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# If I'd Been Polish, I Guess I'd Be Playing Polkas: An Examination of the Social Contexts of Traditional Irish Music in Rochester, New York

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George Michael

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IF I'D BEEN POLISH,  
I GUESS I'D BE PLAYING POLKAS:  
AN EXAMINATION OF THE SOCIAL CONTEXTS  
OF TRADITIONAL IRISH MUSIC  
IN ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the Center for Intercultural and Folk Studies  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
George Michael Stoner

May 1976

IF I'D BEEN POLISH,  
I GUESS I'D BE PLAYING POLKAS

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"IF I'D BEEN POLISH, I GUESS I'D BE PLAYING POLKAS":  
AN EXAMINATION OF THE SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF TRADITIONAL IRISH  
MUSIC IN ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

George Michael Stoner

89 pages

Directed by: Burt Feintuch, W. Lynwood Montell, and Kenneth W. Clarke

Center for Intercultural and Folk Studies

Western Kentucky University

Anthropologists, folklorists and popular writers have, in general, neglected to describe the social contexts in which traditional Irish music is played. Although the dance was probably the most important context for traditional Irish music in Rochester, as elsewhere in the United States and Ireland, interest among Irish-born Americans and Irish-Americans in traditional dancing has waned. At present, the most important social contexts for Irish music in Rochester are the session, the Feis, and various representational contexts. The session is by far the most important, and has developed as interest in the dance has declined. Unlike the dance, it is musician-focussed and music-oriented; few members of the community attend. The Feis is an institutionalized dancing competition for young people that many musicians dislike. Representational contexts are events, such as folk festivals, at which the musicians present their national music to people of other ethnic groups. There seems to be sufficient interest in the session and in Irish music in general so that the music will continue its popularity in Rochester.



## PREFACE

This thesis began as an attempt to discover and analyze narratives associated with traditional Irish fiddle tunes played by Irish musicians resident in the United States. Funded in part by a grant from the Faculty Research Committee at Western Kentucky University, I began fieldwork in New Rochelle, New York, on 17 May 1975 by attending The Fleadh Cheoil, a competition in which young people from four to twenty-four competed for cash prizes and ribbons by playing Irish tunes on instruments ranging from tin whistles to fiddles, in groups from two to seven, and alone. There are two Fleadhs held in this country, one in New Rochelle and one in Chicago. Winners go to Ireland to compete in the Irish national Fleadh. Despite meeting several older musicians in informal sessions at the Fleadh, I met no performers who knew any narratives or stories associated with the tunes they played. Friends in Rochester, New York, assured me that Irish musicians who lived there did know some stories about their tunes, so it was to Rochester that I turned my attention.

On 14 June I made my first trip to Rochester to attend a session at the Harp's Club, home of the former Gaelic football team and now a social hall for functions of the Irish community. Once a month the Irish Musicians' Club held sessions there. The June session was the last one for summer, and consequently there were many musicians in attendance. At that meeting, I was introduced to Ted McGraw, Marty O'Keefe, and Frank Murphy. Ted, an Irish-American, is a collector of

recordings and books on Irish music, and serves as a focal point for local musicians. He is "historian" for the session in Rochester, and was a catalyst in getting the Irish Musicians' Club started. Ted suggested that I speak to Frank Murphy and Marty O'Keefe about my project, and intimated that they would probably be most helpful. I recorded some of the session, and spoke to Marty and Frank over the course of the evening; they agreed to talk to me when I returned to Rochester.

I returned in July, when I spent three days, from 22 to 25 July, researching and doing fieldwork in the city. I spoke at length to both Marty and Frank and tape-recorded interviews with each of them. The interviews covered their musical backgrounds, how they learned to play, where they played, and when and why they emigrated to the United States. In addition, I asked about some of the tunes they played; specifically, if any had stories connected with them. I recorded Marty playing some tunes during my visit with him, but he could not tell me any stories about them; in fact, he remembered little about where he had learned specific tunes. I did not record Frank playing music, but he told me that there were no stories he could recall attached to any of his tunes. Ted, who learned to play the accordion under Frank's tutelage, could never recall Frank telling any stories about the tunes he played.

It began to seem that there were indeed few narratives associated with Irish fiddle tunes, a view supported by research which was being carried out parallel to the fieldwork. Nowhere could I find mention of stories or narratives associated with fiddle tunes, except by performers who used the stories as introductions to tunes in concert



performance (such as Robin Morton of The Boys of the Lough, a popular group), or musicians such as Seamus Ennis or Johnny Doherty in Ireland who were also renowned story-tellers. I had met no Irish-born musicians in America who routinely told stories about their tunes; indeed, the musicians in Rochester never told such stories when performing their tunes in my presence, claimed not to know any after persistent questioning, and, in fact, said very little about their music when they performed in session or in concert.

Although I had focussed on the narratives themselves throughout my research, I began to realize that the reason that they were not told by the musicians I was interviewing in Rochester was because such narratives--if they ever existed--were not pertinent to the contexts in which the music was being played. Indeed, I began to wonder if the contexts in which Irish music had traditionally been played were conducive to story-telling. Although attempts at reconstructing past events are only speculation, by examining present contexts for the music I was able to determine that the structure of the events themselves did not allow musicians to relate narratives associated with the tunes being played. My conclusions were reported elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

In the course of researching the narratives associated with fiddle tunes, I read everything about Irish music that I could find in scholarly and popular works. Aside from isolated mentions of dances in journals, novels, and books, mentions of sessions in popular works, and my informants' descriptions of these events, there was

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Stoner, "Narratives Associated with Irish Fiddle Tunes: Some Contextual Considerations," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society, October 1975.

little discussion anywhere of the contexts in which Irish music was played, either in the United States or in Ireland. I had felt a need for this kind of discussion when I began working with the narratives and, since I had never found one, I decided to write a thesis examining the contexts in which Irish music was played in Rochester. When I returned to the city on 10 October, I was again able to participate in a session and observe what went on in this most important event. The next day, I attended a Feis in Syracuse to observe another context in which traditional Irish music is played. This thesis, then, is a discussion of these and other important contexts in which the Irish musicians in Rochester play their music. Although it is based on fieldwork with the Irish in Rochester, I have drawn on comparative material from novels and studies of Irish life where applicable, especially in the discussion of the dance, always an important element in Irish life.

The thesis contains four chapters. Chapter I contains a discussion of the Irish musician and Irish music in a historical perspective in the United States and in Rochester. Chapter II presents a discussion of the role music plays in the lives of the informants for this thesis, Marty O'Keefe and Frank Murphy. It is mainly centered on their musical careers and educations, their emigration to the United States, and their subsequent activity as musicians here. Chapter III describes the social contexts in which Irish music is played in Rochester: the session, dances of various types, the Feis, and various "representational contexts." Chapter IV will present conclusions of the work. Material will be drawn from fieldwork experiences as a participant observer at many of the events, and from printed sources, both scholarly and popular, where such are available. When possible, parallels will be drawn with similar



events in Ireland.

I wish to acknowledge the contributions of several people and institutions who have helped in preparing this thesis. First, a grant from the Faculty Research Committee at Western Kentucky University enabled me to do fieldwork on which this thesis is ultimately based.

Individuals at several libraries were particularly helpful in research. The Reference Staff at Kutztown State College Library extended me the courtesy of inter-library loan privileges, and procured several important documents for me. The staff of the Local History Room at the Rochester Public Library, and particularly Dr. Joe Barnes, the city historian, were extremely helpful when I was in that city. Dr. Kenneth S. Goldstein, of the University of Pennsylvania, generously opened his considerable personal library for my use at some inconvenience to himself; without his help I could not have obtained several books vital to this thesis.

The staff at the Center for Intercultural and Folk Studies at Western Kentucky University aided and abetted my interests in many ways. Cam Collins encouraged an early interest in narratives associated with fiddle tunes, and provided moral support during early struggles with that subject. Dr. Mary W. Clarke encouraged my interests in too many ways to mention. Dr. Kenneth W. Clarke, Dr. Lynwood Montell, and Dr. Burt Feintuch served as my thesis committee, bringing to my attention many errors in the first draft of this thesis. Needless to say, the errors in the final draft are my own and do not reflect the admirable advice I received from all of them.

Several other people helped this project in various ways by

discussion or correspondence; particularly helpful in this respect were Lois Kuter, Michael Moloney, Miles Krassen, Daniel Michael Collins, and Breandan Breathnach. Burt Feintuch, even before he became Dr. Feintuch and took over the inadmirable task of overseeing my thesis, provided suggestions and ideas for research and thought. Skip Evans and Marie Brate were instrumental in introducing me to the musicians who became informants for this study. Dave Fry supplied moral support and discussion when such was sorely needed. Karen Lalik served as a capable and willing typist.

My wife Carol played an important role in the production of this thesis through her constant support and encouragement. She also applied her expert editing and proofreading skills to the preliminary draft of the manuscript.

Finally, a special thanks to Frank Murphy, Marty O'Keefe and Ted McGraw. Without the help of these three men, this thesis could not have been written.

CONTENTS

PREFACE. . . . . iv

Chapter

I. TRADITIONAL IRISH MUSIC IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE. . . . . 1

II. INFORMANTS AND THEIR BACKGROUNDS . . . . . 19

    Marty O'Keefe; Frank Murphy

III. CONTEXTS OF TRADITIONAL IRISH MUSIC IN ROCHESTER, NEW YORK . . . 37

    Dances; the Feis; the Session; representational  
    contexts; Conclusions

IV. CONCLUSIONS. . . . . 72

APPENDIX . . . . . 76

BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . . 82

DISCOGRAPHY. . . . . 87



## CHAPTER I

### TRADITIONAL IRISH MUSIC IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

There seems to be a growing popular interest in the United States in traditional Irish music. Sing Out!, a magazine concentrating on various forms of folk music, devoted an entire issue to Irish music not long ago. The magazine printed articles about Joe Heaney, an Irish ballad singer, Seamus Ennis, a celebrated uilleann piper, "Teach Ins" featuring Irish tunes to be played on various instruments, and songs from Ireland, many transcribed from recordings.<sup>1</sup> Capt. Francis O'Neill's larger collection of Irish tunes had been reprinted in this country in the 1960's, and other books of Irish tunes continue to proliferate in the popular market.<sup>2</sup> Record distributors, particularly those who specialize in recordings of traditional music, have steadily increased the number of LP's dealing with Irish traditional music in their catalogs. Sessions-- or music-playing events devoted primarily to Irish music and song--are held by Irish immigrants and attended by interested young Americans of all national backgrounds in many large cities in the East and in

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<sup>1</sup>Sing Out!, January-February 1973.

<sup>2</sup>Capt. Francis O'Neill, ed., O'Neill's Music of Ireland: Eighteen Hundred and Fifty Melodies, Arranged by James O'Neill (Reprint. ed., New York: Dan Collins, 1963). Other recent books of Irish tunes usually do not provide the methodology for collecting as did O'Neill in a variety of publications. Small companies specializing in folk music publications often list a number of such books; Andy's Front Hall in Voorheesville, New York, is one example.

California. Young Americans are learning to play Irish tunes on fiddle, flute, and tin whistle, an increasing number are becoming interested in the distinctly Irish uilleann pipes, and popular American musicians are adding Irish tunes to their repertoires. David Bromberg, a well-known guitarist, has recorded several on his latest record, and The Chieftains, a popular Irish group, have received a great deal of airplay for their work on Stanley Kubrick's Barry Lyndon.<sup>3</sup> Concerts by popular Irish musicians sell out regularly on college campuses and in eastern cities.

Unfortunately, scholarly attention to Irish traditional music (as to folk music in general) has not kept pace with this popular interest. Although some musicians in Ireland have been documented both by recordings and in scholarly studies,<sup>4</sup> there has been no study of a

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<sup>3</sup>David Bromberg Band, Midnight on the Water, Columbia PC 33397. The Chieftains play traditional Irish tunes; their settings for these tunes, however, are highly arranged, using harmonies and instrumental breaks by one or several instruments not usually found in group instrumental performances of traditional Irish music. The original Chieftains were brought together by the Irish composer Sean O Riada, and have played together for about a dozen years, releasing five records: Chieftains 1, Claddagh CC 2; Chieftains 2, CC 7; 3, CC 10; 4, CC 14; 5, CC 16; In addition, Paddy Moloney, and Sean Potts, two members of the group, have released Tin Whistles, Claddagh CC 15. The group has long been popular in Ireland and England but are just beginning to make inroads in the United States. Recent releases indicate that the Chieftains are moving into sort of "classical" music based on traditional Irish tunes and instruments and composed by Moloney. This is particularly evident on The Chieftains 5, and Barry Lyndon/Music from the Soundtrack, Warner Bros. Records BS 2903. See also "Piping Hot and Cool," Time, 12 January 1976, p.68.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, the recordings by Johnny Doherty: Johnny Doherty, Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann CL-10; Pedlar's Pack: Songs, Stories and Fiddle Tunes, English Folk Dance and Song Society LP 1003, repr. Soundpost Recording Studios FSA 074; The Fiddler and the Fairy: Tales and Tunes, Soundpost FSA 073; and The Star of Donegal: More Fiddle Talk and Tunes, Soundpost FSA 075. A paper on Johnny Doherty appeared: Paddy Tunney and Francis Collinson, "John Doherty: Fiddler King of Ireland," Chapbook 4(1967): 9-16.



traditional musician to compare with Robin Morton's Come Day, Go Day, God Send Sunday,<sup>5</sup> a study of traditional singer John Maguire; and no work on Irish music has appeared to complement Hugh Shields' study of Anglo-Irish balladry.<sup>6</sup> In fact, a great deal of fieldwork and analysis needs to be done to fill the gaps in scholarship on traditional Irish music.

