 3.5), where Jimmy introduces several repeated notes, allowing him to introduce some tight playing which would be considerably more difficult if he were bound to the written version. Conversely, in the fourth part (1'57" to 2'12", see Figure 3.5), he opts to omit what appears to be a notated variation, and keeps to a more repetitive structure. In a sense, he is honouring the processes behind the notation rather than the notation itself.

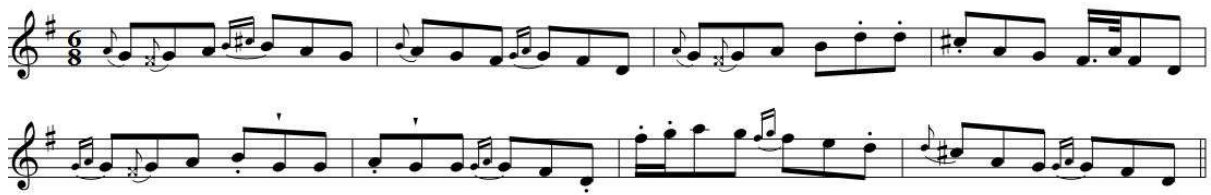
The wearied lad. Set by Lord Rosmore from P. Coneely 1843.

Allegro.

541.

Figure 3.4 – *The Wearied Lad* in Petrie's collection (Cooper 2002)

The Wearied Lad
Jimmy O'Brien Moran (O'Brien Moran 2013)



The Wearied Lad
Jimmy O'Brien Moran (O'Brien Moran 2013)



Figure 3.5 – two excerpts from *The Wearied Lad* (1'17" - 1'24", 1'57" - 2'12")

This kind of organic, ongoing variation could be said to be in the spirit of Clancy's 'spontaneous' musical decisions. Additionally, a number of other devices beloved by Clancy are given prominence in this recording. While it is impossible to be comprehensive in considering every detail of his playing, we can isolate some areas where the fingerprints of Clancy are particularly apparent.

As has already been discussed, a great deal of emphasis is placed on articulation in uilleann piping practice. This often takes the form of cuts, where a finger is lifted momentarily to sound a higher pitch. This is sometimes referred to as a grace note, but this terminology is somewhat controversial in Irish traditional music. The argument goes that cuts (and their lower pitched counterpart, taps) are articulations rather than ornaments; their function is to provide a rhythmic and dynamic accent rather than a melodic embellishment. However, many musicians deploy the terms 'grace note' and 'ornament' to refer to these same devices. On an instrument with minimal latitude for dynamic variation, cuts and taps are considered especially vital for providing the required emphasis to convey the rhythms of dance music (Mitchell 1999).

Throughout both tunes, Jimmy very effectively exploits both the melodic and articulatory possibilities of this technique. He typically plays cuts on the main beats; indeed, he deplores

excessive cuts on notes which do not fall on the beat as a modern piping innovation which does not serve the music. This ensures that there is ample scope for examining the ways in which Jimmy uses this device. Often the cut is brief and precise, adding a crisp accent to the note in the standard piping fashion. Sometimes, however, he lengthens the cut note so that it begins to be heard as a melodic presence. As well as experimenting with its length he can also be heard varying its placement such that it sometimes falls after the principal note. This delay has the effect of generating two pitches before the principal note and therefore a heavier articulation, a very common effect in Clancy's piping albeit one without a standard terminology (Jimmy notes that it is referred to as a 'casadh' in documents of Conneely's era). Before the first tune is repeated, we have already been exposed to a wide variety of extremely subtle variations to this simple technique.

At their most elongated extreme, these longer, more melodic cuts approach the duration of the principal notes of the jig rhythm, generating an open quadruplet. We can see quadruplets of a sort notated in the source transcription, in the fourth part of *The Wearied Lad* (see Figure 3.4). The C that appears in both quadruplets here is the most typical pitch that would be used for a cut to separate the repeated Bs and As. It is therefore reasonable to imagine that this represents an attempt by the transcriber to notate a similar elongated cut effect. But whether Jimmy's is an accurate reconstruction of how Conneely might have played the tune is largely beside the point. It provides an interpretation of the source material which is personal to Jimmy and his forebears in the tradition. Furthermore, he extrapolates this concept to generate further quadruplet possibilities which do not appear in the transcription (see Figure 3.7). Perhaps unsurprisingly, we can once again find strong precedents to these kinds of rhythmic explorations in Clancy's music, such as his version of *Banish Misfortune* (Clancy 2010).



Figure 3.6 – (left to right) a typical cut, a 'casadh', two quadruplets from the Rossmore transcription, a similar quadruplet movement represented with cuts (which could be elongated to approach the preceding movement)



Figure 3.7 – the final repetition of the D section of *The Wearied Lad* (3'09 - 3'20"), demonstrating quadruplets

Another noticeable aspect of Jimmy's playing of these jigs that seems to owe a debt to Clancy is his exploration of the microtonal areas between the notes F \flat and F \sharp , and C \flat and C \sharp . These areas have been noted as vital to expression in Irish traditional music as far back as Henebry (1928) and are often exploited by pipers by means of alternative fingerings, slides and off-leg playing. Clancy, however, is commonly cited as one of the most adventurous pipers in this regard (Harper and McSherry 2015). While the Rossmore transcription of *The Wearied Lad* contains the accidentals F \flat and B \flat , Jimmy appears to treat these as indications of microtonal colourings rather than literal discrete pitches. In other words, he plays with a wide range of Fs, Cs and, to a lesser extent, Bs. Jimmy also does not restrict them to exactly the places indicated in the transcription, but spreads them throughout his playing, keeping some of his most adventurous moments until the end.

There is a noticeable deviation from regular tempo in the fourth part of *The Wearied Lad* where Jimmy lingers on the final note of a phrase longer than one would expect, thereby delaying the following beat. Jimmy replicates this gesture almost exactly at the same point on the repetition of the fourth part a few seconds later, strongly suggesting that it is not a mistake. This kind of metric flexibility is seldom discussed by practitioners. Indeed, suggesting that a musician does not always maintain a perfectly regular tempo could be interpreted as an insult by many. The piper Ronan Browne does refer to it in a video interview, however (NPU 2007), where he describes it as a feature of the approach of older musicians (including Willie Clancy) which is rarely heard nowadays. He also indicates that these musicians tend to balance the equation, 'making up' for the inconsistency by accelerating or decelerating elsewhere. Here too, Jimmy noticeably shortens the beat following the delay, as if to balance out the extended beat, before stabilising again (see Figure 3.8).

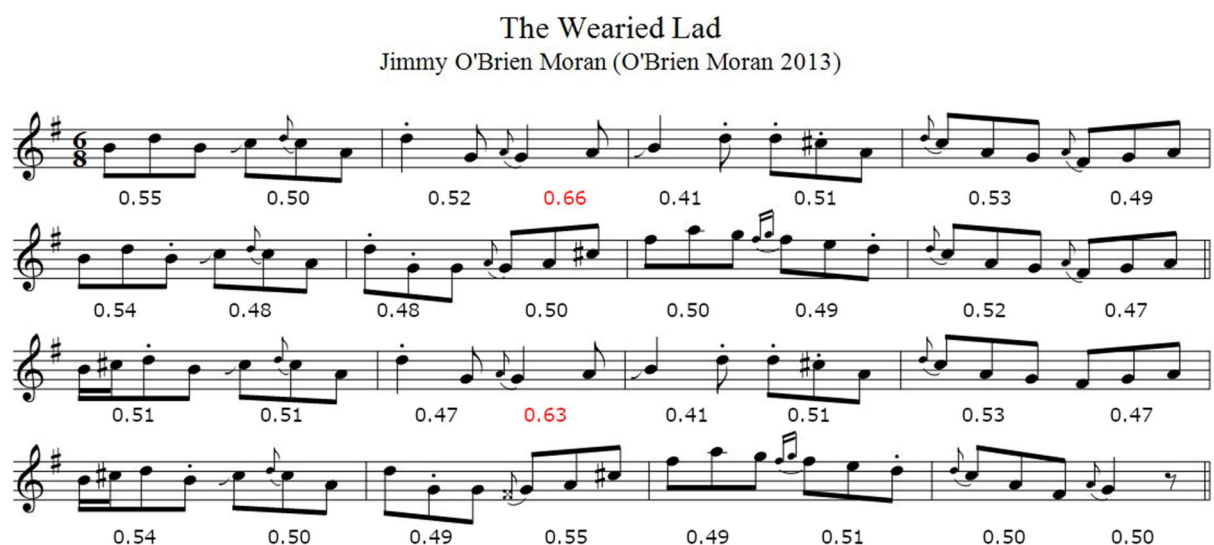


Figure 3.8 – excerpts from *The Wearied Lad* (1'57" - 2'12") with durations of each beat in seconds (the elongated beats are noted in red)

If there is any one decision made by Jimmy which does not seem to spring directly from Clancy's music, it is his use of trills. Rapid trills on the high E and high F#, both using the right index finger to give the pitch of G, are idiomatic of Séamus Ennis' piping, to the extent that they are often called 'Ennis trills' (Ennis himself called them 'shivers' (Ennis 1998)). Both of these occur a number of times throughout Jimmy's rendition. Again, we find them not always deployed as clear, discrete events (as Ennis typically would) but subtly introduced and manipulated. Typically there will only be two quick oscillations of the trill, only one more than the 'casadh' figure discussed above, and therefore further blurring the lines of articulation and melody. By the end, Jimmy is throwing in these short trills on Bs and As as well, further removing them from Ennis' usage and claiming them as his own (see Figure 3.9).



Figure 3.9 – excerpt from *The Wearied Lad* (2'19" - 2'23"), demonstrating a number of trills

These features could be seen as kinds of uncertainty; treating pitch, meter, and articulation as parameters to be explored rather than fixed standards. It gives the impression of a game, seeing how far the player can push things away from the expected, 'safe' values. Of course, a less charitable reading could see them as mistakes, a lack of control. But regardless of whether they are intentional in the sense of being under the player's conscious control, these features of Jimmy's playing are what connects his music to that of earlier pipers like Clancy. They stand counter to a more modern aesthetic that demands a cleaner and arguably more homogenised approach, placing cuts and taps precisely on even divisions of a regular pulse (Smyth 2018). As Jimmy puts it, they are 'the mistakes you want to copy'. Keil (1985) notes a tendency in 'proletarian music' moving away from the unpredictable and idiosyncratic towards a sweeter and more controlled 'Apollonian' sound, in response to the increasing technologisation of their host cultures. While one can undoubtedly find evidence for such a shift in Irish traditional music, Jimmy stands out as a dissident to this thesis. There is a certain irony to this, in that Jimmy's close imitation of Clancy and early pipers could be seen as simultaneously a conservative and radical stance.

E. Conclusion

Jimmy's remembrances of the 'Eureka moment' when he first experienced the sound of the uilleann pipes - and to an extent the second epiphany that occurred when he first played the Colgan chanter - present intriguing parallels with Willie Clancy's own experiences. Clancy tells of a life-changing encounter with the Traveller piper Johnny Doran when he visited the area in 1936 - possibly his first experience of the uilleann pipes (see Harper and McSherry 2015, 349). He describes the moment in religious terms ('I thought it was something from heaven, I really did'), shaping his career as a piper as he 'followed Doran around the country day and night' (Clancy and Casey 1975). As with Jimmy, the epiphany was followed by a journey of sorts, eagerly trying to extract every bit of knowledge from his sometimes unforthcoming mentor, just as Jimmy had spent diligently studying his recordings. This tension between the ecstatic moment and the rigours of study, both of which have left their mark on Jimmy and his music, suggests another aspect of the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy introduced earlier.

Just as he started out studying the recordings of the masters without an instrument to play them on, there is a sense in which Jimmy's music seems to spring from a place of listening. It is his knowledge and discernment that set him apart from so many other pipers, with his instrumental abilities almost an afterthought. But for all his reputation as a scholar of piping and an uncompromising performer of 'serious' piping repertoire, Jimmy still engages in a broader musical economy. A substantial section of Jimmy's website (www.jimmyobrienmoran.com) is devoted to his business as a freelance wedding musician, with a repertoire list including such non-traditional offerings as the *Braveheart* theme. But behind the well-produced promotional video, and its soft-focus close-ups of flowers and bridal dresses, is the unmistakable throaty buzz of Jimmy's antique Colgan set playing *Dark Lochnagar*.

Jimmy's music provides us with an opportunity to reflect on musical style as a means of embodying historical connections. As the analysis above indicates, the lines between Jimmy's own creativity and that of Clancy, Conneely, Ennis, and others are not always easily drawn. Perhaps they do not have to be. These forces are all part of Jimmy's musical lineage and there may be no sense in wondering about who is responsible for what. He also speaks powerfully of his connection with his instrument as a vital part of his musical identity. This has been less frequently discussed as an aspect of musical style than more easily quantified and analysed musicological parameters (Keegan 2010), a topic which will be explored in more depth in Chapters 8 and 9. The following four case studies will see

many of these themes return and new ones emerge. Even the next chapter, a case study of Michael 'Blackie' O'Connell whose musical activities often occupy a very different realm from Jimmy O'Brien Moran, will give us cause to re-examine them and see how these two pipers are able to coexist in the same musical community of practice.

Chapter 4 – Michael ‘Blackie’ O’Connell

‘I’m not precious about my music. I’m quite happy to share with everyone ... It’s just sharing music with people... friends!’

The biographic and ethnographic material, as well all quotations in this chapter (except where indicated), have been taken from a recorded interview with Michael ‘Blackie’ O’Connell conducted on 20 July 2018.

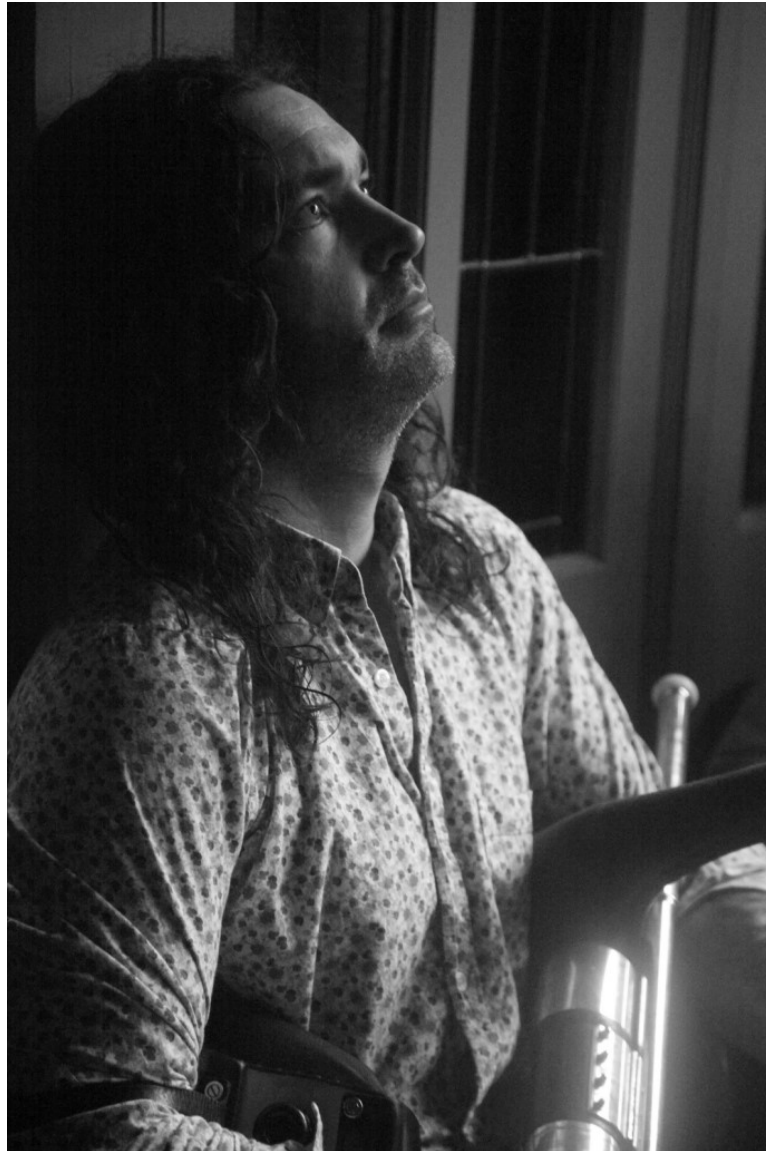


Figure 4.1 – Blackie O’Connell. Photo by Bob Singer.

A. Introduction

Michael ‘Blackie’ O’Connell (b. 1982), nicknamed for his flowing black hair, is a charismatic and popular figure in the modern piping scene. Blackie maintains a busy schedule as a performing and

recording artist, a piping teacher, and a mainstay of the session circuit in Ennis (the county town and largest population centre of County Clare). In particular, his weekly 'Piping Heaven/Piping Hell' session has quickly become a cherished part of uilleann piping life in Ireland. He also performs regularly at the pubs in Doolin, the West Clare village which has become a major stop on the tourist circuit, describing itself as 'the home of Irish traditional music' (Doolin Tourism 2020). His image has featured prominently on tourism promotional videos and advertising billboards, prompting good-natured jokes at his celebrity status from his fellow musicians.

My strongest impressions of Blackie were established at the 2017 National Folk Festival in Canberra, where he was performing in a trio led by the singer Daoirí Farrell. He spent hours every day in the Session Bar, often at the heart of a fiery session, but occasionally playing solo to an informal but spellbound audience. While I had heard and appreciated his piping on recordings before, experiencing his music in this setting was utterly captivating - in Canberra it suddenly made sense to me.

Having made several attempts to catch Blackie for an interview, he suggests we meet up following an event he is organising at Dan O'Connell's Pub in Ennis including an informal concert and session with guest pipers Mick O'Brien, Máire Ní Ghráda, and Mickey Dunne. Several of Blackie's students also perform, providing a strong community focus for the gathering. During our 27-minute interview in a side room of O'Dea's Bar, Blackie occasionally has to interrupt proceedings to respond to the greetings of customers, commanding the space just as he does in a session or onstage.

B. Biography and ethnography

Blackie's first teacher was Mickey Dunne, a piper of Traveller descent living in Limerick. Blackie acknowledges a great musical debt to Mickey, whom he was 'lucky enough to have fallen in with' at an early age:

I was about 12 years old and. I wanted to play the harp but I couldn't get a harp made, so my dad bought me a brand new set of uilleann pipes from Cillian Ó Briain. A holly chanter, I'll never forget it, beautiful! ... Mickey Dunne got them for me and handed me the pipes and I was kind of, I was iffy about playing them, like. Until I saw Paddy Keenan. I saw Paddy Keenan here in Ennis and I remember the date! It was the 17th of January 1997. I remember the date, I have a recording of it. And Paddy Keenan, the first time I'd seen him live, and it was the best I ever saw him live, you know! I know, isn't that the way it always is, like? Because when you see him first, Paddy is just spectacular! And I said to

myself, I want to learn how to do that and I'm going to grow my hair long! And I grew my hair long and I'm still learning! [laughs]

So, Mickey... Like, Mickey taught me everything and I had lessons, it was every second Tuesday for a year. And even every second Tuesday, that was kind of haphazard enough to be honest, like. And Mickey taught me two tunes, *Rolling in the Ryegrass* and *The Gander in the Pratie Hole* and uh, he kept making me go back over those two tunes. He drilled the bejeezus out of them, like, and then he said "Now Michael, go on away now and learn yourself" he said, "I'm finished with you now!"... He hasn't, he's never been finished with me, I still learn from him every time I sit with him, like!

Mickey's influence and generosity also took a more tangible form:

For my eighteenth birthday, Mickey was waiting for his new set from Cillian [Ó Briain] for six years, and for my eighteenth birthday he changed his place in the queue and I got a new set from Cillian, I got Mickey's spot in the queue. Mickey waited another three years and that was my present ... and a fishing rod!

I mean Mickey has a... it's not only his music, it's his outlook in life and everything and he's just been... I can't, I can't go on about it enough... an absolute rock of a man! I'll put that on tape! That's recorded!

Blackie also recalls one of Mickey's harsher lessons:

When I was learning from Mickey, I had *Rolling in the Ryegrass* and *The Gander in the Pratie Hole* and I went down to Miltown [Malbay for the Scoil Samhradh Willie Clancy]... But I was doing the classes, anyway. And I'm back to Mickey two weeks later. I remembered a tune, *Bonnie Kate*. I learned *Bonnie Kate* in Miltown and I have not played it since that day! I went down to Mickey, right, and I put the pipes on and I... you know I was cock of the walk. I mean, like, Jesus! I was showing Mickey how good I was, you know. Look at all the stuff I learnt! I was delighted with myself! When I finished the tune Mickey says, "Michael, do me a favour now," he says, "Don't fuckin' play that again. Now go back and play the tune I taught you the way I taught you. Nice and slow, *Rolling in the Ryegrass!*"

And I went in ten foot tall and I came out that size [gestures to indicate a minute quantity]. I actually... I broke down crying. I started to cry cos I was so delighted with myself and Mickey just cut the shit out of me, like! But he was right! He was absolutely right! I never, it was the best lesson I ever got in my life, cos I thought I was doing great and he was there to tell me, "No you're not doing great - go back

and do the bit the way I taught you, nice and slow!” And that will stay with me forever but it was the best lesson I got, and I could never thank him enough...

Another vital ongoing relationship is with the pipemaker Cillian Ó Briain. Blackie has never stopped playing Cillian’s pipes, now onto yet another of his sets, and is unstinting in his praise of Cillian’s work:

The quality of them is just a cut above... the finishes, the little touches he does....the little things that he gets right every time. [He pauses here to show me a subtle technical feature of how the chanter is connected to the bag, ensuring a snug fit and minimal chance of it embarrassingly coming loose while playing.] I’m severe on pipes, I know I am, I’m kind of, I’m heavy duty on them to be honest, like, and Cillian’s stand up to that ... which is class!

Perhaps unsurprisingly as a student of Mickey Dunne and a fervent admirer of Paddy Keenan, Blackie is sometimes described as an inheritor of the Traveller style (eg. Fegan and O’Connell 2011). When I bring this up, however, he tells me that he is not entirely comfortable with the label. He acknowledges that ‘years ago [he] probably would’ve’ identified as a Traveller style piper but nowadays he is happier with the descriptor of ‘Clare style’:

I’m a huge advocate of Keenan, and [Finbar] Furey and Davy Spillane. I’m lucky enough to have spent time with these people. I don’t think I have the wildness... I do think I play a lot of Clare music and I play it on an instrument that’s wide, that’s open. I don’t really have the real Traveller edge. But I don’t think Mickey Dunne is a Traveller piper. Mickey listens to Liam O’Flynn... and classical music! ... I think I play like Mickey as well. Mickey’s - I can’t stress that enough - a huge influence, an absolutely huge influence really.

It is worth pausing here to examine some implications of these comments. Firstly, it is clear that, for Blackie, Traveller ethnicity is neither necessary nor sufficient for identification as a ‘Traveller style’ piper. Davy Spillane and (elsewhere in the interview) Martin Nolan, not Travellers themselves, nevertheless possess a Traveller piping style, presumably inherited from their lessons with the Traveller piper John Keenan (father of Paddy Keenan). On the other hand, Mickey Dunne is of Traveller descent but Blackie does not consider him a Traveller style piper due to the influence of the more refined voices of the piper Liam O’Flynn and the Western classical tradition in his musical horizons. The terms he uses to distance himself from his concept of the Traveller style, ‘wildness’ and ‘edge’, reinforce this difference he describes.

This terminology immediately suggests Keil's (1985) discussion of 'Dionysian' and 'Apollonian' archetypes in twentieth century musical narratives, a thread which will be examined in more depth in later chapters. In contemporary Irish music practice the Apollonian, corresponding to 'a frozen moment of dreamlike perfection' is often uppermost in individual practice and the recording studio, while the Dionysian, with its resulting 'immersion in fellow man and nature, [and] loss of self' can emerge in live performance and especially the communal frenzy of the session (Keil 1985, 128). In this view, Traveller style piping can be best identified by a particular musical spirit or affect, rather than being clearly bounded by community or pedagogical lineage. While the old distinction between 'gentleman' and 'Traveller' piping may seem increasingly irrelevant to contemporary manifestations of social class and ethnicity (Tuohy and Ó hAodha 2008), this underlying struggle between Apollonian and Dionysian forces can still be felt keenly in uilleann piping practice. In fact, if Keil is correct that 'a vital style [of music] always has Dionysian and Apollonian aspects competing for primacy' (Keil 1985, 127), then it may represent a fundamental dialectical tension that gives piping style its meaning and relevance.

Blackie's identification with 'Clare style' is also worth reflecting on. The concept of a single Clare style is noticeably lacking from the received wisdom of regional styles which commonly subdivides the county in East Clare and West Clare styles, if not further (see Keegan 2008). In the discourse of piping West Clare is the more frequently invoked of the two. The chief association here would be with Willie Clancy, with other West Clare pipers such as Tommy McCarthy and Seán Talty coming to mind secondarily, if at all. By invoking a monolithic Clare style, Blackie seems to be doing away with this distinction and drawing attention to his own musical milieu of Ennis. The town of Ennis would perhaps be considered too cosmopolitan (inasmuch as that word can be meaningfully applied to a population of barely 30,000 people) by the old advocates of the regional stylistic complexes who often venerated the music of more remote rural areas (Corcoran 1997), but today it represents a thriving socio-musical hub and one that Blackie is clearly proud to be a part of.

He gives further insight into this viewpoint by (perhaps controversially) naming the fiddler Siobhán Peoples as another exponent of this Clare style. Although a longtime resident of Ennis and a frequent session colleague of Blackie's, Siobhán is the daughter of Tommy Peoples, the most famed Donegal fiddler of modern years. Blackie's understanding of style, then, is something embedded in community connections, superseding lineages of transmission and perhaps even sonic artefacts:

I play with Siobhán Peoples a lot. And people might associate Siobhán with Donegal music. Siobhán's a Clare fiddle player! Be under no illusions...

Blackie also singles out the Ennis concertina player Hugh Healy, with whom he recorded a 2010 album, for special mention. In the process he provides further insight into his understanding of what makes the music of Clare so unique and important:

Hugh is a quintessential Clare musician. Absolute rhythm coming out of his bones, like. Just absolute top drawer! And no kind of... silly dances. No, no...no gimmicks. Just honest Clare music!... There's just a vein of music in the area that's hard to ignore. It's, it's contagious, like. So you know, you, you tap into the well and you know, keep going... People come to Clare for that. There's something about it. There's something, something honest in Clare music that's, you know, inclusive. Infectious, as well. And if you can hone in on that you're not going to go too far wrong, like. You know, you really won't.

The West Clare pipemaker Derrick Gleeson, strongly associated with narrow-bored flat sets, is in many ways a polar opposite to the aforementioned Cillian Ó Briain. But Blackie also mentions him, recalling that he recorded a few tracks on a Gleeson C set on his *Friars Green* album, providing helpful advocacy for Gleeson's work during his early career, because 'we're all Clare lads, we're all saluting the same salute!'.

Blackie has made an impressive number of albums with plucked string specialists Cyril O'Donohue and Karol Lynch (O'Connell and Lynch 2008; *Foolin In Doolin* 2009; 2011; O'Connell and O'Donohue 2014) as well as the aforementioned duo album with Hugh Healy (Healy and O'Connell 2010). Compared to many modern pipers (such as Kevin Rowsome, Robbie Hannan, or Jimmy O'Brien Moran) who may have published only two or three full albums even well into their careers, this is quite a prolific output for a relatively young piper. Unlike many of my other informants, Blackie has been able to generate and sustain a professional career as a performer and music teacher, an especially impressive achievement in the relatively small centre of Ennis. Collectively these recordings document his music in a variety of contexts, from noisy live sets for tourists in Doolin to polished studio offerings.

Blackie acknowledges that many of the musical decisions he makes operate at an instinctive level, although undoubtedly informed by his aural feedback from the instrument he is playing. A revelation came when he was teaching at a summer school in the Catskill Mountains with fellow pipers Benedict Koehler and Ivan Goff:

I was sitting there and I didn't know how to start or how to finish or begin or what-have-you. And Benedict said "We'll play *Collier's*, we'll all play *Collier's*". So we all played *Collier's Reel*. And then he,

then we stopped and Benedict graciously, um, moved 'forward and said, "Now you'll notice Blackie actually used the chanter off the knee as a default position except for the occasions when he was playing the tight triplets, on which occasion he put the chanter back down..." And I was sitting there and I was going "Jesus, he's actually right! I didn't... I didn't realise that, like!"

I mean, now that... I've a new chanter, that's my new chanter, so I play it slightly differently. The older one, you could do things on it, I could spend the day off the knee on it, like. The new chanter demands a little bit more, which is good. It's good practice if nothing else. So I probably have changed a little bit to... to satisfy that chanter as well. [Here Blackie briefly jokes with a nearby friend who once accidentally dropped the thankfully unharmed chanter]. But yeah, I've probably... I've probably tightened up a little bit. The other chanter was a lot more forgiving, this one is less forgiving. It's less, um... the other one is more resilient. Tuning isn't as good, like, on the other one. The other one is a bit wilder, like. It doesn't bother me, like. It bothers other people!

Throughout my conversation with Blackie, I get the impression that his music-making arises intuitively from his personal relationships and the music he is surrounded by. As his reflections freewheel between particulars of instrumental technique, impressionistic descriptions of the music that has influenced him and personal anecdotes, I am reminded of Keil's (1987, 279) terminology of 'organic intellectuals'. Even his occasional jocular asides to fellow customers in the pub become a part of this gestalt, as much (and as little) a performance as when he plays the pipes.

This is not to suggest that there is anything unconsidered or unformed about his piping. His technical virtuosity alone is proof of highly disciplined practice habits and his playing displays an inner logic that is no less precise for being unanalysed. His analogy of 'building blocks' (one also employed by a few of my other interview subjects) seems entirely appropriate here; it is at once creative and constructive, imaginative and rigorous:

If I play a tune three times, for example, the drones might go on the second time, and the third time you'll hear big 1980s power chords on the bass regulator and it's trying to build the set. You know, start the tune, build the set up and then, you know, change it and build it again and it's, it's building blocks all the time. And I try to use the instrument both, you know, harmonically and rhythmically... Cos the regulators are... are great rhythm too. And I was a drummer before anything so I try and use you know all those... And I try not to make too many mistakes.. and I mean literally that's the long and short of my theory, like, you know! Good or bad... I'm not shy about playing with my heroes or I'm not... I'm not precious about my music. I'm quite happy to share with everyone. I'm quite happy to see young people do well and, you know if you're kinda... confident enough in yourself to do all that,

well then you're grand, like! Just keep going, like. It's not a big deal. It's just sharing music with people... friends!...

C. Rolling in the Ryegrass/The Woman of the House/The Holly Bush

This set of reels was performed by Blackie at a recital for the 2018 Piper's Gathering, an annual event currently held in Litchfield, CT, catering not only to uilleann pipers but also to players of other instruments including Scottish smallpipes and Northumbrian smallpipes. For the last several years, the organisers have released a series of recordings of performances from the gathering. Blackie is a consummate entertainer and is arguably at his best in the full flow of a live performance, a context captured here with excellent audio quality. That Blackie would choose this occasion to play the hackneyed *Rolling in the Ryegrass*, a tune so associated with beginners, speaks volumes as to his confidence performing in this environment. Nearly as soon as he begins, however, we realise that this is not just any rendition of *Rolling in the Ryegrass* and Blackie takes advantage of the audience's total familiarity with the tune to depart from its basic outline in dramatic and striking ways. More esteemed piping repertoire follows with the reels *The Woman of the House* and *The Holly Bush* (the latter a composition by the accordion player Finbarr Dwyer), but Blackie continues to defy expectations in his approach to them.

Of course, for Blackie, *Rolling in the Ryegrass* is also the tune over which Mickey Dunne 'cut the shit out of [him]' in that harsh but powerful lesson he recalled. Blackie's commitment to this tune proves that his deference to Mickey as the teacher he has never stopped learning from is more than mere lip service. Indeed, more than once I have seen Blackie informally dedicate a set of tunes to Mickey in performance, as he also does on his *Friars Green* album (O'Connell and O'Donohue 2014). Here, he seems to have taken to heart Mickey's advice and never stopped practising *Rolling in the Ryegrass*, proving here that it is possible to do extraordinary things with a tune that others might dismiss out of hand. Blackie is not one to shy away from displays of virtuosity and his playing here may even transgress the boundaries of good taste for some. But it is difficult not to get caught up in the energy and exuberance of his playing, achieving a state of listening where such judgments seem remarkably unimportant. It is also significant that he is playing for an audience of pipers here and perhaps intends to take the opportunity to give a technical masterclass to those in attendance.

There is a strong sense of playfulness in the modal structure of Blackie's setting of the tune. Most versions of *Rolling in the Ryegrass* adhere to a 'gapped' hexatonic mode centred on D, avoiding

either a C# or a C♭. If a musician were to incorporate one or the other, however (perhaps as part of a melodic variation such as those shown in Figure 4.2), it would certainly be a C#. This is not only in keeping with a common pipers' tendency to use the C# for quick and unemphasised notes due to the ergonomic ease of its fingering (see Mitchell 1993), but also establishes the expected Ionian mode which seems entirely appropriate for this uncomplicated and perhaps slightly innocuous tune. Three ubiquitous pipers' staccato triplets (ACA, BCB, and BCD), any of which could be inserted into this tune, also incorporate the C# for the same rationale of ergonomic efficiency.

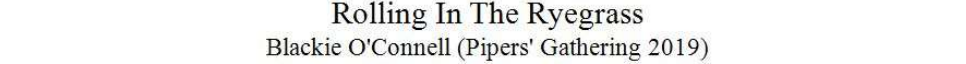


Figure 4.2 – a simple outline of *Rolling in the Ryegrass* (containing no Cs), followed by a version with some possible melodic variations incorporating C#s


Blackie's subversiveness is clearest in the second repetition, where he departs significantly from the standard melodic outline to take the audience into territory not commonly associated with this tune but very familiar to the uilleann piper (see Figure 4.3).

By sharply emphasising C♭s in contrast to the expected C#s (the latter of which he only uses fleetingly in the ACA and BCD triplets mentioned above), he takes a striking deviation into an implied Mixolydian mode. The variations he plays here could be regarded as a quotation, interpolating material from a different tune (especially evident in the second bar shown below). Identifying a precise source is complicated by the number of piping reels with very similar melodic material, but the strongest connection is arguably to a four-part reel, *Jenny's Welcome to Charlie*, strongly

Rolling In The Ryegrass
Blackie O'Connell (Pipers' Gathering 2019)



Jenny's Welcome to Charlie
Séamus Ennis (The Drones and the Chanters 1971)



Blackie's technical prowess is on full display in this performance, as he gleefully incorporates movements and techniques at very high speed that the vast majority of pipers would avoid even at a much more leisurely tempo. On numerous occasions he plays two consecutive tight triplets (eg. the opening gesture of Figure 4.3 above), necessitating rapid but rhythmically controlled movements of his left ring finger (typically the weakest finger for right-handed pipers) to sound and silence the note A. Donnelly (1990, 15) refers to these kind of repetitive A movements as 'piping constipation' and Jimmy O'Brien Moran outlines a number of strategies to avoid such reliance on the finger (NPU 2009b). Nevertheless, Blackie rises to the challenge without any hint of difficulty, and in fact employs a number of very similar movements throughout the performance.

