AN HISTORICAL SKETCH OF TRADITIONAL^1
IRISH MUSIC IN THE U.S.

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Anyone who attempts to chronicle the development of traditional Irish music in the United States is immediately confronted by a distressing paucity of sources on the subject, either reliable or unreliable, which might provide a logical starting point for a reconstruction of the music's history in America. Before the 20th century, references to the music appear infrequently and are scattered throughout a welter of printed media, primarily in the form of brief captions and announcements in Irish-American newspapers and journals, theatrical and vaudeville advertisements, and random bits of biographia.

After the turn of the 20th century, the situation improves with the recording of Irish-American musicians on wire cylinders and discs. These were at first privately recorded on a small-scale, often informal, basis; after c. 1915 they began to be manufactured by commercial phonograph companies for mass distribution. However, the number and depth of printed sources remains pitifully meager and diminishes considerably as the century progresses. In addition, of the large corpus of private and public recordings—which might be expected to yield information regarding musical style, repertoire, and instrumentation as well as some insight into the impact of the recording process upon the subsequent development of the tradition—surviving copies of audible condition are scarce, and there has been to date no discographical study or attempted analysis of this rich, untapped lode of data.

In this reconstruction attempt, the reservoir of oral lore that exists among members of the Irish-American musical community has been utilized as the principal repository of information regarding the history of this musical tradition in the U.S. and has been supplemented by the judicious use and interpretation of the occasional references found in printed sources of the day. It should be understood that the current living memory of informants extends no further than the first decade of the 20th century and is rather hazy beyond 1930. Also, the bulk of printed references are sketchy and vague as to details of musical style, repertoire, and performance practice. Nevertheless, in both the oral lore and the printed miscellanea, it is possible to catch a few fleeting glimpses of traditional Irish music in America as it existed in the full vigor of its most flourishing, halcyon epoch.

The precise origins of traditional Irish music in America are woefully obscure. Emigrants from Ireland to America before the 19th century were largely descended from the stock of the Presbyterian Scots who had been imported from Scotland and established in the
northeastern section of Ireland to assist in the pacification and colonization that followed the final subjugation of the island by England in the 17th century. When they arrived in the American colonies, these Ulster Scots still exhibited a strong cultural affinity with Scotland, despite their sojourn in Ireland, and the musical traditions which they brought to the New World were undoubtedly derivative of those of the non-Gaelic, Lowland Scots culture from which they were but three or four generations removed.  

Although thousands of native, Catholic Irish were transplanted to the West Indies during the first years of the Cromwellian pacification program to serve as plantation slaves, there were relatively few Irish Catholics who emigrated freely to the North American colonies before the second quarter of the 19th century. Those who did emigrate arrived individually or in very small groups and were quickly assimilated. Also, the implacable, anti-Catholic prejudice that was firmly entrenched among many colonial Americans served as an effective deterrent to "papists" who might be contemplating settlement in Great Britain's American colonies. Many of the colonies enacted legislation which restricted Catholic Irish immigration specifically and deprived already-resident Catholics of all nationalities of various civil rights. These legal strictures began to disappear after the institution of the American Republic in the 1780s, but discriminatory legislation against all "undesirable foreign elements," particularly those from poor, Catholic countries such as Ireland, continued throughout the Federalist period of the new nation and successfully obstructed the free flow of Irish Catholic immigration.  

It is difficult to state with certainty what sort of musical traditions were possessed by the native Irish who did settle in America before the 19th century. The numerous historical articles dealing with these early arrivals are almost exclusively concerned with listing how many individuals with Irish surnames settled in various parts of the country or were encamped with Washington at Valley Forge; they are devoid of any descriptions of the cultural activities of the early American Irish. Similarly, the accounts of early American musical life center primarily on the musical occasions of the urban upper and middle classes or those of a few religious denominations, with occasional mention of the musical culture of the black slaves and no mention of the musical activities of lower-class urban or rural and frontier whites.  