The situation in regard to Irish musicians in the United States is almost as bad, if not worse. While several people recently obtained a grant to undertake fieldwork with traditional Irish musicians in Chicago, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, this research team has yet to produce material that scholars may utilize. Indeed, considering the scope of this endeavor and the vast amount of material that it is likely to produce, several years will probably elapse before the collected material or analysis of that material is available in published form.<sup>7</sup> Aside from the works of O'Neill<sup>8</sup> and the recordings of Irish traditional musicians done in the approximately

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<sup>5</sup>(London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973).

<sup>6</sup>"Old British Ballads in Ireland," Folk Life 10 (1972): 68-103. See the companion recording, Folk Ballads from Donegal and Derry, Leader IER 4055.

<sup>7</sup>The Pittsburgh Community Broadcasting Corporation of Pittsburgh, Penna., was granted \$18,520.00 by the National Endowment for the Arts Folk Arts Program for the fieldwork and interviews. Eventually, a series of radio programs and two long-playing records will be issued from the material, and the tapes will be deposited in the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University for public use.

<sup>8</sup>Besides the collection cited above, another recently reprinted book by O'Neill is The Dance Music of Ireland: 1001 Gems (Reprint ed., Dublin: Walton's Musical Instrument Galleries, Ltd., 1965), which contained just the dance tunes from the larger work. He also wrote several books dealing with his informants and collecting experiences: Irish Minstrels and Musicians with Numerous Dissertations on Related Subjects, Introduction by Barry O'Neill (Chicago: The Regan Printing House, 1913; reprint ed., Darby, Penna.: Norwood Editions, 1973); and

twenty-five years from 1920-1945 when recordings of ethnic music by commercial record companies flourished, little data have been made available from Irish musicians living in the United States, even though many of the early recordings made here had a significant impact on the development of music in Ireland.<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly enough, traditional Irish musicians living in the United States also had an effect on the tradition in Ireland through print. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Francis O'Neill, a Chicago police captain, collected over two thousand tunes, including jigs, reels, hornpipes, marches, set pieces, slow airs, set dances, and tunes attributed to Carolan, the Irish harper. These tunes were reprinted in several volumes. O'Neill also wrote supplementary works, one of them, Irish Minstrels and Musicians, is devoted to thumbnail sketches of Irish musicians, many of whom lived in America and served as O'Neill's informants. Irish Folk Music describes O'Neill's hobby, provides information about his collecting procedures, and talks about some of the tunes he collected, giving alternate titles for some of them. These volumes in particular serve as our only in-depth historical documents about Irish musicians in America. But the volumes of tunes also had a significant impact in Ireland, and O'Neill's Music of Ireland is considered to be the standard reference for tunes by Irish

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Irish Folk Music: A Fascinating Hobby, Introduction by Barry O'Neill (Chicago: The Regan Printing House, 1913; reprint ed., Darby, Penna.: Norwood Editions, 1973).

<sup>9</sup> See comments in Lawrence McCullough, review of The Musical Glory of Old Sligo and The Heyday of Michael Coleman, by Michael Coleman, in Folklore Forum, October 1974, pp. 302-307. See also Barry O'Neill, Notes to Wheels of the World: Classics of Irish Traditional Music, Morning Star 45001.



musicians. I have seen musicians in a session playing along with an unfamiliar tune by sightreading a version straight from O'Neill. I have also seen the volume in the homes of musicians who do not sightread music. In this regard, the book has achieved an almost symbolic role in the culture, reinforcing a cherished element of the culture of the musicians: their music.<sup>10</sup>

In the United States today there are many fine traditional performers of Irish music alive and playing, but this fact may well be unknown to many, considering the lack of attention paid to these performers. In fact, these musicians represent little-studied examples of what happens to the repertoire of a traditional musician in a foreign country, what role music plays in the life of a performer, how music functions as a symbol of ethnic identity, and how a performer copes with acculturation.

Unfortunately, scholars undertaking studies of this nature are hampered by a lack of background material. This gap exists not so much in the area of repertoire as in the study of the music-playing context itself. Collections of Irish tunes, such as the O'Neill collection, do represent many of the tunes that Irish Americans seem to play. But although O'Neill provided a vast corpus of tunes, he was almost silent about the contexts in which the tunes were played, except for occasional isolated mentions of informal sessions, appearances in bars, and occasional mentions of dances. Had he been more specific about the contexts of the music, we could have learned a great deal about the ways that recent immigrants from Ireland

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<sup>10</sup>See Richard Dorson's comments about the symbolic value of books to his immigrant informants in, "Is There a Folk in the City," in The Urban Experience and Folk Tradition, edited by Américo Paredes and Ellen Stekert, Publications of the American Folklore Society Bibliographical and Special Series, Vol. 22 (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1971), pp. 45-46.



were handling their contacts with an urban American culture and how those contacts were affecting their music and the contexts in which their music was played. This is just one of the inadequacies of O'Neill's work that maddens modern scholars, but, since O'Neill was writing for a popular audience, it is astounding that he bequeathed us as much as he did.<sup>11</sup>

While anthropologists have been interested in how an item of oral or aural artistic expression fits into culture, folklorists have been guilty of O'Neill's sin of omission. Most folkloristic works until the 1960's--and even at present--have neglected to include even the most basic information about the contexts of items printed in their vast lists of collectanea. Even recent studies are not immune from this tendency, although scholars are paying more attention to context. Many studies have demonstrated the importance of context in understanding the text itself.<sup>12</sup> Describing the context involves describing the social and cultural environment in which a text is embedded as well as describing its narrator, where he learned the text in question, how he performs it, and how it compares with other items in his repertory. This is basic material to accompany any text. But just as important to the kinds of studies that

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<sup>11</sup>For a discussion of O'Neill's shortcomings, see Barry O'Neill, "Introduction," in Irish Minstrels and Musicians, p. vii.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Dan Ben-Amos, "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," Journal of American Folklore 84 (January-March 1971): 3-15; MacEdward Leach, "Problems of Collecting Oral Literature," Publications of the Modern Language Association 77 (June 1962): 335-340; Alan Dundes, "Texture, Text and Context," Southern Folklore Quarterly 28 (1964): 251-265; and "Metafolklore and Oral Literary Criticism," The Monist 50 (October 1966): 505-516; E. Ojo Arewa, "Proverb Usage in a 'Natural' Context and Oral Literary Criticism," Journal of American Folklore 83 (October-December 1970): 430-437; Robert A. Georges, "Toward An Understanding of Storytelling Events," Journal of American Folklore 82 (October-December 1970): 313-328.

folklorists are beginning to publish are questions about the interaction of the performer and his audience, performer interactions with other performers, and considerations of the where, what, why and how of performance. Not only is the concept of the item in its context of performance in a small group important to recent statements of folklore scholarship (see Dan Ben-Amos, for example<sup>13</sup>), but it was presaged by MacEdward Leach, who wrote,

I believe that a collector completely fulfilling his obligations [for other scholars] must work toward four objectives: first, he must collect and present his materials as oral literature; second, he must collect the matrix of his material; third, he must collect the singer or tale teller; and fourth, he must collect what is necessary for a presentation and a study of the folkesthetic.<sup>14</sup>

Later, Leach states a very important point: "...in the telling [sic] is the characterization and the drama, absent in the story when merely read..."<sup>15</sup> Leach emphasizes again the importance of collecting the matrix of the material, but cautions against letting that consideration get ahead of consideration of the oral literature about which he was most concerned.<sup>16</sup>

It was Alan Dundes who added the term "context" to the vocabulary of folklorists through several papers written in the middle 1960's.<sup>17</sup> From Dundes' original articulation of the concept of context have sprung many important studies. One particularly relevant paper is Arewa's "Proverb Usage in a 'Natural' Context and Oral Literary Criticism,"<sup>18</sup> because it

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<sup>13</sup>"Toward a Definition," pp. 3-15.

<sup>14</sup>Leach, "Problems," p. 335. <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 336. <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>17</sup>Dundes, "Texture, Text and Context," pp. 251-265; and "Metafolklore and Criticism," pp. 505-516.

<sup>18</sup>Arewa, "Proverb Usage," pp. 430-437.

provides a model for the study of individual generic units in their performance context. From his collection of materials and responses of informants about their use of proverbs, Arewa was able to ascertain native guidelines about proverb performance and evaluate the effectiveness of the proverbs in oral use. Further interest in context was exhibited by Ben-Amos, who was concerned with defining folklore in its context of performance, and by Robert Georges who provided a model for studying interpersonal communications in the story-telling event.<sup>19</sup>

This study is similar in intent to some of the above-mentioned studies, but differs somewhat in execution. Music is not oral literature, being neither oral nor literature, and this is not an attempt to formulate a model for judging musical performance in context. Neither is it a collection of tunes, although music is of central importance to the events described here. The O'Neill collection, especially when coupled with modern commercial phonograph records, still serves as a basic source for repertory information.<sup>20</sup> Rather, this thesis is an examination of the social contexts in which traditional Irish music is played in this country and particularly in Rochester, New York. As such, it attempts to fill gaps left by those who have studied repertory in the past, and will serve--I hope--as a prolegomenon for further study of Irish music in the

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<sup>19</sup> Ben-Amos, "Toward a Definition"; Robert A. Georges, "Toward Understanding Events," pp. 313-328.

<sup>20</sup> Commercial phonograph records pertinent to the study of the repertoire of Irish traditional musicians are released on a number of Irish and English labels, among them Claddagh, Topic, Gael-Linn, Leader, Outlet, and Tara. Some American companies with releases pertinent to the study of Irish traditional music are Folkways, Tradition, Philo, Morning Star, Rounder, and Innisfree. Breandán Breathnach, Ceol rinne na hEireann (Dublin: n.p., 1972), was recently reprinted and is a fine collection of tunes.



culture of traditional Irish musicians living in the United States, and, by comparison, in Ireland as well.

Ideally, study of the events in which traditional Irish musicians anywhere in the United States play music should proceed from some understanding of the Irish musician in this country and in the locale being studied. This aspect of Irish immigrant history has been neglected by academic historians and popular writers alike. Information about Irish musicians in America exists in a plethora of unrelated, uncollected, and uncollated sources. Lawrence McCullough, in attempting to write a brief history of traditional Irish music in this country, has succinctly stated the difficulty in procuring even basic sources:

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 biography.

After the turn of the 20th century, the situation improves with the recording of Irish-American musicians on wire cylinders and discs. These were 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 public and private 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 the rich, untapped lode of data.<sup>21</sup>

McCullough's study is the best, of any length, that is available on the subject to date.

McCullough theorizes that although there were Irish in America

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<sup>21</sup>Lawrence McCullough, "An Historical Sketch of Traditional Irish Music in the U.S.," Folklore Forum VII (July 1974): 177. Hereinafter cited as McCullough, "Sketch."

before the nineteenth century most of them were Ulster Scots who would carry a strong affinity with Scotland and the lowland, non-Gaelic tradition there in their cultural make-up.<sup>22</sup> Early in the nineteenth century Irish Catholics began emigrating to the United States, and, in fact, several of the first settlers of Rochester, New York, were Irish Catholics.<sup>23</sup> Emigration for Catholics had always been hampered by strict, anti-Catholic laws in many colonies, and public prejudice continued to be a problem even after freedom of religion was legalized by the United States Bill of Rights. McKelvey points out that the arrival of the Catholics in Rochester brought divided Protestant groups in the city together in opposition to the Catholics.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, there was an outburst of anti-Catholic sentiment in Rochester in 1829-1830, and these outbreaks continued sporadically throughout the century as the Catholic population in the city increased.<sup>25</sup>

By the time of the potato famine in Ireland, however, public opinion had relaxed enough to allow huge waves of destitute Irish Catholic immigrants to reach our shores. In Rochester alone, McKelvey says, "The city's total growth between 1850 and '55 was approximately 7,500 and more than half of these came from Ireland. Indeed, the Irish-born doubled in these five years and with their children comprised a fourth of the population."<sup>26</sup> Among these immigrants were surely fiddlers and perhaps players of the uilleann pipes who had been itinerant musicians in Ireland. At home, these travelling musicians made the rounds of bally and booley

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<sup>22</sup>McCullough, "Sketch," pp. 177-178.

<sup>23</sup>Blake McKelvey, "The Irish in Rochester: An Historical Retrospect," Rochester History XIX (October 1957): 1-2.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.    <sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-4 and ff.    <sup>26</sup>Ibid., p.6.



playing for house dances in the winter, and at fairs, patterns, weddings and crossroads dances at other times of the year. For existence they depended on the farmers who in turn depended on the potato. When the potato crop failed, both were deprived of a means of livelihood, and the alternative to sure starvation in Ireland for farmer and musician alike was emigration.

Unfortunately, history does not record when the first Irish musician set foot on our shores, nor do we know what instrument he played, although the fiddle, the flute, or the uilleann pipes are the most likely ones. At any rate, the Irish found job opportunities aplenty in their new home. By 1855, when Jeremiah O'Donovan visited the city of Rochester, he found Irish people in all professions. The head of the city's largest store was an Irishman and there were Irish professionals, merchants, furniture dealers, and tradespeople.<sup>27</sup> Musicians probably found ready employment in many nonmusical capacities, and were in demand for their music as well, since their countrypeople in the United States had a higher standard of living and could afford more musical entertainments. As a consequence, Irish musicians in Rochester probably played in clubs, saloons, and in vaudeville shows. In addition, they undoubtedly played for dances and house parties similar to the ones the Irish had been accustomed to having in Ireland.