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a beat. The embarrassing experience of getting confused in this way is one that all Irish traditional musicians can recall and we find ourselves simultaneously sympathising with Blackie while envying his ability to handle it far better than we could have ourselves at even a fraction of the speed! But Blackie seems entirely unperturbed by the experience and it certainly does not seem to curb his ambitious variations for the rest of the set in any way.

Clearly audible throughout the recording is Blackie's stated preference for wider cut intervals, which he attributes to Mickey Dunne and other Traveller pipers. These wider intervals give more incisive quality to the articulation, amplified by the naturally bright tone of his pipes. He also has a tendency to place cuts on the highest note of a given melodic cell (see Figure 4.4), which frequently occurs off the beat in the first part of *Rolling in the Ryegrass*. The resulting syncopation is an immediately striking effect to a listener acquainted with the conventions of uilleann piping, in which cuts are very typically deployed on the beat. Indeed, more than one of my other interview subjects singled out offbeat cuts as an unwelcome 'modern' development that they saw as untasteful. Blackie also uses his cuts in an 'arrangemental' way, providing an impression of dynamic variety on an instrument that essentially plays at a single volume. His heavy use of syncopated cuts gives a sharp and accented quality to the first part of *Rolling in the Ryegrass*, compared with the lighter and more free-flowing second part (see Figure 4.4).

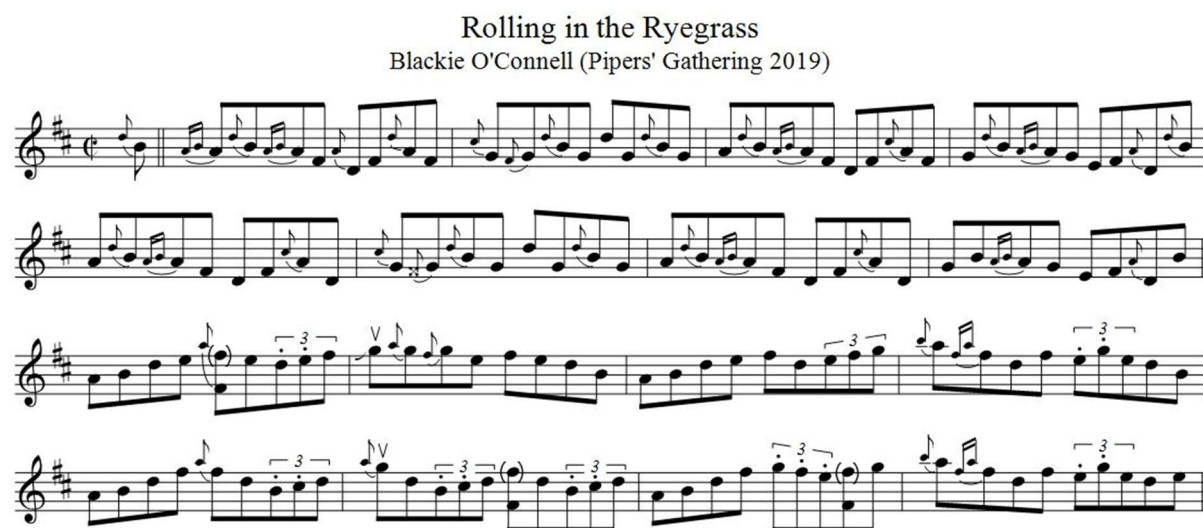


Figure 4.4 – excerpt from *Rolling in the Ryegrass* (0'02" - 0'19") demonstrating contrasting use of cuts

The second part of *The Woman of the House* provides another interesting study. The frequently reoccurring long second-octave F#s and Gs naturally suggest the possibility of lifting the chanter (particularly effective in this register) to provide tonal colour and pitch inflections. While this feature

can be heard in other piping renditions (eg. Glackin and Keenan 1978), Blackie takes it to extremes here and virtually every instance is distinctive in its precise inflection and colour from tight and sudden yelps to wavering blues-like smears (see Figure 4.5). Features such as this demonstrate Blackie's masterful control of his instrument, evident even in the full flow of this performance.

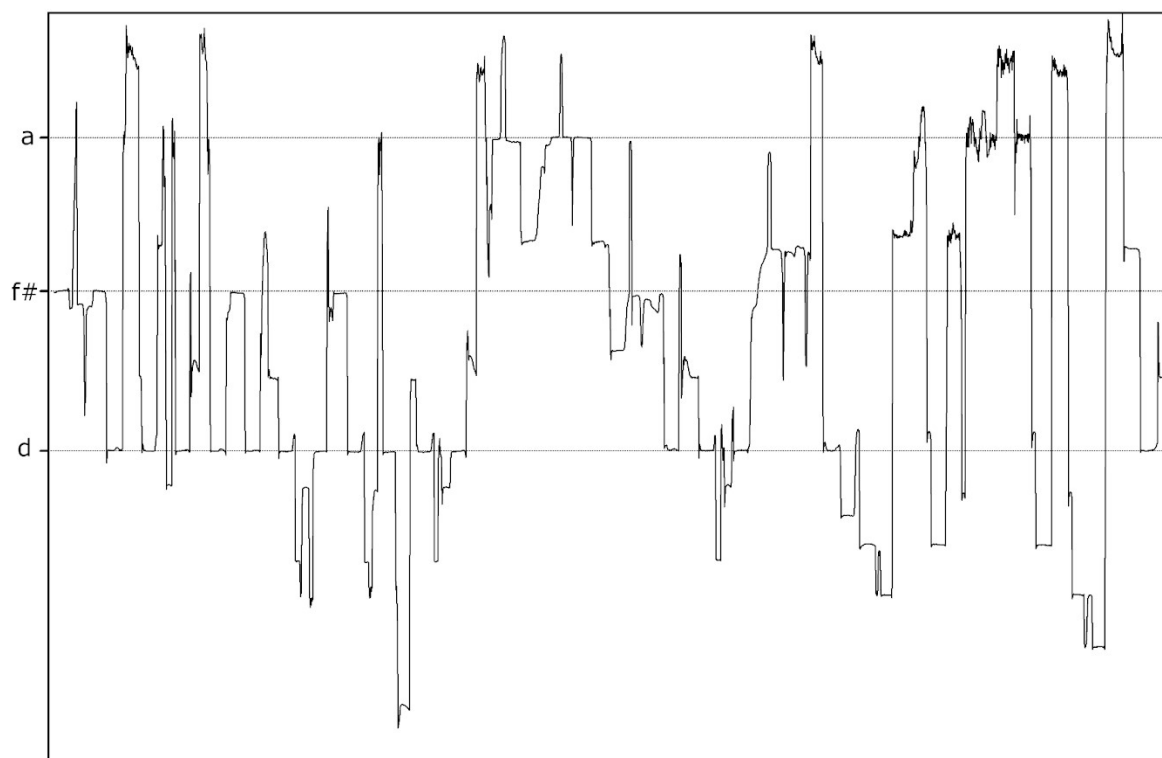


Figure 4.5 – pitch graph of the second part of *The Woman of the House* (2'14'' - 2'22''), demonstrating varying pitch inflections in the upper register

Similarly controlled minute variations can be heard in his use of the regulators for accompaniment. There is an extraordinary heterogeneity in the precise length of each attack, coordinated against the melody to generate maximum drive. Blackie's description of the regulators as a rhythmic tool that appeals to his background as a drummer comes to mind here, although I also hear a close relationship to the orchestrated articulations of a big band horn section. All of these features provide a clear illustration of Blackie's philosophy of 'building blocks all the time' and 'change it and build it again'. In the freewheeling exuberance of Blackie's piping it can be easy to ignore the extraordinary refinement and craft behind the decisions he makes. The discipline of Mickey's lessons, of returning to the same tunes again and again, remains a foundation of his piping and a grounding point for his remarkable flights of fancy.

D. The Flowers of the Forest

Blackie's inventive musicianship is again on display in this slow air from *Friars Green* (O'Connell and O'Donohue 2014). The repertoire of slow airs typically played on the uilleann pipes is much smaller and more circumscribed than the repertoire of dance tunes. If a piper does attempt an air not commonly heard on the pipes, it is overwhelmingly likely to be the air of a song from the seán-nos vocal tradition. But rather than drawing from this established repertoire of piping airs or exploring the broader seán-nos repertoire, Blackie has borrowed a tune from the performance practice of the Scottish Great Highland Bagpipes. As far as I am aware, there are no other recorded versions of this air played on the uilleann pipes for Blackie to have drawn on. *The Flowers of the Forest* is a revered tune amongst Highland pipers, famously considered disrespectful when played in any context other than funerals and memorial services (Dickson 2008, 76). Without sacrificing any of its poignancy, Blackie is able to take the melody far from the rigorous and disciplined world of highland piping, showing creativity and invention in his interpretation.

Particularly emphasised in this recording are the techniques of vibrato and sliding which are well-established in slow air playing by uilleann pipers. In the context of *The Flowers of the Forest*, however, they immediately invite contrast with a Highland piping performance in which these techniques would be considered anathema, obscuring the precision emphasised in that tradition. They also draw attention to the microtonal and quasi-vocal potential of the chanter in Blackie's performance. A particularly noteworthy instance comes at a climactic moment in the second part (4'54"-4'59") when Blackie slides between virtually every note in a phrase for a theremin-like effect. These slides and pitch vibrato are extremely slow and elongated, sometimes dwelling almost uncomfortably long on microtonal dissonances. We again have the sense of Blackie laying claim to a tune from outside the sometimes circumscribed and introverted piping tradition, interpreting it creatively and individually but in accordance with uilleann piping practice and aesthetics. The skill and assurance of his playing at times gives a sense that he is not simply playing Highland piping repertoire on the uilleann pipes, but instead making a compelling claim that it is in fact uilleann piping repertoire.

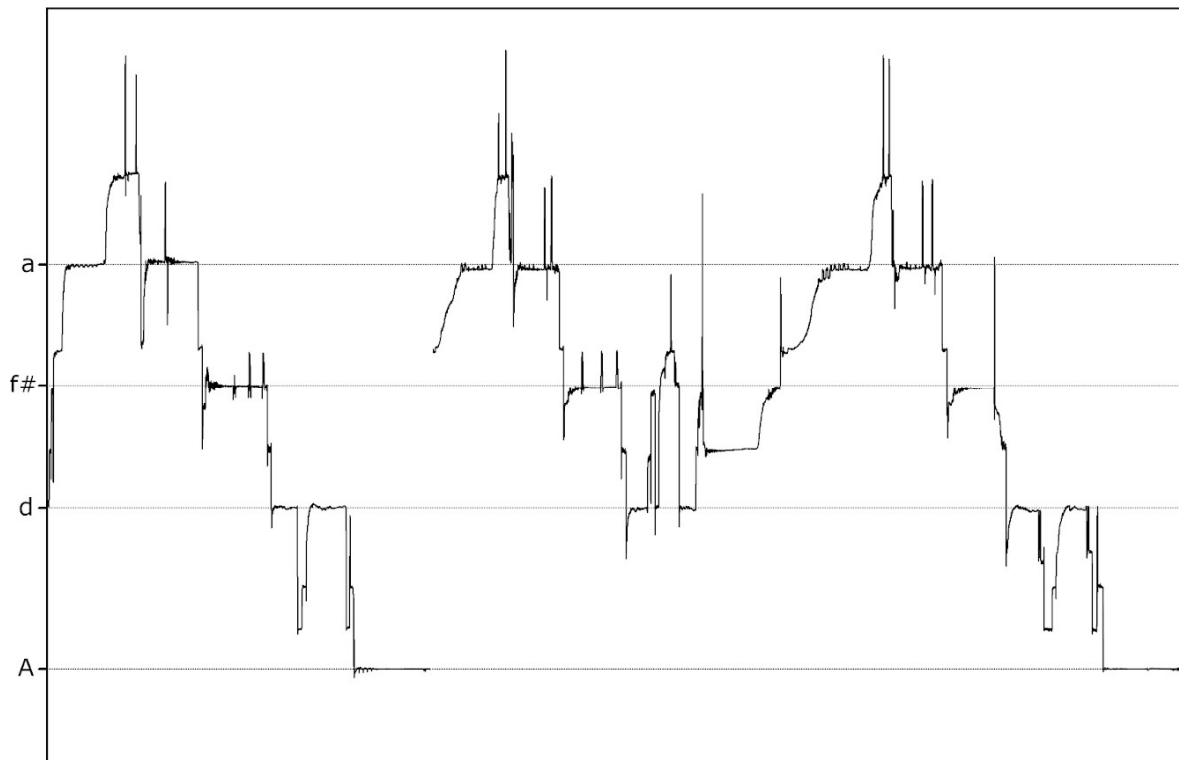


Figure 4.6 – pitch graph of an excerpt from *The Flowers of the Forest* demonstrating slides and other pitch inflections (4'23 - 5'11")

Blackie does something particularly unusual for the uilleann piper when he cuts his drones out for nearly a minute before reengaging them (from 4'22" at 5'12"). It is fairly common practice to begin a set of tunes without drones and bring them in at a later point, but stopping and starting them mid-tune is virtually unheard of. It calls immediately to mind the piping of Johnny Doran, arguably the greatest influence on the Traveller piping style. On his sole recording, Doran (2003) can be heard stopping and reengaging his drones in a very similar manner. Although it remains one of the more cryptic features of Doran's approach, it has been suggested that this is a technique to provide additional variation in his playing (Tuohy and Ó hAodha 2008, 123), in keeping with his adventurous melodic departures from the tune and shifting regulator accompaniment. Regardless, Blackie's use of this technique signifies an immediate and unambiguous association with Doran for those who know his music. Furthermore, it is a striking musical decision, drawing particular attention to the chanter for some of the most expressive moments of Blackie's playing (those represented in Figure 4.6 above) and providing a sense of release when the drones return in combination with a powerful regulator chord.

The drones occupy an unusual place in the imagination of uilleann pipers. In a sense, they are so fundamental to the aesthetics and performance practice of the instrument that they go all but

unremarked in the literature and even the discourse and pedagogy of pipers. The same tune will take on an entirely different complexion when played against a drone as opposed to the chanter alone, with new articulations, intonations and phrasings suddenly becoming not only possible but virtually necessary. As Mikie Smyth (2020) said in an online workshop, ‘the drones don’t really do anything ... but they do everything!’. So when Blackie suddenly and unexpectedly abandons the drones, it does not just alter the immediate sonic landscape of the tune but also reimagines the horizons of what the tune can be.

In this particular instance, Doran’s use of the technique seems somewhat haphazard compared to Blackie’s artful placement of it. Part of the reason that so few pipers have adopted Doran’s tendency to bring the drones in and out (even those who are deeply indebted to other aspects of his playing) may be that we struggle to understand his rationale for doing it precisely when he does. Perhaps here we have a microcosm of Blackie’s relationship with Traveller piping; an undoubted stylistic allegiance but a tendency to polish some of the rough edges, to temper the Dionysian ‘wildness’ with a little Apollonian forethought.

E. Conclusion

Blackie’s phenomenal musical abilities are inspirational to many, pipers and non-pipers alike. In this sense, he is in keeping with the musical legacy of his hero Paddy Keenan. Keenan’s personal charisma and palpable sense of ‘cool’ were undoubtedly important factors in his popularisation of the instrument in the 1970s and 1980s, but his prodigious musical understanding and virtuosity were such that he could never be dismissed as a lightweight by knowledgeable (and perhaps elitist) audiences. It seems fitting to Blackie’s ‘ambassador’ status that Blackie’s regular performances for tourists in Doolin ensure that his piping marks the first experience of the uilleann pipes for many outsiders to the tradition. While he acknowledges that he is fulfilling a certain expected role in this context, he is not at all cynical about this avenue of his music-making which he tells me is ‘drawn from the same reservoir’ as his other musical activities.

While Blackie’s respect for, and knowledge of, his predecessors in piping is evident, his music is grounded in the here and now. Unlike any of my other interview subjects, he scarcely mentions recorded music. Instead, the bulk of our interview is spent speaking of his community and his personal connections; his teacher Mickey Dunne, his colleagues Siobhán Peoples and Hugh Healy, the pipemaker Cillian Ó Briain, and a number of his students. He even relates how he arranged the

event we have just attended as 'a facade' for the benefit of two of his young students. By giving them the opportunity to perform and play alongside piping luminaries such as Mick O'Brien, he attempted to generate an inspiring and unforgettable musical experience that would mean exponentially more to them than to more experienced and perhaps more jaded pipers.

Blackie's reflections on musical style emphasise the power of the social environment in shaping musical style, and the inseparability of place and community. I am left with the impression that Blackie could not (and would not wish to) speak of his own music-making in the absence of social connection. In his self-identification as a 'Clare style' piper, he is suggesting that his music belongs simultaneously to a place and its people. In doing so, he allows us to consider the meaning of social belonging and individual identity, both of which can find expression through musical style. This same tension between individual agency and communal meaning will re-emerge in Kevin Rowsome's reflections in the following chapter, together with the seemingly inescapable force of family lineage.

Chapter 5 - Kevin Rowsome

'I think your personality sort of tends to dictate your style to some extent. You'll be drawn to certain aspects of piping technique because they appeal to you for some reason...'

The biographic and ethnographic material, as well all quotations in this chapter (except where indicated), have been taken from a recorded interview with Kevin Rowsome conducted on 21 July 2018.



Figure 5.1 – Kevin Rowsome. Photo by Bob Singer.

A. Introduction

The surname Rowsome is intimately connected with uilleann piping history, with Leo Rowsome (1903-1970) in particular acknowledged as one of the most significant and beloved pipers of his generation and arguably the most influential pipemaker of the 20th century. His designs are the most frequently imitated by pipemakers today and his original instruments are highly coveted by pipers for their musical qualities as well as their historical significance. Leo's piping, supported by his career as a broadcaster, was a familiar presence on national radio and a mainstay of mid-century Irish cultural life. The list of pipers who approached him for lessons reads as a virtual who's who of modern piping, including Willie Clancy, Tommy Reck, Liam O'Flynn, Paddy Moloney, and Peter Browne. Leo's sobriquet of 'Rí na bPíobairí' (King of the Pipers) would seem grandiose attached to virtually any other piper but for Leo it approaches a simple statement of fact. It is impossible to imagine what the contemporary uilleann piping landscape would look like, or whether uilleann piping would have survived at all, without Leo's tireless work as a piper, pipemaker, teacher and broadcaster.

While it is inevitable that such a figure would overshadow the other members of his family, the full legacy of the Rowsome dynasty is worth reflecting on here. Leo's grandfather Samuel Rowsome (1827-1914) of Wexford was the first recorded uilleann piper of the Rowsome family, highly regarded not only for his abilities as a piper but also for his skills and knowledge as a repairer of antique sets of pipes. John, William, and Thomas, Samuel's three sons, were all described as remarkable pipers but it was William Rowsome (1869-1925) who added the trade of pipemaking, at which he excelled, to the family name. Once again, all of William's three sons were proficient pipers but Leo loomed very large over his brothers. More recently Leo's son Leon (1936-1994) and grandson Kevin (b. 1963) have continued the family traditions of uilleann piping and pipemaking into the current day.

I provide this historical context because it is impossible to imagine Kevin Rowsome's music outside of this family lineage. In fact, much of his musical output and public persona expresses the importance of family tradition to him. Nevertheless, Kevin's prowess and intelligence as a piper in his own right should not be dismissed. His inclusion in this research suggested itself immediately as I began to think about lineage and history as formative forces in determining musical style. There is no sense in which Kevin confines himself to simply copying Leo Rowsome, and yet Leo (and a host of other musical Rowsomes) are always there in his piping.

I arrange an interview with Kevin to coincide with a piping workshop he is co-leading with Mick O'Brien, Francis McIllduff, and Patrick O'Hare as part of the SOMA Festival in Castlewellan, Co. Down. Rather than an organised workshop, it develops into an informal chat with tunes, reminiscences, and wisdom flowing freely. Afterwards, Kevin and I settle in comfortably for a 20-minute interview in the Fountain Bar as a session gradually develops at a nearby table. A piper somewhat given to machismo is heard prominently, presenting a marked contrast to Kevin's quiet and thoughtful reflections.

B. Biography and Ethnography

Very few families in Irish traditional music can claim such a distinguished musical lineage as the Rowsomes. In fact, when I say as much to Kevin, he gently corrects me - 'no others, actually!'. But while Kevin's taking up the uilleann pipes was undoubtedly influenced by his family environment, it was not a complete inevitability:

[Playing the pipes] wasn't actually forced upon me although I was encouraged to play them. It was only really in my late teens that I realised how important it was, you know, for me to continue on the tradition. None of my father's siblings or their families pursued the uilleann pipes, and there was no one else. Of Leo's own siblings, two of his brothers, Sam and Tom played pipes but their families didn't. So it was basically... it was all on my shoulders, so to speak, if it was to be continued.

So the gravity of that always played on my mind when I was younger. But I didn't, you know, act on it until I was in my twenties or so, and said "I really have to get to grips with these things, and fully understand them and everything."

But I had started when I was six. And Leo died when I was seven and he gave me...he started me off with a couple of lessons. But my main teacher would have been my father, you know, and I learned to make reeds from him, and I learned most of my grounding in music from Leon...

Kevin cautions against the assumption that such a strong family legacy implies a monolithic 'Rowsome style'. He describes Leo as a musical omnivore who was constantly seeking out new tunes and new techniques from a variety of sources. He was especially fond of searching through O'Neill's and Roche's collections for obscure or obsolete tunes, many of which would not be considered conducive to the pipes, and reintroducing them into the repertoire through his playing. Nor did he limit his efforts to the Irish tradition. Kevin recounts an anecdote from one student who asked Leo if he could teach him the *Ave Maria*, to which Leo responded by notating it from memory on the spot

after first clarifying if he wanted 'the Haydn or the Schubert version'! Similarly, in discussing his father Leon's music, he points out that unlike most pipers of previous generations he would have been naturally exposed to a wide variety of music growing up.

His [Leon's] style is similar to Leo's, although not the same. A different regulator style but in a similar sort of vein. So many pipers came to the house when he was growing up. He used to tell me, he loved playing certain sets of pipes. There was a Christian Brother called Brother Gildas. He used to come to the house and he had a boxwood set, I think they were Egan or Coyne [19th century pipemakers] and he said they were his favourite set ever to play and he could play them all day, you know. So he would've heard all these pipers which would have been unusual to have such a wide exposure to so many musicians at that time, not like now. You can hear everyone in the world now if you want to, but back then no media...only whoever passed through, you know. I suppose most pipers passed through Leo's house to get repairs done or get their pipes or whatever so he would've heard them all.

The emphasis of these comments is particularly striking. Of all the different environments which can generate stylistic commonalities (see Keegan 1997), it is perhaps the family which seems the most fixed and immutable. Pipers can study with different teachers, seek out different communities, or even relocate to a different region, but have no such control over the family into which they were born and the musical environment which shaped their most formative years. So while one might expect that the son and student of such a revered piping personage as Leo Rowsome would inherit his style directly and faithfully without room for external influences and allegiances, Kevin assures us that this is not the case. In this view, Leo's stature was not merely due to the strength of his own piping but also because his knowledge, skills, and renown attracted disparate pipers to spend time with him. While the young Leon and his siblings were in the optimal setting to benefit musically from this convergence, the knowledge (not to mention instruments and reeds) that Leo's visitors took home with them would have undoubtedly had a great impact on numerous musical narratives around Ireland and even further afield. Nor should we assume that even so assured and famed a piper as Leo Rowsome would not have picked up tunes and techniques from his visitors (and pipemaking and reedmaking knowledge from the instruments they brought with them) to be transmitted in turn to new visitors. In this sense, the Rowsome family home could be said to have fulfilled a similar role to the summer schools and festivals that have become such prominent sites of community gathering, learning, and sharing in the latter 20th century and onwards.

Kevin sees his own musical development as ongoing and similarly informed by diverse experiences:

Even now, I'm still being influenced by things, you know, I might hear a piper doing something and "Oh that sounds interesting, I'd like to incorporate that in my playing!". But it's becoming lesser and lesser than, you know, when my ear was developing and everything had a great sense of wonder. I might hear something that somebody did, like Johnny Doran now was a big influence initially when I was younger. And some things that Ennis did I liked. Even pipers nowadays, even Mick inside [in the workshop we have just come from], Mick O'Brien. A couple of things he does I quite like and I try and incorporate them in. But sometimes less is more, you know... I reckon that a lot of pipers go through a stage of thinking that... it's so hard to learn these techniques – that when they've got them to some level of perfection, they say "these are going in everywhere because it took me so bloody long to learn them!" So the maturity comes when you can leave them out even though you *could* as easily as it in. That's where the true individual styles come in.

When I was younger I would have played in a much more similar style [to that of Leo and Leon] but I think my style has changed over time... I don't think I play like anybody else. Even in the last five years I would say my style has changed and incorporated new little bits and pieces. You might listen back to yourself and say, "Oh God, I do that too much!". I used to do a cut that Mick O'Brien did, I think it was on the C note. I forget, but I was obsessed with it for a while... And I listened back, and "Oh God, I hadn't realised that I put it in everywhere!" I would say mine's more of a hybrid mixture. It's the same for most musicians who don't actively try to emulate someone else. If somebody has a very definitive style and plays exclusively in that style, it's nearly always a contrived intellectual exercise. They just made the effort to do that, but I think your personality tends to dictate your style to some extent. You'll be drawn to certain aspects of piping techniques because they appeal to you for some reason, and that can be in a musical alignment to your personality.

Although the term is not explicitly mentioned, this reflection invokes the notion of authenticity. Implied here is a claim that an attempt by Kevin to rigorously follow even as extraordinary an exemplar as Leo Rowsome to the exclusion of all others would be inauthentic or 'contrived'. Instead, an authentic style develops organically from the piper's 'personality' and constantly shifting tastes and experiences. The influence of the Rowsome musical legacy will never be far from his piping, but it emerges naturally rather than dictating the terms of his music-making.

As its title would suggest, family lineage is strongly emphasised on Kevin's first album *The Rowsome Tradition: Five Generations of Uilleann Piping* (Rowsome 1999). Most strikingly, the last six tracks (a full third of the album) comprise reissues of recordings of Leo, Leon and Liam Rowsome from the 1950s and 60s. Even in Kevin's own recordings, his forefathers' fingerprints are clearly discernible in his tune selections, including *The Lament for Staker Wallace*, *Kitty's Rambles*, and *The Wexford Hornpipe* from Leo's repertoire (the latter bearing an additional reference to the Rowsomes' home

county). Even some of the less well-known choices could be considered as a nod to Leo's adventurousness in refusing to limit himself to received 'piping repertoire'. The Rowsome pipemaking tradition is also represented on this recording with Kevin using both a concert pitch set made by Leo and a C# set made by his great-grandfather William, in addition to a Harrington C set (Rowsome 1999).

As Kevin is quick to point out, however, the influences on his own piping were more diverse than just those of his immediate family, and this is evident throughout this recording. Even disregarding an obvious difference in audio quality, the archival material is immediately distinguishable as distinct from Kevin's playing. The proximity of three successive Rowsome pipers on the same album invites the listener to consider generational differences just as much as musical continuity – family tradition but individual style.

The most immediately noticeable difference is the presence of guitar and bouzouki accompaniment on many of Kevin's selections, which would have been something of a rarity in Leo and Leon's eras. But even here we can draw connections to the family tradition. There is an undoubted musical affinity between Leo's foursquare driving attacks on the regulators and a strummed guitar accompaniment, and extensive regulator work (if not as constant as Leo or Leon's approach) is emphasised on the tracks where Kevin eschews plucked string accompaniment.

The more recent *Cuisle Cheoil na bPíob* (Rowsome 2016) presents a more homogeneous sound with only one set of pipes to be heard and no accompanying instruments. The repertoire, however, shows a much greater diversity, including three of Kevin's own compositions and a large number of (often obscure) tunes from collections of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In addition, the family legacy remains clearly present in selections such as *An Buachaill Caol Dubh*, a slow air recorded by both Leo and Leon, and *Tom Rowsome's*, a single jig associated with Leo's uncle. On the other hand, the version of the set dance *The Ace And Deuce Of Piping* that Kevin plays is not that recorded by Leo (1933) but instead the less common setting of Leo's sometime rival Séamus Ennis. The decision to record without accompanying instruments this time was motivated by a desire to 'prove [him]self'. Similarly, the odd overblown note or pitch fluctuation is audible from Kevin's reeds throughout the album, giving an impression of a performance that stands on its own terms without relying on studio craft.

Kevin is relieved that he will not be the end of the Rowsome piping dynasty with his daughters Tierna (b. 2000) and Naoise (b. 2002) both playing the uilleann pipes (as well as numerous other instruments) to a very high standard. Kevin speaks with evident pride (and a little fatherly/teacherly admonishment of their practice habits) of his daughters' musicianship. Other representatives of the sixth generation, including Kevin's nephews (Leo's grandsons) Mark Lysaght, Luke McGranaghan, and Alastair McGranaghan are also active pipers. In keeping with his previous observations he notes that they are free to choose 'any influence they want ... it's personal styles, very much individual styles'. Kevin believes that no other families in Irish traditional music can boast the same sustained contribution to musical life - 'six generations is a long time ... no pressure!'.

C. The Wexford Hornpipe/Murphy's Hornpipe

These two well-known hornpipes demonstrate great attention to detail and subtle piping colours. This is one of a minority of tracks on the album without guitar or bouzouki accompaniment, also notable for Kevin's use of a flat set (a C set made by Harrington) here. The first is known by a variety of names including *Pretty Maggie Morrissey*, *O'Neill's* and *Hennessy's*, but amongst pipers the name *The Wexford Hornpipe* is typically the most widespread. It is very strongly associated with Leo Rowsome who may have been the first to name it after his home county. Although his father Leon was not commercially recorded playing these tunes, Kevin's notes assure us that they were a favourite of his as well (Rowsome 1999).

As mentioned above, Kevin makes full use of the regulators on this track, introducing them at the repetition of the first part and incorporating them regularly for the rest of the set. He skilfully involves a wide variety of regulator rhythms and subtly varies durations and voicings to provide lift and punctuation in his playing. Furthermore, since Leo Rowsome was renowned (or perhaps notorious) for his individual approach to the regulators, they provide an unmistakable opportunity for Kevin to either pay homage to or break away from his grandfather's legacy.

One particularly effective feature is his use of a recurring rhythmic motive which appears no less than five times in the two repetitions of *The Wexford Hornpipe* (see Figure 5.2). This always coincides with the same melodic material, in bar 2 of the first part and bar 6 of both parts. This is a point of relative melodic and harmonic stasis, with Kevin often simplifying it further by holding a long G on the chanter (as seen in Figure 5.2), making it an effective choice to deploy a quick flourish on the regulators without obscuring the tune. There is a marked contrast here between Kevin's

approach to the chanter and regulators. His chanter work is very open on the whole, especially when the tune remains within the lower octave, but this figure on the regulators is as staccato as possible. Another contrast is in his rhythmic feel. While he indulges in relatively little characteristic hornpipe ‘swing’ in the melody (immediately evident when compared to a recording of his father Leon’s hornpipe playing on the same album), this regulator feature demonstrates quite a strong rhythmic inequality every time it is incorporated. These subtle but effective contrasts in phrasing and rhythm help to give the effect of a separation between melody and accompaniment, almost as if played by separate musicians, providing a thematic link to the guitar and bouzouki accompaniment on the other tracks.

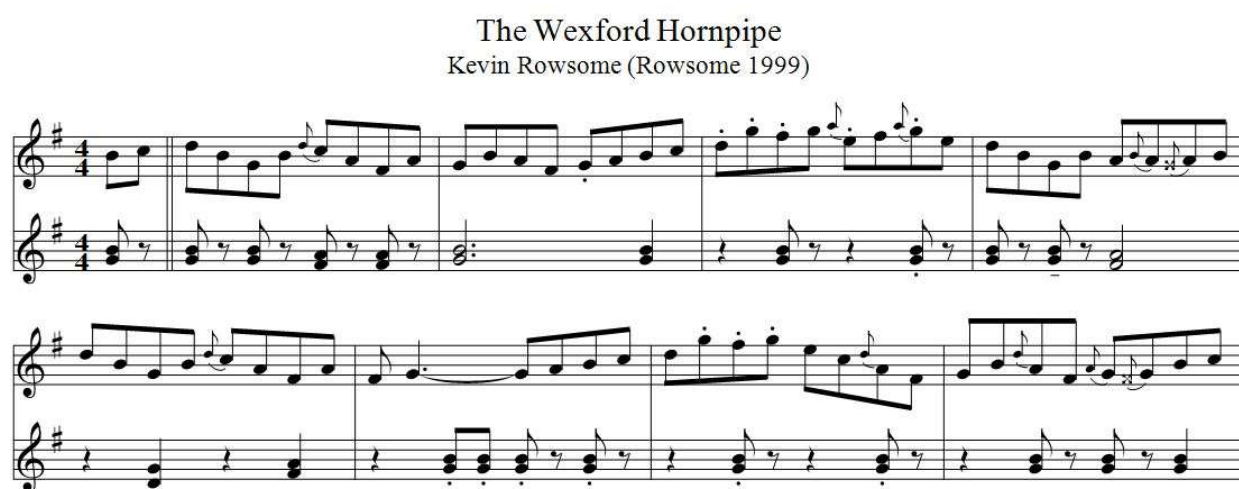


Figure 5.2 – excerpt from *The Wexford Hornpipe* (0’14”- 0’25”) demonstrating the entry of the regulators and the rhythmic motive in bar 6

There is a subtle contrast in the use of the regulators in *Murphy’s Hornpipe*, the second tune of the set, distinguishing between two tunes which otherwise possess a great many modal and melodic similarities. Perhaps most notably, Kevin carefully withholds the use of the bass regulator until the change into *Murphy’s Hornpipe*, where the sudden expansion of range immediately signals to the listener that we have entered new musical territory. He periodically returns to this lower range, often emphasised with longer chords, throughout the rest of the tune. In addition, the extreme staccato taps of the regulators that were prominent in the first tune are much rarer here. While there is still a wide variety of durations explored, the average duration of the regulator chords is subtly increased. Accompanying this are a number of instances where the regulators are struck on beats 1 and 3 of the bar, rather than the frequent emphasis on beats 2 and 4 that characterised the first tune. The clearest example of this is perhaps the final few bars of the track (see Figure 5.3). Taken together, these changes give a sense of weight and forward momentum to the second hornpipe that provides a noticeable but sensitive contrast to the lightness of the first.

Murphy's Hornpipe
Kevin Rowsome (Rowsome 1999)



Figure 5.3 – excerpt from *Murphy's Hornpipe* (2'54" - 3'08") demonstrating longer regulator attacks with more emphasis on beats 1 and 3, and the use of the bass regulator

As alluded to above, Leo Rowsome's approach to the regulators is arguably the most immediately recognisable aspect of his playing and certainly one of the most frequently discussed. On virtually any dance music, he would provide constant taps of the regulators on every beat, only occasionally varied by a longer chord. Examples can be seen in the regulator accompaniments he notated in his tutor book (see Figure 5.3). This stood in marked contrast to a majority of preceding or contemporary pipers who would use the regulators more sporadically and often incorporate more varied rhythms.