If there were not a similar dearth of detailed information on the state of instrumental folk music in Ireland at this time, it might be possible to gain some insight into the musical culture of those Irish who emigrated to America during the 17th and 18th centuries. Few particulars are known concerning matters such as repertoire, style, and performance practices of Irish folk musicians, although travellers' accounts of the period (primarily English) often
mention the instruments in use among the native Irish peasantry.

The current consensus of scholars in the field of Irish folk music is that the bulk of what is presently acknowledged as traditional Irish music was created by the musicians of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Although a few remnants of the music of an earlier period still survive in the present repertoire in the form of instrumental airs derived from older song airs, the instrumental musical traditions of pre-conquest Ireland vanished during the period of cultural trauma that followed in the wake of the collapse of the Gaelic aristocracy and the accompanying social order. The 18th century was a transitional and protean period in which the heretofore highly distinctive musical traditions of the aristocratic and peasant classes were merged. Though the harp still held high status and primacy of place in the households of many of the new Anglo-Irish, the harpers of the 18th century were "already archaic and somewhat anachronistic" and represented a debased, degenerate form of the art. By the second decade of the 19th century, the already-moribund harping tradition was effectively extinct. In its place rose an instrumental tradition that had previously been confined to the lower orders of pre-conquest Gaelic society.

It is recorded in the memoirs of the Irish harper Arthur O'Neill that one of his 18th-century contemporaries, a blind harper named Owen Keenan, reportedly emigrated to America after eloping with his patron's French governess. However, it is more plausible that the first strains of traditional Irish music heard in the U.S. were sounded by either the uilleann pipes or the fiddle. These two instruments of the Irish peasantry had risen to prominence in the wake of the demise of the aristocratic musical orders and effectively filled the vacuum in the native musical tradition caused by the disappearance of the harp. Most of the present traditional repertoire was composed by now-forgotten pipers and fiddlers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and several of the basic stylistic techniques that have come to characterize traditional Irish music and are employed by all traditional Irish musicians are, to a large extent, modeled on techniques developed by early performers on the pipes and fiddle.

Irish emigration to the U.S. had begun to show a systematic increase throughout the 1830's and '40s, and, although the specter of widespread famine had more than once menaced the precarious existence of the Irish peasantry, the severity of the potato blight of the late 1840s left tens of thousands of Irish with no choice but emigration. Upon their arrival in America, they clustered into the burgeoning Irish communities which began to appear in every major urban and industrial area of the U.S. Their recent disastrous experience with agriculture was impressed indelibly upon their collective consciousness, and, for this reason and others, the Irish experience in America became synonymous with the
However, the entire previous history of the Irish had been oriented toward a non-urban life mode, and the culture that they brought with them to the U.S. was a product of centuries of rural, peasant existence. The transition from countryside to shantytown was painfully abrupt, and much of the old Gaelic culture did not survive beyond the first generation of exposure to the new social environment.

The traditional music and dance, however, proved remarkably resistant to assimilative and acculturative pressures. Though both arts were strongly rooted in rural, folk society, they were adapted to an urban, non-traditional environment with little initial difficulty. Traditional Irish musicians and dancers moved smoothly into the popular American entertainment milieu of the time and were frequently employed as performers on riverboats and on pleasure cruises, in hotels, saloons, dance halls, and theaters. The musicians often accompanied popular singers on nationwide concert tours and gained great public acclaim for their performances in travelling minstrel shows and vaudeville companies. Their activities in these troupes involved music, dance, and comic monologues and sketches. They were usually performed by pairs or trios but occasionally by one extremely versatile individual. Some of the more talented and illustrious Irish musicians of the era maintained a substantial livelihood in this manner.

Traditional Irish musicians of this period were also very active in the Irish-American communities and performed at various Hibernian social events such as picnics, house parties, balls, concerts, and numerous other formal and informal musical occasions, as well as for Irish dance classes and at neighborhood taverns. From all indications, the late 19th century was the most prosperous era for the Irish musician in America in terms of financial remuneration and high social status in the Irish-American community. This "golden age" was fittingly crowned by the erection in 1892 of Celtic Hall in New York City, which flourished as "the Mecca for the best class of Irish sociables and gatherings for many years".