From those of the better musicians who began to play frequently and

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<sup>27</sup>Jeremiah O'Donovan, A Brief Account of the Author's Interview with his Countrymen And of the Parts of the Emerald Isle Whence They Emigrated. Together with a Direct Reference to the Present Location in the Land of their Adoption, During his travels through various states of the Union in 1854 and 1855 (Pittsburgh, Penna.: Published by the author, 1864; reprint ed. as Irish Immigration in the United States: Immigrant Interviews, New York: Arno Press, 1969), pp. 326-331.

in many performance contexts evolved a class of professional musicians. These musicians usually made their living by playing in various social contexts, not all of them particularly oriented to their local community or even to an Irish community which shared a common background. Many became travelling vaudeville performers, others performed on riverboats and in saloons. This necessitated, undoubtedly, a change in their repertoires to accommodate the varied musical tastes they encountered among their audiences. Since they could make a good living by playing music, a high standard of performance aesthetics buoyed by continuous practice developed among them. They cultivated virtuoso instrumental techniques, a blending and refinement of regional styles brought to the United States from Ireland by the emigrants. They often sported elaborate instruments symbolic of their high status and improved earning power, especially the uilleann pipes. Some American-made pipes were elaborate and flashy affairs, silver and ivory mounted, with four or five regulators as opposed to the traditional two or three, and broad German silver keys. Several pictures in O'Neill's Irish Minstrels and Musicians feature American professionals and their flashy pipes, and O'Neill says that Nicolas Burke played a set of pipes with an ivory, not wood, chanter.<sup>28</sup> The virtuoso instrumental tradition in this country culminated in the recordings, during roughly 1920-1945, of several American musicians such as Patsy Touhey and Michael Coleman who were to have a major influence on traditional music in Ireland through their recordings alone.

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<sup>28</sup>See p. 281; for a picture of other pipers, see pps. 262, 264, 311 and 314. There is a picture of Nicholas Burke with his pipes on p. 280. See also Barry O'Neill's comments in his Introduction, p. vii.



Parallel to the development of these professional musicians, similar in some senses to itinerant musicians in Ireland, developed a class of non-professionals that I call domestic musicians.<sup>29</sup> In America, these people worked at a variety of occupations not related to music and played during their free time in the local community. These musicians had their counterparts in pre-Famine Ireland in the persons of farmers and crofters who played fiddles or flutes at local dances and in their own homes during long winter nights. Although many were competent performers, for one reason or another they never reached the level of virtuosity required of stage musicians, or, if they did, never became widely known outside their local community. Hence, they developed a repertoire of well-played tunes suitable for dancing at informal local entertainments, were accepted by their fellows and even accorded a high-status role in the local community. They probably envied the professionals, whom they were able to hear occasionally at local bars or on the vaudeville stage, and may have tried to emulate their styles for playing in their own performances. Besides providing the music for local events, they also served as tutors for younger musicians in the community.

O'Neill collected tunes from professionals such as Patsy Touhey,

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<sup>29</sup>The term "domestic musicians" is entirely of my own devising. Unfortunately, no one but O'Neill saw fit to chronicle the class I am describing in the rest of this paragraph. My description of these musicians and their activities is extrapolated from what I know of musical traditions in Ireland and elsewhere, conversations with traditional musicians from both Ireland and the United States, and from knowledge of the development of homemade music in the United States as opposed to the recorded, commercial tradition recorded here from 1923 until the 1940's and reported and analyzed in a growing number of publications. I am suggesting that the development of Irish traditional music in this country followed a parallel development although the virtuoso aspect of the tradition has been more widely studied, probably because it has been documented by recordings which have had an important impact on the development of traditional music in Ireland.



but many of his informants were part-time musicians who held a variety of other jobs. We do not know if the Irish community in Rochester contained as many good traditional musicians as did the musical community in Chicago about which O'Neill wrote, nor do we know if the Rochester Irish reached as high a level of instrumental proficiency as did the men with whom O'Neill played. Little is to be found in standard historical sources and, of course, McKelvey does not concern himself with Irish musicians in his paper. In addition, the people who attend the present session are recent arrivals in the city, having left Ireland in the 1940's; hence, they do not know how they fit into a larger picture of traditional Irish music in their community. In fact, we know little about what went on in terms of traditional Irish music in Rochester until about 1945. A several-volume scrapbook pertaining to vaudeville in Rochester, upstate New York, and nearby parts of Ohio and Canada contains few references to vaudeville acts employing Irish musicians, and I could find no mention of Patsy Touhey in this work. Few other acts featuring Irish instrumentalists and singers were mentioned. One might therefore conclude on the basis of this material that few such acts appeared in Rochester.<sup>30</sup>

It is indeed unfortunate that we do not know anything about the traditional Irish music played in Rochester from 1880 to 1945. These years, as McCullough points out, were important ones for Irish music in this country. Never again would there be as much musical activity. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, both emigration and acculturation had proceeded apace. Newly arrived Irish immigrants found that the children of friends and relatives who had preceded them had become

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<sup>30</sup> John Fenyessey, Scrapbook, 4 vols., Rochester Public Library, Rochester, New York.

Americans. Although the native music of the Irish-born was being kept alive by both professional and domestic practitioners, the tastes of the young, affected by the urban environment in which they lived--and, later, by commercial recordings of all kinds of music--were changing. By the time emigration slowed, the mainstream of Irish traditional music which had been steadily infused by new blood from Ireland was beginning to show the first signs of drought. The era of sound recording (circa 1920 to 1945) captured the end of the "golden era" of Irish music in this country. Further drops in immigration before and after World War II--except in the years 1946-1950--effectively reduced the number of musicians emigrating to the States and the fresh musical input they provided.

Although there seems to be no way of knowing what went on in Rochester before about 1945 or 1946, the next several years were active ones for the musical community there. Dances were held at the local hall of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and also at the Harp's Club, the home of the city's Gaelic football team. Weddings and house parties were other affairs at which dances were held--requiring musicians from the community--and home football games by the Harps were celebrated by a dance. A clipping from a local newspaper describes a fiddling contest between the Irish of Rochester and the Irish of Syracuse.<sup>31</sup> Both musicians who represented the Rochester Irish are still alive. One of them, Jack O'Keefe, Marty's brother, still attends the sessions and plays occasionally. Although once a very good fiddler, he is aging and no longer as smooth as he once was. The other fiddler, a woman, is said to have given up fiddling entirely. Although she still recognizes Irish

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<sup>31</sup>Del Ray, "Their Fiddles Will Sing Sweet Tunes From Emerald Isle for Hibernians," Rochester Times-Union, 15 August 1947.



tunes, she prefers American fiddling. Attempts by Marie Evans to encourage her to attend a session have failed.

The Irish musicians played for various other entertainments during the late 1940's and early 1950's, but they are far less active now. For one thing, they are all older, as are other Irish-born citizens of the local community. Perhaps that is one important reason why many people have lost interest in typically Irish entertainments. Indeed, the music is now represented as often at non-Irish contexts such as international folk festivals as it is at house parties. The Feis, a dancing competition featuring Irish dances, requires live music for the dancers, but is a strict, low-paying, unpleasant context for the music and is disliked by the musicians who tell a variety of personal experience narratives about their experiences in playing for various Feisanna. Ted McGraw was the catalyst in organizing an Irish Musicians Club about two years ago and in beginning the monthly sessions. Begun in the social hall of the Harp's Club building, the sessions have changed location recently when that building was sold, and are now being held in the rear of a bar on Lake Avenue in Rochester.

Although there are 3,211 Irish-born residents of Rochester--about one per cent of the city's population--and over twice that number in Monroe County,<sup>32</sup> interest in typically Irish entertainments seems to be dying out. At present the local Ancient Order of Hibernians is moribund. Located in a run-down section of town, the AOH building is usually closed, and Frank said that only an 81 year-old man in poor health would bother

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<sup>32</sup>U.S., Bureau of the Census, Census of Population and Housing: 1970 Census Tracts, Rochester, New York (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), Table P-2, p. P-17.



to open it. The session is vital and flourishing primarily because of the musicians' interest, but also is attended by young Americans interested in the music and older Irish people of both sexes. Other expressions of ethnicity seem bound to symbolic holidays and events--St. Patrick's Day and the Feis, for example. This may be due to the fact that the community is no longer receiving transfusions of new blood from Ireland. This is certainly the reason for the decline of interest in the Harp's Club. During the 1940's and 1950's when fresh young blood from Ireland was available for the football team, Harp's Club affairs were reported in the pages of local newspapers. As young men stopped emigrating, more men dropped off the team as they grew older, got married, began raising families and working. The team was eventually discontinued. The Harp's Club building continued to function as a social center for the Irish community, hosting wedding receptions and other events, but the building was sold recently because its remaining members could not afford to maintain it.

Assimilation of the group's younger generation, especially children of immigrants, has always been a problem for the Irish-Americans proud of their traditions and the Irish in Rochester are no exception. Although Marty's children dance at Feisanna they have shown no interest in playing his music, and are even beginning to lose interest in dancing. His oldest daughter, Kathleen, plays the guitar, but her tastes run to contemporary music. Marty intellectualizes this conflict and is philosophical about it, but the fact that he has mentioned it several times to me indicates that it might be a sore point--as indeed it must be for other Irish-born Americans who are proud of their ethnic background and see their children abandoning national traditions that they value.

Traditional Irish music is not dying out in the United States, however. There is a great deal of activity centered in New York City, Boston, Chicago, and other large cities in the northeast. Professional musicians gather at centers for music such as Bunratty's Pub in the Bronx. In addition, Irish musicians who live in many other communities in the United States continue to make music in small sessions and present their native music at numerous public events.



CHAPTER II  
INFORMANTS AND THEIR BACKGROUNDS

Although I have talked to several traditional Irish musicians in Rochester in the course of my fieldwork there, I have decided to focus on two of them in this thesis. They are Marty O'Keefe and Frank Murphy, who are both currently living in Rochester. Both Frank and Marty are quite active musicians, playing for dances, frequently attending the sessions in Rochester, and also playing for Feisanna in Rochester and elsewhere. Both of them cut their teeth on the music they play by attending dances; after they learned to play, they played dances in Ireland at weddings, house parties, at crossroads, and in local social halls. This chapter describes the background of each of the musicians in turn: how they learned their music, the musical environment of their home country, emigration, and how music fits into their life in this country.

Marty O'Keefe

Marty O'Keefe comes from the countryside near Killkee, County Clare. Killkee is located on a peninsula bounded on the north by the Atlantic Ocean and on the south by the mouth of the River Shannon. It is an area of small farms where oats and potatoes are a main crop and cattle are becoming important.<sup>1</sup> The climate is generally mild and humid, as is common in the west of Ireland. Marty grew up on the southern side of Killkee, in a district rich in music and musicians. In fact, the

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<sup>1</sup>T.W. Freeman, Ireland: A General And Regional Geography, 3rd Edition (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1965), pp. 378-379.



crossroads dance, once so common in Ireland, survived there into the 1930's, although it had since died out in many other parts of rural Ireland.<sup>2</sup> Although parts of County Clare are Irish-speaking, and Marty's own area of the county was classified as part of the Breac-Ghaeltacht,<sup>3</sup> Marty never learned to speak Irish well. His knowledge of the language has faded considerably since he moved to America where he does not have to use it at all.

Marty's family was not particularly musical, although his mother did play the concertina, an instrument that has declined in popularity in Ireland but still retains a strong foothold in County Clare.<sup>4</sup> Marty says, "...it wasn't an expensive instrument, and there was a lot of music in it."<sup>5</sup> His father did not play an instrument, but his older brother Jack

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<sup>2</sup>Frank Murphy says that in his district in County Mayo, crossroads dancing was a remembered, but moribund, activity.

<sup>3</sup>The Breac-Ghaeltacht is an area in which 25-80 per cent of the population speaks Irish. Research has shown that Irish lost ground among the adult population in these areas between 1926-1936, the years that Marty was growing up there, but was on the rise among the young. This was largely due to schooling in the Irish language. See Freeman, 167-169.

<sup>4</sup>Breandan Breathnach, Folk Music and Dances of Ireland ([Dublin]: Educational Company of Ireland, 1971), p. 91. Breathnach says that the concertina was particularly favored by women, although recent releases of traditional Irish concertina players on the Topic-Free Reed label from London, England, have concentrated on male players. Frank Murphy also asserts that while he has seen many women accordion players, he has yet to see a woman playing a concertina. Cf. the Topic-Free Reed releases, 12TFRS502, Bernard O'Sullivan and Tommy MacMahon, Traditional Anglo Concertina Music from County Clare; 12TFRS503, Chris Droney; 12TFRS504, John Kelly; and 12TFRS505, Bernard O'Sullivan and Tommy MacMahon, vol. 2.

<sup>5</sup>The information about Marty's life and quotes by him are taken from an interview recorded on 22 July 1975 in his home in Rochester, or from my field notes of conversations we had on 22 July and 23 July. Copies of the interview can be found on cassette tapes T(C)1975-126 and T(C)1975-127 in the Western Kentucky University Folklore and Folklife Archive at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

learned to play the fiddle while Marty was still quite young. Marty asserts that he did not learn much from his brother: "Well, I suppose he'd be an--um--inspiration, but ah anyways I learned it [the music] from going around to dances and different places and hearing it continuously over a period of years."