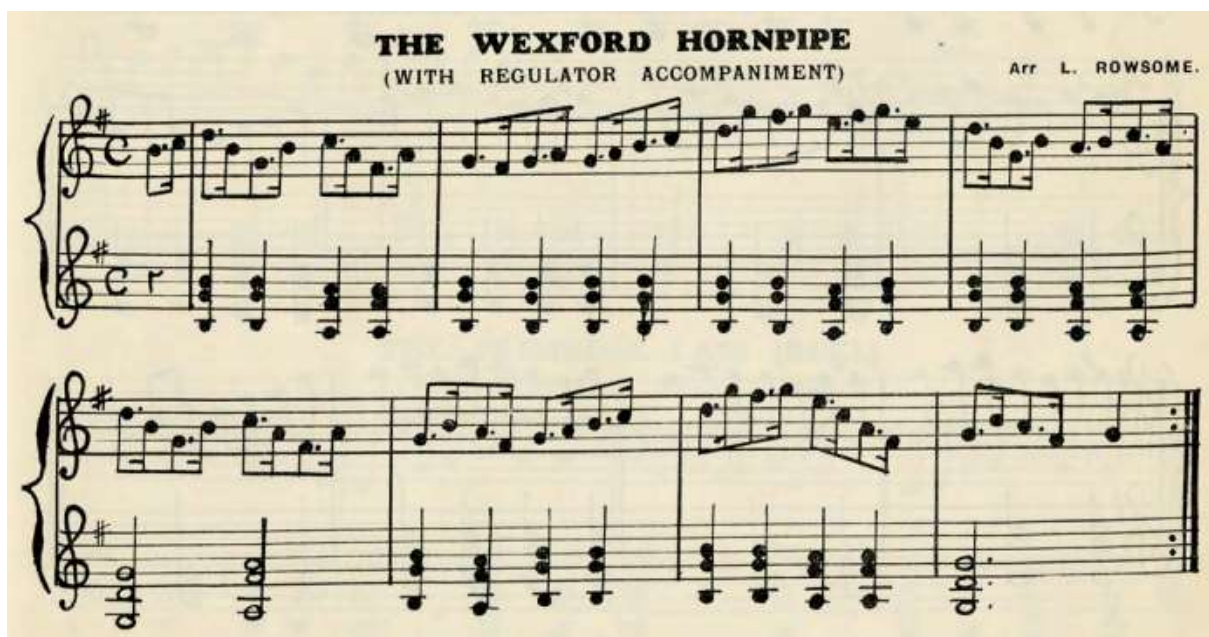


Figure 5.4 – excerpt from Leo Rowsome's tutor book (Rowsome 1936) demonstrating a suggested regulator accompaniment in keeping with his style

This was controversial to some of his contemporaries, as evidenced by Séamus Ennis' admonition that 'there is nothing so vulgar as constant, monotonous *beating time*' on the regulators (Ennis 1998, 43). Although he does not mention Leo by name here, it is not too much to assume that he had him in mind, given their strained public relationship. Seán Reid's insightful reflection on Leo's career gives some further context to the nature of this disapproval:

The sheer economic necessity of impressing audiences and getting engagements with subsequent orders for new sets compelled him to present his music in the most brilliant manner possible. He therefore gave less prominence to the finer points of staccato ornamentation, most of which would have been lost on a lay audience anyhow. He concentrated instead on letting the melody flow out, clearly and sweetly, controlling the tone by clever tricks of fingering and momentary raisings of the chanter, using just enough closed (staccato) fingering to impart the essential phrasing and to making the utmost use of the regulators. Indeed it was possibly the unequalled facility with which he manipulated the latter that was the most potent factor in gaining him wide recognition. Not all pipers, however, fully approved of his style, including some of those he surpassed in popularity. (Reid 1975)

Despite Reid's suggestion that Leo's regulator style was instrumental in his popularity during his lifetime, he goes on to acknowledge that few subsequent pipers have sought to adopt it in its entirety (ibid.). If 'it became fashionable to disparage his piping as too facile and flutelike' (ibid.), then Leo's regulator playing has become a virtual byword for bad taste. Of course, very few of those levelling criticism at Leo would have had the ability to play the regulators with the virtuosity he did. While Leo has continued to be revered as a pipemaker and ambassador for piping, his colleague and rival Séamus Ennis and his sometime student and great admirer Willie Clancy have become substantially more decisive influences on modern piping style.

The implications of this changing aesthetic consensus are skilfully navigated by Kevin in this recording, and are perhaps inevitably most evident in his approach to the regulators. The first entrance of the regulators in *The Wexford Hornpipe* (see Figure 5.2) suggests features of Leo's playing with six consecutive strikes on every beat, the last one (coinciding with the first beat of the second bar) sustained as a held chord. This bold entrance could virtually have come out of Leo's own recording of the tune. But following this insinuation, Kevin quickly moves into a more personal (and perhaps more modern and fashionable) approach with more rhythmic variety, emphasis on the weaker beats, and space given to the chanter alone between regulator entrances. *Murphy's Hornpipe*, however, sees a slight but meaningful change in approach with the deeper tones of the bass regulator, the onbeat alignments, and heavier articulations all suggesting Leo to the cognisant

listener. It is as if Kevin begins by teasing us a little, hinting that he will provide what a reified and fatalistic view of family tradition would have us expect before swiftly deviating into the more individual and idiosyncratic. After leaving us in suspense for a while, however, he delivers at least a partial fulfillment of what was promised, paying homage to his predecessors without being entirely constrained by their example.

D. Tom Rowsome's/Crabs in the Skillet/Paddy's Green Island

This set of jigs from Kevin's second album *Cuisle Cheoil na bPíob* (Rowsome 2016) demonstrates some of the unique features of this album. As with the previous recording, homage is paid here to the family legacy with the single jig *Tom Rowsome's*, associated with Leo Rowsome's uncle. The latter two tunes are representative of another hallmark of this album, Kevin's interest in less common repertoire from historical tunebooks. Kevin points out to me that Leo took many tunes from written sources, especially O'Neill's famed collections, often preserving the settings he encountered rather than altering them to more idiomatic piping versions. In a sense, Kevin is remaining faithful to family tradition by both performing the repertoire of his forebears and extending himself beyond that material.

Single jigs such as *Tom Rowsome's* are rarely considered metrically compatible with the more familiar double jigs, and it is quite unusual to hear a musician play them in the same set. Instead they would typically be coupled with other single jigs or possibly slides, a tune type associated with the southwest of Ireland with a more similar meter and phrasing. Nevertheless, we hear Kevin reducing the tempo of *Tom Rowsome's* to align it with the following jigs. *Crabs in the Skillet* and *Paddy's Green Island* are both unusual tunes to hear on the pipes and represent the revival of historical repertoire which Kevin has pursued on this album. *Crabs in the Skillet* is perhaps more commonly heard in a G minor mode as it appears in O'Neill's collection, but has been transposed to A minor by Kevin, allowing a more idiomatic rendering on the chanter. *Paddy's Green Island* is taken from P. W. Joyce's collection of 1909 and has only been recorded once previously (O'Keefe et al. 2003).

Since single jigs naturally have fewer notes than double jigs, the slower tempo selected for *Tom Rowsome's* generates a feeling of spaciousness, with the longer gaps in the melody providing increased scope for the technical fingering required for tight playing. In the opening phrase of the first part, Kevin makes a pattern of cutting short the first note of each two-note grouping and

Tom Rowsome's
Kevin Rowsome (Rowsome 2016)



Tom Rowsome's
Kevin Rowsome (Rowsome 2016)



This strong sense of tightness established in the opening repetitions gradually gives way to increasing openness. This occurs by means of discrete open gestures inserted into the performance which slowly increase in frequency, matching the increase in density alluded to above. In some ways, it represents an inversion of a style often attributed to Paddy Keenan (and sometimes earlier pipers such as Felix Doran), that of virtuosic tight movements embedded in an overarching open style (Ring 1992; Harper and McSherry 2015). By the end of the performance, however, this Keenan-esque style has virtually become the default with moments of tightness occurring amidst rolling open chanterwork.

Among these inserted open gestures are consecutive rolls, strongly associated with Johnny Doran's piping (see Figure 5.7). While the use of (both long and short) rolls can be considered a near universal element of piping practice, Doran's innovation sees two of these rolls employed in sequence to provide four or more re-articulations of the same note without any noticeable closure of the chanter. Significantly, consecutive rolls were largely eschewed by both Leo and Leon Rowsome, despite their personal acquaintance with Doran and his stylistic disciples. Their unexpected appearance here in Kevin's playing, provides an excellent illustration of his description of 'incorporating' stylistic elements that he hears from other pipers. In this decision we may also see an example of the constantly evolving social meaning of musical style. While the settled Leo Rowsome was a prominent supporter and personal friend of the Doran brothers and other Traveller pipers, his playing is not considered to be part of the Traveller piping tradition. For instance, Tuohy and Ó hAodha distinguish Traveller and Wexford styles as separate phenomena despite a certain amount of interaction, with Leo Rowsome described as the most prominent example of the latter. His son Leon's playing seems to adopt more of the classic Traveller sound, removing the chanter from the leg significantly more than Leo can be heard doing and relying extensively on legato triplets in a manner reminiscent of Johnny Doran. Leo Rowsome's playing of Colonel Fraser is especially close to the Doran recording, sometimes approaching verbatim replication. Kevin's playing is different again, with open effects used extensively but arguably more deliberately and strategically. For instance, consecutive rolls are heard frequently throughout the set (and Kevin's playing more generally) but back D triplets not at all.

Tom Rowsome's
Kevin Rowsome (Rowsome 2016)



Figure 5.7 – excerpt from *Tom Rowsome's* (0'49" - 0'58") demonstrating consecutive rolls in bars 5 and 8

One interpretation here is to see a particular stylistic approach initially remaining confined to pipers of Traveller ethnicity, before gradually becoming adopted outside of the Traveller community. As Kevin indicates, however, the widespread distribution of recordings has further fragmented and complexified the picture. Rather than adopting a wholesale approach, perhaps of a teacher or role model, pipers feel more empowered to draw on a wide range of exemplars according to their personal taste. In this environment, Kevin is able to incorporate discrete techniques from Traveller pipers that appeal to him while avoiding other, equally Traveller-associated techniques. To a certain extent, at least, they have become building blocks, raw materials that can be repurposed to answer a musical need. Kevin hints that modern piping may be uniquely suited to this kind of bricolage as the piper is surrounded with such a wealth of stylistic influences that it may sometimes even be difficult to be certain what the precedents for one's sound are. In fact, it often appears to require a conscious and studious effort, such as Jimmy O'Brien Moran's focused pursuit of Willie Clancy's sound (discussed in Chapter 3), to adhere to a primary exemplar amid such an environment. As this process occurs, a parallel change is seen in the social meaning of these musical gestures, weakening their sole semantic connection with the Traveller community as they acquire new and perhaps more disparate meanings.

E. Conclusion

At first glance it may seem unusual that Kevin, having grown up at the feet of Leo and Leon Rowsome, should develop the individualistic musical philosophy he describes to me. But perhaps in another sense it is not surprising at all. The desire to carry on the family piping legacy must have been tempered by an awareness of the risk of being perpetually in the shadow of such a giant as Leo Rowsome. It is perhaps inevitable that Kevin will always be seen as Leo's grandson and, as affirmed by his website (www.kevinrowsome.com), that is a significant part of how he positions and publicises his work as a piper. The striking decision to feature unreleased tracks of his grandfather,

father, and uncle on his own debut album speaks to this impulse, not to mention Kevin's immediately evident humility.

Family history is vital to Kevin's musical philosophy but it seems to operate more as a source of inspiration than a fatalistic imperative. He describes his family tradition not as a single continuous lineage but as a complex web of interconnected personal narratives; not as inevitability but as rich possibility. It represents a powerful resource to be drawn on, but it is not a destiny. When he speaks of his realisation that the continuation of the family legacy depended on his efforts, even this sense of duty remains leavened with a thankfulness for the richness of the tradition he grew up amongst. He may be a Rowsome, but he is also *Kevin* Rowsome, and the individual position he occupies in the world of contemporary piping should not be overlooked. His evident pride when speaking of his daughters' and nephews' musical accomplishment provides a further insight into this. New stories are being added to the Rowsome family's musical history every day and he is honoured to be a part of that ongoing process.

While my initial aim in interviewing Kevin was to investigate the impact of family or pedagogical lineage in establishing 'schools' of musical style, his thoughtful reflections provided a much richer and more nuanced perspective. The deep but endlessly productive tension between the individual and the communal, the received and the freely chosen, marks both his comments and his music. Furthermore, he is able to deftly situate his music within an ongoing historical narrative, allowing it to illuminate the rapidly changing practice and aesthetics of uilleann piping. All of these threads will return in the following case study of Máire Ní Ghráda, filtered through her unique personal narrative and philosophy.

Chapter 6 – Máire Ní Ghráda

‘So many pipers are solo pipers by temperament. I’m temperamentally not.’

The biographic and ethnographic material, as well all quotations in this chapter (except where indicated), have been taken from a recorded interview with Máire Ní Ghráda conducted on 27 July 2018.



Figure 6.1 – Máire Ní Ghráda (right) teaching a workshop in 2004. Photo by Paul Eliasberg.

A. Introduction

Máire Ní Ghráda (b. 1959) has been an ongoing inspiration on my piping journey. A video recording of her playing the reels *The Rainy Day* and *The Merry Blacksmith*, one of many archival gems from Raidió Teilifís Éireann broadcasts which have been preserved online, made an immense impression on me when I first saw it and I immediately transcribed it in full in as much detail as I could manage. But even in comparison to other uilleann pipers, there is something in Máire’s piping that seems to defy analysis. I could play the notes, even down to the subtleties of her choices of cut notes, but much of what made this recording remarkable to me seems to lie deeper still. Her playing seems to exude an almost paradoxical combination of control and utter relaxation.

Unlike my other interview subjects, Máire has never recorded a full album for commercial release. However, a number of live-recorded performances are publicly available on YouTube and other platforms at the time of writing. She has contributed to NPU's compilation recording *The Piper's Rock* (NPU 1978) and a volume of their *Piper's Choice* DVD series (NPU 2013) and is a regular performer at their events and concerts. All of this ensures that she occupies something of an 'underground' status in mainstream Irish traditional music circles but is relatively well-known to pipers and piping enthusiasts. In particular, she is known as something of a pioneer for women's participation in what has historically been, and to a large extent still remains, a male-dominated community. Her 1978 recording mentioned above was the first commercial recording of a female uilleann piper, only preceded by a single home recording (Mulcahy 2018). While Máire is cautious not to ascribe too much direct influence on her piping to her gender*, this history adds a profound layer of meaning to her personal musical narrative, furthering my conviction that her music deserved a prominent place in this research.

While an interview with Máire had long been part of my plans, I am at the tail end of my time in Ireland by the time we can arrange it. Since I am without personal transport, she kindly offers to pick me up from a Limerick bus station and bring me to her house in rural Co. Clare. Upon arrival she and her husband lay out a very welcome spread of cheese and biscuits. We decide to sit outside in the tranquility of the yard for our interview. It is without a doubt the most pleasant setting of all my interviews, made all the more so by Máire's hospitality and generosity.

* Gender equality is a prominent and urgent topic in the contemporary discourse surrounding Irish traditional music, and has been insightfully discussed by scholars including O'Shea (2008) and Slominski (2020). Taking its impetus from the broader #MeToo movement of 2017, the hashtag #MiseFosta (a direct translation into Irish) and the establishment of the organisation FairPlé has served to document and draw attention to instances of gendered inequality, discrimination and abuse in Irish traditional music.

Even in the context of these broader inequalities, however, uilleann piping remains a disproportionately male vocation despite some heartening progress towards gender parity in the youngest generations of pipers (Ní Ghráda 2018, p.c). This demographic inequality has undoubtedly been exacerbated by the extent to which the contributions of female pipers have been overlooked or underemphasised by historians, scholars, and the broader musical community (Sweeney 2021). Louise Mulcahy's research into and advocacy for historical female pipers (eg. Mulcahy 2018, Sweeney 2021), as well as her prominence as an active piper, is especially noteworthy.

The evident gender imbalance of this research (with a female piper making up only one of five case studies) is neither accident nor oversight, but an acknowledgement that deep and entrenched inequalities exist in uilleann piping practice. As a study of contemporary uilleann piping, its aim is to represent the current situation, rather than an aspirational future. It is the author's hope that a similar study written in decades to come would represent a much more diverse community of pipers than that which exists today.

B. Biography and ethnography

Máire grew up in Cork, with her early immersion in uilleann piping and Irish traditional music overseen by the beloved Cork piper Micheál Ó Riabhaigh. She recalls these experiences warmly:

I didn't in any way choose the instrument. I had no idea what pipes were. I just knew that my father had decided I was going to learn pipes this summer and I just thought of the Scottish pipes cos as a kid that's the only one I had in my head. So what really was behind it was that my father wanted to play the pipes and he hadn't really, I suppose, given it any time. He was busy - small kids, the job - and having invested in the practice set of pipes he probably figured he'd get his value out of it by insisting that someone else play it! That was me! So I just went along because that was what I was expected to do and went along to classes being held in Cork at the time by Micheál Ó Riabhaigh and I always make sure to mention Micheál and give him...give full credit to him. Really looking back on it, he was extraordinarily generous and extraordinarily committed to just bringing music to all generations of kids of my age. And in some ways it was the making of our childhood, you know. It was the big experience of our childhood which actually was different to any other kids. The children I played with where we lived or the kids I went to school with knew nothing of what I did in the world of Irish traditional music cos things were very different then. And it was almost... I dunno, it was almost, you'd stay quiet about it. I didn't... I didn't advertise the fact. It was not cool to be quite honest. It did become cool but I didn't feel cool as a child!

It was very set, routine... we knew it inside out. There were two....Everyone went to his piping classes. We were enrolled at the School of Music. And that was a bit of a first, for him to have the local School of Music which saw itself as having...that its area of activity was classical music. And Micheál somehow or other swung it so that they were prepared to include traditional music in their offering, I suppose. We didn't get the main building, we were up way off from the school of music ... The pipes class I think was Tuesday and Thursday, the beginners on Tuesday I think, and the advanced on Thursday.

You went in there and there was a row of people. We all played one tune together and then we went down the line and everyone played whatever tune it was we were learning. We played and he corrected or showed us or whatever... encouraged us. And you sat listening, you spent the time listening to everyone else as much as playing I suppose... And then Saturday was a different formula. We all, a crowd of kids piled in at eight o'clock and we sat and we learnt a tune together. So you were with... there was this piano-accordion player I remember and mandolin and fiddle and flute, box... So the Saturday night, well it was called the Pipers' Club, but there was a very good mix of instruments.

While several recordings of Micheál Ó Riabhaigh are extant, he is seldom recognised as a great virtuoso by contemporary pipers. As Máire's recollections illuminate, however, his influence on piping in Cork as a teacher was inestimable. Corkonians are widely characterised as seeing themselves as a breed apart from other Irish people, giving rise to the 'People's Republic of Cork' slogan commonly seen on T-shirts and other merchandise around Ireland. In a similar vein, Micheál's status as the primary advocate for uilleann piping in Cork could be said to have provided a unique influence on his pupils and the wider community:

It was just really Micheál and the children, it wasn't as though there was Micheál and his generation, or any other generation. There was Micheál as a single pioneer and all of us as the other generation. We really had great entertainment, great friendships, and a whole generation of musicians came from that work that Micheál did. There was no money involved, we never paid anything!

Máire fondly recalls how the children, having learned their weekly tune 'slid down the banisters and went up to the scary parts of the house which were in darkness'. For special events, 'the mothers would make cakes and God, it was nothing short of, well, a state occasion!'. These recollections do not strike me as nostalgia for nostalgia's sake or an attempt to add colour to the narrative so much as a vital part of her experiences of Micheál's classes; the social inseparable from the musical.

Surrounded by this musico-social network, Máire was less reliant on recorded media than many of my other informants:

We'd stop and listen with almost puzzlement or curiosity [when recordings were played] but we wouldn't, no, we didn't actually actively listen in the way that maybe people do now, you know, really listening to the tiniest things...There wasn't any excessive devotion to it ... We saw this as a social occasion, a social life, and we learned the tunes and we enjoyed playing them, but didn't take a whole pile of notice otherwise.

While she paints this as a generational difference, the picture is at least somewhat more nuanced. As seen in Chapter 3, for instance, recordings were a constant companion and pedagogical mainstay of her near-contemporary Jimmy O'Brien Moran.

While Ó Riabhaigh's musicianship and passion for piping was the central influence in Máire's childhood, she was not entirely removed from wider influences including some of the most famed figures in Irish traditional music. Although many of these guests were eagerly received ('We had our

autograph books all ready!'), Máire recalls being particularly enchanted by Leo Rowsome's presence and charisma:

The pipers' concert was the... next best thing to Christmas. We always got new clothes and we met...we were aware that we were meeting the stars, you know. We were very excited to think that, like we'd go to the train station and collect someone like Leo Rowsome, ... [Tipperary accordionist] Paddy O'Brien would come, and [Clare fiddler] Séamus Connelly, [piper and scholar] Tomás Ó Cannain, Na Filí were a group that were big at the time, [Cork singer] Seán Ó Sé was a big name... Willie Clancy came one year! So there were events that happened during the year where we did realise that royalty had arrived and we were suitably impressed for a certain amount of time...

We were charmed at Leo Rowsome. He was just...such a.... As a piper he was impressive! We were impressed. He really did the business, you know. He came all silver and flashes and light and sound and tunes and we knew that, you know, that this was great stuff!

For Máire, these reminiscences invite a contrast between the musical culture she encountered in her youth and that of today. While not in any way intended as a criticism, her description of the contemporary piping community as a motorcycle club is one that hits uncomfortably close to the mark for me:

There was a great respect alright, for musicians but maybe nowadays it's the case that pipers are almost more, I dunno, like a motorbike club or something - big into their instruments and big into their music and big into their... but we weren't like that. It wasn't... I hesitate to say precious, 'cos I don't think pipers are precious but there was no preciousness about it at all. We were... it wasn't a glamorous scene, it was an enjoyable scene. We hugely appreciated meeting people. Suitably impressed, but not overly, by the big names that came and went. And I suppose it was maybe many years later I realised that Irish music had become something more of a ... that brought a sort of a level of devotion and attention that we... we hadn't brought it in that way. It was more ordinary, an ordinary part of life really.

It was a small scene... far smaller than it is now. I mean, we would look... our jaws would have dropped had we been brought to Miltown Malbay, modern Miltown Malbay. We wouldn't have recognised it or known how to fit in even! It was... in some ways I think that I belonged to a different generation of musicians. It really was a generation that whether or not Irish music was to hit the world stage wouldn't have made a difference to us. It made no difference to us, the fact that... I mean Planxty and Liam Ó [Flynn] was a huge hero of mine. Planxty and The Bothy Band, we were thrilled at their music but we were well-established as musicians before that... I identify, I suppose, with

musicians who go back to this pre-“Celtic revival”.... I know immediately the musicians that predate the popularity of the music cos that’s when I played music. When people played out of tune and played brilliantly!

In some ways, piping as I say was not the niche thing it is now, so we played a very general style and it was nothing, no big deal made of... we pipped as pipers do, we cranned (though we never really figured out what a cran was!), we just cranned, but there no minute.... we weren’t introspective pipers! We played with piano-accordions and mandolins and all sorts of people and there wasn’t a huge piping kind of sensibility really about us. That came in later years and it came as a slight shock, you know and I still I think probably feel that coming from that very broad church I suppose, I’m still a little bit uneasy with that “What do you do with that? What do you do there?” That wasn’t my earliest experience so when I did that, and I’ve done it of course, still my roots were in a much more general kind of music-making.

Many other aspects of Máire’s piping and reflections further cohere with this socially oriented philosophy. Máire can often be heard playing non-standard repertoire, especially newer ‘composed’ tunes that many pipers largely eschew. This is perhaps most directly expressed by Jimmy O’Brien Moran’s claim that he sees his reintroduction of old tunes from Paddy Coneeley’s repertoire as a counterbalance to ‘a lot of awful stuff being composed nowadays!’. Of Máire six selections recorded on the *Piper’s Choice* DVD (NPU 2013), five contain a new composition - a tendency equally observable in many of her other recorded performances. Most accomplished pipers will be familiar with a tune like Hammy Hamilton’s composition *The Kerfunten Jig* (recorded by Máire on NPU 2013) from session exposure and perhaps played it countless times, but few would consider playing it at a solo piping performance. It is a flute tune, a session tune, an Irish tune - but not a piping tune. To Máire’s non-hierarchical and non-exclusionary sensibility, however, it becomes a perfectly obvious choice. Furthermore, through her playing of tunes like these, it often becomes evident that they are entirely suited to a rendering on the pipes.

Arguably related is a seeming tendency of Máire’s to avoid playing slow airs. Of all the readily available recordings of Máire’s playing, formal and informal, there is only one slow air played on the pipes (The Irish Folk Festival 1995). Slow airs are considered a solo artform virtually by definition, not infrequently heard with accompaniment but essentially precluding the involvement of other melodic instrumentalists. As such, they are rarely heard at sessions, and playing one would be viewed as antisocial and self-aggrandising in many session environments. Especially amongst pipers, however, they form a vital and valorised part of the repertoire and are very commonly heard in more formal performance contexts. Máire’s tendency to avoid them would not seem to indicate a lack of skill or

comfort in performing them (the above recording disproves this admirably), but perhaps a preference for more 'social' repertoire in keeping with her musical philosophy. On a similar note, she tells me that she often feels more comfortable playing with an accompanist, something that would be seen as an embarrassing confession in certain more introspective piping circles but is entirely congruent with her musical outlook. Her choice of instrument further substantiates the social orientation of her music-making. While she acknowledges that her Wooff C set is 'a beautiful beautiful set of pipes', the possibility for communal playing will always be her main priority:

In some ways I think I probably made a mistake in that my first full set of pipes was a flat set of pipes and I had no one to play them with. The sound is magical but I mean then I just didn't play. And you never brought them anywhere with you, because.... And then you began to not even think of yourself as a piper at all. And then, um.... And at the end, I wondered was I a piper? ... I do think that I'm a social animal, you know, I need to meet people and I need to play with people. And in some ways, I suppose, that's another thing about - there's a tendency for the piping world to be very solo-oriented...

Playing with someone is my greatest pleasure, and yeah, when I'm on my own... I really enjoy that too but when I'm with people - I certainly want to play with them rather than be listened to. So for me, the pipes are, have been, just in the recent (and when I say recent I'm probably talking 30 years!) have become - they seem to be a solo instrument in a way I'm not comfortable with, you know. And they are a magnificent solo instrument! ... Séamus Ennis was not going to be anything other than a soloist. Willie Clancy, well, Willie Clancy was great to play with other people but it would have been a shame not to give him your full attention. And, and so many pipers are solo pipers by... temperament. I'm temperamentally not.

In Máire's own terms, a lack of communal musical activity is enough to make her question her very identity as a piper. Social engagement is a matter of ontological necessity as much as aesthetic preference. Further insight into Máire's musical philosophy comes when I decide to satisfy my curiosity and ask about her brother Conal Ó Gráda. I consider myself a great appreciator and something of a student of Conal's flute playing and have long been fascinated by a seeming chasm between the siblings' approaches to their instruments. While Conal seems to delight in an earthy and raucous style that pushes the boundaries of technical control, Máire's music seems to exude technical ease and precision. Máire begins by agreeing that their personal styles are highly divergent and speculating that 'Conal would have made a great piper!'. Despite both siblings occupying a similar musical milieu with the influence of Micheál Ó Riabhaigh's pedagogy looming large, Máire traces this difference to Conal's obsession with the 1920s and 1930s recordings of the Irish-American

flute player John McKenna which gradually reshaped and reoriented his musical style. On the other hand, she had never felt drawn to a singular exemplar in the same way. At first glance, this may appear to draw attention to the well-used dichotomy of tradition and innovation. But we must remember that the choice to cleave to earlier models can be just as much a product of free individual agency as the most idiosyncratic approaches, and equally that such approaches have long been recognised and valorised (and sometimes even canonised) within the tradition.

This comparison is a helpful one in illustrating some of the points which Máire raises. Conal's trajectory could be said to embody the approach to music-making which Máire describes as 'introspective'. The act of aligning one's musical aspirations to an exemplar figure immediately lays out a program of (often solitary) study of that individual's style. Máire's philosophy on the other hand allows her music much more to simply be itself, immersed more organically within her musical surrounds. This is not to assert that it does not belong within the broader piping tradition. On the contrary, the fingerprints of Ennis, Rowsome and others are immediately evident to me when I listen to her piping. Two explanations can be furnished for this phenomenon and they need not be mutually exclusive. The first and most obvious is that Máire does not claim to be entirely innocent of this introspective approach, but merely emphasises that it was largely foreign to her early musical experiences. As she herself notes above, she has engaged with more deliberate study of recordings and piping styles and it is entirely possible that these influences are the result of this process. But it is also worth considering the possibility that these sounds are in the air, so to speak, and can be internalised and reproduced without a detailed and formalised program of study. In the hybridising environment suggested by Kevin Rowsome in the previous chapter, the choice to deeply engage with a particular received tradition or more organically respond to one's immediate musico-social environment may become a central determinant of musical style.

Setting aside this complexity, which will be considered in greater depth in the following chapters, there is also a regional and communal element which is worth considering here. In a sense, taking after a recorded historical exponent can assist a musician in bypassing the gravitational pull of their immediate musical surroundings. While some may claim that Máire's music is less rooted in tradition as a result, it is perhaps more likely to be rooted in the immediate communal and regional sound that she encounters. In an ironic turn, it was the modern technology of sound recording and the mass availability of recordings that allowed Conal to incorporate older historical approaches in his music making (this phenomenon also corresponds to reflections from Joey Abarta in Chapter 7).

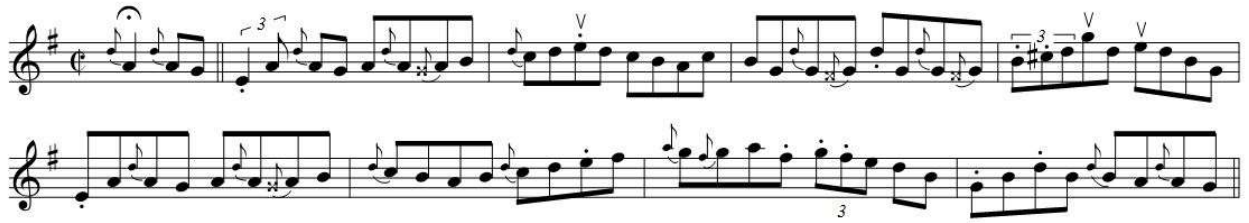
Máire's playing is characterised by a steady rhythm, an immediately appealing swing and effortless control. There is little adventurism or desire to push technique to the point of risk as I have observed in other pipers. Arguably because of this, she does not always attract admiration as a virtuoso in the way that a piper like Blackie O'Connell might. Equally, while her playing is clearly informed by a deep familiarity with the tradition, she does not style herself a piping historicist in the mould of Jimmy O'Brien Moran. Taking into account her lack of affinity with the 'motorbike club' that is the contemporary piping community, it could be said that she plays Irish traditional music first and the pipes only as an afterthought. Nevertheless, as we shall see, there is much in her playing that any piper could learn from.

C. The Rainy Day/The Merry Blacksmith

Máire recorded these two tunes on the NPU compilation LP *The Piper's Rock* (NPU 1978), playing a concert pitch Crowley set with a Howard chanter. The two tracks she contributed to the LP have significance as the first commercial recording by a female uilleann piper. Máire also plays these same two reels (albeit on a C set) on the archived RTÉ video which so impressed me when I first heard it, presumably indicating a certain affinity for these tunes at the time. Even individually, both tunes are strongly associated with Séamus Ennis who recorded each a number of times (Ennis 1995; 1997; 2000). In combination, the spectre of Ennis is practically unavoidable to anyone familiar with classic uilleann piping recordings.

Immediately evident here is a taste for back D cuts (also discussed in Chapter 4), generating bright articulations. Cutting any note other than C# or C♭ with the back D is a matter of some controversy. As noted earlier, it has often been associated with Traveller pipers (Tuohy and Ó hAodha 2009, 34-35; O'Connell 2018) and frowned on as 'vulgar' (Browne 2018). For this reason, it is quite unexpected to hear back D cuts in conjunction with the evocation of Ennis, a consummate 'gentleman piper' who would have very much made different choices in his selection of cut notes (see Figure 6.2). At two points in *The Merry Blacksmith* Máire even incorporates a back D triplet (see Figure 6.3), another Traveller-coded piece of piping technique which is arguably even more controversial (Browne 2018). This kind of free borrowing from different stylistic approaches without fully subscribing to any is another example of the hybridising spoken about by Kevin Rowsome in the preceding chapter.

The Rainy Day
Máire Ní Ghráda (NPU 1978)



The Rainy Day
Séamus Ennis (Ennis 1977)

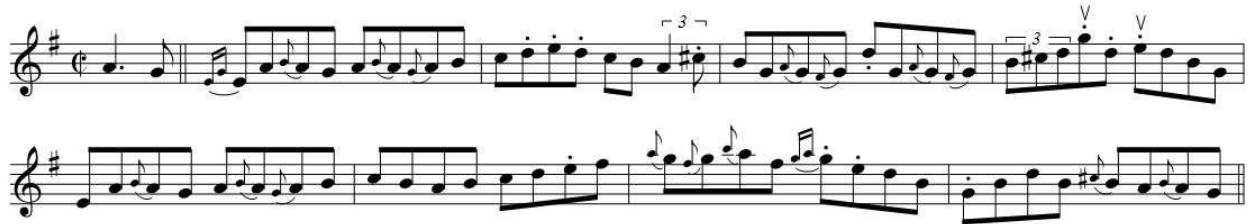


Figure 6.2 – excerpt from *The Rainy Day* as played by Máire Ní Ghráda (0'00" - 0'13") and Séamus Ennis (0'00" - 0'12") demonstrating different cut choices

The Merry Blacksmith



Figure 6.3 – excerpt from *The Merry Blacksmith* (1'49" - 1'58") demonstrating back D triplet in bar 3

Also following Ennis' setting, Máire's playing extensively deploys the FGA triplet as a motivic element around which the performance is constructed. It is complemented by frequent drops down to D, the lowest note on the chanter, in situations not immediately implied by the tune (see Figure 6.4). In a typical session setting of *The Merry Blacksmith*, the low D only appears as the final note of each part but it is used significantly more often in the settings played by Séamus Ennis and Máire. As is typical of Ennis' approach to the note, the chanter is only lifted from the leg very briefly to provide a short plosive attack. While the pipes are often seen as incapable of dynamic variation, the abrasive and slightly louder quality of the hard D note, especially when coupled with this staccato approach, allows it to take on the role of an accent rather than a purely melodic note. In the hands of both Ennis and Máire, it is used to provide syncopation and emphasised backbeats, generating rhythmic impetus.