Like countless other immigrants, the traditional musicians of Ireland were undoubtedly attracted to the U.S. by the prospect of increased economic opportunity. Prior to the 1840s, a considerable number of itinerant musicians roamed the Irish countryside, plying their trade among the peasantry and the lower classes of the towns and cities. Most of these musicians were pipers or fiddle players, though other instrumentalists also occasionally took to the roads. The status of these musicians was roughly equivalent to that of lower-class tradespeople who fulfilled a service function for the agricultural community, such as coopers, potters, tailors, basket-makers, and wheelwrights. His occupational role necessitated that he be both a specialist and a professional. Admission to the
itinerant ranks was attained through heredity as well as by choice, and status within the musical profession was generally achieved, while in the larger society it was ascribed. It remains only to add that the itinerant musician was almost always male.

The extreme fondness—often a virtual mania—of the Irish peasantry for their traditional music and dance is well-attested to by contemporary observers. Together with the dancing master—another male itinerant specialist and professional who was accorded higher social status by the community largely in deference to his refinement, gentlemanly dress and decorum, and role as an instructor—the itinerant musician figured prominently in the cultural life of pre-Famine Ireland. Indeed, says a noted Irish cultural historian:

> Pre-Famine peasant society, for all its poverty, had plenty of sport and gaiety about it. Music and song were woven into the very fabric of society, and the fiddler and uillean piper were kept busy at weddings and wakes, fairs and markets.

The massive social upheaval caused by the Famine was instrumental in hastening the demise of both the dancing masters and itinerant musicians. The immediate economic impact of the Famine was to effect the nearly complete impoverishment of the classes upon which the musicians and dancing masters depended for support. Although the dire economic condition of the peasantry would improve after some decades—mainly due to the emigration of most of the surplus population—the severe psychological trauma engendered by the "great hunger" proved more difficult to assuage. The national psyche was afflicted by a particularly stultifying lethargy which often combined with clerical puritanism to produce a listless, apathetic attitude regarding the pursuit of community cultural activities such as music and dance.

As the number of musical occasions and the functional value of the musical profession in community life continued to diminish, many musicians who had formerly maintained a livelihood as itinerant or semi-itinerant performers found themselves forced to abandon their occupation. Those who were old, physically handicapped, or vocationally unskilled were driven into the local poorhouse or workhouse. Those who were more mobile or vocationally versatile could either take up a new trade and attempt to settle down, take to the roads again and join the hordes of "travelling people" displaced by the Famine, journey to another part of Ireland where the situation was probably no less bleak, or leave the country altogether. It was during these chaotic post-Famine years that the U.S. received its first significant influx of traditional Irish musicians.

The traditional Irish musicians who arrived in America during this
period were undoubtedly quite pleasantly surprised by both the expanded range of economic opportunities and the increased social status accorded them in the Irish-American communities. Not only was the Irish musician popular with the cosmopolitan American audiences who thronged the music halls and minstrel shows, he was also recognized, as were the priest, politician, and publican in their respective domains, as playing an important role in the maintenance of Irish-American cultural solidarity while serving as a role model for young Irish-American males who aspired to achievement and public renown.

Upward social mobility was not beyond the grasp of many musicians who became professional performers or engaged in other commercial pursuits besides music. Celtic Hall in New York City, mentioned above, was constructed by an uilleann piper from Co. Leitrim named Patrick Fitzpatrick only eleven years after he arrived in America at the age of twenty-one, and there were several other instances of musicians who earned enough money to invest in saloons, dance halls, and theaters. This sudden rise in the economic and social hierarchies would not have been possible in the tightly structured economic and social networks of Ireland at this time, in which accession to land or a business concern was regulated by marriage and kinship variables.