Music was a necessary part of life in County Clare, as it provided year-round entertainment in a world without electronic marvels to occupy people's minds. Musicians were needed to furnish music at crossroads dances and other social functions. Young people were encouraged to learn to play an instrument by their recognition that the musician's role in the community was a high-status one, and that musicians were respected--and essential--in the rural Irish community. Marty says:

...you didn't have other types of entertainment. You didn't have television, we'll say...so what did you do? You walked out of a Sunday afternoon, and you walked as far as the crossroads to meet other people and talk to them. And, ahm, a, danced or conversed, whichever the case may be.... Somebody was always anxious to learn to play an instrument because he was kind of a needed individual around the locality.

Marty's musical training, at first, was typical of other beginning musicians in his area. Long winter nights were spent visiting an older, more experienced musician to learn techniques and tunes, and a great deal more time was spent practicing what the musician had demonstrated:

Oh, there was a lot of ahm, there was a lot of time put in when--they worked at nights, you had nothing else to do, so you went to another musician and you, ah, learned a part of a tune each night, and ah, go home and practice it and come back again, and learn the other part of it--and you were very lucky if you learned a tune in a week, or if you learned them even--some of them tunes--if you learned them in a month, you were lucky.... And then it was up to you to perfect it afterwards, because you'd play with that musician and you'd try to get all the techniques that he had, you know.

This sort of musical education was apparently a common one in Ireland among young people hungry for music (and indeed, among traditional



musicians everywhere). Learning from an older musician was an advantage to the young, since they could learn by imitating that musician's techniques and learn his tunes by rote. These older musicians also provided a link with an older tradition. An account of a similar experience in learning to play comes from County Kerry via John O'Donoghue:

...There was one particular person I wanted to help, however, for he was after doing me a lot of good turns over the years. His name was Shaun Heeila. He taught me to play the melodeon and it must have been a trying job for him on account of my great slowness in picking up the notes. Many a night Conneen O'Grady, my sister Bridget and I stole away...and crossed the lonely haunted moor that lay between our house and his. We always got a great welcome from himself and his wife, even though they had a big family of young children and could easily have been upset by visitors like us at the time. Shaun was a jolly old soul, always ready with a laugh. I never saw him frown as he sat on the kitchen chair, his head thrown well back and his eyes fixed on the ceiling as he played. ...he opened and shut the bellows of the melodeon and pressed the keys very slowly so that Conneen or Bridget could call out the notes so that I might write them in a passbook.

"Press three, draw three; press four, press four, draw five,"<sup>6</sup> I recorded as each note was shouted over to me on the settle until Shaun had given me the full tune of "Two Blind Donkeys," a simple polka, as well as many jigs, reels, and hornpipes of traditional descent, popular in the valley for ages.

...Shaun told us a host of stories as well as playing the music.... A stone fell on his left hand when he was a child at Morley's Mountain and damaged the sinews so that he could not move its fingers. Only for that, he said, he would have been either a fiddler or a piper instead of a mere melodeon player which he thought too common an art even though he excelled in it. Many of the tunes he gave us had been learned from old Pad Bwee, a celebrated wandering piper....<sup>7</sup>

As is common to many traditional musicians, Marty learned most tunes in their context as music for dancing by hearing them played at dances and dancing to them himself: "...I went around to different dances

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<sup>6</sup>A system of musical notation is described by Breathnach, p. 90, in which a caret, "^", or a bar, "-", represented the direction of the bellows, and a number represented the note--or more precisely, the button on the melodeon which was pressed to sound the note.

<sup>7</sup>John O'Donoghue, In Kerry Long Ago (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1960), pp. 115-116.



within a twenty mile radius of there you know, and learned all the tunes I could, you know." Indeed, Marty was exposed to a wide variety of music and musicians, and there were many instruments popular in his district. The main instruments used were the fiddle, flute, concertina, and accordion.<sup>8</sup> The flute was either the old-style, open-holed German wooden flute, which Marty calls a "timber flute," or the "tin flute," or tin whistle. The concertina was probably of the German type described by Breathnach rather than the English style of concertina.<sup>9</sup> The accordions were two-row Hohner button accordions; Paolo-Soprani, the brand now popular in Ireland, had not yet been introduced. Percussion accompaniment was provided by a snare drum, spoons (ordinary metal tablespoons), bones (the dried rib bones of cattle), or a "tambourine" (a large frame drum with a goatskin head). The "tambourine," also known as a bodhrán, was made of cleaved oak and covered with a dried, tanned goatskin that could be adjusted with strings stretched around the back of the frame. It was played by using the knuckles of the right hand to beat out a rhythm to the music.<sup>10</sup> Jew's harps were also used to provide a rhythmic accompaniment to dance tunes, and mouth organs were common. Musical "instruments"

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<sup>8</sup>These instruments were the standard ones for playing the folk music of Ireland. See Breathnach, pp. 83-91, for a brief description of each instrument.

<sup>9</sup>See Breathnach, pp. 90-91.

<sup>10</sup>The bodhrán has been revived in Ireland, largely due to the efforts of the late Sean O Riada who included the instrument in his *Ceoltoiri Cualann*. It has always been associated with ceremonial occasions, such as "the hunting of the wren," but was also used as a rhythm instrument to accompany dance music, as Marty notes. Indeed, a bodhrán is included on three cuts on an LP reissue of music recorded in the 1920's and 1930's by early ceili bands. See Reg Hall, ed., *Irish Dance Music*, Folkways FW 8821, side 1, bands 4 and 7, and side 2, band 4. Caoimhín O'Danachair describes the instrument's use in "the hunting of the wren" ceremony in "The Bodhrán--A Percussion Instrument," Cork

were improvised, if necessary, from a pocket comb and a piece of paper:

"Music is music when you have nothing else, kind of...." Marty said.

Although popular elsewhere in Clare, the bagpipes were not played around Killkee. Marty did not hear the distinctly Irish uilleann or union bellows-blown pipes, or the war pipes, similar to the Highland bagpipes but having only two drones,<sup>11</sup> until later in his life. This is particularly interesting because Milltown Malbay, only twenty miles or so up the Atlantic coast from Killkee, was the birthplace of the late Willie Clancy, a famous uilleann piper.<sup>12</sup>

Lilting was common in the country where Marty grew up, and Marty himself is an accomplished lilter.<sup>13</sup> Lilting was not only a way of

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Historical and Archaeological Journal 60 (July-December, 1955): 129-130. A bodhrán with a stick in pictured in E. Estyn Evans, Irish Folkways (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 280. Although O'Danachair describes the making of a bodhrán, a much more complete discussion of various styles of bodhrán making is Micheal Ó Suilleabháin, "The Bodhran," Treoir, Márta/Aibreán March/April 1974, pp. 4-7. An article by the same author discusses playing styles, "The Bodhran 2," Treoir, n.d. Vol. 6, no. 5 1974, pp. 6-10.

<sup>11</sup>Breathnach, pp. 73-83, provides a general description of the uilleann pipes. A brief history, bibliography, and discography are in Burt Feintuch, Liam O'Flynn, Uilleann Pipes and Tin Whistle: Notes for the Recording FSUP-T101 (Philadelphia; Folklore Society of the University of Pennsylvania, 1972). The war pipes and Highland bagpipe are more familiar; the Irish piob mor, or war pipes, are similar to the Highland pipes but lack a third drone. A brief description of this instrument is in Francis Collinson, The Traditional and National Music of Scotland (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1966), pp. 159-197. Collinson's The Bagpipe: The Story of a Musical Instrument (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), contains a complete history of the Highland pipes and touches on other forms of bagpipes as well.

<sup>12</sup>There are several recordings of Willie Clancy available. The best one is Willie Clancy, The Minstrel from Clare, Topic 12T175. For more information about Clancy, see Brendan Breathnach, "The Man and his Music--Willie Clancy," Ceol 2:3, pp. 70-77.

<sup>13</sup>There are several forms of vocal dance music in the British Isles. Lilting is a form that has developed largely in Ireland using nonsense syllables following the tune; lilting can be quite complicated,



remembering tunes or calling them to mind for other musicians, but had a definite purpose as vocal dance music. Marty explains,

...back in Ireland before you had your tape recorders and record players, and there were no musicians around, the person usually what they called lilted for a song, or subsidized for a musician. For instance, there'd be somebody playing maybe, and ah the fiddle would break--they'd break a string in the middle of the tune.... There'd be somebody to fill in the, they'd say, [lilts a tune as an example].

Although Marty no longer lilts for dancers, he does use lilted to illustrate musically a particular tune he might be talking about. He also uses it to illustrate to other musicians a tune he might be thinking about during a session. Since the titles of Irish tunes vary from county to county or even district to district, it is often easier for a musician to recognize a tune by hearing it than it is for him to recognize the tune by a title furnished by another musician.

Marty presently plays the fiddle. Several years ago, he had an accident at work and lost the second and third fingers on his left hand to the first joint. He has not stopped playing fiddle but there are some positions he cannot play as a result of his accident, and he had to relearn his fingering technique when his fingers healed. His accident did curtail his playing of the "timber" flute and the tin whistle, both of which he has given up entirely. During his convalescence, he bought a button accordion and began to play it because he did not have to use his left hand to finger the notes. When he and Frank Murphy play together

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and simple ornaments can be introduced by the lilter. Scattered recorded examples of lilted do exist: Joe Heaney, Come All Ye Gallant Irishmen, Philo 2004; Packie Byrne, "Folk Classics Series," English Folk Dance and Song Society LP 1009; Alan MacWeeney, coll., The Traveling People of Ireland, Lyrichord LL178; Diane Hamilton, coll., The Lark in the Morning, Tradition TLP 1004; The Boys of the Lough, Live at Passim, Philo 1026 and Transatlantic TRA 396; Ulster's Flowery Vale: Traditional Songs and Music of the North of Ireland, BBC Radio Enterprises Record 28M; Planxty, The Well Below the Valley, Polydor 2383 232.



at Feisanna, Marty always plays fiddle and Frank accordion. On these occasions, Marty plays tunes slightly differently from their usual settings; Frank plays many tunes in "C" on the accordion, and Marty retunes his fiddle so they play harmony to each other.

Marty has always played by ear and never learned to "read the notes." Actually, although he picks up tunes rather easily by ear, he expresses admiration--and perhaps some envy--for those who can sight-read, such as Frank Murphy. He is sensitive enough to this lack of skill--as he sees it--to comment on it several times over the course of the night. Once during our conversation he spoke of another Rochester musician with whom he occasionally plays, and told me of the admiration he has for this musician, who is a facile sightreader. To illustrate his point, Marty went to considerable lengths to play a portion of a cassette tape that he made of this musician playing a tune by sight while Marty's daughter Kathleen practiced her dancing for the Feis. It was the first time this musician had played the tune, and the tape amply demonstrated his ability to sightread well. At another point, Marty played a jig for me, and when I asked him what the name of the tune was, he said, "I don't have a name for that one. Say, let's say, "Tune without a name." But, I suppose if I struggle through that book for about four weeks, I'd find it somewhere."<sup>14</sup>

Despite the fact that he learns tunes by ear and not note, Marty maintains a small collection of books about Irish music, including books of tunes, which he keeps on a shelf in his dining room along with a set of encyclopedias. He is familiar enough with these books to discuss

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<sup>14</sup>"That book" is O'Neill's Music of Ireland.

contents, and remembers many of the tunes they contain. For example, when we were discussing the origins of some of the tunes he plays, I was asking him about stories or legends attached to their creation or naming. Marty was quick to point out that O'Neill doesn't print any stories of this type, and also told me about the practices of people who wrote the other books he possesses. Marty also has a small collection of LP recordings of Irish traditional music, and a collection of homemade cassette recordings of traditional Irish tunes. These range from recordings of commercial releases such as some albums by the Chieftains to recordings of friends playing Irish tunes.

Marty came to the United States in 1947, landed in New York, and went to live in Katonah, about eleven miles from White Plains, New York. He also lived in Baldwin Place, outside of Mayopac between Peekskill, New York, and Danbury, Connecticut. At that time, he was one of the few Irish immigrants in that area. He went to New York occasionally to go to various clubs, but since he did not run into any musicians in the city, he ended up going there less frequently. About the same time he met his wife, Theresa, herself an emigrant from Tuam, County Galway. This was a very unsettled period in Marty's life, and he did not play his fiddle very much.

At this time, Marty was coping with life in a new country by trying to adopt American customs, at least to some extent. One way in which he was trying to fit into a new life was by giving up the fiddle--a tie to his ethnic background and an older way of life for him. He explains it this way:

"One thing is that you come into a strange country, you think... that who wants it business. ...You're kind of shy in bothering people with "Comeallyes," you see. Then after a while you say to



yourself, you know, well, this is traditional [emphasis is Marty's]. They may not understand it, but it is traditional, see. ...but that is I think what happens to people when they want to become Americanized really fast....

This seems to be part of a pattern for other Irish, especially those who are not buoyed up in their first months or years in this country by the presence of others born in their native land with whom they can share a common ethnicity. For instance, Marty tells the story of a musician he knows from Pittsburgh who did not play for eight years after he reached the States. Then one night at a concert, "...somebody said to him, "Will you play a few tunes," and he just started doing it."