The Merry Blacksmith
Máire Ní Ghráda (NPU 1978)



Figure 6.4 – excerpt from *The Merry Blacksmith* (1'30" - 1'39") demonstrating an FGA triplet in bar 1 and unexpected drops to the low D in bars 1, 5, and 6

By the end of the performance, Máire has skilfully synthesised both these features into an innovative new technique. In places where she previously introduced FGA triplets, she now plays DFA triplets (see Figure 6.5). These are a non-standard piping technique, unlikely to appear in any piper's arsenal of tight triplets. (While they are included in the extensive table of Willie Clancy's triplets appearing in Mitchell (1993, 24), they are extremely rarely encountered in his transcriptions.) It would be difficult to argue that the movement itself is innovative, for the simple reason that this sequence of notes occurs in a great many tunes and would often be played with similar articulations. Hearing these notes as a triplet deployed in the same places that we previously heard the entirely standard FGA triplet, however, is a rarity that is worth dwelling on. These triplets are also quite difficult, involving a quick, dextrous snap of the chanter off the leg to generate the necessary effect. In this context, they capture the same rhythmic feel as the more conventional FGA triplets while incorporating the accent provided by the low D. In the process the duration of the low D is shortened further, becoming even more plosive and accented.

The Merry Blacksmith
Máire Ní Ghráda (NPU 1978)



Figure 6.5 - excerpt from *The Merry Blacksmith* (1'58" - 2'17") demonstrating extensive use of DFA triplets

For all its innovativeness, the effect of this technique is very subtle. In analysing this recording, I had to listen several times at half speed to identify the notes of the triplet with certainty. It may therefore go unremarked by even knowledgeable listeners, although this is not to say it is without effect. It is not a feat of virtuosity or ingenuity for its own sake, but only exists in the service of a deeper musical end. This is emblematic of Máire's approach and philosophy in many ways. She could be playing beside you in a session, quietly rewriting the rulebook of piping technique and deeply evoking the sound and feel of Séamus Ennis' recordings (or those of anyone else), and you may not even notice, except to say that it is clever, subtle, lovely piping.

D. Dwyer's Hornpipe/Garrykennedy Castle

This performance was video recorded at the Scoil Samhradh Willie Clancy's piping recital in 2011. As with the previous reels, Máire can be heard playing these same tunes on a variety of other recorded media and these performances demonstrate an equally remarkable consistency in her playing of these tunes. The three-part *Dwyer's* is not a common piping tune by any means, but has a piping pedigree as part of Séamus Ennis' impressive arsenal of complex hornpipes (Ennis 1973). Another piping version can be heard from Eamonn Curran (Keane and Faulkner 1979), and here Máire acknowledges fellow piper Mickey Dunne as her source for the tune. But even more than *Dwyer's*, *Garrykennedy Castle*, composed by the Tipperary accordion player Paddy O'Brien, is the kind of tune that few pipers would even consider learning. If it were played in a session, most pipers would immediately put their instruments down and perhaps make a discreet trip to the bar or the toilets. Máire acknowledges that she is reaching outside of the confines of standard piping repertoire by introducing it in this performance as 'not really a piping tune'. Originally composed in the key of F, Máire plays it here in G to allow it to be approached on the chanter.

Máire displays a remarkable facility with rolls on C \sharp and rapid-fire condensed crans in this performance. The note C \sharp is strongly emphasised in a great many piping tunes, and pipers apply a range of characteristic colours and effects to the note. Despite this, C \sharp rolls are not nearly as often heard on the pipes as rolls on the notes from E to B. This is perhaps an effect of the important place of the whistle in piping pedagogy and practice. Due to the lack of a thumb hole for the high D on the whistle, cuts (and therefore conventional rolls, which by definition include a cut) on the notes C \sharp and C $\#$ are impossible and it is likely that many pipers internalise this limitation and unconsciously apply it to the chanter where no such constraint exists. To hear a piper deploy it confidently and

effectively, as Willie Clancy could and Máire demonstrates here, opens up an avenue of expressive melodic possibilities that are off-limits to many pipers.

Virtually every occurrence of the C₄ roll in both hornpipes is augmented by an expressive rising inflection. Sometimes referred to as the ‘piper’s C’, this is often considered one of the defining sounds of the instrument. Máire’s combination of it with the roll articulations is striking for its expressiveness and control. *Dwyer’s* includes two different placements of this C₄ roll relative to the pulse, one beginning on the beat and one immediately after it (see Figure 6.6). A new and more complex rendering of the C₄ roll is introduced in *Garrykennedy Castle*, and heard in both onbeat and offbeat variations (see Figure 6.6). This corresponds to a ‘condensed roll’ in the terminology of Grey Larsen (2003), essentially compressing the same three articulations of a typical roll into a shorter amount of time. As in the previous example, the fluttering effect it generates is subtle but the technique itself (at least on a C₄) is difficult and infrequently heard in piping. These rapid articulations (and the similar condensed crans that are played at one point in *Dwyer’s*) are particularly effective in contrast to the stately and controlled tempo that Máire maintains for the hornpipes. The flexibility that she demonstrates in her approaches to the C₄ roll, coupled with the expressive tonal character that she applies to them, allow it to stand as something of a motivic element that comes to define the performance (see Figure 6.7). As before, Máire demonstrates that she is able to engage freely with sonic possibility, rather than allowing her music to become subservient to instrumental dogma.

Dwyer's Hornpipe
Máire Ní Ghráda (NPU 2011)



Dwyer's Hornpipe
Máire Ní Ghráda (NPU 2011)



Garrykennedy Castle
Máire Ní Ghráda (NPU 2011)



Garrykennedy Castle
Máire Ní Ghráda (NPU 2011)

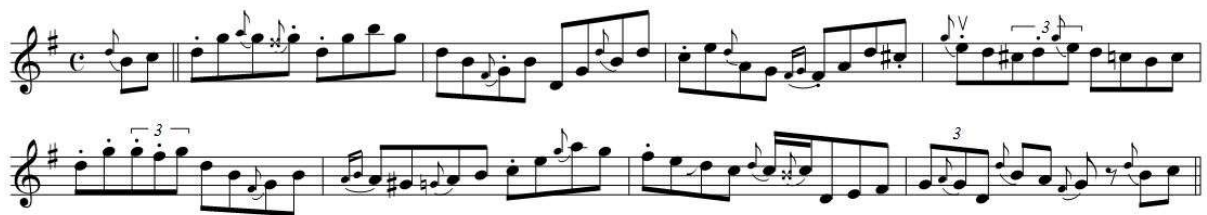


Figure 6.6 – excerpts from *Dwyer's Hornpipe* (0'40" - 0'55", 1'09" - 1'23"), and *Garrykennedy Castle* (3'24" - 3'39", 3'51" - 4'04") demonstrating different C# rolls in context



Figure 6.7 - The different timing and placements of C# rolls heard in *Dwyer's Hornpipe* and *Garrykennedy Castle* (left to right - on-beat roll, off-beat roll, on-beat condensed roll, off-beat condensed roll)

E. Conclusion

There are pipers whose musicianship is so closely bound to the physical and sonic object of the uilleann pipes that it is impossible to imagine them playing any other instrument. I have no such difficulty with Máire, whose considered, subtle, and compelling music seems like it could directly translate to any other instrument. This is in keeping with Máire's observation that she 'didn't in any way choose the instrument', her early learning in musical environments open to a wide variety of instruments, and her lack of affinity with the 'motorbike club' that piping can at times become. Her music may not be piping for piping's sake but this does not presume that it is in any sense less worthy as piping; it may be outwardly oriented but there can be no doubt that it is uilleann piping at the very highest level. As discussed above, this very factor may (somewhat paradoxically) allow it to embrace new possibilities, reinvigorating the practice of piping in the process.

Máire also represents a reaction against an overly analytical mindset. While other pipers study the difference between Séamus Ennis' and Patsy Touhey's crans at quarter-speed playback, Máire points out that, as she put it, it is entirely possible to play crans without even knowing what a cran is! This presents something of a conundrum that problematises the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy I introduced earlier. On one level her music is controlled, crafted, and nearly classical in its logic and poise, but at the same time it eschews the ivory tower for more intuitive and social approaches to music-making.

We see here the danger of assuming a one-to-one correspondence between a musician's philosophy and the sonic content of their music. While Blackie O'Connell strongly emphasised the importance of his socio-musical networks in some ways reminiscent of Máire, he remains in many ways a born performer who thrives as a focus of attention. As seen in Chapter 4, he leaps at the chance to demonstrate his technical wizardry and imaginative musicianship on stage in ways which would often be inappropriate for a session. Even when reining in some of these tendencies for a session context, I have observed that Blackie is likely to attract the attention of spectators significantly more than the other participants. Máire's playing on the other hand, seems suited to unobtrusively supporting a session rather than leading it.

There is a sense in which it feels almost disrespectful to subject Máire's music to any kind of analysis as I have attempted to do here. There is something of the intuition of the master craftsman in her playing, a logic that proceeds from doing rather than studying. As I leave the tranquility of Máire's

garden and the warmth of her company, I'm unsure if I've penetrated any of the secrets that I first heard (and still hear) in her playing of *The Merry Blacksmith*. I'm not sure that would bother her. And after speaking with her, I think it bothers me less too.

Máire's reflections provide a natural vantage point to examine the communal and individual implications of musical style, as she draws on the rich social environment of Irish traditional music to inspire her personal musical stylings. She also returns us to the relationship between the piper and their instrument, with its various musical and verbal expressions. For her, the designation of 'piper' is largely incidental, a statement of fact rather than a cornerstone of her musical identity. Finally, she reminds us that all of this takes place in an ever-changing historical and cultural context, where the instrument and its practice are being reshaped and reimagined by both the uilleann piping community and forces outside of its control. A better illustration of these ongoing historical negotiations could scarcely be found than the subject of the following chapter, Joey Abarta.

Chapter 7 – Joey Abarta

‘So I’m an American, playing an American made instrument, copied and improved (quote unquote) from an Irish instrument, playing music recorded 100 years ago by ... I guess naturalised Americans, but they were Irish playing Irish music in America!’

The biographic and ethnographic material, as well all quotations in this chapter (except where indicated), have been taken from a recorded interview with Joey Abarta conducted on 28 July 2021.



Figure 7.1 – Photo of Joey Abarta. Photo by Louise Bichan.

A. Introduction

Originally hailing from Los Angeles and now residing in Boston, Joey Abarta (b.1985) is amongst the most esteemed non-Irish pipers active today. In particular, he is often seen as a prominent exponent and advocate of the style of the early American pipers, preserved on cylinder and 78rpm recordings from the early decades of the 20th century. Joey is highly active as a performer and teacher on the US festival and summer school circuit. He has recorded two albums, the solo outing *Swimming Against the Falls/Snámh in Aghaidh Easa* (Abarta 2013) and the duo album *Copley Street* with fiddler Nathan Gourley (Gourley and Abarta 2016). He has undoubtedly captured the attention of the

uilleann piping community; I can still recall an air of excitement and admiration whenever his name was mentioned on my first trip to Ireland in 2014.

As a unique stylist and scholar of uilleann piping, Joey's involvement in this research suggested itself naturally. Furthermore, I did not want to fall victim to an all too common diasporic cultural cringe that affixes sole authenticity to the Irish experience of the instrument and music, and therefore wanted to involve the voice of at least one non-Irish piper in my research. I interview Joey on Zoom towards the end of my research. While we have exchanged messages before, we have never spoken in person and I am immediately captivated by his enthusiasm when he talks about piping. At one point his baby son begins crying and he spends the rest of the interview gently rocking him, perhaps talking a little more quietly but no less animatedly. There is an immediate sense of ease and rapport in this interview, perhaps assisted by the informality of the digital medium - a couple of piping nerds sitting around at home talking shop.

B. Biography and ethnography

Unexpectedly, Joey begins by talking about his ancestry. He describes himself as 'very American', emphasising a mixed ethnic heritage ('I'm kind of a mutt, y'know, everything from Mexican to Native American!') with Basque (the origin of the Abarta surname), Sicilian, and Irish currents thrown into the mixture. Joey refers back to notions of cultural ancestry several times during this interview, reflecting on the intersection of ethnicity with more individual understandings of cultural belonging. As he describes it, the 'Irish-American' identity is a singularly powerful force in US circles, often establishing and policing standards of authenticity which are quite different from those that define discourse within Ireland (see Casey 2002):

Being American and having a surname like Abarta and playing Irish music here professionally, you get this question a lot, especially from Irish people... about the subject of authenticity and how that relates to your heritage or blood or whatever.

Joey's first experiences of Irish traditional music can be attributed to his Irish-American grandmother, a second generation immigrant who was particularly committed to ensuring he was exposed to Irish cultural artefacts such as the video recording of *Riverdance*:

She played a lot of Irish music and I liked it a lot as soon as I heard it and I didn't really know what it was or how to do it or that sessions existed or anything. And then she brought me back [from a trip to

Ireland] a Walton's bodhrán when I was like 13 or 14 with a little disc on how to play with the book. So I basically taught myself how to play in my room and then ... I had my older brother download Chieftains records and I would go to record and tape shops and buy tapes of the Chieftains. It kind of started snowballing and I eventually found a place in Los Angeles that had a session.

It was at one such session that he encountered his first set of uilleann pipes. They belonged to Patrick D'Arcy, an emigrant Dubliner, who was to become Joey's mentor and teacher as his interest in the pipes swiftly developed. With the assistance of the Southern California Uilleann Pipers' Club which he co-founded, Patrick helped to arrange a practice set for Joey to learn on and set out a course of study focused around 'the four': Séamus Ennis, Willie Clancy, Leo Rowsome, and Tommy Reck. Patrick's pedagogical philosophy encouraged personal agency but did not compromise on the necessity of deep listening to the recorded history of uilleann piping, constantly encouraging Joey to expand his listening horizons:

I was very indebted to Patrick for sharing a lot of really old recordings with me. And... he kind of nudged what I listened to into the place where I thank him now. At the time I was trying to figure out why, y'know....

I would ask him, like, "What about Paddy Keenan?", y'know, and he goes, "Everybody's trying to sound exactly like Paddy Keenan. ...Why copy Paddy Keenan when you could listen to everybody that he listened to? And then you make up your... make up your mind for yourself..."

Amongst the material that Patrick supplied were compilations of primarily US recordings from the cylinder and 78rpm eras that Joey found both mystifying and intriguing. His interest was further piqued when he discovered the provenance of these unique sounds. As an American whose connection to 'Irishness' was up for debate in certain circles, Joey describes a sense of pride and a growing fascination in the American history of Irish traditional music.

The immense importance that Irish-American musical artefacts - perhaps most importantly cylinder and 78rpm recordings, O'Neill's tunebooks, and the Taylor brothers' revolutionary uilleann pipe designs - assumed within musical life in Ireland challenges a naive view of diaspora as a monodirectional current emanating from motherland to provinces (Carolan 1997; O'Connell 2013; Matthews 2019). Therefore, when Joey emphasises his identity as an American in Irish traditional music communities, he is neither diminishing himself nor claiming an outsider status. Instead he is staking a claim for an Americanness that has long occupied a place at the heart of Irish musical

practice. By extension, he provides an invitation to non-Irish musicians to centre themselves and their experiences in their own personal and local musical narratives, rather than at the margins of an imagined Irish-centred one. Conversely, he challenges any understanding of Irishness that essentialises geography or nationality:

So I'm an American, playing an American made instrument, copied and improved (quote unquote) from an Irish instrument, playing music recorded 100 years ago by ... I guess naturalised Americans, but they were Irish playing Irish music in America. I think there's a PhD in that! [laughs] It's like there's so many levels of insanity that kind of go along with that. It's like, is ... are Taylor Brothers pipes an Irish instrument? They were manufactured, invented and made in America, so are they Irish or are they American? Is the music that, y'know, Tom Ennis ... Tom Ennis was born in America, his father was Irish, he played, heard all his music in America, he played music on an American instrument, is that music American or is it Irish? So then you come up with this thing - is this music early American uilleann piping? Or is it just....a friend of mine says it's just Connacht style ... It was a particular style of uilleann piping that got saved and carried over and preserved, kind of like a time capsule, when everything was going, y'know, bad in Ireland and it's just a continuation of that, but some people think that this style was invented in America, yknow.

Joey's extensive knowledge and enthusiasm for early piping recordings are palpable when speaking to him. At one point he interrupts the conversation to perform a hilarious and surprisingly accurate vocal impression of a degraded cylinder recording. But despite this deep fascination, Joey does not see himself as engaged in an act of historical revivalism that is divorced from the contemporary piping world:

I'm in no way, I would say, an exponent of the style. I would say that I'm a wannabe! [laughs] But I've incorporated a lot of the stuff into my style. Not everything 'cos I'm still working at it. But, y'know, like I said before, you'll never be Touhey... So I wouldn't necessarily say from the beginning to end, that's my style but I... I have a lot of aspects that I attempt from the style and I think that kinda flavours my playing in a certain way, and that's why people think of me as that, I guess.

But yeah, Early American style, if it's that then I try to do it! [laughs] I would say I like to be a closed player and that's something that they really took advantage of, but there are more...there are more aspects to the early American style that I do not do all the time in my playing. Like, there's some things I can't do, like um... like the double grace rolls, y'know, was a big part of early American uilleann piping, y'know.

But while Joey does not see himself as directly re-enacting historical stylistic trends he is nevertheless well aware of his place within a historical trajectory of uilleann piping. He hears something from many early American recordings that he feels is in short supply amongst today's uilleann pipers:

Well, you know yourself, being a musician...you change and your style changes as you grow and mature. There's something that I think kinda gets lost a lot nowadays. I do hear it more than I did when I was first starting and it's really, there was so much technical being put on, there was so much weight of technical ability put on the instrument that the soul of it was buckling. There was no heart, there was no feeling - it's just as many notes as you can, as many grace notes as you can, as many high notes as you can, as many ornaments as you could fit in. And as we all do, y'know, like I wanted to do everything....

One of the biggest influences on how I approach piping right now is from Jimmy [O'Brien Moran]. And Jimmy, y'know, I thought I was alright! I took his class. I was the youngest person in his class, 'cos I was the youngest person that played, there y'know, at the tionól. And I...I played something for him and I was like, "Oh God, I'm gonna impress him, I'm gonna impress him", y'know. And he goes through and goes, yeah, this and this, and oh, and little bits, just...not slashing it to pieces but picking things out and asking the question, why? Why this, why this, why this, why this? And I said to myself, that's a good question, I should actually start thinking about that, and do I want to do this? Because I can do this, and does this freely express me, y'know like... His greatest line was "disgrace notes". [laughs] So that kind of got me thinking and I was saying, yeah, why does everybody cut every beat? Why do some people cut every beat, every downbeat, why do people do that?

But Jimmy's style doesn't do that, and old American styles don't do that either. The... the play of silence in the playing determines the rhythm. And it emphasises rhythm even greater than a C# triplet, or a C# grace note rather, the loudest grace note you can do, or a back D grace note. You can actually have a louder sound by taking out sound. And that's what I started doing. Instead of thinking about putting in, I started thinking about "what do I take out?" And the early American guys did that. Am I saying that there is not a generous helping of virtuosity in their playing? No, I'm not saying that. [laughs] Is it hard to listen to for some people because there's so much going on? Yes, but you have to appreciate, for the time that they lived in and what they were doing, it almost... exceeds the technical bar... of piping that we live in today. Which is insane because it was 100 years ago! Y'know? [laughs] I appreciate that a lot, and... and there were certain things that I really enjoyed about the early American style, if that's what you want to call it.

While Patrick provided the recordings that introduced Joey to the wealth of the early American piping tradition, Joey's subsequent study of them was largely a self-directed journey involving deep listening, analysis and transcription (using his own variant of ABC notation). In a sense, he was recovering a discontinuous tradition rather than receiving a living one. However, he acknowledges ongoing interactions with a number of other musicians exploring similar musical territory on both sides of the Atlantic, including Seán McKiernan, Seán Gavin, Jesse Smith, Fionnán Mac Gabhann, and Emmett Gill, as a recurrent source of inspiration.

Joey has a strong relationship with Na Píobairí Uilleann, having been featured in their Piper's Choice DVD series (NPU 2017) and contributed some tutorial videos to their website, but his musical activities in the USA remain the mainstay of his practice. He admits with amusement that he has never been to the Scoil Samhradh Willie Clancy, having had to decline an invitation several years ago due to the birth of his first child. In a way, it seems appropriate. Just like his American musical forebears, Joey is thriving in (and helping to ensure) the musical health of the diaspora.

C. The Miners of Wicklow/My Former Wife

This set of two jigs is taken from Joey's solo album (Abarta 2013). Joey specifically suggested this set (which I was already leaning toward discussing) as indicative of his engagement with early American style and repertoire - 'they're taken from that [early American piping recordings] but they're not necessarily played 100% in that style'. Both jigs are strongly associated with early American pipers, including Patsy Touhey who recorded both tunes in 1919 (Touhey 2005). There is another strong connection to the Chicago piper James Early whose playing of both tunes was the source for O'Neill's transcriptions and who recorded *My Former Wife* with fiddler Billy McCormick on cylinder around 1905 (under the Irish translation *An Bhean Do Bhí Cheanna Dhom*). Another early version of *My Former Wife* was recorded by fellow Chicago piper Tom Ennis with piano accompaniment in 1919. Both tunes remain significantly more likely to be heard played by pipers than other instrumentalists.

Overall, Joey's performance forms a marked trajectory from a tight approach using comparatively few cuts or taps (resonating with Joey's own description of the historical American style) to a more open sound which naturally presents more opportunities for these techniques. Indeed, some of the variations he deploys on the second tune involving legato quadruplets, suggest the influence of Clancy or Doran more than any of the early American masters. This could be viewed either as a shift from a historical sensibility to a more modern one or as a journey from America to Ireland; perhaps a

symbolic reversal of the tide of emigration, or a reflection on the immense influence of Irish-American music practices on the motherland. The regulator playing in these tunes is also extraordinary, demonstrating virtuosity and creativity while never overshadowing the chanterwork.

The use of silence for purposes of articulation rather than briefly sounding another note by means of cuts and taps was emphasised by Joey as both a hallmark of the early American pipers and something he aspired to in his own playing - ‘you can actually have a louder sound by taking out sound’. Joey’s adherence to this philosophy is especially evident in the second part of *The Miners of Wicklow*, which he plays without a single cut or tap for four out of six repetitions. This is so highly unusual that I found myself listening repeatedly in disbelief. It is something that I might attempt as a contrived exercise in tight playing in the practice room but would never consider doing in a performance context. Even Patsy Touhey, whose recording Joey draws special attention to in the liner notes, does not come close to this complete faithfulness to closed piping. In place of cuts and taps, Joey creatively utilises a balance of tight and open chanterwork and fine variations of duration to articulate and shape the phrases (see Figure 7.2). While the first part of the tune contains many more cuts, both individually and as part of the featured crans on E and D, they are still balanced with some very effective uses of chanter closure. One subtle but distinctive variation on the closing phrase incorporates both cuts and chanter closures on the same notes, a momentary display of remarkable virtuosity (see Figure 7.3). Again, while references to Touhey’s brief recording of the tune are evident, Joey’s rendition never approaches a carbon copy. For instance, while he can be heard using ACA triplets in many of the same places as Touhey, Joey does not incorporate any of Touhey’s distinctive backstitches on the back D. Similarly, one of Joey’s most consistent used devices is cutting the back D short in the first phrase of the tune, while Touhey is almost equally consistent in allowing it its full value.

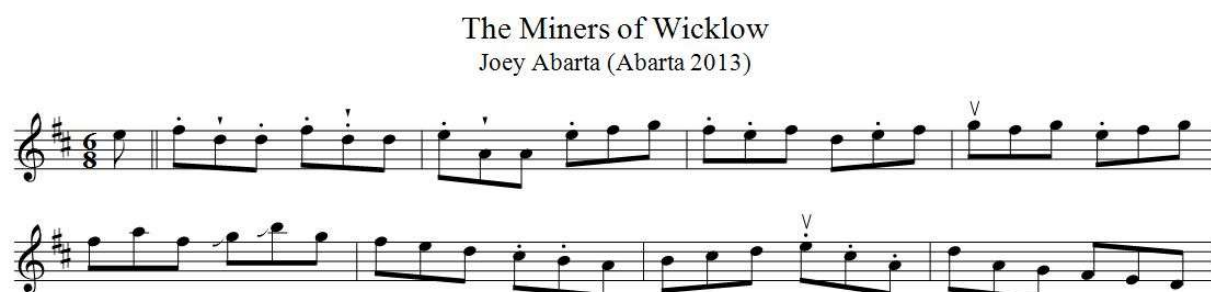


Figure 7.2 – excerpt from *The Miners of Wicklow* (1’25” - 1’34”) demonstrating a repetition of the second part without any cuts or taps

The Miners of Wicklow
Joey Abarta (Abarta 2013)



Figure 7.3 – excerpt from *The Miners of Wicklow* (0'39" - 0'48") demonstrating a virtuosic variation in bars 7 and 8, and a balance of cuts and chanter closure for articulation

Almost as soon as *My Former Wife* begins, Joey transitions to an approach which is much more reliant on cuts and taps and could be reasonably described as more in line with contemporary piping standards. Here the influence of Touhey (whose distinctive setting of the tune lacks a third part and features an unusual D in place of a C \sharp in the opening phrase) begins to lessen but other early American recordings by James Early and Tom Ennis remain influential. Despite Joey's earlier insistence that he is unable to execute double cut rolls (what he refers to as 'double grace note rolls') as heard on early American piping recordings, he produces several fine examples of them during *My Former Wife*. Defined by the addition of an extra cut into the standard roll, these particular rolls are not confined to early American pipers by any means. Touhey and his contemporaries, however, had a particularly distinctive approach to them that compressed the articulations into a short bristling attack rather than spreading them more evenly. Tom Ennis demonstrates this technique with remarkable clarity and control in his recording of the tune, and is especially fond of placing it on a structurally significant high G in the second part. While Early does not appear to use double cut rolls here (as best I can discern from the heavily degraded cylinder), he occasionally emphasises the same note by means of a sharp pop of the chanter. At one point Joey plays this same note with both a double cut roll and a pop, effectively combining both pipers' approach to the note for even more emphasis (see Figure 7.4).

My Former Wife
Joey Abarta (Abarta 2013)

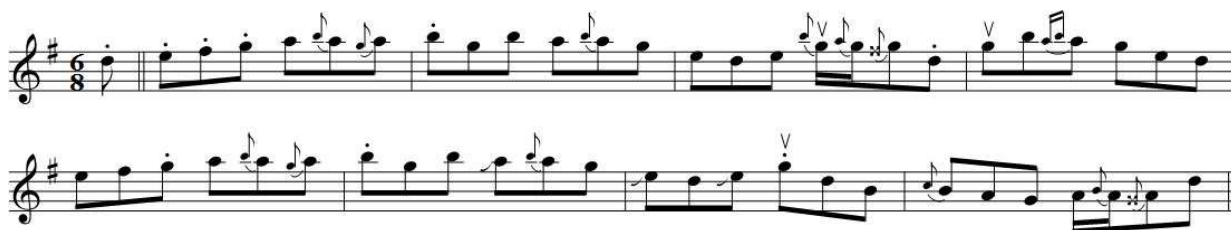


Figure 7.4 – excerpt from *My Former Wife* (1'50" - 1'58") demonstrating a double cut roll with a pop in bar 3

Joey's approach to the unique material of the third part of *My Former Wife* is also striking when compared to the early recordings of the tune. Here he markedly pares back the cuts and taps which had been introduced, returning to the overwhelmingly closed playing that defined *The Miners of Wicklow* and producing an effective contrast with the overarching style of the tune. Joey's treatment of the C \sharp in this phrase is also deserving of attention. As referenced in Chapter 6, the C \sharp has acquired talismanic status in modern piping. But for early American pipers the note was no different to any other, if not something to be avoided. Touhey steadfastly opted to play C \sharp s in tunes which seem to be all but defined by a C \sharp in standard practice today such as *Rakish Paddy* and *Scotch Mary*. When Touhey and others do play a C \sharp , they often use the C \sharp key resulting in a more neutral timbre that lacks much of the distinctive character generated by the cross-fingering that is overwhelmingly preferred today (Mitchell and Small 1986, 29-30). This can create a certain cognitive dissonance amongst pipers today, such is the hold that the sound of the wavering cross-fingered C \sharp has over uilleann piping imagination and lore. Here, Joey generally makes comparatively little use of expressive effects on his (cross-fingered) C \sharp , preferring to explore creative variations including several of the same staccato quadruplets that Early and Ennis employ. The exception comes at 3'00" where Joey combines a rapid vibrato with a rising pitch inflection on the C \sharp , briefly abandoning these evocations of historical America for what might be considered a more modern Irish sound (see Figure 7.5). It provides a perfect illustration of the approach Joey has described to me - an interest in reviving historical sounds but in the context of musical choices produced by and productive of contemporary approaches to piping.



Figure 7.5 – excerpt from *My Former Wife* (2'52" - 3'08") demonstrating expressive C \sharp s in bars 9 and 10, contrasting with a more staccato treatment elsewhere

D. Lament for Limerick

Joey does not focus solely on repertoire played by early American pipers, a significant portion of which is out of common circulation today. In a parallel to Jimmy O'Brien Moran's 'WWWD?' philosophy (see Chapter 3), he demonstrates an enthusiasm for applying elements of their style to tunes which were not a part of their repertoire. Joey describes this as 'taking like a fiddle tune, and just basically dissecting it, taking it apart and putting it through an early American uilleann pipe filter'. This approach can be heard on his solo album (Abarta 2013), perhaps most evident on the tune *Tom Billy's Butcher's March* (track 7), a unique setting of the common *Butcher's March* from the Sliabh Luachra fiddler Tom Billy Murphy. For reasons of chronology and geography, it is all but impossible that any of the early American pipers even knew the tune. In Joey's hands, however, it is reimagined into something which would be entirely appropriate to Touhey and his contemporaries, yet almost diametrically opposed to conventional understandings of Sliabh Luachra fiddling. Some similarities in method could be said to underlie his playing of *The Lament for Limerick* here.

The Lament for Limerick (also known as *Limerick's Lamentation*, *Marbhna Luimní*, and *Sarsfield's Lamentation*) is an instrumental air commemorating the surrender of Limerick which marked the end of the Williamite War of 1688-1691. The air most likely predates the siege and is most often attributed to one of two 17th century Irish harpers, William Connellan or Myles O'Reilly. While it is quite possible that it was known to some early American pipers since it appears in one of O'Neill's tunebooks (1922), it was first recorded by Seán Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Chualann (1970). Since then it has become a frequently recorded slow air amongst uilleann pipers (O'Flynn 1988; Deegan 1999; McKeon, McKeon and McKeon 2005; Smyth 2006; Rickard 2011). Joey recorded this tune (Pipers' Gathering 2020) in a live performance at the 2019 Pipers' Gathering in Litchfield, CT (the same annual event as Blackie O'Connell's recording analysed in Chapter 4).

On the surface, Joey seems to adopt a very different approach to the strategies he uses for dance music in the previous example and in other recordings. He makes relatively little use of closed chanterwork throughout this performance, a decision which is entirely congruent with standard piping practice when playing slow airs. Even amongst the early American pipers, Patsy Touhey and Tom Ennis demonstrated a distinctly more open approach on their playing of slow airs (Patsy Touhey's *Brian the Brave* (Touhey 2005) being something of an exception), although James Early held fast to his overwhelmingly closed style. Joey's intimate knowledge of these recordings (including the counterexamples) assures that this is a conscious choice informed by both the

recorded canon and contemporary piping practice, rather than an unquestioning adherence to convention.

Unlike the previous tunes, Joey fully utilises the expressive potential of cross-fingered C \sharp s throughout, with further microtonal effects including frequent usage of the ghost D and howling off-leg F \sharp s at 3'52". Again, this could be framed as a reference to early American recordings - even primarily using a keyed fingering, Touhey was able to inject some expressive inflections into his C \sharp s in airs like *The Blackbird* and *The Dear Irish Boy* (Touhey 2005) - but Joey goes so far beyond that in his microtonal adventurousness that a stronger case can be made for a debt to Willie Clancy.

Underlying these differences to Joey's earlier approach, however, are some deeper congruences. Here, I wish to focus primarily on Joey's use of the regulators, which feature virtuosically in this performance. The most immediately striking use of the regulators comes at 2'57" when Joey removes his right hand from the chanter to play a portion of the melody with his fingers on the bass and baritone regulators, sounding an octave lower. This is not distinctive in itself and is adopted as an occasional manoeuvre (if not an outright gimmick) by a number of pipers, although Joey's use of it is more musical than many. Appropriately, however, the earliest recorded precedent is Patsy Touhey on *Miss McLeod's Reel* (1919), with O'Neill (1913) also attributing the trick to the earlier Irish-American piper John Moore.

More noteworthy may be Joey's use of staccato playing on the regulators. These shorter durations would not attract any particular attention in dance tunes but are very unusual to hear in slow airs. Joey explores the durational possibilities of the regulators extensively throughout the performance, sometimes matching and sometimes contrasting with the elegiac legato melody. Particularly striking examples are the three staccato taps heard at 2'41" and two phrases beginning at 3'30" where he harmonises every note of the melody with detached regulator chords (see Figure 7.6). An antecedent could be Touhey's playing of *Killarney* (a song by 19th century Irish composer Michael William Balfe) in which repeated non-legato regulator chords seem to evoke the sound of a parlour piano (Touhey 2005). I also hear a connection to the slow airs recorded in 1922 by Tom Ennis with John Muller on piano (available at archive.org), with Joey embodying some of the tension between legato melody and percussive accompaniment. In a less direct sense, however, he has translated his interest in the expressive use of silence between notes from the chanter to the regulators. For all its allusion to the recorded history of the instrument, it demonstrates an intelligence and imagination that is purely Joey's.

Lament for Limerick
Joey Abarta (Pipers' Gathering 2020)



Lament for Limerick
Joey Abarta (Pipers' Gathering 2020)



Figure 7.6 – excerpts from *Lament for Limerick* (2'40" - 2'48", 3'30" - 3'51") demonstrating detached regulator chords

E. Conclusion

Like Patsy Touhey, Joey is able to present highly detailed and complex piping in a way which is wildly entertaining. Comparisons with the American pipers of the early 20th century are easily made on the basis of his music alone, but Joey's complete presence as a performer is evocative of an earlier age. Not only does his Koehler and Quinn concert set possess the unmistakable Taylor-style regulator keys emblematic of the era but he has also become famous for a penchant for vintage clothing, including waistcoats, fedoras, and pocket handkerchiefs. This has become such an integral part of his image that a fellow musician once joked to me that they 'knew Joey before he started dressing like Joey!'. It is all the more distinctive in the context of a broad tendency amongst contemporary pipers to dress casually for all but the most highbrow performance engagements. But Joey's evident fascination with the sound and aesthetics of an earlier time is counterbalanced by an adeptness at navigating global and digital musical landscapes, often more expertly than many pipers whose musical output would often be described as more 'modern'.