The repertoire of the professional Irish-American musician was based on the same body of music shared by other traditional musicians in Ireland and America. However, musicians who chose a professional career in the U.S. were often required by the circumstances of their employment to perform quadrilles, strathspeys, waltzes, barn dances, schottishcees, show tunes, and even light classical music in addition to selections from the traditional Irish repertoire. To what extent the professional musicians can be considered as representative of the entire community of American Irish musicians is a matter of speculation. It seems, however, that, despite the potential for interchange between the musical cultures of Ireland and the U.S., the traditional Irish repertoire remained intact during this period of contact. The non-Irish music adopted by the professional Irish-American musicians was not introduced (or if introduced, was not accepted) into the traditional repertoire at this time. Full-scale acculturation in the Irish-American musical community came later, in the 20th century, as a result of a change in tastes and preferences of the American Irish audiences--indicative of their increased assimilation within mainstream American society--rather than from any development within the community of traditional musicians, creating the demand for musical entertainment that was neither traditional nor Irish.

The performance of several musicians in consort, except during informal sessions, does not seem to have occurred until the first decades of the 20th century. The tradition, except for occasional
duets and trios, remained one of solo performance throughout the 19th century. The fiddle, pipes, and transverse flute made up the first rank of instruments in use among American Irish musicians at this time. Although the tinwhistle was present, it does not seem to have been accorded much notice, but functioned primarily as the instrument used by novices when first learning Irish music. The melodeon and its successor, the two-row button accordion, came into fashion during the last three decades of the 19th century, but did not attain a significant niche among Irish-American musicians until the 20th century. It was also in the last decade or so of the 19th century that the practice of harmonic accompaniment on piano or guitar became increasingly widespread among Irish musicians in America—possibly introduced via the professional musicians of music hall and vaudeville.

There is little information on the stylistic techniques employed by Irish-American musicians of this period. One piper was described as favoring "the free and rolling style with a liberal sprinkling of graces and trills"; another was criticized for having a "too open and flute-like tone"; yet another piper's playing was characterized by "a choppy execution subversive of both rhythm and melody". Fiddle styles of the day are also a matter of conjecture, with players being described as "a fine free-hand performer" or the style as displaying "the exuberance of graces skilfully interwoven into the texture of the theme". It is likely that the first comment refers to the amount of free variation in the bowing style, and the second might indicate a lively, strongly-accented and profusely-ornamented style of playing, but one can only speculate.

What seems certain is that during this period the traditional Irish music found in the U.S. was marked by a wide diversity of stylistic traits that reflected the variety of provincial, regional, and local styles which existed concurrently in Ireland. Despite the phenomenon of musicians representing different sectional and stylistic backgrounds suddenly coming into close contact, no pan-American style of playing traditional Irish music emerged, although several Irish-Americans made significant stylistic contributions. Stylistic sovereignty was maintained, although some styles gained a large number of adherents for short periods of time. However, it was primarily in regard to the exchange and dispersion of repertoire that the increased interaction among musicians in the Irish-American communities had the most significant consequences upon the subsequent development of the tradition.

Traditional Irish music continued to thrive throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th, eventually producing performers who were not only outstanding musicians but important contributors to the development of the tradition in Ireland as well as America. Few of their names have survived into the present, however, since
those who maintain oral tradition are highly selective and often forgetful.25 With the advent of the recording process, it becomes possible to examine more closely the relationship of individual musicians to the evolution of the larger tradition.

The emergence of the commercial recording industry occurred as the "golden era" of traditional Irish music in America entered its final phase (c. 1920-1945). Along with the "race" or "Negro" series, the major labels also maintained a special "Irish" series that featured a variety of Irish-American performers and included several of the finest traditional instrumental musicians of the day. The recordings made during this period reveal an interesting assortment of instrumental styles that reflect not only the older styles brought over from Ireland in the immediate post-Famine decade, but ones subsequently developed in the U.S., as well as others first introduced by the musicians who arrived in the last great wave of Irish emigration in the 1910s and '20s.