Marty moved to Rochester in 1950 or 1951--he is not sure of the exact date. He had relatives there--a brother, a sister, and an aunt and uncle. He was also attracted by the aura of the city--one of prosperity and "action," as he put it. Marty moved into a rather large Irish community in Rochester, one that was active in promoting various aspects of Irish ethnicity. For example, there was a large and active chapter of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, several other Irish clubs, and the Harp's Club, with which Marty associated until the building was recently sold. The Harp's Club was the home of Rochester's Gaelic Football team and was, in the 1950's, a thriving organization constantly gaining influxes of new members from younger emigrants from Ireland. The Harp's Club sponsored regular dances for the home team and visitors before matches, and served as a locus for other social functions. In Rochester, too, Marty met other Irish musicians with whom he could play at the various club events, house parties, and dances, including Frank Murphy and his brother Jack. Marty "filled in" a little at these occasions, but did not begin playing regularly again until his children began dancing at Feisanna about



fifteen years ago. He feels that music, like swimming, is something you don't forget--"you just get a little stale on it."

### Frank Murphy

Frank Murphy's background is quite different from Marty's. Frank grew up in Westport, County Mayo, which must have impressed Thackeray so much that he described it at some length in his The Irish Sketch Book.<sup>15</sup> Mayo is a county of small farms which get even smaller on the densely populated coast.<sup>16</sup> The main crops are oats and potatoes, and most farmers raise a small patch of green crops and have a tiny meadow where they maintain cattle, sheep, poultry, and a few pigs. Since the farms are so small and the population density so great, many of the boys and older men serve as farm laborers elsewhere. County Mayo is part of the Breac-Ghaeltacht, but Frank did not learn Irish at home. He does recall that only ten miles away to the north, however, there was an area that was heavily Irish-speaking, and he remembers hearing the shepherds there giving orders in Irish to their sheepdogs.

Frank learned his music in Ireland, but his musical education was spotty and more difficult than Marty's. Frank's father played the accordion and his mother had some songs. Frank himself played the mouth organ when he was younger, and knew several jigs and reels on the instrument, but he only began to get serious about his music when he was about twenty. He "got a liking for the violin"<sup>17</sup> when he heard someone

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<sup>15</sup>William Makepeace Thackeray, The Works of W.M. Thackeray, vol. XVIII: The Irish Sketch Book and Critical Reviews (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1879), pp. 218-229

<sup>16</sup>Freeman, p. 409.

<sup>17</sup>Quotes and information about Frank Murphy are taken from an interview recorded in his home in Rochester on 24 July 1975 or from my field

playing one, and decided that he too would like to play. His search for a violin finally ended when he bought a second-hand fiddle from a family who had bought it in the States, but had never learned to play it, and had stored it when they returned to Ireland. Frank had the fiddle repaired and restrung, and then tried to learn what he could about the instrument. However, few of his neighbors were musically inclined, and no one in the neighborhood even played the fiddle. Thus Frank, unlike Marty, could not go to another musician to learn the art of traditional fiddling, and his education in that art was sketchy, at best, when he first began playing.

One of his neighbors did know enough about the instrument to show Frank how to tune it, and suggested that he buy a "tuner" (perhaps a pitch pipe) to help him until he could tune by ear. It was not until a traveling dancing teacher<sup>18</sup> arrived in the area to demonstrate and teach dancing that Frank got a chance to make significant gains in his ability

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notes of that visit. Also present at the interview was Ted McGraw, an Irish-American, himself a collector of recordings of Irish music and possessor of a large library of books dealing with the music of Ireland. Ted, an accordion player, learned his art from Frank Murphy.

Cassette Recordings of this interview are T(C) 1975-128, 129, and 130, on deposit at the Western Kentucky University Folklore and Folklife Archive at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

<sup>18</sup>The traveling dancing teacher was a well-established institution in Ireland in, at least, the eighteenth century. Constantia Maxwell, Country and Town in Ireland Under the Georges, Revised edition (London: George D. Harrap & Co., Ltd., n.d.; reprint ed., Dundalk, Ireland: W. Tempest, Dundalgen Press, 1949), p. 156, says:

The Irish peasants learned to dance from dancing masters of their own class who went from cabin to cabin accompanied by a piper or blind fiddler. "It is," wrote Arthur Young, "an absolute system of education." Young refers to jigs and even to the minuets as being danced by barefooted boys and girls....

William Carleton describes a dancing master in "The Dancing Master," Tales and Stories of the Irish Peasantry (Dublin: James Duffy, 1845),



to play the fiddle. The dancing teacher was also a fiddle player, and she taught Frank a little about the instrument: "...she showed--she'd give you the scales and where to get the scales on the fingerboard of the violin. So, that was, that was the real beginning...." She also taught Frank something about sightreading, enough so that if he worked hard enough he could pick up a tune from musical notation. Frank notes, however, that these rudiments were barely enough; he spent a good deal of time and effort trying to teach himself more about his instrument. Unlike Marty, who could profit from another's knowledge and expertise, Frank's playing was the result of trial and error applied to the little knowledge that he had been able to gain from his teachers:

...you had to be really dedicated to it, you had to be really, you know, really fond of it, you know [laughs] because you--the help they gave you didn't amount to that much, you know. You had to [coughs] [go] searching and studying yourself with it. Which ah, which we did. Because it 'twas...the winter nights are long and dark. There's nothing, there's no television to watch....

Although Frank now had some basics of the fiddler's art, he knew few tunes. He expanded his repertoire by reading notes and picking up tunes from musical scores, and also learned tunes by ear. These came to him in three ways. He did learn tunes by going to dances and learning them as they were played, as Marty had. Although crossroads dancing had died out in Frank's part of County Mayo, there were dance halls in every town where people congregated to dance. There were also house parties that lasted from dusk until the early morning. When Frank was first learning to play, he got together with other musicians and played with them, and learned tunes by ear this way.

Frank did learn some tunes by visiting other musicians in the

neighborhood and picking up their tunes by ear. One he remembers with fondness was a neighbor who played the tin whistle:

...there was a man around our place, all right, who could really knock music out of that. Just this...his was only just the bare tin, you know, silver, like aluminum--unpainted or nothing, just a bit of tin with a piece of wood stuck in here.<sup>19</sup> And to hear him play that, boy, and never took a lesson! ...and ah, he'd picked them [his tunes] up as he heard them. Maybe on records, you know, or maybe somebody'd whistle them, or like that. Or heard somebody else play 'em.

Such musicians were few, however, so Frank learned many tunes from 78 rpm records which were far more plentiful. It was rather easy to buy records in town at a small music shop which sold records and post cards. Frank bought records there when he could. They were mostly recordings of Irish ceili bands,<sup>20</sup> but the store also carried recordings of singers such as John McCormack and Percy French. Frank remembers hearing records by Finn McCool's Ceili Band<sup>21</sup> and also Austin Stack's Ceili Band. In the early 1940's, Frank remembers hearing Steven Garvey's band, a more elaborate

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<sup>19</sup> During the interview, Frank was holding a Clarke tin whistle, and his comments here are clearer if this is understood. There are two types of tin whistle now being sold. One has a cylindrical bore with a plastic mouthpiece. The other, of which the Clarke is the most popular variety, is conical. The Clarke whistle is painted black and has designs in gold painted on it, and there is a wooden plug in the mouthpiece. As Frank points out, it differs only in its coloration from a type of whistle sold in Ireland for decades.

<sup>20</sup> A ceili band is a group of musicians who play traditional Irish music for dancing traditional Irish dances. Frank calls traditional Irish music, jigs, reels, and hornpipes, "ceili music," differentiating between it and the fox trots and waltzes played for modern-day dancing in Ireland. The word "ceili" comes from an Irish word meaning a gathering of neighbors in the evening in some house for talk, gossip, song, and perhaps dancing. Seamus Ennis says that certain houses in a community are designated as "ceiling houses"--Ennis, Seamus Ennis, Masters of Irish Music, Leader IEA 2003, 1:1. This came to be applied to a gathering for dance and song particularly, both in Ireland and the U.S. See Breathnach, Folkmusic and Dances, p. 50.

<sup>21</sup> Finn McCool was a legendary hero in Irish m<sup>u</sup>irchen and manuscript tales. Many collections of Irish folk tales include some tales of Finn and



group that included a banjo player, a piano accordion player, and a drummer who used a wooden block called a "2x4" as well as a standard trap set.

Frank also listened to music on the radio at the neighbor's house: "...we wouldn't bother with it only just to listen to the music [laughs]. And then when the music was over, heck with it, that's all." Stack's band was featured live on the radio on Wednesday nights between 8:30 and 9:00 P.M. Frank obviously enjoyed these broadcasts since he can still remember the time and day of the week. Another group that Frank remembers was Jerry's Haymakers, an American band from the Boston area that played Irish music.<sup>22</sup>

A year or so before 1940, Frank bought a second-hand accordion and began playing it.<sup>23</sup> He liked the instrument, and the accordion came easier to him than the fiddle. Not only is it a simpler instrument to play, but Frank also knew many tunes that he could play on it. Doubtless his father also helped him by showing him techniques on the instrument.

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the Fenians, as his companions were called. See, for example, Sean O'Sullivan, ed., Folktales of Ireland, translated by Sean O'Sullivan, Foreword by Richard M. Dorson, Folktales of the World Series (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 57-74 and Jeremiah Curtin, coll., Hero-Tales of Ireland (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1911), pp. 407-530. For some translations from Gaelic manuscript tales, see Tom Pete Cross and Clark Harris Slover, Ancient Irish Tales (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1936), pp. 335-468. A book devoted exclusively to the tales of the Fenians is Mary Grant O'Sheridan, Gaelic Folktales (Boston: Richard G. Badger Publishers, 1926), and Myles Dillon, Early Irish Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 32-50, provides a scholarly analysis of the Fenians.

<sup>22</sup>Information on early ceili bands is woefully inadequate, as is any information on recorded Irish music in general, although some recordings of early bands and solo players are now being issued. I am indebted to Ted McGraw for jogging Frank's memory during our interview by mentioning many early ceili bands.

<sup>23</sup>If his accordion needed repairs, Frank had to send it to Crowley's

Eventually as his ability on the accordion improved, Frank stopped playing the fiddle altogether and began playing accordion with three other musicians in a small ceili band. The band boasted Frank on accordion, a fiddler, a drummer, and a saxophone player--an unusual addition to a ceili band. Frank and the rest of the band played for dances, weddings, and house parties, but the war came along and the other musicians emigrated to England. That left Frank in Westport, where he was the only musician "for twenty miles around," and his services were constantly in demand for dances and house parties as well as weddings.

The musical climate in Frank's area of County Mayo was quite different from the area around Killkee where Marty grew up. Musicians were fewer, even before emigration took its toll, although dancing was still a popular activity among the local population. One gets the impression that the area around Westport, a rather large town, was already in the throes of a modernization that has since hit the rest of Ireland, and even in Frank's time was showing evidence of atrophying and changing musical traditions. Besides his father, the tin whistle-playing neighbor, and the members of his band, Frank could recall only two other musicians in the area: a man in the next village who played the concertina, and a fiddle player he met after he began playing the accordion. No one Frank knew played the Irish pipes, and he was familiar with war pipes only through broadcasts of a bagpipe band that he heard on the radio. The bodhrán was unknown, and no one lilted.

Frank came to the United States in 1949 and moved immediately to Rochester, where he had an uncle who had urged him to "come out" for a  

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Music Store in Cork, a long and perilous journey for the instrument.



while to see how he'd like the States. Frank liked Rochester enough to stay there, but his first year was a hard one:

Forty-nine was a bad--things weren't too good at that time. There was a kind of recession then--work was kinda, was not too easy got. Ah, I went to work for a brewery up here--used to [be] at that time, right up here on Lake Avenue, the Standard Brewing Company. I worked there on maintenance. And that was back, '49 or '50. And they used to--the breweries were paying good money then, and I was working nights, and ah about \$50.00 a week take home, \$60.00 a week take home pay....

Frank decided not to go back to Ireland permanently, although he has returned to his home three times since he has been in this country.

Unlike Marty, Frank did not undergo an identity crisis with respect to his music when he reached the United States. He began playing almost immediately after he got here, and found support for his music in the large and active Irish community in Rochester: "...well, it leaked out that I could play a little bit on the accordion, so the Hibernian Club, they got wind of it.... So myself and Neville O'Connor<sup>24</sup> then we played in the Hibernian Club for a good many years, just the two of us." Until three years ago, Frank played only accordion. Then when Ted McGraw organized the Irish Musician's Club in Rochester, Frank got interested in the fiddle again and began playing once more. He now switches from fiddle to accordion when he plays at Club meetings, although when he plays duets with Marty, and when he plays for Feisanna and for dancers, he usually plays accordion.

Both Frank and Marty are still active musicians, although their musical activity currently seems to be confined largely to the sessions and to other such non-Irish contexts as folk festivals. In addition, neither of them have been professional musicians at any time in their

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<sup>24</sup>Neville O'Connor, a banjo player, is now deceased.

lives, although with practice both would probably be proficient enough instrumentalists to make the grade. They are typical of "domestic musicians" who pursue vocations other than music--Frank is a janitor, Marty works in a machine shop--but fill an important social role in the local community. During the 1950's especially, both men were active musically at house parties and dances in the Irish community, although Frank was by far the more frequent performer. Lately, opportunities to play have been less frequent and the session has assumed a large importance in the musical lives of both men.