Joey's collaborations with his wife Jaclyn O'Riley, a skilled dancer with a particular interest in older traditions of Irish dance, prompt further historical reflections. Indeed, comparisons to his musical hero Patsy Touhey, who would regularly accompany his wife's dancing on the pipes, are difficult to avoid. More broadly, however, these activities must be contextualised within the pronounced 20th century trend away from musicians accompanying dancers in Irish traditional music (see Doherty and Vallely 2019). With its aristocratic historical overtones, uilleann piping could arguably represent the forefront of this 'classicisation' (Vallely 2005) which prioritises listening above dancing as the standard posture for non-musicians. In this context, Joey and Jaclyn's collaborations are not merely presenting a historical curiosity but revitalising the contemporary musical landscape by highlighting the essential but neglected relationship between Irish traditional music and dance.

Both Americanness and Irishness are touchstones for Joey's musical practice, playing out in rich and complex ways. As he has expressed, they embody a tension which is fertile ground for his musical activities. He is dismissive of any attempts to fetishise Irish ancestry as a necessary (if not sufficient) condition for meaningful engagement with Irish culture - 'if you like the music you like the music!'. His deep knowledge of history, whether that of American uilleann piping or his own family heritage, provides a far deeper connection to the tradition than reified national or ethnic identities could ever hope to. When I press him to describe his stylistic approach, his response is full of characteristic humour and self-awareness - 'just an Old Yankee Doodle trying to do his thing!'

This final case study provides further conceptual traction in considering the power of history and tradition in shaping musical style. As with many of the previous case studies, Joey's understanding of his place in the uilleann piping community is situated within a historical narrative, his awareness stretching back over a hundred years but grounded in and responding to the here and now. It also brings the diaspora into focus, demonstrating how essentially congruent musical practices can attract profoundly different significations simply based on their geographical locations. Furthermore, this takes place within an individual context; Joey's musical choices can be read in historical and geographical terms but they are still *his* choices. The following chapters will re-engage with these concepts, bringing our five case studies into dialogue with one another and the wider literature.

Chapter 8 – Style re-examined

This chapter returns to some of the theoretical material introduced in Chapters 1 and 2, allowing for a deeper examination of relevant concepts as illustrated through the preceding case studies. It begins by considering existing literature on musical style, particularly the writings of Meyer (1989) and Keegan (1997; 2010). As well as bringing these scholars' work into dialogue with one another to determine their compatibility in this field, it also uses their theoretical frameworks to reflect on the five case studies. The following section delves deeper into Meyer's definitional understanding of musical style as choice operating within constraint, locating resonances and tensions within the field of uilleann piping.

A. Two perspectives on style

In order to account for the concept of style in uilleann piping (or Irish traditional music more broadly), it is helpful to consider it in two different but complementary ways, both of which are well-represented in the literature. Bearing in mind McCullough's definition of style (1977, 97) as 'the composite form of the distinctive features that identify an individual's musical performance', we can either seek to break the composite apart into its components or try to understand it as a conceptual unity with its own significance and implications.

This first approach identifies style as something arising out of the combination of constituent musical elements. This approach corresponds to traditional Western musicological analysis, which frequently separates a piece of music into parameters including harmony, rhythm, timbre, and form and considers them as individual objects of study. However, it is by no means foreign to Irish traditional musicians who often occupy themselves with this kind of analysis of musical exemplars. The second approach, bearing more commonalities with anthropology, identifies style as an existing cultural, conceptual construct and examines the practice and discourse of musicians to investigate its meaning and significance. This approach allows more traction for considering the qualitative and at times inconsistent language surrounding style that one invariably encounters when speaking to practitioners. It can also illuminate social, cultural, and political implications of musical style which do not reveal themselves to a purely analytical perspective.

Neither of these approaches is satisfactory in itself. In the first, we find ourselves posing as scientists, microscopes at the ready, trying to locate the exact pitch values of Willie Clancy's evocative, wavering C \sharp (for instance), and finding ourselves ever further from the embodied processes and socio-cultural understandings that lie behind these sounds and their meaning. In the second, we run the risk of philosophising style out of the realm of music altogether, establishing it as a concept that is so amorphous and ineffable that it lacks any traction to describe the production of actual sounds.

1. Parameters

Meyer devotes significant attention to the parameters of a style, claiming that 'styles can in part be characterised and defined by what might be called dominance of parameters' (Meyer 1989, 21). According to this concept, some parameters are primary forces in the generation and shaping of music (such as harmony in pre-20th century Western art music), while others (such as tempo, dynamics, and timbre in that idiom) are of secondary importance.

McCullough (1977) and Keegan (2010) have provided lists of stylistic parameters in Irish traditional music, although both are quick to assert that such attempts to quantify and categorise style can be artificial and alien to the musical processes of practitioners. A composite but most likely non-exhaustive list of possible parameters (from Keegan 2010, McCullough 1977, Buckley 1979) is as follows:

- Ornamentation
- Phrasing
- Articulation
- Variation
- Intonation
- Tone
- Dynamics
- Repertoire
- Duration
- Emphasis
- Speed
- Instrumentation
- Instrument specific techniques
- Performance context

Bearing a substantial similarity to the kind of parameters identified by Meyer, this list includes interpretive approaches such as ornamentation, phrasing, articulation, and variation, as well as more fundamental concerns of repertoire and instrument choice. Buckley (1979) notes that style must be

said to encompass additional dimensions such as the musician's dress and demeanour when performing. Although these concerns would be considered as outside of the scope of any conventional musical analysis, she argues that they are just as capable of holding social and aesthetic implications as the other parameters considered here. Séamus Ennis, for instance, delighted in telling stories during his performances that established an air of mysticism and authority around his music while Patsy Touhey's virtuosic uilleann piping on the US vaudeville stages was interspersed with slapstick comedy sketches. Even if these two pipers' sonic outputs were identical, contextual differences as pronounced as these will ensure that they are received completely differently by others, potentially eclipsing many of the more traditionally 'musical' factors considered above in their ability to convey meaning.

Recalling Smith's (1990, 51) understanding of style as a 'bearer of meaning', we can consider any communication of meaning surrounding a musical performance as at least potentially a manifestation of style. As well as Buckley's parameters of a musician's dress and demeanour, I would argue that image and reputation, in large part established outside of performance, can similarly be considered parameters of style. For instance, as discussed in Chapter 5, Kevin Rowsome's music will inevitably be coloured to some extent by knowledge of his family legacy, providing powerful semantic resources for him to draw on. Since any observer will have a subjective and unique perception of a musician (even assuming the same beginning knowledge), these considerations are inevitably somewhat more nebulous than those that can be sonically quantified. Yet we should remember that none of these parameters can be considered truly objective, no matter how appealing the visual purity of staff or spectrogram may be.

Keegan is also quick to point out that it is rare that all of these parameters are actively being manipulated by a musician at the same time (Keegan 2010, 67) and that a given musician will have their own set of priorities about which are more important, perhaps never directly engaging with some of them. He uses the example of instrumentation being an active parameter for some musicians who carefully choose an instrument to suit a musical intent, but not a factor for others who may have had to take what they were given or could afford (*ibid.*, 84). In this, we see a congruence with Meyer's separation of primary parameters which are actively manipulated according to the stylist's choice, and secondary parameters which only change in response to the primary parameters. In fact, the decision of which parameters to prioritise can itself be considered a parameter of style.

A further emendation I would propose to the list above is the inclusion of a musician's preference for unaccompanied, accompanied, or ensemble playing, and even their frequent or preferred musical collaborators. These decisions are unlikely to be made in the course of performance but, as Keegan argues with respect to instrument choice, they play 'an active roll (sic) in the life of the musician' (ibid.). Another increasingly vital parameter, especially in the context of recorded music, relates to production values (see Spencer 2010, 346-348; Motherway 2012). Uilleann piping recordings range from extremely naturalistic attempts to capture every nuance of the instrument (down to incidental bellows noise and key clicks) to highly produced and reverb-laden pieces of studio craft. While control over this aspect of their sound may not be solely in the piper's hands, it is undoubtedly part of the discourse of meaning, potentially prompting even more acrimony from piping cognoscenti than the notorious back D triplet!

Analysis using parameters of this kind is not merely a concern for musicologists, since practitioners will frequently apply a similar lens to the music (Keegan 2010). This can occur in pedagogy, such as when a teacher might instruct a student to play with minimal embellishment and variation to focus on the basic melodic structure of a tune, but can also be encountered in everyday discourse. Indeed, Keegan notes that the majority of the terms and concepts he uses in this article have been encountered in his interactions with fellow musicians (ibid., 66). A simple statement like 'she has a lovely tone' is essentially engaging the same principle as the most rigorous analysis by isolating a single parameter from the totality of the musical experience.

Elements of these lists of parameters, including my suggestions, evoke clear resonances with both the words of the pipers discussed in the previous chapters and my own observations and discussions of their music. But, as useful as they may be, these parameters can become subjective and nebulous when investigated a little closer. For instance, the overlap of articulation, ornamentation, emphasis, and instrument specific techniques is convoluted and contested in Irish traditional music (Larson 2015 provides an insightful discussion). Perhaps more significantly, the analyst runs the risk of forgetting that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (Keegan 2010, 94). In seeking to explain style as a function of these parameters, we must not lose sight of the mystery and affect, 'the cry of the curlew on the mountain' (Kelly quoted in MacMahon 1999, 199) that compels us to ponder style in the first place.

2. *Categories*

Keegan (1997) also provides an insightful discussion of the other approach I have identified, which takes style as an existing and central concept to Irish musical life, and seeks to illuminate its meaning to practitioners. He conceives of five different conceptual categories that encompass the multitude of ways in which style is invoked in Irish traditional music. It is worth spending some time elucidating these categories, since their precise character and relationship is not immediately apparent. His categories are:

1. the style of Irish traditional music as a whole
2. the style of a particular instrument
3. the style of a subset of musicians (dialect)
 1. descriptive
 2. social/historical
 1. regional
 2. virtuoso
 3. chronological

the style of an individual (idiolect)

the style of an individual performance

Keegan's first category is 'the style which is the Irish musical tradition'. Keegan notes that this first category is referred to most commonly when Irish traditional music is considered in a wider context. This might occur when one refers to the music of the Celtic nations or the broad construction of 'folk' music. This naturally introduces the question of what stylistic elements make music sound Irish, irrespective of the instrument the music is being played on. Conversely, there must be elements which are 'beyond the pale' for Irish traditional music. As such, an attempt at an Irish traditional tune from a bluegrass fiddler might be said to lack 'the right style' regardless of its other musical merits.

Keegan's second category is the style of a particular instrument, a notion quite commonly encountered in the literature and the vernacular surrounding Irish traditional music. Ó Canainn (1978) provides separate discussions of musical style amongst uilleann pipers, fiddlers and seán-nos singers, and numerous other studies focus on the style of a particular instrument (Buckley 1979; Smith 1990; Koning 1979). This concept is obviously fundamental to the current research. By referring to uilleann piping style, it is implied that there are stylistic elements that define and delimit

pipng. Keegan gives an obvious example of the range of the uilleann pipes, flute and whistle finishing at the bottom D (unlike fiddles, banjos, accordions and concertinas), leading to a preference for certain repertoire and a range of techniques for modifying tunes that do not fit within their compass.

Refocusing on Keegan's third category of style, we arrive at his concept of a dialect, an extremely broad category which he subdivides at length. Verbal descriptions of dialects fall into two different modes. The first, 'descriptive' mode, is characterised by attempts to describe the sonic content of the style. He gives a number of commonly heard examples in his realm of flute playing, including a 'choppy' style or a 'pure' style. Smith (1990) refers to a dichotomy he encountered between 'sweet' and 'strong' styles of accordion playing which would also apply here, as would more impressionistic descriptive categories ('a lonesome style', 'an elegant style'). For our investigation, the most important descriptive categories are located in the ubiquitous uilleann piping terminology of 'closed style' and 'open style'. Inasmuch as these terms refer to specific qualities of articulation and the techniques required to produce them, they are examples of this kind of language. Other associations of these rich and multivalent terms are not so easily classified as purely descriptive of sonic content, a problem which will be considered later in this chapter.

The second mode refers to concepts of style that are not direct descriptions of the sound, but instead refer to social or historical stylistic distinctions. Keegan further subdivides this mode into three categories; regional, 'virtuoso', and chronological. The first of these, regional style, is without doubt the most familiar application of the term within the Irish traditional music community. Its ongoing fascination to scholars and practitioners renders it worth considering in some depth as this chapter proceeds. There is some contestation over to what extent this concept, which largely originated in the discussion of fiddle playing and singing traditions (Kearney 2009), can be coherently applied to uilleann piping. Breathnach (1977) and Vallyely (1997) both suggest that once prominent regional piping styles are no longer consequential in the Irish tradition. Nevertheless, the perspectives of my informants in this research, amongst other literature, paint a substantially more nuanced picture as we shall also consider in more depth later in this chapter.

The second subdivision of this mode of speaking about dialects is what might be termed a school of playing that develops around an influential virtuoso. This can be the result of the musician acting as a formal teacher to a community of students (Leo Rowsome is the obvious historical example amongst pipers), but it may also develop without direct contact and potentially across different

historical eras. As Keegan acknowledges, this category is closely intertwined with notions of locality and historicity since a musician's influence will typically be felt most profoundly in their immediate locality and historical timeframe. A particularly influential player may even help to define a regional style for generations to come. For instance, Cranitch (2006) has considered the extent to which the Sliabh Luachra style of fiddling may be attributed to the personal influence of the legendary Pádraig O'Keefe. The same phenomenon can be observed when one encounters references to regional styles of piping, such as the close associations of West Clare style with Willie Clancy or Wexford style with Leo Rowsome.

As well as being subject to the musical influence of an individual, regional styles can change their connotations significantly over time. Séamus Ennis made reference in an interview (1973, 10) to a very tight style of piping associated with the Northern counties, allegedly even tighter than that of the Dublin pipers at the time, arguably preserved in the intriguing 1943 recordings of the Belfast piper RL O'Mealy (available at Anderson 2021). Any mention of a Northern piping style today, however, would be much more likely to suggest a quite open style favoured by contemporary pipers such as John McSherry, Cillian Vallely and Jarlath Henderson, which itself serves to elide alternative stylistic approaches amongst contemporary Belfast pipers such as Robbie Hannan and Tom Clarke (Byrne 2019).

The final subdivision of dialects that Keegan considers are chronologically defined. References to an 'old style', or a 'modern style' are encountered relatively frequently amongst practitioners and commentators. Keegan notes that they are often applied in conjunction with another label, such as an 'old Sligo style'. Smith (1990) notes the importance of chronological classifications in discussions of accordion style, especially as they relate to technological developments in instrument design and tuning. The same considerations may apply to a certain extent to the uilleann pipes, which saw marked changes in instrument design throughout its history. While this research focuses on contemporary manifestations of piping style, the impact of these historical factors remains relevant in many ways.

It is worth noting the 'Traveller style' that uilleann pipers often speak of clearly matches the definition of a dialect but does not cohere precisely to any of Keegan's subdivisions. I would therefore suggest a minor modification of Keegan's system to include a fourth category of social/historical dialect, that of a particular ethnic and social community. This instance foregrounds

the political nature of stylistic practice alluded to by Keegan and Smith, and will be considered in greater depth shortly.

The next category of style that Keegan discusses is that of the personal style or 'idiolect'. This creates a certain overlap with the virtuoso style mentioned in the previous category, which referred to the style of an individual as a model for their community or later musicians. An individual style, however, can be considered on its own terms, regardless of whether its impact has been sufficient to generate anything resembling a school of playing. Keegan acknowledges that discussions of personal styles are not so frequently encountered amongst Irish traditional musicians, although he contends that some notion of individual style lies behind the ability of most musicians to identify a familiar musician from an unlabelled recording. The tension between the individual and the communal will be considered in greater depth as the present chapter proceeds.

The final conceptual category outlined by Keegan is that of the style of an individual performance. He acknowledges that this use of the terminology of style is less frequently encountered than many of its more communal manifestations. Nevertheless, it can be invoked when musicians speak of someone playing in a different style when recording rather than performing live, or when playing for dancers as opposed to listeners.

Keegan's categories present natural parallels with what Meyer refers to as levels of style. The first of these is a dialect, a style practised by a number of composers. To Meyer, dialects can range from very broad historical classifications, such as 'Baroque style' or 'Romantic style' to much more specific constructions such as 'late eighteenth century Italian operatic style'. The next level is that of the idiom, the style of a particular composer. Finally, Meyer discusses the intra-opus style, the style of a particular composition as distinct from the rest of that composer's output. It is easy to draw connections between Meyer's three levels and Keegan's third, fourth, and fifth categories. Keegan's third category shares the label of a 'dialect', and like Meyer's, can cover a wide range of stylistic conceptions from broad to specific. Similarly, Keegan's personal style correlates strongly with Meyer's idiom, and Keegan's individual performance style with Meyer's intra-opus style.

Keegan – categories of style	Meyer – levels of style
Irish traditional style	-
instrumental style	-
dialect	dialect
individual style (idiolect)	idiom
individual performance style	intra-opus style

Figure 8.1 – parallels between Keegan (1997) and Meyer (1989)

B. Choices and constraints

Let us return to Meyer's definition of style: 'a replication of patterning ... that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints' (Meyer 1989, 3). He goes on to speak of three different kinds of constraints within which musical choice operates. The broadest of these are 'laws', universals that, as a result of human physiology or cognition, apply across all traditions of music. Since this study is concerned with one particular tradition, laws will not feature strongly. Indeed, the chief relevance of universals to Meyer's study comes in his claim that human perception accounts for which musical parameters possess the discrete, proportional character which allows them to function syntactically (his criterion for primary parameters) and which are purely quantitative or continuous in nature (secondary parameters).

The next category is 'rules', which Meyer defines as 'intracultural', and constituting 'the highest, most encompassing level of stylistic constraints' (ibid., 17). Rules set out the 'permissible musical means' or parameters of a given style, and 'establish the relational possibilities and probabilities within such means'. Meyer notes the difficulty of discerning rules of musical style, likening it to deducing the rules of an unfamiliar sport from watching the behaviour of the players on the field. He distinguishes here between syntactic rules which 'establish sets of possible functional relationships within [primary] parameters' (ibid., 19), dependency rules which control the relationship of secondary parameters to syntactic rules, and contextual rules which dictate the manipulation of secondary parameters at particular points in a composition.

The third level is that of 'strategies', different approaches to implementing the rules of the culture. Meyer notes that while the rules of a style are finite in number, there are innumerable strategies for realising those rules. In Meyer's analysis of the Western art music tradition, individual composers' styles are typically distinguished by their differing strategies within the broader rules that govern the music of the culture. As such, he sees the history of Western art music as primarily one of changing

strategies with rules only changing at rare historical junctures (eg. the development of serialism). While rules isolate possibilities from impossibilities, strategies begin to define probabilities within these possibilities.

Meyer's theory of style as a system of choices within a set of constraints finds an echo in the writing of uilleann piper and scholar Tomás Ó Canainn. Ó Canainn attests that 'style implies a selection by the performer of certain traditional patterns or clichés of the tradition in his improvisation' (Ó Canainn 1978, 41). He further suggests that gaining musical proficiency is primarily a matter of broadening this vocabulary of traditional patterns, effectively increasing the number of options at a musician's disposal and thereby providing them with greater freedom of expression. Elsewhere, like Meyer, he emphasises the primacy of constraint to stylistic meaning, claiming that 'there is no art where there are no constraints on the artist' (ibid., 47). A similar note is struck by Na Píobairí Uilleann's series of *Piper's Choice* videos which make reference to the 'processes of choice and necessity that bring great piping into existence' (NPU 2007) while Carson (1996, 2) refers to a performance of Irish traditional music as 'a temporary delineation of the possible'.

Applying these aspects of Meyer's theories to the uilleann piping tradition does not present major difficulties here. We can distinguish two different sets of rules that provide the constraints within which uilleann piping style operates. The first are those that apply to the Irish tradition as a whole and delineate that music relative to other musical cultures. The second set of rules circumscribe the tradition of uilleann piping and govern the actions of pipers. Transgression of these rules would not be considered innovation since they themselves set the limits of acceptable innovation. Rather, a piper who does not observe these rules would be deemed to be outside of the tradition (and its stylistic considerations) altogether. As Meyer suggests, these rules are virtually never explicitly stated and so their presence and nature must be deduced from careful and comprehensive observation of the tradition.

An immediately evident example of a rule which defines Irish traditional musical practice would be adherence to the repertoire itself, since it would be difficult to describe a musician who does not play jigs, reels, hornpipes, or slow airs as an Irish traditional musician. Similarly, while there are countless valid ways to generate a recognisable reel rhythm through articulation, duration, emphasis, rhythmic placement, and instrumental techniques, an entirely flat and even delivery would be considered unacceptable to the vast majority of musicians in the field, immediately identifying the musician as an outsider. Rules which circumscribe uilleann piping as a whole can be

discerned when habits developed by players of other instruments are unthinkingly transferred to the pipes. For instance, the practice of cutting with the top finger to articulate lower hand notes, commonly heard from musicians trained on the Great Highland bagpipes, is a signifier which marks someone as not fully literate in the uilleann piping tradition. However, as noted in the case studies, wider cut intervals are also considered a feature of Traveller style piping, meaning that the exact point at which internal stylistic diversity gives way to something outside the realm of correct piping (and thereby the distinction between strategy and rule) is not clearly delineated. Similarly, Hutchinson's study (1997) of Chris Langan's piping demonstrates that techniques from Highland piping can be coherently included in an individual style, provided they are carefully evaluated against the aesthetics of the tradition.

Central to Meyer's theories is the connection between style and ideology, 'that external parameters - political and economic circumstances, religious beliefs and intellectual currents, and the like - have continually impinged upon the theory and practice of music and have, at times, significantly affected the course of style history' (Meyer 1989, 10). Since stylistic rules essentially dictate what is within the bounds of acceptable musical expression in a given musical tradition, they are naturally prone to reflect and even reinforce existing prejudices, especially when that music can be easily conflated with a national or ethnic identity. As such, it can be very difficult to discern when culturally maintained aesthetic principles become a straightforward gatekeeping of 'Irishness' in music. Mac Aoidh speaks powerfully of the 'cultural imperialism' of a national musical establishment all too willing to dismiss the music of his native Donegal as nothing more than 'aberrant Scottish music' (Mac Aoidh 1997, 68). Similarly, Hastings (1997) makes a compelling case that the exclusion of the Northern Irish fife and drum tradition from common perceptions of Irish traditional music is based more on sectarian than musical grounds.

Amongst the instrument-specific rules too, we can find political and social implications of seemingly purely musical judgements. The use of the back D triplet, probably first heard in the recordings of Finbar Furey and Paddy Keenan but now in common circulation, was initially derided by many established pipers as outside the realms of proper piping style and forbidden by some conservatively minded teachers (Browne 2018). The fact that the progenitors of this technique came from the Traveller community marked it as a shibboleth of social class, lending an undertone of prejudice to what might initially seem a simple aesthetic preference.

While ideas of acceptability frequently govern the discourse around the practice of Irish traditional music or the uilleann pipes, they are much less commonly encountered in discussions of dialects, idiolects, or individual performance styles (to use Keegan's terms). To illustrate this, a statement that a fiddler does not play with a Sliabh Luachra style does not diminish their music in the same sense that placing them outside of acceptable fiddle style would (and a statement that an individual should play with something other than their own individual style is all but nonsensical). As such, further constraints which come into play in uilleann piping generally possess the status of strategies rather than rules. These strategies may range from utterly individual approaches to commonly practised received wisdom, at times even approaching the status of the intransgressible rules. The selection of which strategies to employ at a given time may be used to classify an individual as belonging to a certain style of piping, mark out an individual's personal style as opposed to others, or define the style of a given performance or tune. The employment of or refusal to employ certain strategies can undoubtedly still attract negative value judgments from those of a certain aesthetic persuasion, but these are likely to be counterbalanced with positive judgments from a different community.

Meyer's system of style is thorough and internally consistent but despite his ambitious intentions to produce theories which can be readily extended to all manifestations of musical style (and even some non-musical styles), it remains grounded in the theoretical analysis of Western art music. This tendency is probably most evident in his choice of examples, but presents a more profound limitation when it comes to the concerns of syntax, motion, and closure which recur extensively throughout his discussion and analysis. Emphasis of these elements is entirely consistent with the score-based tradition of Western art music theory from which Meyer emerges, which affords fundamental importance to forward-moving linear process.

The emphasis on scores as the object of analysis also presents certain features that cannot be generalised to this research. Since scores essentially quantise continuous values (pitch, volume, rhythm etc.) into discrete units, statistics become a natural focus for attention. An analyst (or a computer program) may easily count the frequencies of particular note sequences or chord types, but in the context of an embodied, gestural, and nuanced performance presents severe limitations, unless we first apply this same kind of quantisation. In doing so, we risk losing vital stylistic information or even analysing something which is qualitatively different from the original object - in much the same way as the most comprehensive nutritional analysis of a given dish will be unable to inform us about its taste or the process of cooking it. Nevertheless, Meyer's overarching concept of

a system of choices operating within a set of constraints, his categorisation of different levels of constraint, and his identification of primary and secondary parameters provide significant conception traction in considering uilleann piping and will continue to bear on the following discussion.

C. Prescriptive and descriptive style

One subtle but significant dichotomy present in the multitude of ways that Irish musicians speak of style is the presence or absence of an indefinite article. Are we speaking about style or a style? Lacking the article, style becomes a unified presence. It defines the limits for acceptable and meaningful expression within the Irish musical idiom and in doing so it naturally takes on a prescriptive status. With the article, we see not one but many styles. It is descriptive rather than prescriptive, aiming to describe an existing diversity. An individual or community may have their own preferences for different styles but none is inherently more valid than any other. While seemingly at least somewhat contradictory, both of these uses have their place in an informed understanding of stylistic processes.

Keegan's (1997) five categories (outlined above) provide an effective vantage point to examine this distinction, despite it only being considered tangentially in his work. His first and broadest category comprises 'the style which is the Irish tradition'. This is generally a prescriptive signifier amongst Irish traditional musicians, since any discussion of non-Irish musical practices is more likely to invoke the terminology of 'genre' or 'tradition' than 'style'. Discussions of style as a prescriptive phenomenon can also exist within a narrower context, however. For instance, a discussion about piping practice in the context of a piping masterclass might naturally (and tacitly) exclude approaches to other instruments in its concept of style, while a discussion specific to the music of Sliabh Luachra could exclude other regional styles.

The following three categories (instrumental style, dialect, and individual style) can all be understood to exist as subsets of this overarching style while themselves overlapping in complex ways. None of these three can be considered solely a subset of another. For instance, while many discussions of an individual's musical style may fall within the ambit of their chosen instrument, one could coherently speak of Martin Rochford's individual style encompassing both his fiddling and his piping. Equally, some people may refer to the dialect of 'Sliabh Luachra style' as a subset of an overarching fiddle style while others may consider it a regional style containing both fiddle and accordion styles. Individual styles can often be considered a subset of a dialect, especially when the

referent is to a community which the individual is a member of, as in the case of a regional style or a playing school. Meyer (1989, 24) is in agreement on this point. But it seems more doubtful that an individual's style will always exist fully within one of Keegan's less categorical dialects (eg. 'a flowing style'). Disregarding this nicety, however, the relationship between an individual style and the style of their broader community (which itself may be understood in various ways) will be a pertinent topic moving forward.

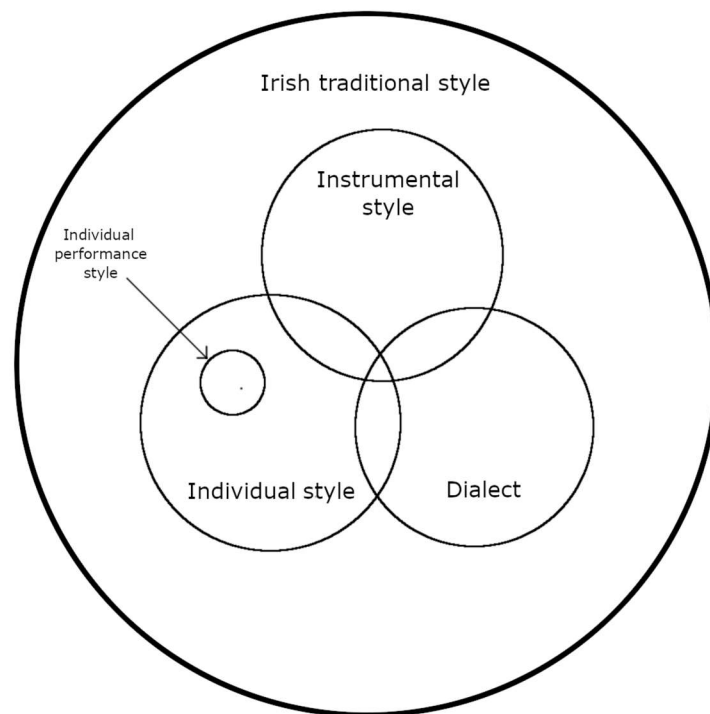


Figure 8.2 – representation of interrelationships between Keegan's (2017) categories of style

We see here a clear example of Meyer's theory of musical style as a process of choice operating within a set of constraints. Whenever style is discussed, there is a context and scope for the discussion; an outer limit is defined (or more typically assumed), giving meaning to the choices made within it. It is this interface between the necessary and the contingent that style allows us to conceptually navigate. One fascinating difference between Meyer's understanding of style and the picture we are constructing here is that, to Meyer, constraints are determinative of style but not themselves part of it. In the Irish tradition, however, the prescriptive and descriptive registers of the concept of style allow it to account for both the choices made and the constraints that circumscribe them. The distinction is subtle but profound, pointing towards a fundamental reciprocity of choice and constraint in the production of style. Above all, it positions style not as a static quantity but a fluid process embodied in an unresolvable tension and open to continuous negotiation. This

understanding of style as process rather than product, or perhaps becoming rather than being, is suggestive of Deleuze's philosophical project:

Creation takes place in choked passages. Even in some particular language, even in French for example, a new syntax is a foreign language within the language. A creator who isn't grabbed around the throat by a set of impossibilities is no creator. A creator's someone who creates their own impossibilities, and thereby creates possibilities ... it's by banging your head on the wall that you find a way through. You have to work on the wall, because without a set of impossibilities, you won't have the line of flight, the exit that is creation, the power of falsity that is truth. (Deleuze 1995, 133)

This inseparable and symbiotic nature of constraint and freedom must be kept in mind. At times, it becomes difficult to tell which is which as the two continue to reshape, refine, and hone one another.

The term 'choice' is worthy of some further consideration here. As any musician can attest, a great deal of musical practice is the result of pre-learned muscle movements which can operate with very little cognitive awareness. In fact, once learned, highly ingrained patterns can be extremely difficult to remove from one's playing should they become less desirable. Meyer gives this problem some consideration by stressing that his definition of choice included such 'ingrained habits of discrimination' (Meyer 1989, 6). But it is also worth remembering that processes will only become reflexive after a musician has made the often conscious choice to practise them (and not others) for many hours on previous occasions. Meyer also reminds us of the apophatic nature of choice; every decision necessarily takes meaning from an understanding that there were other possibilities not chosen.

This separation between necessary conditions and individual choices is not always clear-cut. Aesthetic values are not immutable, universal laws but evolve out of the musical choices of countless individuals in communal networks. While there may be broad unspoken agreement about the necessary characteristics that define Irish traditional musical style (or uilleann piping style, Sliabh Luachra style etc.), these conceptions themselves only exist as a composite of socially enacted individual understandings. As with other identities and systems of values, when individuals are pressed on their exact beliefs they may disagree with one another to a surprising extent. We see this phenomenon in the case studies presented in the preceding chapters. Style can be expressed as a matter of received tradition, individual agency, communal practice, or regional identity, but these

divergent understandings rarely compromise the ability to converse meaningfully or make music together.

Conversely, while an individual may have seemingly limitless agency to make choices in their music-making, the meaning of these choices (and the reception they may generate in a listener) is not entirely within their control. Instead, it will be significantly predetermined by communally and culturally maintained systems of aesthetic values, further shaped by the individual perspective and preferences of the listener. Keil reflects on the necessity of these communal frameworks to any meaningful understanding of style:

The presence of style indicates a strong community, an intense sociability that has been given shape through time, an assertion of control over collective feelings so powerful that any expressive innovator in the community will necessarily put his or her content into that shaping continuum and no other (Keil 1985, 122).

As Meyer (1989) argues, musical choices and the constraints within which they operate are shaped by and illustrative of powerful cultural, ideological, and historical forces. Similarly, his theories of choice and constraint need not be confined to a purely musicological framework but can provide an insight into the powerful and productive tensions between individuality and community, possibility and meaning. Having laid out an impression of how style can be understood amongst uilleann pipers, we now turn to this question of how style can shape and express a musician's understanding of themselves and their world. The discussions of the following chapter will begin to examine some of the rich and complex ways in which musical style can manifest itself beyond its purely sonic content. In doing so, we will focus on prominent themes emerging from the case studies and represented in the literature on style in Irish traditional music.

Chapter 9 – Style and meaning

This chapter reflects on some of the recurring themes of my interviews - instruments, identity, individuality, community, geography, diaspora, history, tradition - through the lens of musical style. In doing so it also draws on perspectives from a number of scholars in the fields of ethnomusicology, musicology, anthropology, and cultural studies. The concepts of parameters, categories, choice, and constraint examined in the previous chapter will continue to bear on the discussion.

A. Instruments and instrumentality

One common understanding of style in Irish traditional music relates to the interface between a musician and their instrument(s). The relationship between player and instrument is of particular significance to uilleann pipers, in large part due to the expense and difficulty of acquiring an instrument, and the rigours of maintaining one in good working order. Valley (1997, 110) emphasises these same attributes when he ascribes the absence of distinct regional styles in piping to the technical complexity and expense of the instrument. As outlined earlier, Keegan locates instrumentation as one of his parameters of style. He asserts that it 'has perhaps had greater significance in modernity' (Keegan 2010, 83), presumably reflecting on the fact that access to a wide variety of instruments, and therefore the ability for a musician to choose their instrument, has undoubtedly increased since the nineteenth century.

Ó Canainn argues that some of the features of uilleann piping style 'stem directly from what might be considered defects of the instrument' (Ó Canainn 1978, 43). This idea is echoed in Smith's argument that Irish accordion styles arose out of 'a dialogue between the limitations of the instrument and a pre-conceived musical idiom' (Smith 1990). Ó Canainn's chief example here is the *cran*, essentially a technique to rearticulate the bottom D using a series of cuts. He suggests that this feature arose out of the difficulty in rearticulating this particular note with a momentary silence, which would involve a cumbersome movement of the chanter on and off the piper's leg. It has become, however, a central element of uilleann piping technique, and often practised in more rapid and complex ways than what could be achieved by rearticulations with silence. According to Ó Canainn, the *cran* demonstrates a trajectory from an instrumental limitation to a creative solution to a stylistically valued technique. As evidence of the latter status, *crans* are commonly executed by pipers on *Es* (which can be rearticulated using silence), and are frequently imitated on other instruments with no comparable restrictions on articulation.