As with the recording of other American folk and ethnic musics of the period, such as blues, jazz, and hillbilly music, the recording of traditional Irish music facilitated a wider dissemination and more extensive cross-fertilization of styles and repertoire formerly unknown outside a particular locality or circle of musicians. Although syncretic processes had already taken place to a limited extent in the repertoire of American Irish musicians, the diffusion of style was a much slower process wholly dependent upon personal interaction among musicians. Recordings rendered this method of style transmission obsolete by providing access to style on a mass, impersonal level that made it no longer necessary to know personally or to have ever heard the musician whose style one wished to copy or incorporate.

This acceleration and extension of the process of style acquisition exerted a profound influence on the future development of the tradition. Despite the fact that many of the styles in circulation among present-day Irish-American musicians are reflections of those currently popular in Ireland, the influence of these early recordings in shaping the norms of modern style in both Ireland and America has been substantial. Several of the players recorded in the 1920s and '30s are still revered as paragons of excellence by which the efforts of modern musicians are measured, and many of their tunes are played by present-day musicians in the same grouping, order, and setting as they were recorded forty and fifty years ago. Other tunes and tune-settings recorded during this period have since attained the status of "classics" or "standards" in the traditional repertoire and serve as test pieces by which musicians aspiring to eminence are judged. These recordings have become increasingly important since World War II, helping to preserve a sense of continuity within the Irish-American musical community.
In view of the many musicians recorded and the large number of recordings produced between the two World Wars, it would appear that traditional Irish music still retained a secure place in the musical affections of the American Irish. However, an examination of catalogues of the major recording companies from the late '20s to the early '40s reveals a steady decrease in both the number of Irish musicians recorded and the number of recordings produced, until by 1945 (in some cases much earlier), the "Irish" series had disappeared from the active catalogue lists. Although a half dozen of the best-selling traditional artists were retained on studio rosters until the end of the 1940s, the market for traditional Irish music had evaporated, and even reissued material sold poorly. A few small labels—notably the Copley company of Boston—carried on into the '50s, but were inoperative by the end of the decade.

The Depression was partially responsible for the diminished recording activity, but other factors of greater irreversibility were more decisive in contributing to the demise of traditional Irish music in the U.S. The increasing structural assimilation of the Irish into mainstream American society and their entrance into the realms of the American middle class were accompanied by the adoption of the cultural values and lifestyle of that society and particular social stratum. In most cases this movement up the social ladder involved the discarding of cultural paraphernalia such as traditional music and dance, pastimes and customs—items viewed as expendable or of no value in a society obsessed with the melting pot syndrome.

This vacuum created by the assimilation of first-, second-, and third-generation Irish-Americans was not, as in previous times, filled by a new wave of immigration from Ireland. Although civil strife and an unpromising economic situation brought 220,591 Irish to the U.S. between 1921 and 1930, the next decade witnessed the arrival of a mere 13,167. Only 1,059 Irish came to the U.S. between 1941 and 1945, but the post-war shortages of jobs and consumer goods were responsible for 26,444 Irish arrivals from 1946 to 1950. A brief flurry of immigration in the mid-1950s introduced some new additions to the Irish-American musical community, but the reduction of the once-steady stream of immigration to a mere dribble has robbed the Irish-American musical tradition of an important source of fresh input.

In recent years New York City has become the major focus for activity among traditional Irish musicians in the U.S. Its large Irish and Irish-American population, estimated at 315,000, has made possible the support of some forty to fifty schools of Irish dancing, a half dozen schools of Irish music, numerous musical occasions featuring traditional music of a high standard, and a class of semi-professional traditional musicians who derive a substantial portion of their income from public performance and
teaching. Another factor contributing to New York's status is that, with only two recent exceptions, all of the traditional Irish musicians who have been commercially recorded in the U.S. in the last two decades either live or have resided for lengthy periods of time in New York. The great number of active musicians and the frequency of public and private musical occasions have given New York musicians the reputation of being the most polished and practiced players in the country.