CHAPTER III  
SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF TRADITIONAL IRISH MUSIC  
IN ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

In this chapter, I will discuss several contexts in which traditional Irish musicians play their music. The data in this chapter is derived from my field experiences and notes from Rochester, New York. Much of this material can probably be generalized to other cities, but communities of Irish-born Americans in such cities as New York, Chicago, Boston, or Philadelphia seem far more active than the Irish in Rochester. These cities have large populations of Irish-born residents and support active Irish clubs, bars, and other places where one can find Irish people making and enjoying music at night. Such activity is more limited and has less support from the Rochester Irish community at large. The session is poorly attended, dances and house parties have waned in popularity, and there are, at present, no clubs dedicated to presenting Irish music in the city, although some nightclubs do present popular Irish entertainment on St. Patrick's Day. This is quite different from New York City, for example, which is the hot-bed of Irish music in the United States and always has been,<sup>1</sup> despite O'Neill's natural emphasis on Chicago. There are several weekly sessions there, teachers of Irish music, active ceili bands, and almost nightly entertainment at Bunnratty's Pub in the Bronx.

In Rochester, however, there are primarily four contexts in which

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<sup>1</sup>See McCullough, Sketch, pp. 185-186, for his remarks about the Irish music scene in New York City.

Irish music is commonly played. Historically, the most important of these is the dance. Dances were common recreational events in Ireland, and the Irish have always been famous for their love of dancing. Some popular writers have written about this aspect of Irish life, and although there has been a general neglect of the dance by folklorists and ethnographers, it is possible to form a picture of what dancing must have been like in Ireland in the recent past by reading novels and short stories about Irish life. In my discussion, these descriptions have been combined with material provided in interviews with Frank Murphy and Marty O'Keefe. As far as I have been able to tell, many events at which dancing was done--especially the house party--transferred to American soil and were enjoyed here by Irish immigrants until the onset of a general decline in the popularity of dances in the 1960's.

At present, dancing is not very important in the musical life of the Irish in Rochester, except in the institutionalized competition known of as the Feis (plural, Feisanna). Feisanna are held in the northeastern United States, England, and Ireland, and are competitions at which children and teenagers compete for trophies by performing intricate Irish dances both alone and in groups. The Feis circuit is supported by schools of dancing in cities with a large population of Irish-Americans and Irish-born Americans. A child does not have to be of Irish parentage or ancestry to compete. The majority of competitors certainly have Irish surnames and receive support, encouragement, and pressure from parents who see the Feis as a symbol of ethnic identity. For musicians, the Feis is a mechanical and therefore unpleasant context in which to play.

The monthly session is by far the most important musical context in which the Irish musicians in Rochester commonly play. It is almost



entirely a musician's context--that is, the flow of the session is determined largely by the musicians and not by members of the audience. The musicians direct the music and conversation, although the audience may participate in conversation while the musicians are playing. Musicians may interact with the audience or virtually ignore them. Often, both occur at different times. The musicians depend on their own momentum to carry the evening and provide the musical programming.

There are other contexts in which the musicians perform. I term these events "representational contexts" because the musicians are on stage representing a portion of their culture to people who are not members of their ethnic group of reference. Sometimes the musicians play by themselves; at other times, they accompany dancers to present a larger slice of ethnic life.

#### Dances

Traditional Irish dancing was done at many kinds of social events in Ireland; traditional dances were carried to the United States by Irish emigrants to this country. In fact, dances were the most important context for Irish traditional music; they were vital in terms of presentation and dissemination of music to the community as well as an important source of community entertainment. The musician was an indispensable part of the community since he provided music for these events. John O'Keefe wrote in 1826 that every group of small cabins in Ireland had a musician for neighborhood dances,<sup>2</sup> and wandering, usually handicapped, fiddlers or

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<sup>2</sup>John O'Keefe, Recollections of the Life of John O'Keefe, written by himself, 2 vols. (1826) quoted in Maxwell, Country and Town in Ireland Under the Georges, p. 153.

pipers were respected and welcomed by the peasantry. These men (itinerant musicians were rarely women) could make a good living playing music for their countrymen. In any case there were also local musicians who played merely for their own enjoyment and the prestige they were accorded among their neighbors.<sup>3</sup> Any event was an excuse for a dance--a fair, races, a pattern,<sup>4</sup> or any night of the week, particularly Saturday, in any season of the year. Dances were held at the crossroads in summer or in the kitchens or barns of country houses. In later years, dance halls were erected in many communities, or the parish hall of the church was used for dancing. House parties still continued, however, and houses that frequently hosted these events became known as "ceilidhing houses," the dances themselves being termed "ceilidhs."

Dancing was primarily a young people's entertainment, although older people sometimes participated. Carleton writes of two of his characters slipping away from the old people at a wedding and joining other young people at a dance,<sup>5</sup> and Arensberg says,

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<sup>3</sup>This is, of course, not unlike the "payment" received by fiddlers in the United States as well. See, for example, Robert D. Bethke's remarks on kitchen dances in New York in "Old-Time Fiddling and Social Dance in Central St. Lawrence County," New York Folklore Quarterly XXX (September, 1974), pp. 171-172.

<sup>4</sup>A "pattern" was a harvest dance or fair. T. Crofton Croker describes a pattern witnessed in Co. Kerry in the introduction to The Keen of the South of Ireland: as Illustrative of Irish Political and Domestic History, Manners, Music, and Superstitions (London: Printed for the Percy Society by T. Richards, 1844; reprint ed., n.p. Library Resources Microbook Film Card LBL 10111, 1970. See Also S.C. Hall, Tales of Irish Life and Character (London: n.p., 1913; repr. ed., New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1971), pp. 164-165; and the description by William Thackeray of a pattern at Croaghpatrick, County Mayo, near Westport, in Works, Vol. XVIII, pp. 224-228. Apparently, the pattern had died out by O'Neill's day, if his "patron" is the same thing; see Irish Folk Music, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup>William Carleton, The Works of William Carleton, Short Story Index Reprint Series, vol. 2: Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry



The country dance belongs to the young people. It differs from the gamble [gambling], from the standpoint of participants, in that it unites both sexes. In most communities it is an affair in which the whole community takes part, the old people as onlookers, the young and still spry among the older ones as performers. In late years the more formal "all night" dance, an organized dance for which admission is charged and from which the older people are usually absent, has made its appearance. Like the gamble it draws from a wider area.

But there is a good deal of the spontaneous dancing which springs up wherever the young people of the community gather even today. The young men and women learn the skills required and value them. There are elaborate codes of etiquette round them and a wealth of proverbs and jocular superstitions.<sup>6</sup>

Informality and spontaneity are characteristic of most country dances; neither Marty, Frank, nor any but recent sources (other than Arensberg) speaks of the organized dance at which admission was charged. In fact, most people comment about the spontaneous way in which dances were organized. John Maguire, for example, comments,

They had a night in the week maybe for ceillidhing 'til some separate house. They'd go to that house and it just happened to be if there came in many ceillidhers to a house they'd strike up a wee bit of a dance. If there wasn't a music man there they sent for him.<sup>7</sup>

Frank Murphy says,

...you say, I'm having a dance tonight. Well, that's all they wanted to hear in them days. Your, your house would be full of dancers, and all--they'd come there and they'd dance--they'd dance 'til you put them out. They'd dance until daylight in the morning. Oh yeah. All night long.

Marty O'Keefe says that dances often began when several young people gathered and just decided they wanted to dance.

Attire at such dances was informal. John Maguire says, "At that

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n.p., 1881; reprint ed., Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), p. 700.

<sup>6</sup>Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball, Family and Community in Ireland, 2nd edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 189.

<sup>7</sup>Morton, Come Day, Go Day, p. 43.

time people wasn't interested in dressing up so well. You might have a pair of clogs on you or your old jacket, you weren't too exact."<sup>8</sup> Synge reports that when the church halls were built for dancing on the Aran Islands, signs were posted forbidding women to wear slacks to the dances; henceforth, they wore skirts when attending dances at the church hall.<sup>9</sup>

Spontaneity was the order of the day in arranging the entertainment. Although Synge reports one woman arranging an evening of music, song and dance,<sup>10</sup> such arrangements usually seemed to rise organically from the participants rather than being imposed by someone in the group. Generally, though, dancing came first and was then followed by singing, storytelling, and more dancing. Gibbings describes a country dance as follows, and the informal arrangement of events during the evening is apparent in his description:

Conversation continued while we waited for the fiddler. I inquired about the fishing. 'If you had St. Peter in the boat with you you wouldn't catch trout this weather. 'Tis too cold,' said Mick.

'Isn't it an old saying that March doesn't go out till the twelfth of April,' said Una.

'Where's the fiddler? Where's the fiddler?' was now the talk. 'Isn't he the linchpin of the evening?' Would he be outside in the bar, they wondered. One or two were getting anxious.

'Yerra, stay quiet,' said someone. 'He isn't wet enough yet.'

But just then the fiddler appeared. He had been having a few pints to soften up his fingers.

Hardly had he put his bow to the strings when a dozen boys and girls were whirling round the room in a reel-set, and by the time that was finished Paddy Quill had arrived with his fiddle and another man with an accordion, and soon after that Jim Callaghan came in with his fiddle, and then four men danced a jig step, each one in turn picking up the beat on the last step of the man before him in a...sequence of ever-increasing tempo. After that they drew two crossed lines on the floor with chalk and four men danced 'The Peeler and the Goat,' at

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 45-46.

<sup>9</sup>J.M. Synge, Guide to the Aran Islands, ed. Ruth Wills Shaw (Old Greenwich, Conn.: The Devin-Adair Co., 1975), p. 107.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 109-110.



one moment confining their jig steps to their own particular segment and at the next leaping from one division to another while all the time keeping to the jig time. And when they'd danced a reel-step and a hornpipe, someone called for a song, and Batty Kit's son, Batt the Bus--he's a bus driver by profession--sang Noreen Bawn, and then Paddy Quill sang Mount Massy, the Pride of Macroom. Square dances and more jigs followed, and then Shaun Pat gave us The Buck from Bunane....

The company now thought it was my turn and...called on me for Red is the Rose. But this time, wet or dry, I couldn't...get out of it after. So they all joined in and helped me, and we finished together in a grand conclusion. After that there was more dancing. From what I could see of the clock when I rose to go it was twenty past two, but next morning they told me that it was ten past four when I left the house, which might be a lesson to any man how time flies.<sup>11</sup>

The beginning of this quotation is typical of mock anxiety among the dancers fearing that a musician would not arrive on time--"on time" being approximately 9:00 P.M. in Ireland, which was when dances usually began. (Interestingly enough, Rochester sessions still begin at 9:00 P.M.)

Although dancers would make do with "puss music" (lilting) or whistling<sup>12</sup> at a dance if a musician could not be present, a live musician was much preferred. As Maguire noted above, people would send out for a musician for a dance, Synge reports the excitement of the Aran Islanders when they learned he was a fiddler. This reaction is apparent in this passage:

Just after sunset an old man came down from my cottage to say that some of the lads...were up at the house, and had sent him down to tell me they would like to dance, if I would come up and play for them.

I went up at once into the kitchen and began tuning my fiddle, as the boys were impatient for my music. At first I tried to play standing, but on the upward stroke my bow came in contact with the salt fish and oilskins that hung from the rafters, so I settled

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<sup>11</sup>Sweet Cork of Thee (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1951), pp. 8-10.

<sup>12</sup>See Morton, Come Day, Go Day, p. 45; John O'Donoghue, In a Quiet Land, Foreword by Sean O' Faolain (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1958), pp. 150-152, 155-156, 165; J.M. Synge, In Wicklow, West Kerry, The Congested Districts, Under Ether (Boston: John W. Luce & Co., 1912), p.61.

myself at last on a table in the corner where I was out of the way. I played a French melody first, to get myself used to the people and the qualities of the room. Then I struck up 'Black Rogue,' and in a moment a tall man bounded out from his stool under the chimney and began flying around the kitchen with peculiarly sure and graceful bravado.

The speed, however, was so violent that I had some difficulty in keeping up, as my fingers were not in practice, and I could not take off more than a small part of my attention to watch what was going on. When I had finished a whole body of people filed into the kitchen and arranged themselves round the walls, the women and girls, as is usual, forming themselves in one compact mass crouching on their heels near the door.

I struck up another dance--'Paddy get up'--and the fear lionta [the 'man of the nets' who taught net-mending] and the first dancer went through it together, with additional rapidity and grace....

One man, however, the champion dancer of the island, got up after a while and displayed the salmon leap--lying flat on his face and then springing up horizontally, high in the air--and some other feats of extraordinary agility, but he is not young and we could not get him to dance.

Then word went round that an old man, known as Little Roger, was outside, and they told me he was once the best dancer on the island.

For a long time he refused to come in, for he said he was too old to dance, but at last he was persuaded, and the people brought him in and gave him a stool opposite me. It was some time longer before he would take his turn, and when he did so, though he was met with great clapping of hands, he only danced for a few moments. He did not know the dances in my book, he said, and did not care to dance to music he was not familiar with. When the people pressed him again he looked across to me.

"John," he said, in shaking English, "have you got 'Larry Grogan,' for it is an agreeable air?"