The most powerful expression of the connection between musician and instrument encountered in this research was undoubtedly Jimmy O'Brien Moran's reflection on making music with his beloved Colgan set - 'that's what I do, as far as I'm concerned' (O'Brien Moran 2018). His whole identity as a musician becomes predicated on his relationship with an instrument. For Jimmy perhaps, the stylistic parameter of instrumentation is a primary one, the Colgan set perhaps even a necessary condition for his music. Recalling Meyer's theories, primary parameters can control the manipulation of secondary parameters through dependency rules (Meyer 1989). For Jimmy, the very fact of his playing the Colgan set - as experienced through its acoustic qualities, its history, its physical presence - may begin to outline or even dictate his style. In doing so, it challenges Meyer's notion of primary parameters as syntactic and maximally manipulable. His instrument is a constant, not a parameter to be controlled like pitch or rhythm - and yet it provides the point from which his music naturally flows.

While Jimmy expresses the affective and even spiritual dimensions of the relationship to an instrument, he is no stranger to getting his hands dirty in dealing with an obstreperous antique instrument. Noting that his chanter is 'renowned for the autocran' (NPU 2009b) - a humorous name applied by pipers to an undesirable gurgle on the low D - Jimmy can be heard on a 1979 recording with a setting of *The Merry Blacksmith* carefully designed to draw attention away from this feature. Throughout the performance he uses both crans and very brief soundings of the low D to disguise the gurgle, which can only truly be heard on the very final note of the performance (RTÉ One 2013). It illustrates perfectly how a bug can become a feature in the hands of a skilled and imaginative musician. These less desirable features of the instrument should always be kept in view. They provide an important antidote to an overly romantic view of the player-instrument relationship and, perhaps more importantly, they are almost always operative in musical style. When I asked Kevin Rowsome why he opted for just one instrument on his second album rather than the three heard on his first, he suggested, with a touch of embarrassment, that the decision may have been a much more pragmatic one - 'it's nearly always been, when pipes are going well you play them!' (Rowsome 2018).

A particularly fascinating idea was expressed by Joey Abarta in speaking of his friend and mentor Seán McKiernan. In Joey's analysis, McKiernan's personal style changed substantially when he was bequeathed the Taylor set which once belonged to Patsy Touhey, incorporating more 'Americanisms' and tight playing.

All that stuff changed when he got the Touhey set ... from Tom Busby. Because before that, like if you hear him play the whistle, and sometimes when he wants to - I guess it's when he wants to - he sounds just like Clancy! (Abarta 2020)

The grammatical construction Joey uses here is telling. He does not imply that McKiernan actively chose to change his style, but rather that his style changed as a direct result of his receiving such a storied instrument. In the uilleann piping imagination, instruments are not merely passive objects to be sounded but can take on the status of active forces which shape a musician's style. The following statement, 'I guess it's when he wants to', almost gives the impression that Joey is trying to convince himself that McKiernan's evocations of Clancy are a result of his own agency, rather than according to the caprice of his instrument.

Just as a musician's choice of instrument can be embedded in their style, so a musician's style can become embedded in an instrument; an aural ghost in the machine. A recent concert (humorously titled *The Coyne Set vs. Five of Ireland's Best*) saw five renowned pipers, including Jimmy O'Brien Moran, perform on Séamus Ennis' iconic Coyne set (The Séamus Ennis Arts Centre 2021). It presents a fascinating comparative study in style and sound between the five pipers and Ennis himself. While each piper clearly selected tunes associated with Ennis as a tribute, often adopting some stylistic elements as well, the evocation of Ennis extended to the sound of the instrument itself. Indeed, it was apparent from the moment the drone was switched on. Again we can ponder who was the active agent here. Did the pipers actively choose to sound like Ennis or did the instrument make them sound like Ennis? Who was playing whom?

These musings bring us to an idea powerfully expressed by Slominski (2020). Reflecting on the experience of flow, of 'letting the tunes take control' (ibid., 148), that many Irish traditional musicians describe, she asks:

But what if we consider "the music itself" as another actor that might also have agency in asking for a note to be held out, demanding extra attention for a particularly tricky string crossing, or coyly revealing a trapdoor into a similar tune? (ibid.)

Here, rather than (or perhaps as well as) Slominski's notion of 'the music itself' becoming a collaborator, the instrument itself becomes an active force in music-making. Naturally, this way of thinking can apply to any instrument, but the combined scarcity, complexity, expense, and

capriciousness of the uilleann pipes can undoubtedly amplify these tendencies. In other words, as the piper affords the instrument more respect, it assumes more power over the piper. And in doing so, it can function as simultaneously an agent of choice and constraint, in both senses a bestower of style. The instrument can bring to mind half-forgotten tunes, suggest unimagined possibilities, evoke powerful new associations. But by the same token it can also frustrate, limit, and regulate. Musical style, as a conceptual guide to the otherwise ineffable relationship between musician and instrument, provides the mediator and method by which this alchemy can occur.

B. Identity and community

In virtually all my ethnographic interviews with uilleann pipers, I asked a variant of the same question: 'How would you describe your piping style?' I found myself asking this question with a certain air of apology because I knew that it was an uncomfortable question for a musician to have to answer. As discussed in Chapter 4, it was at this point in our interview that Blackie O'Connell responded by throwing a question back at me: 'I dunno, Clare style? Is that a style?'. Covering similar ground, another piper's first question to me when I mentioned my research was a simple 'So how many styles do you think there are?'.

These questions are not at all common in discussion amongst pipers. Rather, they speak to my unusual position in the community and its social functioning. While I may have been a fellow piper, my status as a researcher was likely to take precedence, at least during my interviews. I was conducting doctoral research into the concept of style in uilleann piping and was therefore an expert on the subject (perhaps even to a greater extent than mere practitioners such as them!). Surely I must be able to express an opinion on how many styles there were, what they might be, and whether or not 'Clare style' was among them.

These questions could be seen as arising from a certain objectivist understanding of musical style that can be encountered in scholarly discussion as well as the discourse of practitioners. In this paradigm, musical styles can be classified into discrete categories according to some kind of pre-existing taxonomy. As in a biological taxonomy, every conceivable style must be a member of one and only one category. This kind of thinking is most clearly seen in the discourse of regional style (examined in greater depth later in this chapter). Since the border between the counties of Clare and Galway is clearly defined and universally agreed upon, it seems natural to assume that the same goes for their respective musical styles. However, as Keegan (2010, 63) notes from his research into

flute styles, 'one man's East Galway style was another's Clare style was another woman's Sligo style'. Indeed, adherence to a rigid organisational scheme may tempt us into excising altogether certain individuals whose music does not fit our preconceived taxonomy (Keegan 2010, 63) and hierarchically elevating certain regions' musical practices above others according to a politics of authenticity (Corcoran 1997). This rigidity need not be confined to the regional stylistic complex; taxonomic thinking which sees classification as its logical end is extremely common in the discourse surrounding Irish musical style. The discussion of open and closed styles of piping, for instance, infers a spectrum between two fixed polarities, if not a simple binary distribution.

Rather than considering the fixity of regional borders, a more accurate analogy for musical style may lie in regional identities. For instance, a certain person may have been born in Dublin to parents from Donegal and Cork, live in Galway, and holiday in Clare. These various affiliations will interact dynamically, with some perhaps assuming primacy at different times or in different social settings. They may describe themselves as being from Galway but suddenly become a proud Dubliner when they see Dublin playing in a hurling match, all the while feeling their strongest affinity to the landscape of Clare. And this person's friends, colleagues, or family may perceive them in an entirely different but equally contingent way. The identities ascribed could be even finer-grained, associating them with a town or neighbourhood. To a foreigner, on the other hand, this play of intersecting identities may be entirely meaningless and instead collapse into the monolithic identifier of 'Irish' (if not the all too common 'British'!).

From this perspective, Blackie O'Connell's self-identification with 'Clare style' does not have to be formally accurate or preclude identification with other styles. Another's description of him as a Traveller style piper may be equally valid and equally telling. In years to come, his musical approach may seem to change substantially while remaining, in his opinion, an expression of Clare style. Conversely, he may begin to categorise his style in a different way while it remains much the same sonically.

This connection of style with identity is supported in the broader literature. Feld (1988, 107) argues that 'style is a gloss for the essence of identity', while Hutchinson describes Chris Langan's piping style as 'invoking ... a profound authenticity of self, an expression of constancy to his most cherished values.' Brubaker and Cooper (2000) address the subject of identity in an insightful analysis of the multiple and often contradictory valences of the term. They suggest the usage of the word identity in fact does duty for three distinct clusters of concepts. The first is 'identification' or 'categorisation':

As a processual, active term, derived from a verb, “identification” lacks the reifying connotations of “identity.” It invites us to specify the agents that do the identifying. And it does not presuppose that such identifying (even by powerful agents, such as the state) will necessarily result in the internal sameness, the distinctiveness, the bounded group-ness that political entrepreneurs may seek to achieve. Identification of oneself and of others is intrinsic to social life; “identity” in the strong sense is not.

One may be called upon to identify oneself - to characterize oneself, to locate oneself vis-a-vis known others, to situate oneself in a narrative, to place oneself in a category - in any number of different contexts. In modern settings, which multiply interactions with others not personally known, such occasions for identification are particularly abundant. They include innumerable situations of everyday life as well as more formal and official contexts. How one identifies oneself - and how one is identified by others - may vary greatly from context to context; self- and other-identification are fundamentally situational and contextual. (ibid., 14)

This form of identity can be understood as two separate phenomena based on the identifying agent: self-identification and other-identification. Brubaker and Cooper go on to clarify that self-identification always has a fluid and contingent character; one may identify oneself differently in different contexts or at different times. On the other hand, other-identification has both contingent and non-contingent forms, with the latter being especially prominent in institutional and bureaucratic forms of categorisation (ibid., 15). In the field of Irish traditional music, almost all discussion of stylistic identity would seem to occur in the contingent mode, even when it uses terms that cohere with those used in an institutional setting (such as Traveller).

Self- and other-identifications can also occur in both relational and categorical modes (ibid.). The former identifies the self or another by its position in a network of relations, while the latter identifies it as belonging to a class based on some definite attribute. In uilleann piping, saying that a certain piper plays like another is an example of relational identification while identifying them as a Traveller style piper is an example of categorical identification.

The second of Brubaker and Cooper’s concepts is that of self-understanding:

Recall that one key use of “identity” is to conceptualize and explain action in a non-instrumental, non-mechanical manner. In this sense, the term suggests ways in which individual and collective action can be governed by particularistic understandings of self and social location rather than by putatively

universal, structurally determined interests. "Self-understanding" is therefore the second term we would propose as an alternative to "identity." It is a dispositional term that designates what might be called "situated subjectivity": one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act. As a dispositional term, it belongs to the realm of what Pierre Bourdieu has called *sens pratique*, the practical sense - at once cognitive and emotional - that persons have of themselves and their social world. (ibid., 17)

While identification places some value in conforming to existing and mutually understood categories, there is no such incentive in self-understanding. Indeed, it can lead to completely idiosyncratic self-description, if one feels that description of such subjective concerns is possible at all. In self-understanding, we see 'people's drive to singularize out of populations and categories, to take themselves out of the stream of history and social destiny' (Biehl and Locke 2010, 336). Much of the substance of my interviews could be considered to express self-understanding in one way or another.

Here we encounter again the balancing act between the individual and the communal, possibility and meaning. However important a person's claim to subjectivity through self-understanding may be to their identity, it is by definition limited to their interior lives. But individuals will inevitably be read, and a reader is likely to draw on the interpretive tools which come to hand, including culturally constructed and communally understood categories. This dialectical tension between the rigidity of identifications and the indeterminacy of self-understanding is at least partially resolved in Brubaker and Cooper's third understanding of identity, which encompasses commonality, connectedness, and groupness:

One particular form of affectively charged self-understanding that is often designated by "identity" - especially in discussions of race, religion, ethnicity, nationalism, gender, sexuality, social movements, and other phenomena conceptualized as involving *collective* identities - deserves separate mention here. This is the emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group, involving both a felt solidarity or oneness with fellow group members and a felt difference from or even antipathy to specified outsiders.

The problem is that "identity" is used to designate *both* such strongly groupist, exclusive, affectively charged self-understandings *and* much looser, more open self-understandings, involving some sense of affinity or affiliation, commonality or connectedness to particular others, but lacking a sense of overriding oneness vis-à-vis some constitutive "other". Both the tightly groupist and the more loosely affiliative forms of self-understanding - as well as the transitional forms between these polar types -

are important, but they shape personal experience and condition social and political action in sharply differing ways. (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 19-20)

Brubaker and Cooper feel that this difficulty in distinguishing between relative degrees of strength, permanency, and exclusivity in senses of group belonging is a chief weakness of the discourse of identity. Ultimately, they hope 'to develop an analytical idiom sensitive to the multiple forms and degrees of commonality and connectedness, and to the widely varying ways in which actors (and the cultural idioms, public narratives, and prevailing discourses on which they draw) attribute meaning and significance to them' (ibid., 21).

This cluster of concepts also possesses a clear relevance to Irish musical life. The vital social relations that underlie musical practice naturally demand a sense of commonality and communality. And as Brubaker and Cooper suggest, it may occasionally manifest as hostility towards those not a part of the group. Many of my interview subjects named other musicians with whom they felt some kind of musical affinity. But affinity is not quite the same as similarity, and not all groupist identity will be understood as a matter of musical style. Joey Abarta (2021) names Jimmy O'Brien Moran as a musical kindred spirit of sorts, yet few would suggest that they play with similar styles.

As I expected, no one directed outright animosity to pipers outside of a perceived affiliative group. While many of my informants expressed some aesthetic preferences, they were careful to keep references to their less preferred approaches to piping very general (as opposed to opinions I have heard expressed by some pipers off the record!). Except on rare occasions, the affiliative group identity of the uilleann piping community as a whole is sufficient to preserve good diplomatic relations between its members, over and above any existing groupist tensions.

All of my interview subjects demonstrated something of a distaste for self-identification, using a number of rhetorical strategies to avoid precisely classifying their playing into a commonly recognised category. These strategies, including switching to descriptive and subjective language (Kevin Rowsome and Jimmy O'Brien Moran both opted for 'a musical style'), invoking an unexpected category (Blackie O'Connell's 'Clare style'), or an outright joke (Joey Abarta as 'just an old Yankee Doodle trying to do his thing'). The language of style here takes on a subversive character, allowing musicians to escape its own totalising tendencies. As Brubaker and Cooper argue, the same term 'identity' acts in different registers and often in opposite directions. It allows individuals to assert subjectivity while also eliding it in the process of classifying them into categories, establishing feelings of 'groupness' that can both affirm and threaten prevailing orthodoxy. The same would

appear to apply to the concept of musical style in Irish traditional music. It becomes a means for musicians to navigate the complexities of history, geography, community and aesthetics as free agents who are simultaneously interlinked with countless others.

A number of my interview subjects also demonstrated a shrewdness in trying to ascertain my expectations and intentions, whether out of curiosity or an understandable concern that they would be misrepresented. Blackie O'Connell even went so far as to apologise to me, thinking that his rejection of the label of Traveller style may have confounded my expectations and hindered my research. Various others enquired as to how they fitted into my research and who my other informants were, in part a strategy to discern my perception of them. These moments provide a welcome reminder that the ethnographic gaze is always reciprocated. But perhaps more importantly, they demonstrate something of a discomfort with other-identifications and a desire to set the terms of their own stylistic identity.

While I did not directly ask my informants to classify other pipers' style, discussion about other pipers did form a significant part of several interviews. One of the most striking examples was when Blackie O'Connell argued that Mickey Dunne was not a Traveller style piper, despite his Traveller ancestry. In fact, this was the only occasion where one of my informants identified another contemporary piper in the categorical mode (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 15). In my other interviews, other-identifications featured less reifying language, relying instead on more subjective description or the relational mode of identification (*ibid.*). I received a distinct impression that these more objective forms of other-identification were a dangerous business, easily prone to misinterpretation even when done with the best of intentions. Proximity has a role to play here. Blackie was willing to classify his teacher and friend Mickey, especially in the context of extensive praise elsewhere in the interview, with an ease that he may not apply to others with whom he has not established such a deep mutual understanding. Historical distance can also permit these kinds of identifications; describing Johnny Doran as a Traveller style piper will most likely be less controversial than identifying a colleague in the same way. As before, diplomacy and the need to maintain good public relations will undoubtedly limit what is said as a matter of public record, so these observations from my interviews should not be taken as representative of all discourse amongst pipers. The more significant conclusion, however, is that being identified with a reifying and inescapable category (whether the identifier is oneself or another) appears to be an uncomfortable state of affairs for many pipers.

C. Individual styles

As noted earlier, Keegan (1997) argues that individual style has received less attention in Irish traditional musical thought than regional style and other communal manifestations. He argues that individual styles (as well as playing school styles, modelled after a prominent individual) have become increasingly prominent in the modern era as technology and travel have opened previously isolated regions to a multitude of influences:

The style of such individuals has, with the aid of modern communications, flourished away from the local environments where it was previously a part of a continuum based on a geographically restricted, face-to-face, person-to-person, music-to-music existence, with little prospect of radical change brought about through alien influences or propagation of the style outside of the restricted cultural areas. (ibid., 120)

This phenomenon was reflected in Máire Ní Ghráda's reflections on the differences between her and her brother Conal's approach to music-making. In a sense, Máire has taken the regional and communal route, organically absorbing the sounds that surrounded her, while Conal's dependence on a personal study of historical recordings is more representative of a modern individual approach.

However, this shift in emphasis does not imply that individual style is a wholly contemporary construction. Kearney (2009, 138) suggests that the concept of individual style considerably predates that of regional style and early literature such as O'Neill's (1913) historical accounts contains several mentions of musical style as an individual phenomenon. With this in mind, an argument can be made that a natural variance amongst individual musicians has always existed within Irish traditional musical practice. Narratives of the individual, the national, and the regional, however, have ebbed and flowed, subject to ideological, cultural, and historical forces (Sommers Smith 1997). If Keegan is correct, however, the contemporary era has truly seen the triumph of the individual over these other manifestations of style. As referenced earlier, Vallely (1997, 110) indicates that individual styles are particularly prominent in uilleann piping, overshadowing regional and other communal manifestations of style.

Individual style can be said to hold an additional level of importance for our investigation for the simple reason that musical activity is the work of individuals. One can dispute the existence of regional styles, or even the meaningfulness of Irish traditional music as a conceptual unit, but it is all but impossible to mount an argument that a person's subjectivity has no impact on the music they

themselves produce. When McCullough describes style as ‘the composite form of the distinctive features that identify an individual’s musical performance’, he seems to be suggesting something of this nature. Whether the features in question identify an individual’s performance as a part of a broader stylistic narrative or something entirely unique to that person, they remain part of *an individual’s* performance.

In the preceding chapters, Kevin Rowsome seemed to express the strongest desire to have his music evaluated on individual terms. His comments attached a sense of authenticity to music-making that was in tune with the musician’s personality, rather than a ‘contrived’ attempt to serve another stylistic end (Rowsome 2018). In keeping with Keegan’s earlier suggestion that a unique individual style is often produced by the presence of non-local musical influences, Kevin strongly emphasises the diversity of sounds he incorporates into his music and the multitude of influences that were with him from his very earliest days. This notion of the individual emerging from the multiple illuminates the complex web of musical influences that surrounds the musician willing to listen, and ‘the in-between, plastic, and ever-unfinished nature of a life’ (Biehl and Locke 2010, 318).

The process of developing a personal style and the criteria by which a personal style is judged are worthy of further study in themselves. While it is easy to come across laudatory references in both scholarship and popular media to those deemed to be innovators (eg. Hannan 1999; Ó Súilleabháin 1999; Quinn 2008), many musicians seem unconcerned to primarily imitate the approach of an earlier musician, sometimes down to very fine details. This latter approach was seen in Jimmy O’Brien Moran’s reflection that ‘I used to be very much trying to be a Willie [Clancy] clone’ (O’Brien Moran 2018). At the same time, Jimmy acknowledges that his music has gradually shifted towards something he sees as more personal: ‘What happened was I grew up, y’know, and in a way I certainly miss that Clancy stuff and I occasionally try to recapture it, y’know, but I think I’ve become too self-conscious in a way’ (ibid.). While Jimmy’s self-understanding here is undoubtedly powerful, his music itself remains open to subjective interpretation; there are certainly many musicians who would claim derisively that Jimmy remains a Willie Clancy clone!

The notion of style as choice within constraint is arguably at its most fertile and most vexing when applied to the individual. In the preceding discussion, inspired by Slominski, musical style became the mediator between instrument and instrumentalist. Here perhaps, it can begin to interrogate the limitations and potential of the musician themselves. Hutchinson poignantly describes Chris Langan’s uilleann piping style as an act of painstaking self-examination and self-expression inseparable from

his life's work of blacksmithing, reconstructed following the death of his wife and after a hiatus of eighteen years.

An old cliché among ethnomusicologists imagined the workings of tradition on a tune as the slow erosion and smoothing out of an ocean pebble. This image never sat well with me as I listened to Chris play, making the tune his own by putting back the edges and angles as if he was back in the forge in Rush, shaping solid and dependable iron. In Chris' settings each tune was smithered and smitten, scarfed, upset, hammered, fullered and bullied into shape. But this was a new way of playing for Chris after a long period away from the uilleann pipes. Coinciding, as this stylistic retooling did, with the necessity of reestablishing clarity in his life after the loss of his wife Mary in 1972, it is perhaps not too far-fetched to think of his rebuilding a piping style as a part of rebuilding a life after such a loss, and his way back to wholeness naturally called upon his history as a maker, both for its methods and for its values. Had Chris been a potter by trade the piping style he built would have been surprising to me, but I believe I am not stretching credulity in recognizing a certain fit between his way back to wholeness, his way of working as a smith, and his way with a tune. In both his life and music he needed to rebuild clarity, and in his use of the staccato possibilities of the uilleann pipes chanter he did it piece by piece, note by note. (Hutchinson 1997, 181-182)

Keegan proposes a still finer distinction in 'the style of an individual performance.' This usage of the term 'style' finds comparatively little mention in scholarly literature and vernacular discourse. Nevertheless, it functions as an extremely valuable reminder that style as a function of individual agency cannot be limited to a monolithic and unchanging individual style but is reenacted in every musical choice of that individual. An analysis of Willie Clancy's piping, for instance, demonstrates a remarkable variance of stylistic approaches even in his playing of a single tune across his career. Hannan (1999) has provided brief but insightful comments on some of Clancy's different approaches to the reel *Rakish Paddy*. These differences can be contextualised as part of a lifelong stylistic trajectory with different influences and aesthetic objectives taking primacy at different stages. But such an analysis should not obscure the importance of the individual performance context, the company, and the whim of the moment in determining the musical result. O'Neill's (1913, 260) reflection that 'James Cash could play a tune in ten different styles before he would finish' describes this ability to produce varying musical interpretations as a kind of virtuosic party trick which other pipers could not hope to imitate. (In fact, in the self-referential discourse of musical style, the ability to vary one's individual style could itself be considered a hallmark of that individual's style.) These observations neatly connect with Meyer's concept of the 'intraopus style', 'concerned with what is replicated within a single work' (Meyer 1989, 24).

The exact relationship of the individual performance style to the individual's style is not elucidated by Keegan, presenting a number of questions to the reader. One such question is whether every performance must be considered in terms of the performer's individual style. For instance, if a teacher attempts to replicate the approach of another piper as a pedagogical demonstration or if a performer presents a tribute to another piper by adopting elements of their approach which they may otherwise eschew, can this be considered a part of their personal style? We return here to Meyer's statistical thinking. Do we dismiss the outlier or pay it special attention as a unique case? In O'Neill's account, did Cash have ten different individual styles or just one? And if the latter, was it one of the ten, an average of all of them, or something else altogether?

These questions are not easily answered. As Meyer suggests, such determinations are chiefly of concern to theorists and analysts rather than the musicians themselves, and there will be as many readings of an individual's style as there are readers. For Meyer, the only solution to this statistical quandary is a statistical one: 'those [constraints] that a composer repeatedly selects from the larger repertory of the dialect define his or her individual idiom' (ibid.). The exact formulae used from this calculation may vary, but the basic fact remains; the analyst takes on the power to evaluate, classify, and define the individual. In doing so they risk entrapping the subject (and perhaps themselves) in a web of theories and data from which 'people are missing' (Biehl and Locke 2010, 319). Rather than Meyer's method, I would here prefer to take Biehl and Locke's (ibid., 318) advice: 'People's everyday struggles and interpersonal dynamics exceed experimental and statistical approaches and demand in-depth listening and long-term engagement'.

From the style of an individual performance, it follows that we could focus the microscope even further and discuss the style of a single note, a cran, a pump of the bellows, or a tap of the foot. While this intensely small focus may be useless for many purposes, it reminds us that all broader categories of style (including the totality of Irish traditional music practice itself) do not and could not exist outside of a multitude of minute musical acts. The dizzying complexity that this perspective suggests possesses a likeness to a biological ecosystem, with the smallest organisms existing as an integral part of massive environmental structures. Attempts to impose an external conceptual order on such a system may serve a purpose but can never hope to capture either the diversity or the unity of the phenomenon.

D. Geography and regionality

Style in Irish traditional music is often spoken of in the same breath as geography. This connection is so prominent in the contemporary Irish musical imagination that it can come as a surprise when one realises that the concept of regional style is a recent invention, most commonly traced to the pioneering 1963 series of radio lectures by Seán Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage* (published as Ó Riada 1982). Undoubtedly there is evidence of regional musical diversity before this time, but it went largely unremarked and was certainly unlikely to attract the terminology of 'style' (Kearney 2009, 141). Sommers Smith (1997, 130) is in agreement, asserting that 'although modern observers of traditional music in Ireland note marked regional differences in musical repertoire or playing style (if only to mourn the progressive loss of such styles), late nineteenth- and twentieth-century collectors and writers fail to mention such variety'. One notable exception comes from O'Neill's observation that '[the Chicago piper] James Quinn's style of execution was close staccato of the classic Connacht school of piping' (O'Neill 1913) which clearly draws a connection between certain musical practices and regionality. In doing so, however, it also invokes the terminology of a 'school' which implies a certain community of practitioners located within Connacht rather than the stronger claim of a uniform regional style. Intriguing as it remains, when taken in the context of O'Neill's other writings, it is significantly outweighed by mentions of style as a national and individual phenomenon.

Implicit in Ó Riada's understanding was a fear that regional musical diversity was under threat from an encroaching homogeneity. In identifying regional styles, he was not acting as an impartial observer but actively polemicising for their preservation, the geographical boundaries he delineated intended as battle lines. This same anxiety about the loss or dilution of regional style is frequently encountered in literature (eg. Ward 1976; Feldman and O'Doherty 1979; Fairbairn 1994) and to some extent amongst practitioners. According to this perspective, regional styles developed in the pre-modern era before recording and broadcast technology and travel became ubiquitous. In this cultural context, musical contact and influence were limited to one's immediate locality, creating and amplifying regional distinctions in playing style. Following similar lines, Sommers Smith (1990) traces regional styles to the humanitarian disaster of the Great Famine of 1845-1849. The marked population decline and resulting economic regionalisation formed isolated and marginalised local populations where regional styles could develop and thrive. As seen earlier, Keegan (1997, 120) traces a decline in the prominence of regional styles to media technology. Another commonly cited factor is a stylistic uniformity encouraged by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ), the national Irish

body that administers the fleadh system of competitions and festivals, and occupies a central role in music education in Ireland (see Corcoran 1997; Kearney 2010).

Others have challenged the prevailing narratives of regional style from a range of perspectives. Corcoran (1997) argues convincingly that studies of regionality in Irish traditional music rely on romanticised images of an isolated, pre-modern Ireland occupied by 'noble peasant' musicians, glossing over the complexities of social, economic, and political history. In the process, music from rural, Irish-speaking communities is deemed purer and more worthy of consideration than that of urban Anglophones. In a similar vein, O'Shea (1998) presents a perspective of regional style as a conceptual construct inextricably tied to forces of nationalist mythmaking and economic commodification. Vallely (1997) warns against a fetishisation of regional style, claiming that he and a majority of musicians play with a hybrid style which is true to their background in the music and the influence of their musical community. He argues that 'a regional style is of real meaning only to local identity, because only therein is it invested with the experience of its people's earlier lives' (ibid., 113), and questions whether attempts by an outsider to adopt a specific region's style can be similarly offensive to mimicking a foreign accent. At the same time, he acknowledges that other musicians have acquired a different regional accent naturally and organically as a result of gradual immersion in the music of that region.

Vallely is skeptical that regional styles are a feature of uilleann piping, a tradition he claims 'dismisses or bypasses the concept of regional style', 'rendering variance mostly personal' (ibid., 110). He attributes this to the expense and complicated nature of the instrument encouraging a higher degree of technical expertise amongst pipers, and prompting pipers to incorporate 'idiosyncrasies of former local styles as piping 'technique'' (ibid.). Breathnach (1977, 91) was in agreement, suggesting that former regional styles of piping have faded and that now 'players usually follow the style of the player who most impressed them when they were learning to play'. Both scholars here, paralleling Keegan (1997), imply that individual and regional styles are connected in an inverse relationship, the former gaining traction as latter loses its hold. Browne, however, suggests that regional styles remain vital as one of many stylistic resources that individuals may freely draw on.

Some years ago it might have been all too easy to predict the complete death of the regional styles but now a new consciousness has appeared among younger players. If in former times a learner acquired a style because it was the only one available, now he or she can choose to play in a particular way... This is happening and it's encouraging. (Browne 1997, 65-66)

The concept of emotional geography (Davidson, Bondi and Smith 2007) is also apposite here. In drawing a relationship between geography and emotion, we can challenge the reduction of place to a lifeless set of Cartesian coordinates and recognise the presence of affective dimensions and subjective meanings within natural and human geographies. At the same time, we can begin to 'understand emotion – experientially and conceptually – in terms of its socio-spatial mediation and articulation rather than as entirely interiorised subjective mental states' (ibid., 3). It provides a vital reminder that region and regionality in Irish traditional music are experienced emotionally, not mapped dispassionately.

In part amplified by this ongoing discourse, regionality has become a powerful association in musical practice. Smith (2008) and O'Shea (2008) provide insightful studies of the ways in which musicians such as Jackie Daly and Martin Hayes have drawn on local traditions as both a sonic resource and a powerful semantic signifier in their music. While regionality may be invoked strategically at times by these musicians, it cannot be purely dismissed as a savvy marketing ploy. In a sense, they have reclaimed regional style from its ideologues to become a productive and creative force in their music-making.

Despite the common belief that regional styles are meaningless in uilleann piping, the picture is substantially more complex, with numerous pipers drawing on local sounds or local meanings in diverse ways. For instance, Hannan (1999) draws attention to a current interest in Donegal repertoire, strongly associated with fiddling, amongst uilleann pipers. While Hannan's chief example here is Joe McLaughlin, he himself has made numerous forays into this territory, as have Seán Potts, Ronan Browne, and Sheila Friel more recently. Of these, the majority do not have ancestral or geographical connections to Donegal, reinforcing Browne's viewpoint above that local traditions are a stylistic resource to be drawn on as an active choice, rather than a predestined inheritance exclusive to a local community.

Another piper who maintains a powerful sense of locality in his music is Brian McNamara of Leitrim. With the family album *Leitrim's Hidden Treasure* (McNamara Family 1998) and his solo albums (McNamara 2000; 2004), he has championed Leitrim music received from his immediate musical community and rediscovered from the manuscripts of the 19th century Leitrim collector Stephen Grier. Brian emphasises a sense of 'connection' to Leitrim informed by and inseparable from personal memories, family and social ties, landscape, and the musical history of the region

(McNamara 2018). His knowledge of this history is meticulous. He points out a hyper-local connection to the famed Chicago piper Sergeant James Early: ‘we count it in fields (and the fields in Leitrim are not big!) - two fields over from where I lived, that’s where he came from!’ (ibid.). Brian describes himself a ‘vehicle for that music coming alive for others’, a position he feels honoured and fortunate to hold (ibid.). This phrasing is telling, almost positioning himself as a passive channel for the music of Leitrim. Here we encounter the sense of inevitability which Keegan, Browne, and others have suggested may have departed from the contemporary experience of regionality. Nevertheless, he emphasises the importance of non-local piping influences such as Ennis and Clancy in both his learning of the pipes and his current musical approach. Individual choice would seem to be present, even if it sometimes feels like destiny.

Joey Abarta’s strong identification with America and Americanness expresses a geographical affiliation of a different kind. The ‘heritage hungry’ (Lowenthal 1998) nature of Irish-American identity should not be underestimated here. In our field of enquiry, this is perhaps best evidenced by the New York piper Tom Busby, who was born in Ireland but first encountered the uilleann pipes after emigrating, describing his piping to an audience of American pipers using the language of a specific regional piping style virtually unknown today in Ireland:

I am of the old school of Connacht style piping, closed chanter, close fingering, back stitching, tipping, cranning and a flowing rhythm. With the old time Connacht pipers it was a cardinal sin to play the chanter while raised off the knee. (Busby 1982, 5)

Joey, however, takes a different route. His canny and self-aware mobilisation of Americanness (‘just an old Yankee Doodle trying to do his thing’) affords him a certain critical distance from some of the more overwrought expressions of Irish-American identity and acts as an ironic reproof at those who would consider his music as less than authentic (Abarta 2020). At the same time, however, his profound knowledge and musical evocation of Irish-American musical history shape his identity as a musician. Masquerading as a lack of belonging is a dual belonging; his allegiance to American piping places him at the heart of the Irish musical tradition.

While not deriving from an academic viewpoint, Blackie O’Connell’s simple assertion that he plays in ‘Clare style’ (see Chapter 4) provides a critical interrogation of regional fetishisation every bit as pointed as those of scholars like Corcoran (1997) and O’Shea (2008). Paralleling Vallely (1997), he acknowledges his inseparability from the contemporary musical-social landscape of Clare and challenges the classic constructs of East and West Clare styles, subverting the terminology of

regional style to do so. This subtly yet powerfully destabilises the whole edifice of regional stylistic identity, acting as a statement of community affiliation in the face of received wisdom that sees regional categories as immutable and deterministic. Furthermore, it acts as a counterbalance to the anxious regionalism of Ó Riada and his disciples, reminding us that style is a vital process embodied and embedded in living musical communities rather than a relic of a bygone era which must be preserved at all costs.

These various approaches to regionality from uilleann pipers are strikingly different. While they do not in any sense debunk the scholarly assessment that regional styles have declined in prominence or are less influential in piping, they do add layers of nuance to the picture. Above all, they demonstrate that a sense of regionality, itself encapsulating layers of community, geography, and history, remains a powerful source of meaning and inspiration to many pipers. And while it can be (or perhaps must be) freely chosen by musicians, the 'healthy afterlife' (Dowling 1999, 65) of regional style may possess the old affective charge of something greater, flowing through an individual.

Again, we encounter resonances of Slominski's (2020) suggestion of devolved agency - the place, or the imagination of the place, actively collaborating with or sounding through the musician. Style here can encapsulate this process of mediation between individual, community, place, and imagination. As musicians grapple with the seeming contradictions of place as immanent and encompassing, innate and adopted, they draw on the simultaneous constraint and freedom of musical style.