Musical activity among Irish-Americans in other cities has stagnated, although a few cities can still boast of three or four players acknowledged by their peers as "first-rate". Chicago long ago surrendered the position of eminence in Irish-American musical affairs it maintained in the 19th and early 20th centuries, although there are a number of active musicians and musical occasions there. Unlike New York, Chicago receives virtually no new permanent immigrants and very few transient arrivals from Ireland. The isolation of the Chicago musical community has been intensified by the severe lack of interest in traditional music exhibited by young Irish-Americans (although there are approximately a thousand or so students enrolled in schools of Irish dancing in the Chicago area). Efforts to organize the musical community along lines similar to those proven successful in New York have received minimal support from the larger community and have been marked by factionalism within the musical community itself.

Boston, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and San Francisco were also distinguished centers of Irish music at one time but have declined drastically due to general apathy, the lack of fresh blood from Ireland, and the inability of local musicains to replenish their rapidly-thinning ranks with young American recruits. Although attempts have been made to encourage young people to participate in local Irish musical events, the musical communities in these cities still consist overwhelmingly of musicians forty years of age and over who will likely be inactive in twenty years. Unless this "generation gap" can be filled to some extent, it is very possible that cities will eventually suffer the fate of Milwaukee, Baltimore, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, St. Paul, and St. Louis--cities with sizeable Irish and Irish-American populations now conspicuously barren of interest in traditional Irish music. Like some rare species of wildlife endangered by a sudden ecological shift, the traditional Irish musicians of the U.S. have become a breed threatened with imminent extinction.

However, any discussion of the present state of traditional Irish music in America must be cognizant of the slow groundswell of renewed interest that has begun to appear in various parts of the country among individuals encompassing a variety of ethnic and musical backgrounds. The last decade has witnessed the phenomenon or re-emerging ethnicity and a concern for various aspects of
ethnic culture as many nationality and racial groups in the U.S. have begun to question the wisdom of effacing their ethnic and cultural identity to achieve the anonymity and cultural desolation offered as rewards for successful assimilation into mainstream American society. The revival enjoyed by traditional music in Ireland in recent years has had a considerable psychological impact upon Irish musicians in the U.S., providing a model for a similar movement in this country as well as establishing a much-needed sense of solidarity with the Irish emigrants and descendants of emigrants who have preserved this aspect of their ethnic heritage often without benefit of nourishment from the tradition's source.

These and other occurrences, such as the more than one hundred American musicians who competed in the 1973 Fleadh Ceoil na hEireann at Listowel, Co. Kerry, augur well for the future of Irish music in America. In addition, Irish music has begun to attract the notice of the urban folk revival and its attendant media. Irish-American musicians have been injected into the established folk festival circuit, recorded by a label specializing in North American folk music, celebrated in Singout!, and hired to play in Greenwich Village clubs. While traditional Irish music will not prove as marketable or as enduringly popular among folk music devotees as has bluegrass, Appalachian music, and country blues, it cannot fail to benefit from the increased exposure; already, a noticeable change has occurred in the attitudes and performance of musicians who have been "discovered" in this manner. Buoyed by this new-found and unexpected appreciation, their pride and confidence in their musical abilities has grown, while their newly-acquired status as important musical artists has increased their stature within their own communities and resulted in a greater recognition of their role as preservers and propagators of the Irish cultural heritage. If this current wave of interest can be sustained over the next few years, there is every indication that traditional Irish music in the U.S. might well stave off its decline and enter into an epoch of vitality and prosperity unknown since the passing of its "golden era" in the early 20th century.

NOTES

1. This article was originally presented as Chapter I of an undergraduate thesis for the Independent Learning Program entitled "Farewell to Erin: An Ethnomusicological Study of Traditional Irish Music in the U.S." (April, 1974).