I had not, so some of the young men danced again to the 'Black Rogue,' and then the party broke up.<sup>13</sup>

This passage by Synge is interesting because it introduces two other aspects of Irish social dance which are rather important. One of them is the competitive turn that dancing could--and did--take. The competition that Synge describes was not uncommon at informal dances. It provided the Irish with a chance to demonstrate a highly valued skill; the men especially were competitive dancers, dancing intricate hornpipes on a table if one was available. Women and girls seem not to have

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<sup>13</sup>Synge, Aran, pp. 108-109.



participated in the competitions very often. The competitive nature of dances became readily apparent at events at which members of rival social groups were in attendance. See, for example, Ridge's description of a competition held at a wedding in Conemara Man. The dance erupts, finally, in conflict between rival parties.<sup>14</sup> From this tradition of competitive dancing, commented upon and informally judged by onlookers, developed the competitive dances of the Feis. (The man who would not dance to a tune with which he is unfamiliar has his counterpart at the Feis; O'Neill mentions another such dancer in Irish Folk Music.<sup>15</sup>)

Another important aspect of house parties which Synge mentioned above was the speed at which the dances were performed. Of course, the mark of a good competitive dancer was that he could dance well to fast music, putting in all the steps and leaps required to make the dancing graceful and complicated. Music played up-tempo was also important for the enjoyment of people who performed group dancing at house parties. Frank Murphy commented: "At house parties the faster you play them, the better they like it. ...oh, they like it fast, ...good and fast." Frank virtually echos the words of several novelists in his own description of a dance at a house party:

Boy, they were full of energy. And, ah, sure your home would be full. You might have too much, you know...everybody that would hear of it would come, maybe they'd come from five miles away, for that matter. I seen 'em doing that, and oh boy--I've seen the houses, and they'd be, oh they'd be--really too full--they'd be really too many for dancin', you'd be out there to dance and you wouldn't be able to dance--you may be only able to dance one square dance or one set dance at a time, see. But then, I say, a room, oh maybe this size here [twelve feet by twelve feet]. Well, there was two, two sets going.

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<sup>14</sup>Seamus Ridge, Conemara Man (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 153.

<sup>15</sup>O'Neill, Irish Folk Music, p. 14.

Now before that set was finished, you better take your place for the next one, or you wouldn't get, you wouldn't get dancing...you'd queue up.

The speed and informality of group dances did not lead to a stress on "correct" dance form or emphasis on proper stepping in the dance figures. In Irish dances as they are danced at the Feis or at informal competitions such as Synge witnessed, proper steps are important. The dancer must fill in the beats in the music with his toes or heels, kick in the right places, and keep his body straight and fairly rigid from the waist up. Depending on the dance, the type of kicks used are important, as is the way one foot crosses another, and so on. Competition dancing requires skill and dexterity far beyond that which most people care to achieve. Dancing in the informal context of a house party was less rigorous. Although dancers had to know the appropriate sets and figures, and there was no caller (as in American square dances) to give directions for those who did not know what to do next, dancers could do anything they wanted with their feet.<sup>16</sup> There were no required steps for the dances. Besides, everyone was dancing and having a good time and would not have noticed the fancy footwork. Frank Murphy said: "...somebody that never danced before can get up and ah and make believe he's dancing, as long as they keep rhythm. ...as for the steps, you just put your own steps in it--make up your own steps."

The dances performed were traditional Irish dances--jigs, reels, and hornpipes. There are various kinds of jigs--single jigs in 3/8 time, double jigs in 6/8 time, and slip or hop jigs in 9/8 time. The reel is in common time, or 4/4 time. The hornpipe, played largely for solo dancing,

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<sup>16</sup>O'Donoghue, *In a Quiet Land*, pp. 155-156, 165, mentions that an experienced dancer might lead beginners through the dances.



is also in 4/4, or 2/4 and the first and third beats are stressed. There are also various so-called "set dances," such as "Rodney's Glory," "The Walls of Limerick," and others. These dances have certain steps and figures performed to them that never vary. These traditional dances are discussed in more detail elsewhere.<sup>17</sup>

By the time Frank was playing for house parties and weddings, other dances were becoming popular, such as polkas, highland flings, the barn dance and the varsouvienne. Actually, the Irish have never been reluctant to adopt foreign dances, and polkas and other new dances first began coming into vogue at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> By the middle of the 1940's waltzes were also becoming popular, although Frank did not play many waltzes until he came to the United States. In addition, each county had its popular dances, and certain types of tunes were often used for the popular local dances. For example, in Marty's area in County Clare, reels were used for dancing the Caledonian Set, a set of five figures with a jig and a hornpipe in the last part of the dance. In nearby Kerry, and elsewhere in Munster a round set was popular, danced to a tune called a polka but lacking the distinctive polka rhythm with which we are familiar. The sequence of dances at a dance seems to have followed no pre-arranged pattern, other than in the instance already mentioned from the Aran Islands, but depended on the mood of the participants.

Despite the informality of house dances, etiquette between the sexes was important and at any event where dancing was held, men always asked

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<sup>17</sup>Breathnach, Folk Music and Dances, pp. 59-65; Donal O'Sullivan, "Irish Dances and Songs," Journal of the International Folk Music Council II (March, 1950), pp. 33-34.

<sup>18</sup>Breathnach, Folk Music and Dance, p. 89.

women to dance, never vice versa. Frank Murphy said:

The ladies wouldn't dance at all unless they were asked, you'd have to ask them, you know. They'd be, they'd be sitting around there, so 'course they'd be...waiting for you to ask them out, but they'd never get up on the floor to dance, I never did see them. Or, you'd never see two ladies in them days, dancing together, like what you see now. They'd never think of it. They'd wait there until they'd be asked to...dance. If they weren't asked all night, they'd go home without ever dancing a step...which would have been a disappointment to them.

This is much like the women on Aran, who sat on their heels at the door while Synge played for their men. Priests often danced at these events; Carleton reports several priests dancing at a wedding.<sup>19</sup>

There was an important distinction between the dances held at house parties and the dances held at weddings, however. Since house parties were informal, spontaneous affairs, attendance could not be limited. They were open to everyone in the neighborhood--and, as Frank noted, this could mean everyone from next-door neighbors to people five miles away. By contrast, weddings were closed affairs, with attendance by invitation only.<sup>20</sup> In addition, musicians who provided music for dancing at weddings were paid for their efforts. For house parties and informal local dances in County Mayo, Frank notes that

...musicians would automatically arrive with the crowd. They'd bring their, whatever musical instruments they played, they'd bring them with 'em. They'd sit and play there all night, and then go home feeling happy.

Musicians were never paid--and Frank added that if one got a cup of tea for his troubles, he'd be happy. If several musicians showed up, they would spell one another off "so that no one got tired and all had a chance

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<sup>19</sup>Carleton, Works, pp. 700-701.

<sup>20</sup>A brief discussion of weddings can be found in Evans, Irish Folk Ways, pp. 282-289.



to dance." The musicians seldom played together at dances at that time, although ceili bands composed of several musicians later became popular for country dances.

Weddings were booked with musicians in advance to ensure that there would be someone who could play for the dancing. After the other members of Frank's ceili band left for England, he was approached by people as far away as twenty miles to play for weddings. At these affairs, alcoholic beverages were served--poteen (a potent, illicitly distilled whiskey), beer, porter or stout--provided by the host family. Gibbings says about a wedding he attended that "...it seemed to be a ritual that the glasses should overflow."<sup>21</sup>

The institution of house parties was carried over into the United States wherever Irish people settled, and, of course, house parties were not very unlike social events being held in America by people of all ethnic backgrounds when the Irish got here. For example, the dance that Francis O'Neill describes in Irish Folk Music took place in Edina, Missouri, and was very similar to the dances at home in Ireland. O'Neill even reports that his accustomed seat was "behind the fiddler" where he was "intent on picking up the tunes."<sup>22</sup> At these events, the Irish mingled with other nationalities. They undoubtedly also had their own parties and dances. About such parties there is a paucity of information other than odd mentions in the various O'Neill books. House parties, however popular in the Irish community in Rochester during the 1950's and 1960's, are currently on the wane. I have never witnessed a house

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<sup>21</sup>Lovely is the Lee (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1945), p.229.

<sup>22</sup>O'Neill, Irish Folk Music, p. 17. For his description of the dance, see pp. 16-17 and *passim*.

party, but Frank and Ted both describe the parties at which they played with a good deal of nostalgia. Frank played frequently for house parties as well as for organized affairs at the AOH hall and the Harp's Club. Several aspects of the dance had changed, however, at the Rochester house parties.

For one, the Irish community was composed of people from widely scattered areas of Ireland and from northern Ireland as well. Therefore, common ground in the choice of sets for dancing was important. The dances that survived in Rochester were those that everyone knew, not the styles, such as the Caledonian Set, peculiar to one region. The Caledonian Set was not danced because not enough people knew the steps; Kerry polkas are remembered by fiddlers from West Kerry but are no longer danced. Commonly known dances therefore became popular in the Irish community. New dances were introduced--the waltz, for example--products of both changing dance styles in Ireland and contact with and absorption by the larger mainstream culture in the United States. These new dances, played in tempos new to the musicians, required that musicians add new tunes to their repertoires. American house parties therefore mixed traditional Irish dances known to the emigrants with more modern dances. In addition, house parties were not as informal and spontaneous as they had been in Ireland. A complex urban society and dispersed population necessitated that more complex plans had to be made for entertainment events.

The Irish in Rochester--many of whom had come from country districts in Ireland--were also introduced to institutionalized dancing events sponsored by the AOH or the Harp's Club. These events were more formal than country dances or house parties, requiring more formal conduct and dress. The music was contracted for these events, and admission was



charged for the services of the band and the price of the hall. Often, food and liquor were served. Such dances were little different from dances of any other large organization except that the band played more traditional Irish tunes and occasional traditional set dances were performed.

### The Feis

The Irish have always found competitions and contests of all kinds attractive. Storytelling, singing, and music-playing could be competitive. Individuals at ceilidhs performed step dances hoping to outdance each other. This style of dance, highly institutionalized, is performed at Feisanna today.

Although both Marty and Frank had told me about Feisanna, their descriptions hardly prepared me for the Feis I attended in Syracuse, New York, on 11 October 1975. It was a grey day, and just beginning to rain as my wife, Carol, and I pulled into a parking space at the New York State Fairgrounds at Syracuse. We arrived at 2:00 P.M.; the Feis had been in full swing since 10:00 A.M. that morning. With tape recorder slung over my shoulder and pocket full of extra cassettes, we entered Farm Machinery Hall where the Feis was being held. We paid our entrance fee and parted with \$.50 for a souvenir booklet with a list of all the events and competitors.

Farm Machinery Hall is a large, concrete building built around an open, grassed courtyard visible through slightly dirty windows from anywhere in the building (see Appendix for diagram). We entered at the lower end, and followed the crowd around the courtyard. Immediately to our left as we entered, next to the ladies' room, was a booth where

several men were talking to anyone interested, selling "Unite Ireland" buttons, and handing out literature on the same theme. On our right was a table loaded down with homemade sugar cookies, cakes, and candies. Nearby was a large truck that had beer, ale, and Guinness stout on tap. Needless to say, the crowd at the counter of this popular attraction was always two to three people deep. The stand's popularity was undoubtedly enhanced by a television set tuned to a football game, and many customers languidly sipped their brew and watched the battle on the screen. Across from the beer stand was a small stage supporting a battery of microphones and two large speakers. "Dooley's Flying Column," a singing group, performed and sold records from this stage. There were five members of the group dressed in black slacks, white shirts, and bright green sweaters. They played guitars, a bass, a banjo and sang a variety of sentimental and popular "Irish" songs.

Other stands on both sides of the aisle sold various plaques with Irish-derived lettering, souvenirs, hand-crocheted items, and refreshments. At the corner was located the scoreboard--a board listing each event by number with gaps provided to list the numbers of winners. Each contestant is provided with a black-on-white, easy-to-see number, worn around the waist, which is the only identification that the competitors are allowed. The numbers are listed in the program booklet with the names of the competitors.

Turning the corner, we could see several stages, including the main stage. This was where the important events were held--the Syracuse opens, figure dancing, choreography. Next to it was a small stage where a competition was taking place when we arrived. This stage was typical of five others scattered around the building: a wooden platform raised



slightly from the floor, about six by six feet, with a small table in front for the judge and room in front and on each side for contestants to stand. Seating to one side of the stage--usually to the left of the judge's seat--was provided for the musician or musicians. Often a microphone was placed there for those who could not plug their instruments directly into the amplifier. Stanchions with velvet-covered chains stretched between them prevented spectators from getting too close to the stage, judges, or musicians. Some stages had two musicians, and during lulls in the competition they would converse.

At the small stages, procedure for the events were roughly the same. The judge would announce the title of the competition; for example, "This is Girls' Number 26, Under 16 Years, Reel." A line of nervous girls (the number varied from competition to competition), each clad in her school uniform--tights, short skirt, some kind of emblem, soft or hard shoes depending on the kind of dance, and her number fastened around her waist--would line up in the back of the stage. The musician (or musicians) would begin playing on cue, his features contorted in concentration, and one of the girls would step forward. If she wanted the music slowed down, she would place her hand palm down at her side and motion by moving her hand rapidly up and down. The same motion palm upward meant that the music should be speeded up. The musician would play faster or slower as indicated, and the girl would begin dancing. The musician played the tune one time through for each of the dancers; the next one would step up for her turn. He continued playing, responding to the girls' comments until all had danced. At this point, after some deliberation, the judge would announce his or her decisions for the class, and there would be cries of happiness from the winners and whimpers of sadness--or tears--

from the losers. Boys' events proceeded in a similar fashion except boys wore plain jackets, plaid kilts, and knee socks.