E. History and Lineage

Perhaps unsurprisingly, no study of Irish traditional music can entirely sidestep a direct confrontation with the concept of tradition. The existence of a tradition (if not 'the tradition') is overwhelmingly acknowledged amongst practitioners of Irish traditional music but its exact characteristics are rarely elucidated. Sean Ó Riada's metaphor of foreign bodies in a river of sound is one of its most famous expositions:

You might compare the progress of tradition in Ireland to the flow of a river. Foreign bodies may fall in, or be dropped in, or thrown in, but they do not divert the course of the river, nor do they stop it flowing; it absorbs them, carrying them with it as it flows onward. (Ó Riada 1982, 19-20)

While he used the analogy to describe Irish traditional music as a whole, with the ‘foreign bodies’ representing outside influences (accordions from continental Europe, strathspeys from Scotland and so on), it can have wider resonance. As O’Shea (2008, 1-3) notes, this image of assimilation into a greater and more powerful narrative springs from a cultural nationalist ideology which ascribes a unique status to (typically Gaelic) Irishness. For this reason, it can be revealing to refocus the image to see the Irish tradition, or an element thereof, as the foreign body in another’s river, powerless and stripped of its identity. This may give us pause to ask some difficult questions. Where did the river begin? Where is it going? Are we helpless in its currents?

In my discussion of Kevin Rowsome’s piping, I presented some introductory thoughts about the direction of the contemporary piping tradition, if indeed one can speak coherently of such a thing. As the fifth generation scion of the most famous dynasty in uilleann piping (and perhaps a forefather of many more to come), Kevin’s music and musical identity are a natural vantage point to begin an examination of historical currents in uilleann piping. In a sense, the family lineage is a concept uniquely prone to an oversimplified deterministic outlook. Some of Ó Riada’s river of sound, with its sense of implacability and inevitability, is easily felt here. There is a tendency to imagine an eminent patriarch (rarely a matriarch) handing down the sum of his wisdom to his children. Each subsequent generation then has the task of preserving it as faithfully as possible, virtually absolving them of any agency or creativity of their own. Outside influences, if considered at all, are corrupting factors which erode the authenticity of the original musical information.

Ethnomusicological research on hereditary musical traditions, with the richest bodies of work focusing on India and West Africa (eg. McNeil 2007; 2018; Charry 2000; Hale 2007), can be illuminating here. While the influence of hereditary musicianship in the Irish tradition does not approach what is described in these contexts, enough parallels exist to render them worthy of consideration. Of particular relevance to the present discussion, both Hindustani and Mandé traditions see a close relationship between lineage and musical style. McNeil (2007; 2018) traces the origins of *gharanas*, a system of stylistic organisation of musicians which retains significant conceptual traction today, to social upheavals precipitated by the arrival of colonial modernity in India. As earlier systems of patronage collapsed, *gharanas* formed around hereditary musical lineages, allowing for the transmission of musical knowledge to outsiders while still maintaining the original bloodline as a social and symbolic nucleus. In the contemporary era, the hereditary aspects have weakened further rendering *gharanas* as primarily stylistic communities. Charry (2000) similarly locates distinct styles and repertoires within hereditary lineages of Mandé griots. Here, the

autonomy of these hereditary styles is blurred by the practice of training for several years with a master from outside the lineage as a phase of traditional pedagogy. One desired outcome of this is allowing a griot to develop a distinct personal style not fully beholden to their lineage (ibid. , 93), producing an ongoing stylistic hybridisation even within a primarily hereditary system of transmission.

As Kevin Rowsome makes clear, despite growing up at the feet of a veritable patriarch of uilleann piping, there was never a hereditary destiny laid out for him (Rowsome 2018). In fact, Leo's prestige was precisely the factor that exerted a gravitational pull on other pipers and led to Kevin being exposed to a great diversity of influences on his piping, rather than a monolithic 'family style'. As with the cross-fertilising pedagogy of Mandé griots, it generated an ongoing negotiation of the familial, the individual, and the social, one which I believe has come to define Kevin's musical narrative. The connection to Leo and Kevin's other musical forebears lends a symbolic and affective dimension to his playing beyond that which can be directly measured in cuts, taps, and crans.

While family provides the most clearly delineated instances of musical lineage in Irish traditional music, it is not the only manifestation. Non-familial teaching and mentoring relationships form another significant expression of the transmission and evolution of musical style through history. As mentioned earlier, piping practice often holds to a more formal pedagogical model than that of other instruments within the Irish tradition (Spencer 2010a, 134). As evidenced by the preceding case studies, most pipers pay respect to a single teacher or small handful of teachers as formative to their approach to the instrument, and total autodidacticism is rare, especially within Ireland. Even Jimmy O'Brien Moran (2018), who did not experience sustained formal pedagogy, still emphasises the importance of mentors such as Seán McKiernan and the classes at the Scoil Samhradh Willie Clancy in his formative piping years.

Many of the same concerns introduced in the preceding paragraph apply to non-familial teaching relationships. As discussed above, even in Hindustani and West African traditions the exclusive nature of family lineages has gradually weakened, affording outsiders some of the status and knowledge formerly exclusive to family members. Lacking the more institutional connotations of gharanas or lineages of griots, strong student-teacher relationships in Irish traditional music can fulfil much the same role in establishing a sense of stylistic lineage.

A student-teacher relationship does not always imply a readily discernible sense of stylistic similarity, however. For instance, Mikie Smyth strongly emphasises his connection to his childhood teacher Andy Conroy, but his approach to the instrument suggests as many points of difference as it does commonality. While Smyth is able to execute many of Conroy's feats of tight chanter technique (as he demonstrates in *The Harvest Home* on Smyth 2006), he has become just as renowned for his prodigious command of the regulators as Conroy is for completely ignoring them. As seen in Chapter 7, Joey Abarta gave extensive credit to his early teacher Patrick D'Arcy as a source of support and an inspiration to his musical philosophy without ever suggesting that he plays like him. Nevertheless, we cannot establish a complete separation between these twin phenomena of sonic similarity and perceived lineage. Both are able to invest a musician's performance with meaning by mobilising understandings of historical continuity and individual identity.

The third way in which musical stylistic lineage can manifest does not rely on direct contact. A piper can be said to play in the style of an older exemplar, by those who identify a sonic relationship between the two. Joey Abarta, for instance, might be described as playing in the style of Patsy Touhey despite a gulf of nearly a century separating the two. Similarly, Jimmy O'Brien Moran's sonic evocations of Willie Clancy were the result of a detailed study of his recordings, rather than a direct relationship with Clancy. Naturally, such a form of lineage was all but impossible before widespread dissemination of audio recordings. As Máire Ní Ghráda (2018) indicated, such an approach involves a certain element of introspection, turning away from one's immediate musical community to engage in solitary study and practice.

Such an approach, which aims to capture an element of wholeness in its reworking of earlier styles, must be contrasted with Kevin Rowsome's description of an act of musical bricolage and hybridisation, a style that 'changed and incorporated little bits and pieces in' (Rowsome 2018). Here, the musical objects being utilised are decontextualised, stripped of at least a portion of their original meanings in order to acquire new ones. Kevin speaks admiringly of Traveller pipers who 'really stick to their own style' but describes many other attempts to play with a non-hybrid style as 'contrived' (ibid.).

Different as these approaches may seem to be, drawing a clear distinction between the two is a difficult task. As discussed earlier, Kevin's music draws deeply from family tradition in both its sound and signification. And Jimmy O'Brien Moran, speaking of his immense musical debt to Willie Clancy on the one hand, uses the analogy of 'the sweet shop' where 'you go in and you pick two or three of

these and two or three of these and that's your style ultimately' (O'Brien Moran 2018). Rather than seeing unilateral and hybrid musical lineage as mutually exclusive, they may be better understood as dialectical forces necessary to the production of musical style.

The easy proliferation of recordings, sounds, and information is undoubtedly a major influence on contemporary uilleann piping culture. But this does not dictate that everyone will draw on this potent resource in equivalent ways. As seen in the preceding discussion of regionality and regional style, some of the inevitability of musical lineage has faded. Pipers have a far greater range of stylistic influences than what is 'handed down' from past generations in the traditional sense. For this reason, the more pronounced forms of bricolage can be seen as a contemporary innovation in piping. But the logic of freedom that underlies it is not new, and the power of tradition and history is not so easily stifled. Ironically, styles of playing that are often seen as more 'historical' or 'traditional', such as those of Joey Abarta and Jimmy O'Brien Moran, are the result of modern media technology. And Kevin Rowsome's own drive towards personal expression is balanced against the deep presence of legacy and family tradition which must inevitably be felt in his music.

Handler and Linnekin's trenchant analysis of the concept of tradition has bearing here:

In sum, the relationship of prior to present representations is symbolically mediated, not naturally given; it encompasses both continuity and discontinuity. Thus we can no longer speak of tradition in terms of the approximate identity of some objective thing that changes while remaining the same. Instead, we must understand tradition as a symbolic process that both presupposes past symbolisms and creatively reinterprets them. In other words, tradition is not a bounded entity made up of bounded constituent parts, but a process of interpretation, attributing meaning in the present though making reference to the past. (Handler and Linnekin 1984, 287)

Tradition here is neither an original message being gradually corrupted, nor an implacable river bearing foreign bodies to an as yet unimaginable sea. We do not receive tradition, nor are we carried by it, but instead we engage in a process of tradition - interpreting, reworking, honouring, subverting. This process of tradition contains both entropic and negentropic vectors, accruing and dissolving meaning at every stage. Coleman (2012, 169) is in agreement, with his study of memory and history in Irish traditional music reminding us that 'every accumulation of meaning involves a partial forgetting of the older contexts and stories that were attached to an element of the tradition'.

Once again we hear the echoes of choice and constraint. We may challenge the inevitability of tradition but our choices do not occur outside of its ambit. The power of tradition, lineage, memory, and history in making and shaping meaning is unquestionable. But we must also be reminded of the power of individuals to collectively remake and shape history, act by act and piece by piece. I cannot play an 'Ennis cran' without evoking the spirit of Séamus Ennis to the knowledgeable listener. To do so (or at least to do so well) is to honour and solidify the legacy and unique musical vision of Ennis. And yet, in another sense, every time I play it, it may come to belong a little less to Ennis and a little more to me. Above all, I can find ways to make its sound and its meaning true to me, or discard it as I see fit.

As well as Meyer's choice and constraint, Slominski's thoughts have formed a backbone to this chapter. They are every bit as poignant and insightful here. Instrument, identity, community, locality, and tradition can all become, or seem to become, active forces and collaborators in our music making. We play them and they play us. At the most sublime and profound moments of music making we cannot be sure where one ends and the other begins, and everything feels entirely inevitable and unimaginably free. Musical style is a guide to this journey.

Chapter 10 – Conclusion: the future of style

If the preceding chapters elucidated some of the mechanics and meanings of musical style, the following discussion will reflect on what the future may hold for style in uilleann piping. This theme was not entirely absent from my interviews; in their own way, all of my informants had an awareness of their place in an ongoing historical narrative of uilleann piping, naturally encompassing some sense of future direction. Nevertheless, it has not been a primary feature of this research, and it is worth considering the speculative potential of our new understanding of musical style. These reflections are not in any sense comprehensive, but may represent a point of departure for further thought or research.

There is an ongoing discourse around the death of styles, if not style itself. While the anxiety around the erosion of regional styles has subsided a little since its peak in the 1970s, it is still frequently encountered amongst musicians (Fleming 2004). Fears around the disappearance of traditional Traveller lifestyles have naturally translated to a concern that the Traveller style may vanish from uilleann piping practice (Fegan 2014). Overall, there is a powerful conviction shared by many that the diversity of musical style is subject to increasing homogenisation, whether competitive fleadh culture, the mass availability of recordings, or other factors are presumed to be at fault. Underlying all these anxieties is the tacit premise that styles (or style) are incompatible with the (post-)modern world.

These concerns should not be too readily dismissed. Commercial, state, and institutional interests rarely have the best interests of the practice and practitioners of Irish traditional music at heart (Vallely 2003; 2014). The belief sometimes encountered that some spiritual heart of the music is invulnerable to the effects of mass mediation and cultural change can run dangerously close to the romanticised depiction of an idyllic rural Gaeldom cut off from the rest of the world. At the same time, an unthinking disposition against change should be guarded against. Appadurai (1996, 4) argues that the forces of globalisation ‘seem to impel (or sometimes compel) the work of the imagination’, becoming ‘a staging ground for action’ (ibid. ,7). This could scarcely be better evidenced than Slominski’s (2020) compelling case that the increasing global and postnationalism reach of Irish traditional musical practice is gradually creating more breaches in the armour of a (hetero)sexist ethnocentrism through which racially, sexually, and gender-diverse musicians can assert themselves musically and personally.

This sense of uncertainty should come as no surprise to even a casual reader of the preceding chapters. Change inevitably carries with it the possibility of loss and the desire to return to where we were (or where we imagine we were) before, just as it has the potential to guide us to a better future. Uilleann piping occupies a place in today's world which would have been unimaginable even a short time ago, let alone to the participants of the 1968 Bettystown tionól, for whom the total extinction of uilleann piping was a conceivable prospect. As Máire Ní Ghráda described it to me, 'our jaws would have dropped had we been brought to Miltown Malbay, modern Miltown Malbay. We wouldn't have recognised it or known how to fit in even!' (Ní Ghráda 2018). Some of the most obvious changes may be discerned from statistics alone. The number of uilleann pipers is burgeoning, and with it the number of pipemakers, teachers, and recordings. All of this naturally leads to an increased visibility of the instrument and its music being felt within Ireland, the Irish diaspora, and in the world at large.

Other changes can be seen as arising from, or paralleling technological developments. We are seeing innovations in instrument design, from David Daye's budget chanter which have enabled countless beginners to obtain an affordable and functional instrument, to Benoit Trémolières' revolutionary reinvention of the regulator keyboard (impact yet to be determined). The growth of globalised travel (at least before the COVID-19 pandemic) has vastly increased contact between even the most remote traditional music communities. In Australia, renowned Irish pipers Paddy Keenan, Jarlath Henderson, Blackie O'Connell, John McSherry, Tiarnán O Duinnchinn, and Fionntan Byrne have all toured in recent years, most of them teaching workshops and lessons along the way. Equally, the trip to Ireland, typically planned to coincide with major summer schools or festivals has become a virtual rite of passage for many pipers outside of Ireland, if not a recurring tradition.

The most common reflection on technological progress occurring in my interviews, however, was undoubtedly the mass availability of recordings and information in the internet age. Any piper has access to countless hours of recorded piping at the very highest standard, from specialist sources like Na Píobairí Uilleann's online archive to the ubiquitous platforms of Spotify and YouTube. This is coupled with the tens of thousands of transcribed tunes in various online databases, online workshops and lessons, and the community and advice offered by forums and Facebook groups. The former scarcity of information, which had the young Willie Clancy cycling after Johnny Doran's caravan in the 1930s for every scrap of knowledge he could extract, has become a bounty. The primary challenge has become one of filtering and curating a selection from the masses available, or sometimes even being aware when and how one is being influenced. O'Brien Moran compares the

impact of Paddy Keenan's piping since the 1970s to that of Charlie Parker in jazz, suggesting that "it is difficult to quantify the number of players who have adopted elements of his style, but at this stage it is almost all-pervasive" (O'Brien Moran 2012, 103). And as with Charlie Parker, it may be all but meaningless to attribute positive or negative values to such a watershed, since it quickly becomes impossible to imagine that things could ever have been otherwise.

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly hastened some of these trends. While Spencer (2010a) has skilfully documented the impact in online activities in establishing a global piping scene, it is unlikely he could have foreseen the immense growth in digital information sharing and community building of the last several years. Pipers who previously had little musical interaction outside their immediate community are now enrolling in (or teaching) online masterclasses and lessons. A committed enthusiast can easily attend online uilleann piping events several times a week, including masterclasses, lectures, and recitals. Even when primarily oriented around a local piping club or community, these events offer unprecedented access to audiences around the world and in doing so, disseminate information, tunes, and styles globally. As I write this, the 2021 Scoil Samhradh Willie Clancy is taking place entirely online. After hearing so many of my informants reflecting on the impact it has made on their musical lives, I wonder just how many of this year's participants will feel the same way? The ability to log on from wherever you may find yourself in the world without the expense and difficulty of flights to Ireland, transport, and accommodation will undoubtedly be a godsend for many. But of course, something is lost as well as gained; what is Willie Week without the hunt through every pub in Miltown Malbay to find just the right session, a swim in the Atlantic Ocean off Spanish Point, a cup of tea with pipers you have admired for years between classes, a serving of curry chips by Willie Clancy's statue at 3am?

All of these changes may seem particularly drastic in the context of an instrument with a visual aesthetic that I have heard described as 'steampunk', a repertoire of which a substantial portion dates from the nineteenth century or earlier, and a community which (despite some heartening shifts in recent years) is overwhelmingly straight, white, and male. And yet, uilleann piping has successfully embraced change for much of its history. The acclaimed performances of O'Farrell for London high society in the 1790s are very far removed from Johnny Doran's busking at rural Irish horse fairs, not to mention John Cage's aleatoric sampling of Séamus Ennis' piping in *Roaratorio: An Irish Circus on Finnegans Wake* (Cage 1976). The 1968 Bettystown tionól participants would have had difficulty imagining the popularity of Planxty, with Liam O'Flynn's uilleann pipes front and centre, just a few short years later. And the most ardent folk revivalists of the 1970s could not have

foreseen the massive cross-cultural appeal of Afro-Celt Sound System and Riverdance with their respective pipers Ronan Browne and Davy Spillane.

The preceding conclusions, that style is an open-ended process by which identity, community, geography, and history are productively engaged with and negotiated, allow us to reflect on further, less tangible changes. All of these themes are being challenged, contested, and redefined in the contemporary world. As they change, style must follow. Even the same sounds may come to possess different meanings as the conceptual and discursive landscape shifts. But perhaps more importantly, style will also allow pipers to navigate these changes just as it has in the past. Style, as an ongoing and unfinished process of coming to understand internal and external forces, allows us to reflect on change and see ourselves as part of that process. All of this should remind us that musical style remains contingent, fluid, and flexible - precisely as it must be. It is a powerful and elegant scheme, operating within and translating between sonic, aesthetic, and social registers.

I concluded the preceding chapter by likening musical style to a map which allows us to conceptually navigate landscapes of memory, geography, community, and identity. Maps, the ways we use them, and even the landscapes they describe have changed and continue to change, sometimes drastically. But what has not changed is the need for maps. So it is for style. The concept of musical style exists naturally and inevitably because it serves a purpose, and so long as that purpose remains we can be sure that it will persist in some form.

When I began this research, I was convinced that style was an essentially musico-sonic phenomenon - a matter of frequencies and amplitude (or their direct analogues in the musicological realm of rhythm, pitch, and so on, or the bodily realm of technique and mechanics). I was certainly aware that musical style had powerful implications for identity, community, history, place, and even spirituality, but all of this felt like a certain 'reading into' the sound. I gradually came to realise, however, that the sound itself (and the reception it generates in a listener) are themselves produced by individual subjectivities. The sound, in other words, can be seen as just as much a 'reading' of these inner worlds and understandings. Aldous Huxley's essay *Meditation on the Moon* provides a vital reminder that the sonic and the affective, exteriority and interiority, can (and perhaps must) co-exist:

Materialism and mentalism - the philosophies of "nothing but." How wearily familiar we have become with that "nothing but space, time, matter and motion", that "nothing but sex", that "nothing but economics"! And the no less intolerant "nothing but spirit", "nothing but consciousness", "nothing

but psychology” - how boring and tiresome they also are! “Nothing but” is mean as well as stupid. It lacks generosity. Enough of “nothing but”. It is time to say again, with primitive common sense (but for better reasons), “not only, but also”.

Socrates was accused by his enemies of having affirmed, heretically, that the moon was a stone. He denied the accusation. All men, said he, know that the moon is a god, and he agreed with all men. As an answer to the materialistic philosophy of “nothing but” his retort was sensible and even scientific. ... For there is nothing, of course, to prevent the moon from being both a stone and a god. The evidence for its stoniness ... may be found in any children's encyclopaedia. It carries an absolute conviction. No less convincing, however, is the evidence for the moon's divinity. It may be extracted from our own experiences, from the writings of the poets, and, in fragments, even from certain textbooks of physiology and medicine. (Huxley 1931)

Just as the moon can be simultaneously a stone and a god, a musical gesture can be simultaneously a set of atmospheric vibrations and a mystical evocation with the potential to transform both the listener and the player. These two states of being exist in a dialectical tension, giving meaning and power to the concept of musical style.

I return to the anecdote with which I opened this thesis: Mick O'Brien and the case of the two back Ds. The gesture was an inherited one; Mick had himself learned it, either actively taught or picked up through observation, and so on back through the generations. It is not particular to him; virtually every piper will play something like it, and it has a meaning and affect that makes it understood by the community at large. And yet no one plays it in exactly the same way. Ubiquitous as it may be, there is a sense in which it is truly Mick's. But it had also become mine. As with everything to do with style, the process flows both ways at the same time. I had become its new custodian, initiated into its mysteries, and part of its ongoing lineage. I will inevitably shape it subtly in my own ways, just as naturally and unconsciously as I possess my own individual manner of speaking or walking. I may teach it to others formally or it may be observed and copied without my knowledge. But I will still remember that Achill schoolroom and Mick's teaching of it. The gesture has a sound, a feel, a meaning, a location, a community, a lineage. All it needs is a willing set of fingers and an open pair of ears.

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Appendix A – Technical Information

A. Organology and description

The uilleann pipes are a member of the bagpipe family of aerophones. According to Van Hees' (2014) comprehensive organology of bagpipes, they are mono-/semi-melodic, meaning that they have a primary voice (chanter) with full melodic capabilities and secondary voices (regulators) with limited melodic capabilities. Like the overwhelming majority of bagpipes, they are drone instruments.

The instrument is blown by means of a small bellows which is strapped to the piper's waist and pumped with the right elbow. This feature gives rise to the name, *uilleann* being the genitive singular form of the Irish *uill*, meaning 'elbow'. The bellows is pumped independently of the music to provide a constant air supply. Air from the bellows travels through the hose and blowpipe and into the bag which rests under the piper's left arm. By squeezing the bag with the left arm, the piper provides air to the seven sounding pipes.

The most complex of these is the chanter, which feeds into the bag's neck. It is held in both hands with the fingers and left thumb covering the chanter's eight open holes. The bore is conical, with a double reed (somewhat similar to an oboe's) enclosed in a chamber at its top. The chanter will typically rest on the player's leg which has the effect of completely closing its foot (the instrument is almost always played seated). In this position, with all fingers covering their open holes, the reed will remain silent. When the chanter is lifted from the leg or a finger is removed from its hole, the reed sounds. The ability to fully close the chanter is rare amongst bagpipes and allows for staccato playing, a feature that has become highly idiomatic in the uilleann pipes and central to uilleann piping pedagogy and discourse..

The chanter has a basic compass of two octaves with some additional higher pitches being technically possible but almost never used. Chanters will commonly have four or five keys that allow for the playing of all semitones within their compass, with some historical models possessing additional keys to extend the upper range. The upper octave is obtained by increasing the bag pressure, sometimes while closing the chanter to induce a faster vibration in the reed. The lowest note is sounded by lifting the chanter from the leg with all fingers remaining on their holes. At other

times the chanter may be lifted from the leg to obtain expressive modifications of pitch and timbre which are considered highly idiomatic in the uilleann piping tradition. This element is often seen as giving the pipes a uniquely vocal quality. The piper Andy Conroy, for instance, was known for his ability to make his chanter “speak” the name “Paddy Lavin”, an older piper he greatly admired (Whitmer 2019).

The uilleann pipes possess three drones which feed out of the bag through the mainstock and rest across the piper’s lap. Termed tenor, baritone, and bass, they sound the same note in three octaves with the tenor sounding in unison with the lowest note of the chanter (referred to as D regardless of the instrument’s sounding pitch). The drones are sounded by single reeds, also known as guills, traditionally made out of a single stem of cane. The drones can be switched on or off by means of a switch on the mainstock.

The mainstock also feeds the three regulators, keyed pipes that remain silent until one of their keys is opened by the player’s right wrist or thumb. The regulators are the most unique feature of the instrument and are not encountered in any other bagpipes. The origin of the term is uncertain but may evoke a visual similarity to the regulators of a steam engine. The regulators allow the piper to play separate melodic voices, but typically one or two are used to accompany the chanter’s melody with simple chords or a contrapuntal voice. In certain situations, the right hand may be removed from the chanter to play the regulators with its fingers. This affords more dexterity on the regulators and allows the playing of certain chords which would otherwise be impossible. Also termed tenor, baritone, and bass, the regulators possess a total of thirteen keys which sound ten different notes. Their range extends upwards from a fourth below the lowest note of the chanter. In certain circumstances the right hand can be removed from the chanter without significantly altering its pitch and can be used to play more complex figures on the regulators. Rare instruments with additional regulators or drones are sometimes encountered.

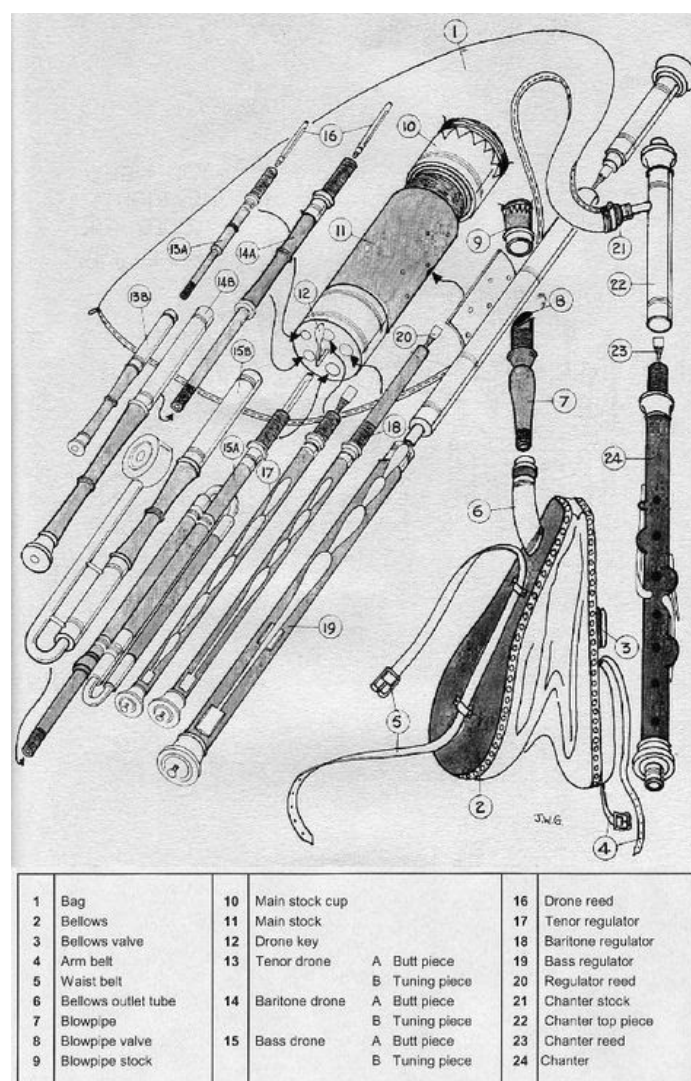


Figure A.1 - diagram of the various elements of the uilleann pipes (www.pipers.ie)

While the instrument's physical capabilities and limitations are undoubtedly vital to this research, they represent only one perspective on the instrument. The uilleann pipes may occupy the same category as the Maltese *zaqq* and the Ukrainian *dude* in Van Hees' organology of bagpipes (2014), but the barest familiarity with these instruments is sufficient to verify that they occupy vastly different sonic and social terrain. For this reason we must begin to contend with the uilleann pipes not only as a physical presence but also as a sonic presence, a historical presence, a cultural presence, and perhaps even a spiritual presence.

1. Nomenclature

While the uilleann pipes are today intimately associated with the music of Ireland, historical evidence indicates an early presence throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland. Before the twentieth century, the instrument was known as the "Irish pipes" and later the "union pipes". It has

been variously speculated that this latter name referred to either the physical layout of the instrument with drones and regulators attached to the bag via a single mainstock, a sonic union between the different sounding pipes, or a metaphorical union between the musical cultures of Ireland, Scotland, and England (Carolan 2012)

Uilleann pipes, the modern name for the instrument, came into vogue in the early twentieth century in an era of burgeoning Irish nationalism. The term “union” was particularly unsavoury in this climate, due to its association with the 1801 Acts of Union which crippled Irish political autonomy and introduced an era of disenfranchisement and oppression of Irish Catholics. A solution presented itself in the Irish word *uilleann* which bore a certain resemblance to the earlier name and ably described the bellows action of the instrument. While the nationalist scholar Grattan Flood (cited in Carolan 2012) attempted to argue that “uilleann pipes” was the original term for the instrument and was later corrupted to “union pipes”, even producing a Shakespearean reference to inflate the credentials of his preferred name, his claims have been thoroughly discredited.

In the context of Irish traditional music, “the pipes” is understood to refer to the uilleann pipes, and “a piper” to an uilleann piper. Although the uilleann pipes belong to the bagpipe family of instruments, the term “bagpipes” is rarely applied to the uilleann pipes within the tradition and is much more likely to refer to the Great Highland Bagpipes. The plural noun “pipes” presents some awkwardness (which the singular Irish noun *píob* avoids) and there can be inconsistency as to whether an individual instrument should be referred to as an “it” or a “them”. Perhaps for this reason, when speaking of individual instruments a very common convention is to speak of “a set of pipes”, or simply “a set”. This can be further qualified with the pitch (“a C set”) or pipemaker’s name (“a Wooff set”). The complete configuration of bag, bellows, chanter, three drones, and three regulators is known as a “full set”, with smaller configurations including a “half set” (lacking regulators) and a “practice set” (bag, bellows, and chanter, typically associated with beginners).

2. Pitch and intonation

Uilleann pipes can be heard today in a number of pitches. Historically they were often classified according to the length of their chanter but today they are distinguished according to the lowest note of the chanter, to which the drones are tuned. The earliest specimens of uilleann pipes were often pitched around a modern D (such as the c. 1760 Kenna set currently in Ronan Browne’s possession) but lower pitches quickly became preferred. The most common pitch for surviving

antique instruments approximates a modern B, with C#, C and Bb also encountered. In modern terminology, these have become known as “flat sets” or “flat pipes”.

As mentioned above, a major innovation in pipemaking came in the late nineteenth century from the Irish-American Taylor brothers. They widened the bores and tone holes of the instrument, in the process raising the pitch to a modern D (or even higher). These instruments are now classified as “concert pitch”, “concert sets”, or “concert pipes”. For much of the twentieth century concert pitch reigned supreme, despite the prestige attached to antique flat sets. The 1980s and subsequent decades, however, saw a resurgence of interest in the making and playing of flat sets led in large part by the renowned pipemaker Geoff Wooff. While concert pitch pipes are still more numerous, perhaps largely due to the convenience of playing with other musicians, both are widely made and played today.

The terminology of flat and concert pipes is somewhat misleading since the distinction is one of timbre and volume as well as pitch. Flat sets demonstrate a more complex spectrum of overtones, sometimes reminiscent of the oboe, and are often described as softer or sweeter. The volume balances well with a single fiddle. Concert sets are louder, somewhat closer to the Great Highland bagpipes in tone, and often described as brighter. Many pipers express a strong preference for one or the other, with the choice often considered to be of particular musical significance. To complicate matters, some modern pipemakers have designed a “narrow bore D” that attempts to replicate the tonal properties of flat pipes in modern concert pitch while others use a significantly wider bore to produce pipes at lower pitches, effectively creating hybrid instruments that borrow from both classic designs. Regardless of pitch, the convention throughout the history of the instrument has been to refer to and notate the lowest note of the chanter as D, transposing as required. This convention will be followed in the following research.

The chanter and regulators are typically tuned so as to provide beatless intervals (or as close as possible) against the drones. The resulting intonation approximates just intonation against the drone pitch, with certain anomalies that can be considered idiomatic to the instrument. Different pipemakers will typically have subtly different approaches to tuning, in some cases requiring a different fingering for certain notes from the piper. Most notes on the chanter are receptive to microtonal adjustments produced by alternative fingerings, which can be used for expressive purposes or to provide a tuning appropriate to a different harmonic or modal context. When playing

with equal tempered instruments, for instance, pipers can modify their fingerings to bring certain notes closer to their equal tempered values although an exact congruence is often impossible.

B. History

The uilleann pipes emerged in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. They can be contextualised as part of a fruitful period of innovation in instrument design that saw the sophistication and refinement of many wind instruments across Europe. As such, there is no sole innovator or prototype but rather a gradual evolution which drew on a number of earlier instruments.

Although a basic version was sketched by Da Vinci sometime before 1505, the earliest extant bellows-blown bagpipe, probably of French origin, can be dated to the late sixteenth century (Kopp 2005, 15-18). By the time of the development of the uilleann pipes, the bellows had been adopted as an element of a number of European bagpipes including the French musette de cour, the Northumbrian smallpipes, and the pastoral pipes in Ireland and Great Britain. In the case of the uilleann pipes, the bellows is of singular importance since a reed delicate enough to provide an overblown second octave will have difficulty withstanding the hot and moist air that a mouth-blown instrument receives.

The origins of the regulators are uncertain but McLeod (1999) has suggested an inspiration from the musette de cour, a bagpipe popular in the French courts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The later musettes de cour included a second chanter which extended the upper range of the instrument and, like the regulators, was fully keyed and closed at the end so that it would remain silent until a key was depressed. As such, it is functionally identical to the regulators, although the latter have been repurposed to a very different musical end: serving a primarily harmonic function as compared to the melodic and contrapuntal role of the musette de cour's second chanter.

The musette de cour was an attempt to render a sweeter and more refined version of various folk bagpipes to satisfy an ongoing fascination with artistic evocations of pastoral pleasures. The aim was to create an instrument that was agreeable to upper-class musical sensibilities and capable of fulfilling the demands of the art music of the day while still conveying a frisson of the rustic. A similar aim most likely guided the development of the uilleann pipes in Ireland and Great Britain. In this case an additional aesthetic impetus was provided by a fashion for romanticised depictions of Gaelic

Scotland and Ireland, spurred by the largely spurious Ossian poems of James McPherson (Carolan 2012).

The most significant ancestor, however, was an earlier bellows-blown bagpipe most commonly known as the pastoral pipes, which had an additional footjoint on its chanter. The footjoint extended the range to a low C but could not be stopped against the leg to silence it. Anderson (2005) has speculated that pastoral pipers may have begun to experiment with removing the footjoint from their chanters and stopping them on the leg to enable staccato effects. Once this became the norm, makers optimised their instruments for this approach, eventually omitting the footjoint altogether. In any case, there was no immediate and clearly defined transition from the pastoral pipes to the union pipes. Hybrid instruments, such as those incorporating a pastoral footjoint with a single six-key regulator, were experimented with in these transitional decades. By the 1830s, the modern configuration of uilleann pipes with three drones and regulators had been largely standardised.

A new, mechanically complex, and fashionable instrument was an object of considerable expense and the most accomplished pipemakers such as Egan, Kenna, Coyne, Moloney, Colgan, and Harrington could charge a small fortune for their creations. As such the uilleann pipes remained largely the domain of wealthy amateurs and professional musicians who were able to attract patronage, rather than the general populace (Carolan 2012). Any preconceptions of a “folk” instrument in the hands of the rural peasantry must be re-evaluated when approaching this period. The two most highly renowned union pipers of the instrument’s early history were two Irishmen, Courtney and O’Farrell, who achieved fame on the London theatrical stages (in particular the Ossianic-themed pantomime *Oscar and Malvina*) and in the houses of the gentry, typically playing with harp accompaniment.