2. The terms "traditional Irish music", "Irish music", and "Irish folk music" as used in this article refer only to the native
tradition of instrumental music composed and performed by members of the community of Irish folk musicians, unless otherwise specified. This article does not deal with Irish folksong which, though clearly related to the instrumental tradition, is a separate development with its own repertoire, styles, aesthetic standards, and performance traditions. Neither does this article concern itself with the varied spectrum of "Irish entertainment" found in the U.S.--an innocuously general epithet that encompasses within its highly elastic boundaries a bewildering array of musical forms that range from the partially acculturated to the fully hybrid to the blatantly ersatz, all of them claiming to possess some sort of "Irish connections".


9. Ibid.


12. Breathnach, Folkmusic and Dances of Ireland, p. 61.


17. The cultural torpor of the post-Famine Irish countryside was the subject of frequent comment by contemporary novelists, journalists, and chroniclers. The following eloquent and impassioned appeal for rejuvenation was issued by traditional dance instructors in the first decade of the 20th century:

If we are to have a revival of things Irish we cannot in reason pass by the dances. This, however, is only the academic view of the question. The study of Irish dances can well afford to be put on a higher plane of consideration. No one who has given any thought to our town, and village, and, above all, to our rural life, can deny that it is sadly lacking in the most elementary resources of pleasure. This dulness, this death in life, has often been advanced, and surely with justice, as one of the main reasons for the terrible drain of emigration from our country. Everywhere people tell you that beyond the daily round of labour there is nothing to look forward to in Irish provincial life. Can it, therefore, be a matter for surprise that the noisy streets and music halls of foreign cities allure our people? It was not so at any time, so far as we are aware, in Irish history down to the end of the eighteenth century. Town and country life in Ireland, for many centuries within the ken of observant travellers, appears to have resounded with music of the pipes and the accompanying movements of the dancers. We would desire to see once more the village cross-roads peopled with merry groups of dancers, to hear the music of the pipes borne down the lanes between the white-thorn trees, in the interval between the long day of labour and the night of rest (O'Keeffe and O'Brien, A Handbook of Irish Dances, pp. 29-30).

18. "The travelling people" is the sympathetic term used for the small nomadic communities also known as "gypsies", "tinkers", and, in official government parlance, "itinerants". These were, and still are, groups of individuals and families who travel throughout Ireland living off the countryside and plying various skilled and semi-skilled trades, many of which have now become obsolete in modern Irish society. The genesis of these bands occurred in the wake of the Famine when thousands of farmers and their families were evicted from their holdings and given no alternative but to take to the roads. They were joined by tradespeople dislocated by the general social turmoil, migrant labourers, and, not
infrequently, formerly itinerant musicians who could no longer rely on their home community for support and were compelled to join a travelling band for reasons of survival.

20. Ibid., p. 310.
21. Ibid., p. 301.
22. Ibid., p. 263.
23. Ibid., p. 410.
24. Ibid., p. 375.
25. Most of those which have been preserved are to be found in Irish Minstrels and Musicians by Francis O'Neill, first published in 1913. It is a splendid volume of anecdotes, historical essays, and biographical accounts of over 250 Irish musicians, including many Irish-Americans of the 19th and 20th centuries. Though heavily biased toward uilleann pipers, it is the best contemporary source for information on traditional Irish music in the U.S.

26. "There are a dozen books that proudly recount the rise of Irishmen to American fame and fortune throughout the nineteenth century, but these instances are irrelevant to the main theme. Most of those who succeeded vanished as Irish." (John V. Kelleher, "Irishness in America", Atlantic 208 (July, 1961), p. 39.)


29. The Fleadh Ceoil na hEireann is the grand culmination of a series of county and provincial competitions for traditional Irish musicians and singers. It is a week-long event at which thousands of competitors, free-lance performers, and traditional music enthusiasts from Ireland, Britain, Australia, and North America converge to affirm the resiliency of traditional Irish music and song. In addition to the All-Ireland finals, the Fleadh features scores of exciting, impromptu jam sessions throughout the town at all hours of the day and night.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