O’Farrell left us with five volumes of published music and a tutor book for the pipes, which afford some fascinating insights into the piping practice and repertoire of the era (O’Farrell 1804; O’Farrell 1806). The majority of tunes notated are of Irish or Scottish origin, including some which are familiar today to traditional musicians. However, the collection demonstrates a strong influence of the art music of the day in forms including rondos, gavottes, and minuets, and musical effects such as appoggiaturas and cadential trills. Often O’Farrell presents variations on familiar traditional tunes, such as his treatment of *An Chuilfhionn* which strongly suggests Baroque diminution practice (O’Farrell 1804). The picture that emerges is of an instrument and repertoire designed for the drawing room, satisfying the fashion for things pastoral and Gaelic while making aesthetic

concessions to upper-class musical sensibilities. Carolan (2012) notes, however, the social picture was more complicated with bellows-blown bagpipes familiar to Irish proletarian audiences at rural fairs and gatherings.

By the 1830s the fashions in Britain had moved on and the uilleann pipes had largely vanished from the theatres and salons and the rest of the nineteenth century saw steady stream of published advertisements for cut-price second-hand instruments (*ibid.*). Gradually the uilleann pipes, while still an object of expense, began to percolate further and further outside the social spheres of the wealthy. Their popularity lasted slightly longer in Ireland but the humanitarian devastation of the Great Famine of the 1840s took a heavy toll on the cultural life of the country. Additionally, in a narrative common to many bagpiping traditions of Europe, they began to be supplanted by accordions and concertinas. Louder, cheaper and easier to produce and maintain, these new free-reed instruments were eagerly adopted into the socio-musical life of Ireland, ultimately rendering the pipes a curiosity unfamiliar even to many Irish audiences by the turn of the twentieth century.

The nineteenth century also saw the beginnings of mass emigration from Ireland. O'Neill's anecdotal history of uilleann piping (1913) provides details of numerous Irish pipers who emigrated to Great Britain, the United States, Australia, Canada or New Zealand, often enjoying successful performing careers in their new homes. The uilleann pipes were to achieve particular significance in the Irish-American centres of New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston.

Much of this impetus came from a revolutionary change in the design of the instrument by the pipemaking Taylor brothers of Philadelphia in the late nineteenth century. Essentially, they took a genteel chamber instrument designed for the parlours of the gentry and refashioned it to provide a louder and more piercing sound able to hold its own in a raucous vaudeville hall. Their innovations made their way back to Ireland to be adopted by early twentieth century pipemakers such as Willie Rowsome, Leo Rowsome, and Tadhg Crowley. Irish-American pipers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries such as Patsy Touhey and Bernard Delaney achieved great popularity amongst the Irish emigrant population and took full advantage of the burgeoning US recording industry to leave a remarkable recorded legacy for later generations of musicians.

It is also around this time that we have the first record of an uilleann piper from the marginalised Irish Traveller community, the legendary John Cash. Thanks to the extended familial ties amongst Travellers, Cash became the patriarch of a musical dynasty that encompassed many of the most

renowned exponents of the instrument, such as Johnny Doran, Finbar Furey, and Paddy Keenan. The Traveller piping tradition was to become a vital component of the instrument's history and performance practice. Indeed, one of the most common understandings of piping style encountered amongst the traditional music community is that of "the Traveller style."

The first decade of the twentieth century saw the establishment of pipers' clubs in Dublin and Cork, spurred by the Gaelic cultural revival, followed by similar organisations around the country. Despite their efforts and those of pipers such as Leo Rowsome, Séamus Ennis, and Willie Clancy, the piping tradition remained marginal for the first half of the 20th century. In particular, the craft of pipemaking seemed at risk of extinction, with just two full-time pipemakers active worldwide in 1968 (Spencer 2010a, 1). Largely motivated by this dire state of affairs, the organisation Na Píobairí Uilleann was founded in 1968 by the Dublin piper-scholar Breandán Breathnach to promote and preserve the uilleann piping tradition. The famed pipers Séamus Ennis and Leo Rowsome even put their notoriously frosty relationship aside to present a united front in the service of this new initiative.

The 1960s and 1970s also coincided with the so-called revival of Irish traditional music, which took much of its impetus and direction from US and English folk music revivals. Gradually the perception of Irish traditional music shifted from a dying relic associated with backward rural populations to a flagship of national culture. The uilleann pipes were integral to the sound of bands such as The Chieftains (Paddy Moloney), The Fureys (Finbar Furey), Planxty (Liam O'Flynn), and The Bothy Band (Paddy Keenan), redefining the instrument's musical possibilities and bringing it to new audiences. Bands of the 1990s including Moving Hearts (Davy Spillane) and Lunasa (John McSherry and later Cillian Vallely) as well as the worldwide commercial phenomenon of the Riverdance stage show continued this trend.

Today sees an unprecedented number of active pipers and pipemakers in what can be considered a second "golden age" to rival the instrument's early heyday (Mac Aoidh 2020, 3). Na Píobairí Uilleann remains at the forefront of worldwide advocacy and promotion of the uilleann pipes, supported by numerous smaller pipers' clubs and informal social gatherings at the local level. The pipes have achieved an unparalleled level of worldwide prominence thanks to stage shows like Riverdance and the soundtracks to movies such as *Braveheart* and *Titanic*. Their cultural status was formally recognised in 2017 when UNESCO added the uilleann piping tradition to its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

C. Techniques

While many of these techniques are recognised on other instruments in Irish traditional music, these descriptions will focus on their application to the pipes.*

Cuts

A cut is a higher pitch sounded very briefly as an articulation of a melodic note. On the chanter this involves a rapid lifting and replacement of a higher finger than that sounding the melodic note. While cuts are often described as grace notes, they differ from what a conventional understanding of the term in Western art music might imply. Here the upper note is so brief that it is not heard as a melodic presence but rather as an articulation (see Larsen 2013). In fact, since the fingerings utilised prioritise economy of motion to allow the quickest possible duration, the actual pitch sounded would often be heard as significantly out of tune or modally inappropriate if it had the status of a melodic pitch. Cuts can be used in two different situations. They can either rearticulate a note which has already been sounded, or provide a sharper articulation for a note on its first sounding. For many notes, cuts using a variety of pitches are possible and the choices made between them are an important element of piping style. Selecting a wider interval for the cut will typically provide a brighter and more pronounced articulation. A cut can also be delayed so that the principal note is briefly heard before the cut note. Unusually, there is no standard terminology for this commonly heard effect, but I have opted for O'Brien Moran's (2006) suggestion of 'casadh'. The notation corresponding to a grace note in Western art music has been used throughout for cuts, since it clearly represents the pitch (or more appropriately fingering) that produces the cut.

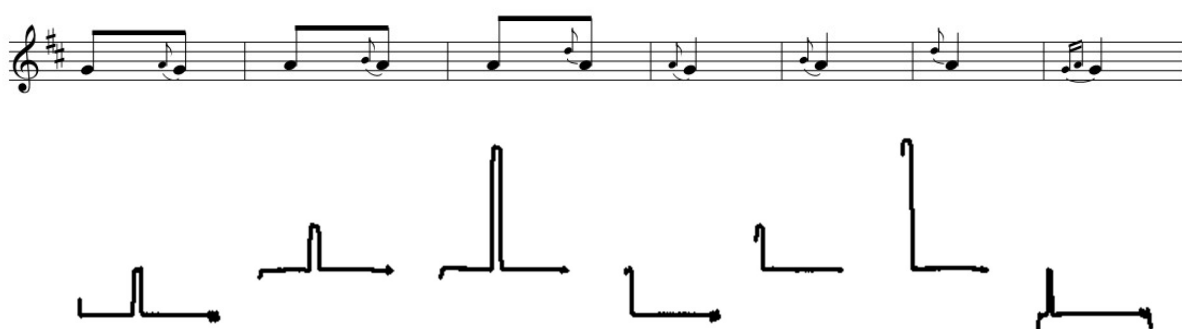


Figure A.2 – (top, left to right) a cut rearticulating G, two possible cuts rearticulating A, a cut articulating G (for the first time), two possible cuts articulating A, a 'casadh' on G; (bottom) a pitch graph of these gestures

* See Ennis (1998) for further detail.

Taps

Taps (occasionally called pats or strikes) provide a similar sonic effect to a cut, although the actual finger technique is entirely different. They are performed by rapidly bringing a finger (or fingers) down to make sharp contact with an open hole, momentarily sounding a lower note. The same comments regarding the terminology of grace notes apply here. Additionally, depending on the precise fingerings used on the chanter, a tap can sometimes close the chanter entirely generating a silence rather than a lower pitch. For instance, on a conventional G fingering, the piper has the choice to tap with one finger generating an F#, or to tap with two fingers generating a silence. Since both use essentially the same finger movement to strike the chanter, they are both conventionally described as taps. Unlike cuts, taps are almost always used for rearticulating a note which has already been sounded.

As with cuts, the notation for a lower grace note is used here. Where the tap closes the chanter an 'x' notehead has been used at the appropriate pitch for the finger which closes the chanter. Because of the nature of the tap, a finger may not fully cover a hole or multiple fingers may make contact at minutely different times, so determining the exact pitch of a cut can be difficult. While I have tried to be as accurate as possible, the pitches given for taps and the distinction between closed and open taps involve a greater margin of error than other elements of the transcription.



Figure A.3 – (top, left to right) a tap on A, a tap on G without closing the chanter, a tap on G which closes the chanter; (bottom) a pitch graph of these gestures

Rolls

Rolls are produced by a cut followed by a tap. They are conventionally categorised into long rolls and short rolls (with the former implied when the term “roll” is used without further qualification). Long rolls include an initial articulation before the cut, for a total of three articulations of the same note, while short rolls begin with the cut so only two articulations are heard. Using Larsen’s (2016) terminology, double cut rolls, in which two cuts precede the tap, can also be encountered in both

long and short configurations. Different rhythmic organisations may be applied to these basic sequences. Larsen (2013) also distinguishes between regular and condensed rolls, the latter compressing the articulations of the roll into a shorter time. The combined notations for cuts and taps have been used throughout. While the frequently seen notations (\sim , \frown) for rolls or crans are useful for many transcription purposes (and less liable to be confused with devices from Western art music), they lack the details of finger choice provided by the grace note notations and have therefore been eschewed.

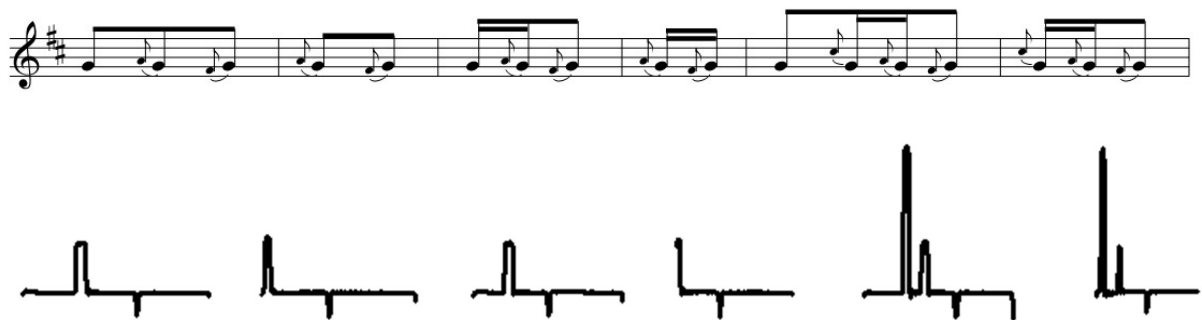


Figure A.4 – (top, left to right) a long roll, a short roll, a condensed long roll, a condensed short roll, an long double cut roll, a short double cut roll; (bottom) a pitch graph of these gestures

Crans

Crans, typically placed on the low D and E of the chanter, involve a series of cuts to provide a rapid series of rearticulations of that note. There are various ways of executing the cran, and many pipers have distinctive approaches. Almost all involve some combination of cuts using the F#, G and A fingers, with the precise sequence only having a subtle effect on the sound. As with rolls, Larsen (2013) distinguishes between long and short crans, based on whether an initial articulation of the main note precedes the first cut. A particularly distinctive approach to the cran is known as the Ennis cran after its most famous exemplar Séamus Ennis. O'Brien Moran (NPU 2009b) describes it as a cran in which the cut note A is lengthened into a full melodic note. As with rolls, grace notes have been used to notate the individual cuts which compose the cran.

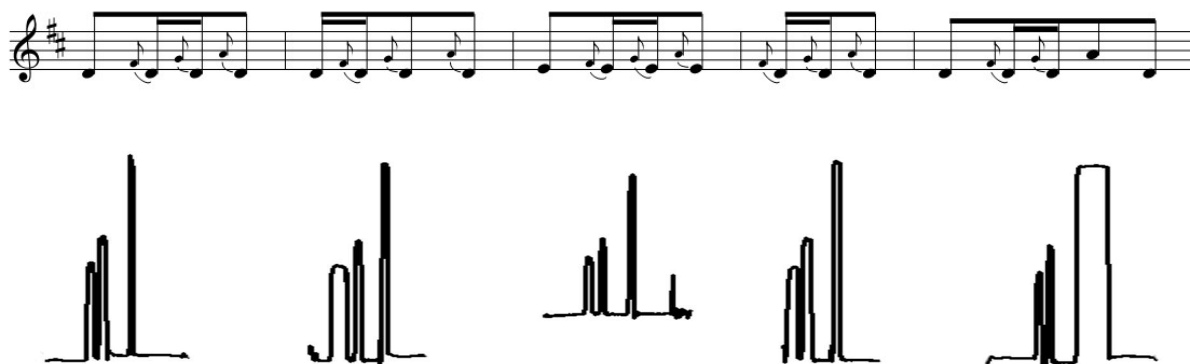


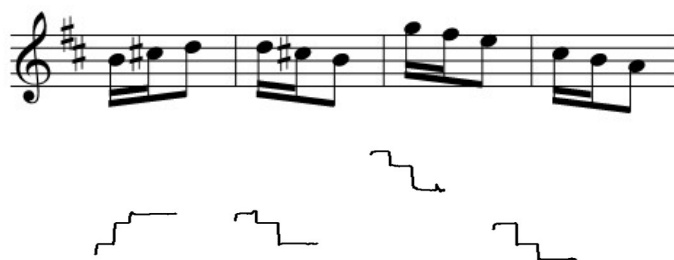
Figure A.5 – (top, left to right) two possible crans on D with different rhythmic divisions, a cran on E, a short cran on D, an Ennis cran; (bottom) a pitch graph of these gestures

Triplets

Sequences of three notes typically played in the space of two are known as triplets. Despite the name, they are rarely true triplets in the sense the term implies in Western art music, with their precise rhythmic placement varying subtly according to the individual. Triplets are identified verbally by the notes present, with the most commonly executed being ACA, BCB, BCD, FGA, GFE, FGF, and GFG (in all of which C signifies a C#, and F a F#). Since inserting a triplet in the context of a jig rhythm will produce four notes where three were expected, the term ‘quadruplet’ is sometimes heard. Triplets may be played as either tight (staccato) or open (legato) movements, with the latter especially associated with those that follow a scalar movement.



Figure A.6 – (top) common staccato triplets; (bottom) a pitch graph of these gestures



Backstitching

Backstitching involves the placement of two rapid staccato notes between a repeated melodic note. The most commonly inserted staccato notes are C# and A. When applying the technique to an upper hand note, the lower hand notes F# and G (in either order) are sometimes substituted for more ergonomic ease. It is particularly associated with the pipers Patsy Touhey and Andy Conroy.



Figure A.10 – (top, left to right) backstitches on the notes G, F#, B, and back D; (bottom) a pitch graph of these gestures

Trills

Trills are a rapid oscillation between a melodic note and a higher pitch. While some early method books contain fingerings for trills on a wider variety of notes (eg. O'Farrell 1804), the two which are commonly executed in modern piping are on E and F#, both using the upper pitch of G. These are particularly associated with Séamus Ennis, to the extent that they are sometimes called 'Ennis trills' (Ennis himself called them 'shivers'). Trills have been represented as individual notes in transcription.



Figure A.11 – (left) trills on the notes F# and G; (right) a pitch graph of these gestures

Vibrato

Vibrato is executed by oscillating a finger up and down over an open hole, either partially or fully covering it. It is particularly common on certain notes, particularly the back D and C#.

fingers used will often vary based on the chanter design and the piper's personal choice. Because of the lack of open holes, vibrato is essentially impossible on a low D. The symbol for a mordent in Western art music has been used throughout.

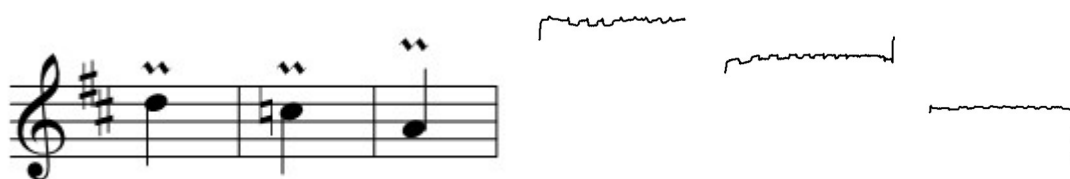


Figure A.12 – (left) vibrato on the notes back D, C#, and A; (right) a pitch graph of these gestures

On- and off-leg playing

The conventional placement of the chanter is typically considered to be resting on the piper's leg, with the thigh blocking the bell of the chanter. This allows the piper to generate a silence by placing all the fingers on the chanter, facilitating staccato effects and allowing the sounding of certain upper octave notes which are most easily achieved from a static reed. In certain situations the player will lift the bell of the chanter from the leg. The most straightforward of these is to sound the bottom D which requires the bell to be open. The chanter can also be lifted to generate a timbral difference, with a more complex harmonic spectrum and increased volume. Lifting the chanter without compensating for pitch by adopting a different fingering can also be used for microtonal effects, essentially detuning a given note. Rapid lifts of this nature are known as 'popping' or 'barking'.

Popping/ Barking

Popping (or 'barking') involves a rapid lifting and replacement of the chanter on the leg to give a rough accent resembling the yelp of a dog. It is especially common on the upper octave notes E, F#, and G. In keeping with Ennis (1998), the upbow (V) symbol has been used for popping.

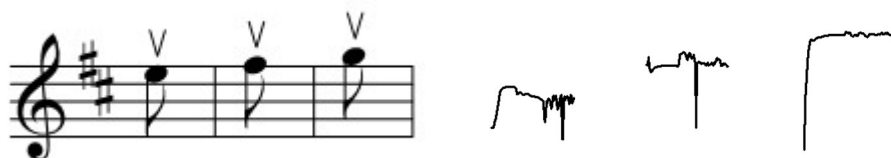


Figure A.13 – (left) pops on the notes E, F#, and G; (right) a pitch graph of these gestures

Hard/Soft D and E

Two different colours are possible on the bottom D of the chanter, corresponding to different states of vibration in the reed. The hard D, louder and richer in harmonics, is preferred in most situations and most pipemakers will tune their chanters so that the pitch of the hard D aligns perfectly with the drones. A cut on the pitch A and a slightly increased air pressure assists in sounding the hard D. The soft D is primarily heard when the note is unemphasised and sounded only briefly. Instability between these two states produces an undesirable gurgle, humourously known as the ‘autocran’. A hard E is possible on many chanters, using the same principles in conjunction with an off-leg E fingering, but is less commonly heard than the soft E. The distinction has not been pertinent to the research and so no special notation has been used.

Ghost D

The evocatively titled ‘ghost D’ refers to a note sounded by lifting the little finger of the bottom hand. The exact pitch produced falls between the back D and the Eb above it, depending on the design of the chanter, and has a distinctive muted timbre. It is frequently used for slides upwards to the E or downwards to the D. Occasionally it is used as a note in its own right (eg. Ennis 1961; Deegan 1999). To avoid unnecessary symbols, ghost Ds have been represented as a simple D# (a note which is unlikely to occur in any other context in uilleann piping)



Figure A.14 – (left) upward and downward slides from the ghost D; (right) a pitch graph of these gestures

C#

C#s are possible in both octaves, but the lower octave version is worthy of particular note here. On the uilleann pipes, it is typically sounded using a cross-fingering which produces an evocative timbre, is extremely manipulable in pitch, and is considered one of the most distinctive sounds of the instrument.

D. Features of Irish traditional music

Irish traditional music recognises a common repertoire of well over 10,000 instrumental tunes. None of these are considered instrument specific. While some tunes may be associated with a particular instrument and even described as ‘piping tunes’ or ‘fiddle tunes’, this indicates that they are idiomatic to that instrument rather than restricted to it.

Tunes are subject to both spontaneous and predetermined variation by individuals, lacking a universal or canonised ‘correct’ version. Even when a tune has a known composer, their version is rarely considered prescriptive. A player’s unique approach to a tune is often known as a ‘setting’ or ‘version’. Shared understandings of a given tune are therefore derived from a composite of different versions. They may be likened to a culinary dish in this sense. There are countless variations on how to bake a carrot cake, for instance, none of which can be said to be ‘correct’ to the exclusion of others - and yet there remains a broad communal consensus on what a carrot cake is and is not. A particularly unique setting can sometimes become a new tune in its own right identified with both the original tune and that particular musician, eg. *O’Donnell’s Sligo Maid* or *Tom Billy’s Butcher’s March*.*

When multiple melody instruments play together, tunes are typically rendered heterophonically with the musicians playing their own settings of the tune simultaneously. This often involves spontaneous compromise if the settings happen to conflict. In a band context, settings may be aligned more formally and precisely, and more arranged polyphony may be heard. Percussive or harmonic accompaniment may also be present, with musicians creating their own accompaniment to match the tune.

The majority of the repertoire is dance music, falling into a number of rhythmic structures which correspond to particular dances. The most common are reels, jigs, slip jigs, and hornpipes described below (for a fuller discussion see Williams 2009). Other tune types, including polkas, slides, set dances, waltzes, mazurkas, flings, and highlands are not featured in this thesis and therefore not described here. Tune types not used for dancing include marches and slow airs. Despite the

* See Ó Súilleabháin (1990) or Johannson (2017) for fuller discussions on the creative processes involved in interpreting a tune.

centrality of dance music to the repertoire, the majority of instrumental music is performed without dancers today. Doherty and Valley (2019) provide a historical and cultural outline of this transition. Most tunes in the repertoire possess two parts of equal length, sometimes referred to as the 'tune' and 'the turn' (a terminology which is becoming less common), the 'first part' and 'second part', or 'A section' and 'B section'. Tunes with three or more parts are not uncommon, with the 7-part piping jig *The Gold Ring* arguably the upper limit of the standard repertoire. Parts are repeated, meaning that the most common form is AABB for a 2-part tune, AABBCC for a 3-part tune and so on. Some tunes have anomalous forms such as *The Maids of Mt Kisco* (AABCC) and *The Trip to Durrow* (AABCBC). A tune is almost always repeated, potentially many times (especially for shorter tunes), but most are played two, three, or four times. Tunes are often played consecutively in 'sets' - two, three, or more tunes, usually of the same type. Some sets are universally recognised, such as the reels *The Tarbolton*, *The Longford Collector*, and *The Sailor's Bonnet*, referred to collectively as 'the Tarbolton set', while others may be particular to a community or individual, or devised spontaneously.

The vast majority of the repertoire falls into modes of D and G major, with modes of A major, C major, and F major occurring with decreasing frequency. The practice of Irish traditional music does not cohere precisely to the Western art music understanding of the church modes, but modes approximating the Ionian, Mixolydian, Dorian, and Aeolian modes are all commonly encountered (although this terminology is often confined to musicians who have studied music theory). Additionally, many tunes fall into 'gapped' modes, most commonly pentatonic or hexatonic variants omitting the fourth or seventh degree (or both) of the major scale. Modal ambiguity is common, with the notes F and C especially likely to occur in the same tune as both natural and sharpened. On instruments with the facility to play microtonally, intermediate pitches are also common. Sometimes the same tune can occur in different modes, such as the reel *The Bunch of Keys* which has Ionian, Mixolydian, and Dorian variants, as well as settings that occupy an ambiguous modality between two of these. When played on non-concert pitch instruments, such as many sets of uilleann pipes, the fingerings are not altered, meaning that they will sound at a different pitch. For a fuller account of modality and pitch in Irish traditional music, see Cowdery (1990).

Reels

Reels, believed to have a Scottish origin, are the most common tunes in the Irish repertoire. They consist primarily of a string of unbroken notes in groupings of four per beat. When notated, reels typically use a 2/2 time signature (4/4 is also commonly seen but less appropriate) with either four

or eight bars per part. The former, shorter reels are referred to as single reels and the latter as double reels. Reels may be played with a degree of rhythmic inequality, lengthening the first and third notes of every grouping and shortening the second and fourth correspondingly.

Jigs

Jigs are often considered to be the oldest dance tunes in circulation, though it is arguable whether the jig rhythm itself can be considered indigenous to Ireland. The tradition differentiates between single and double jigs (as well as slip jigs and hop jigs, addressed later). Double jigs are significantly more common, and usually referred to as 'jigs' without further qualification. They feature three-note divisions of each beat, typically in constant unbroken rhythm. Double jigs are commonly notated with a 6/8 time signature and almost always contain eight bars per part. As with reels, some degree of rhythmic inequality can occur, especially at slower tempos. Typically, the first note of each three-note group will be lengthened, and the second correspondingly shortened.

Single jigs are distinguished by a balance between three-note divisions of each beat (as characterise the double jig) and two-note divisions with the first note doubled in duration. They are typically played much faster than double jigs. When notated, they can appear in either 6/8 or 12/8, or occasionally even 4/4 with triplets occurring frequently. They bear a marked resemblance to slides, considered later. Due to a tendency to even out the two-note divisions of each beat, especially at faster tempos, they can sometimes also be mistaken for reels.

Slip Jigs/Hop Jigs

Slip jigs bear a resemblance to the double jigs discussed above, with even three-note divisions of each beat being the standard. The difference is that phrases occur in a three-beat structure in slip jigs, rather than the four that define the double jig. As such, they are typically notated in 9/8 with four bar parts. If slip jigs resemble double jigs in their note groupings, then hop jigs correspond to single jigs. They feature more two-note divisions and a faster tempo. Many musicians do not use the term 'hop jig', referring to both kinds of tune as slip jigs.

Hornpipes

Hornpipes are believed to be a more recent import from England. They are usually played slower than reels and often suggest an emphasis on every second note, rather than every fourth in a reel. They are typically notated in 4/4 time. Many hornpipes have a structure where the second part

reprises the ending of the first part at its halfway point. As with reels, hornpipes can be heard played very evenly or with a marked swing.

Slow Airs

Slow airs are non-metrical instrumental pieces. They are often the melodies of songs from the sean-nós singing tradition (see Williams and Ó Laoire 2011 for a full account of sean-nós singing), while others may be instrumental compositions (a number of laments fit this category) or songs for which the lyric has been lost. They can vary greatly in length, character, and complexity. Unlike other types of tunes, it is rare to hear multiple musicians playing slow airs in unison. Slow airs are highly venerated within the Irish musical tradition and especially associated with the uilleann pipes.

Appendix B – personal reflections

The following personal reflections and anecdotes were at one time intended to be interspersed throughout this thesis as a kind of commentary. This proved awkward to execute but I believe they still have a place in this research. I have included them here as a postscript in the hope that they will provide a final reflection on the concepts explored herein.

To my surprise, I could feel aspects of my playing unconsciously changing almost as soon as I took possession of the Derrick Gleeson C set I currently play. I remember one piping friend remarking that I had found “the perfect instrument for me” in much the same way that we sometimes speak about finding a romantic partner. In certain ways I feel a connection with my instrument which could reasonably be described as spiritual. When I first visited Derrick’s workshop in Coore, Co. Clare a few years later, I felt a certain thrill to be seeing the room in which the set was made and to think that it was returning home for the first time. Derrick’s comments about how happy he was to see “one of his babies” being cherished by its owner only served to reinforce this impression. Furthermore, I learned that the building had once been a famous pub which saw regular visits and countless hours of music from legendary musicians such as Willie Clancy, Séamus Ennis and Bobby Casey. In my more fanciful moments I like to imagine that some spiritual residue of that powerful music remained in those walls and infused my instrument as it was being built.

Another profound experience occurred on my trip to Ireland in 2014. A number of the pipers in attendance at the Scoil Acla summer school on Achill Island had flat sets pitched in B with them and it had become something of a tradition to have a B session on one evening. Such so-called “flat sessions” immediately establish something of an exclusive aura as players have to either tune their instrument down (in the case of fiddles) or, for wind and free reed musicians, possess another instrument in that particular tuning. On this evening Séamus Ó Rocháin, a piper from a renowned West Clare musical family, had travelled up bringing with him an almost holy relic, a Coyne set which had previously been owned by the great Willie Clancy. As an owner of a set in C rather than B, I was expecting to just sit and listen to the session. Séamus, however, handed me a beautiful chanter showing clear signs of age. Astounded, I confirmed with him that I was indeed holding Clancy’s original Coyne chanter. It was mine to play for the evening, Séamus explained, since he would be

playing a replica chanter he had commissioned as a more consistent and predictable alternative to the original.

Naturally I was deeply honoured and more than a little anxious. Was I really worthy of holding, let alone playing Clancy's chanter? The most remarkable part of the experience was that, as the evening progressed, I found myself playing more like Willie Clancy (a piper whose music I have studied and tried to replicate more than any other) than I ever had before or since. As before, one is tempted to think that the chanter was imbued with some spiritual essence of Clancy that emerged whenever it was played. A more rationalistic explanation would be that that chanter had a distinctive tonal character well known from Clancy's recordings, and any music played on it was liable to convey that association. Furthermore, in receiving the aural feedback of that chanter, I immediately began to hear Clancy's playing and my ears and memory naturally supplied yet more "Clancyisms", internalised from hours of studying his recordings, to my fingers.

Towards the end of my trip to Ireland in 2014, I returned to my teacher Mikie Smyth's house. I had left some belongings there in order to travel lighter and was there to pick them up and say my farewells to Mikie and his family. Mikie said he had a present for me - a festival t-shirt he had been given which did not fit him. (I ended up wearing it until it fell apart, occasionally having to confess that I'd never actually been to the festival in question.) As we stood outside his house, he reflected on the changes he had observed in my playing over my time with him. He congratulated me on the work I had put in, saying that my piping was 'much easier on the ear' now, but then proceeded to warn me: 'I think it might be a bit less interesting though. Bear that one in mind.'

In 2017, I was invited to perform a solo recital on uilleann pipes at the Bendigo International Festival of Exploratory Music. The more contemporary or experimental manifestations of Western art music have long been an important part of my musical practice, and I am thrilled to be able to present the uilleann pipes in this context. I end up commissioning and performing a 50-minute solo composition *A Book of Migrations* from an old friend Liam Flenady. In our collaborations Liam and I collectively devise a microtonal fingering chart covering some 180 pitches. Virtually every note of the composition is accompanied by a number stipulating one of these fingerings. The process of learning

its intricacies is nothing like the process of interpreting Irish traditional repertoire - but these are all fingerings I might use in that context. I find my fingers tracing unexpectedly familiar pathways, a serendipitous sequence of notes conjuring up the shade of Séamus Ennis or Johnny Doran. Memories embedded in fingers, instruments, sounds. Occasionally I feel my musical instincts, shaped in large part by Irish traditional music, pulling me in a different direction from the instructions on the page. More often, they seem to work in tandem. I may even temporarily forget whether I am playing a highly notated new composition or *The Collier's Reel*.

I have been playing in the Australian production of the musical *Come From Away* since the middle of 2019. Even given two extended lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I have played well over 500 shows in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. The vast majority of my part is written for whistles and Irish flute, with only a few short excerpts on uilleann pipes. Nevertheless, it gives me cause to reflect on both piping and Irish traditional music more broadly. Often, my role is to impart a feeling of authenticity to the score's evocations of Newfoundland traditional music (intimately related to Irish traditional music through both historical and contemporary connections). My attempts to channel a little of Ian Anderson notwithstanding, in a folk-rock score there can be no doubt which side of the equation I fall on. An understanding of style undoubtedly comes to the forefront here; what can I do to make this material sound 'Irish'? Not a difficult proposition when so much of it clearly references jigs, reels, and slow airs, but is this enough? I want my music to be more than just a tweed cap (if not a leprechaun costume), a comfortably assimilated symbol of imagined Irishness. I want it to be living, breathing, probing, struggling. I want the pathos, mischief, wit, and rapture of Willie Clancy. But of course, Willie did not have to contend with a score, a click track, and a musical director. I don't pull off this balancing act every time I play *Come From Away*, but sometimes it feels like I get close enough.

It is Thursday morning and I am about to submit this thesis. Perhaps unsurprisingly, my practice habits have fallen into a steep decline over the preceding weeks as this project occupied more and more of my attention. I am ecstatic about the prospect of re-immersing myself in my instrument, the repertoire, and the Irish traditional music community. And so, to commemorate this moment, I strap on the pipes. With no clear intention, I find myself playing *The Miners of Wicklow*. I try playing the

second part without cuts and taps as Joey Abarta does (it feels wrong). I try playing the first part completely open (it feels even more wrong). I play around with the D and E crans in the first part, first aiming for the crispness of Touhey's machine-gun crans, then opening them up for a gentler rolling sound. I attempt an Ennis cran (have I ever tried that in this tune?), a little insecure at first but quickly assimilated into the structure. I realise I can use the same principles to generate an 'Ennis-like' cran on the E rather than the D. It's a new idea for me (I don't think Ennis ever did it either) and I mentally file it away for further investigation. A few more jigs follow, *The Yellow Wattle* (where I find myself wishing I had Máire Ní Ghráda's ease with C natural rolls) and *The Newport Lasses*. Concentration flagging, I decide to finish with my favourite slow air *The Bright Lady*. I might have tried *Dark Lochnagar* but it's not quite all there in my memory, so I opt for the easier option. Even so, I'm rusty and have a few moments of uncertainty early on. After checking that my regulators are acceptably in tune, I tend towards the bass regulator more than I normally might, its deep rich organ tones contrasting with (and to be realistic, occasionally drowning out) the restlessness of the melody. I find myself remembering previous times I have played the tune: one of my first lessons in Mikie Smyth's dining room, at The Cobblestone in Dublin in memory of a friend's death, in a recording studio in West Footscray. To amuse myself, I find a place to slip in a little trill on the low F# à la Jimmy O'Brien Moran and Willie Clancy on *Dark Lochnagar*. And then I'm done, putting the pipes back in their case. I find myself wondering how this research process might affect the way I play in the future. Undoubtedly there are some new sounds and new techniques, not to mention new ways of thinking about old sounds and techniques. On a larger scale, the impact remains to be seen. But already I feel a sense of compatibility. What I hope to have achieved here - a respectful listening to the music and words of others, followed by the process of sitting with them, grappling with them, and reshaping them into something meaningful to you - is already embedded at the heart of uilleann piping.