There were several classes of events in Beginners, Novice, and Solo Open categories, as well as figure dances and choreography dances. The various categories of events are shown in the chart in the Appendix reproduced from the pages of the program booklet.<sup>23</sup> In addition, awards were offered for Irish lace, wood carvings, whittling, and embroidery (with Irish scene or Celtic design).

The large stage was used for the Syracuse Championships and the group championships--figure dances and choreography. It was raised about five feet from the ground, and was about fifteen feet square. In the rear corner was a stairway to the stage. Two musicians were playing on this stage, and they sat in the rear corner near the stairs with a fiddle and an accordion, microphones, amplifiers, and music stands. (Since each contestant who dances a set dance selects his or her own tune, the musician must be able to play a number of tunes; if they did not know the tune called for, the musicians would use a copy of O'Neill's or sheet music and play the tune by note.) A long, cafeteria-style table with several microphones was located at the rear center of this stage. Official Feis announcements were made from this table. In front of the stage were card tables for three judges. The stage area was cordoned off from spectators as were the small stages, but unlike these smaller staging areas, benches were provided in front and on one side of this stage for spectators. On the other long side of the hall were located three more stages.

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<sup>23</sup>Onondaga County [New York] Board Ancient Order of Hibernians, "Twelfth Annual Feis" (Syracuse, N.Y.: N.p., 1975).



The noise at the Feis was, at times, deafening: children running, people talking or arguing, various announcements coming--never audibly--over hidden loudspeakers. One begins to understand how much concentration it takes for a child to compete in one of these events, and why the faces of competitors are so tense when they dance.

Both Marty and Frank were attending the Feis. Neither was playing; they were watching their children dance. Marty had four children competing, Frank one. Both men had already talked to me about the Feis, and our conversation now rambled to general topics--the weather, the farm Marty hoped to buy, the session the evening before. Carol and I watched the Syracuse Opens, and also saw one of Marty's daughters win a Third in a competition. Before going on stage she practiced one last time to a tune that Marty lilted for her. Although children were practicing elsewhere throughout the building, often to tunes being played for someone else's competition, no one practiced to live music provided by a relative or friend, and none of the musicians in the audience had begun an informal session with anyone else.

The Opens were the most complicated of the solo dances, and they were danced by the most experienced dancers and were the most hotly contested dances. Competitors were often very haughty in instructing the musicians, motioning impatiently if the fiddler did not get the tempo correct the first time he began. Dancers who had been expressionless on the stage--one of the qualities on which they are judged--gestured angrily or swore softly when they left the stage if they thought they did a bad job. One girl who broke a strap on her shoe cried as she limped offstage, and argued, sobbing, with a judge to allow her to perform her dance again.

Throughout all this, the musicians sit impassively playing tunes on demand, responding mechanically to directions for speed. Marty and Frank had both told me how much they disliked playing at the Feisanna and just that morning at breakfast Ted McGraw had told of his experiences in playing for a Feis.

For the musicians Feisanna are low-paying and unpleasant. They must play the same tunes over and over from 10:00 A.M. until 6:00 or 7:00 P.M. In addition, conditions are not good; Ted McGraw told me about an older musician who played outdoors in the hot sun all day. He was not even offered lunch or drinks, and finally stood up and told the judge he was going for a sandwich and a beer. Both Marty and Frank have told me similar stories. Frank said,

And you're playing there for--you may be playing for ten minutes without ever stopping, and some places you're out in the sun, the sun beating down on you, on the key, on the fingerboard, on the keys, your fingers begin to get sticky, you know, and boy, is it easy to make a mistake.

The problem is especially bad because if a musician makes a mistake in the tune the dancer may lose a beat. The judge, in turn, may dock the dancer, not allowing the benefit of the doubt for the musician's mistake.

Another problem in playing for the Feis is that the dancers do repeatedly slow the music down and speed it up. A musician must be adept enough to respond to this change dozens of times a day without misplaying the tune. Marty said,

It has made it a bit difficult for players, because we'll say that you are on a fast tempo and then the next kid comes on and he says, down. It's not that easy to come down all of a sudden, you know, and hold it down.

In this respect the Feis has had an impact on Irish traditional music, the musicians feel. In fact, both Marty and Frank mentioned this



independently to me. Unlike the music played for dancing in Ireland, music played for dancing in this country has slowed down--particularly set dances, jigs, and hornpipes. This is because in the Feis competition it is important for the dancers to put in all the steps for the dances in the right places and this is easier for a dancer who is not very good if the music is slower. Marty feels that some of the dances sound better played at a slower tempo, Ted seems to disagree somewhat, and Frank is noncommittal. Whether this slowing down of the music due to the Feis dancing is a permanent change in the repertoires of the musicians in Rochester--or of Irish musicians anywhere--is only to be determined over a long period of time.

The Feis is similar to the Fleadh Cheoil, another competition for youngsters from Irish backgrounds. The Fleadh, however, is music-oriented. Competitions are held for various age groups who compete on Irish instruments--the uilleann pipes, the fiddle, the tin whistle, the flute, melodeon, accordion--and play Irish tunes. They compete singly, in pairs, trios, and as ceili bands. There are only two Fleadhs held each year in the U.S., one in New York and one in Chicago. Winners go to Ireland to compete in the Fleadh Cheoil held there yearly in August.

Feis winners of the more important divisions earn a chance to compete in advanced divisions in other Feisanna, held throughout the northeastern United States and in Canada. Winners of several Feisanna compete in the Oireachtas in New York City, and winners from this competition go to Ireland to compete in the Irish Feisanna.

Both the Fleadh and the Feis are events symbolic of Irish culture. The display of "Irishness" is important to many of the parents; when their children win, their own ethnicity as Irish-Americans is reinforced.

However, facts indicate that many of the same people do not, in turn, support less public expressions of ethnicity. As Marty indicated to me, both the AOH and the Harp's Club have died out in Rochester from lack of support. Rochester does not support a bar offering Irish music, as do other cities. Few persons other than musicians and young Americans interested in learning the music attend the sessions. Unlike Marty, then, who demonstrates his ethnicity in many ways, from practicing and playing his fiddle at home to playing in sessions to playing at the Feis, only public expressions of ethnic background seem to be in order for many people who have children participating in the Feis.

As a context for Irish music, musicians find the the Feis is lacking. Even dedicated musicians such as Marty and Frank dislike playing for Feisanna because of the conditions in which the music is played. Instead of free exchange between a number of musicians, Feis competitions are characterized by either a mechanical grinding out of the same tune over and over or, for the Set Dance competitions, playing of a tune on command. This leaves very little room for individuality, and people seem to notice the music only if a mistake is made by the musician. Otherwise, they are concentrating on watching the dancers. In short, the Feis does not offer the musician a pleasant context in which to play, although some utilize the opportunity to play and sell LP recordings of other performances.

#### The Session

I have elsewhere defined the session as "a gathering of musicians for the express purpose of playing music as music, and not for dancing."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Michael Stoner, "Narratives Associated with Irish Fiddle Tunes: Some Contextual Considerations," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of



Because of the decline in dancing in Rochester, and the infrequency and unpleasantness of the Feis as a context for traditional Irish music, the session is probably the most widespread context for traditional Irish music in this country--and certainly the most important in terms of traditional Irish music in Rochester. As noted before, there may have been a session in Rochester before the current crop of musicians arrived from Ireland, but the one currently in progress was organized about two years ago by the musicians with Ted McGraw acting as a catalyst. The session was first held in the social room of the Harp's Club. In June, I was able to attend the last meeting at the Club. The session was not held for the rest of the summer, and in September the musicians gathered in the back room of a bar on Lake Avenue in Rochester.

I attended my first session in Rochester on 14 April 1975 with my wife, Carol, and Skip and Marie Evans. We had eaten dinner and by the time we reached the Harp's Club, the session was in full swing, having begun about half an hour before we got there. We were the last to arrive at the small, white building located on a tree-lined street in Rochester and joined by a crowded parking lot. Inside the front door was the bar with perhaps a dozen stools, half of them occupied by people sipping drinks and quietly talking (see Appendix for diagram). Across from the bar was a long window in the wall through which the social room was visible. The four of us stepped to the bar and ordered drinks, Skip and Marie greeting the bartender and others in the room whom they knew.

At the rear of the bar was a door which lead into the social room. We entered and found a knot of people right inside the door who were

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the American Folklore Society, New Orleans, Louisiana, 25 October 1975.

standing around, drinking and listening to the music. Several people in the group of eight or ten were conversing. These non-musicians included Ted McGraw's wife, Bridget, and several other women as well as a few men. Most of these people were related in some way to the musicians. There were a few children running in and out of the room, but they were not loud enough to create a disturbance. Skip went over to join the musicians, and Marie introduced us to several members of the audience and then tuned up her fiddle and joined the group. As outsiders, they welcomed us, and began asking where we had come from. Upon learning that we were from Philadelphia, one of the men told me about an accordion-playing priest who had formerly lived in Rochester and now was living near Philadelphia. Several in the group asked why we had come to Rochester, and I explained my personal and academic interest in the music, and my general interest in Irish folklore. I talked with one of the men at some length about story-telling and legends, while Carol talked to Bridget McGraw. Soon, I took out my bodhrán, and pulled a chair over to the end of the semi-circle of musicians as I had observed Marie do.

Except for Marie and a woman playing the hammer dulcimer to my right, all the musicians were men. I was at the far left of the semi-circle with Skip to my immediate left. At the center of the arc was Ted McGraw who sat with one accordion on his lap and another on the floor beside him. Ted was not leading the session or acting as organizer in any respect. Rather, the others seemed to consult him from time to time about the music or a tune being played, and he had a copy of O'Neill's Music of Ireland close at hand. To Ted's immediate left sat another accordion player, Tim Finucane, and to Tim's left, Marty with his fiddle. Frank sat on Ted's right and next to him, John Walker from County Kerry.



Several young Americans were present as well. Two hammer dulcimer players had their instruments set up on tables to my right. There was a young man playing balalaika, another playing whistle (I found out later that he also played uilleann pipes, but that his set was currently without a reed). An older man playing guitar sat behind Ted. Many of these instruments, although certainly not traditional, appeared to be well received by the musicians. Many of them were unfamiliar with a hammer dulcimer, but enjoyed the sound of the instrument, and the man who played one of these instruments was proficient enough on his instrument and familiar enough with Irish music that he was able to pick up unfamiliar tunes quite easily and play along with them. The young man playing the balalaika was obviously a regular at the session--many of the musicians knew him, and laughed and joked with him--and he knew many tunes. In fact, he was one of the few younger musicians who would frequently begin playing a tune by himself, suggesting it to the group at large.

When I sat down, the musicians were playing a jig. I did not join in the music because the head on my bodhrán was too loose to play. After playing the tune through three times, they began playing another tune. The music flowed freely from one tune to another, with only brief pauses and minimal conversation between tunes. Sometimes one of the musicians would say, "Do you know 'Saddle the Pony,'" and when several agreed, they would play the tune together. Far more often, however, they would not even mention the name of the tune they had in mind, but would play a few bars on their instruments: a musician might begin by saying, "Here's a good tune, " and then play the first part of a reel on the fiddle. The others would join in and everyone would play the tune two or three times together. If no one else knew the tune, however, the musician would finish

it and then stop playing, or just might fade into silence and let someone else suggest a tune that all might know. Since the musicians were, at this point, all holding their instruments, no one illustrated a tune by whistling or liltng it, although I heard this occuring numerous times later in the evening when the musicians were standing around talking without instruments in hand.

There seemed to be no imposed order as far as the suggestion of tunes was concerned. All musicians in the group were equal in that they could suggest tunes, and infrequently a member of the audience (i.e. a non-participant in the music-making) would request a tune for the musicians to play. No one musician seemed to make more suggestions than the others, although Ted, Frank, Marty, and Tim Finucane seemed to offer slightly more suggestions than the younger musicians--Marie, Skip, the hammer dulcimer players, the whistle player, and the balalaika player. These people might have offered fewer suggestions for the simple reason that they had fewer suggestions to offer.

Approximately an hour after I joined the circle, the music broke up, and the musicians went to the bar to get something to drink. Marie introduced me to Ted McGraw, and I spoke to him for a while. When asked if he thought the musicians would mind if I taped the rest of the session, he said that he doubted it. I opened my briefcase, set up the recorder and microphone, and plugged everything in. John Walker and the tin whistle player had begun talking about music nearby and were beginning to play a tune, so I placed the microphone near Walker and sat down next to him. While the rest of the musicians talked to each other or members of the audience, Walker and the younger man talked music and tried to think of a tune that both of them knew. Several tunes were suggested and rejected.



Walker played a Kerry polka for us, talking about how these tunes, different from the polkas we were used to, were danced in the West Limerick-Kerry area where he grew up. When we began talking about slip jigs, he began playing "The Rocky Road to Dublin," a popular and well-known slip jig. Many of the musicians picked up their instruments and joined in the tune. By this time, Frank Murphy and Marty O'Keefe had rejoined the group, as had Tim Finucane. They began playing some tunes together and individually while Walker, the whistle player, and I discussed a tune called variously "The Choice Wife," or "O'Farrell's Welcome to Limerick."<sup>25</sup>

By this time, other musicians had finished their drinks and were drifting back into the circle. Marty began playing some tunes by himself and with Finucane, the accordion player. Walker and I moved to a nearby table where he smoked a cigarette and we talked about his childhood and experiences in the West Limerick-Kerry area of western Ireland. All the time we talked the tape recorder was running and the musicians continued playing, some of them actually clustering around the microphone. However, there were still several, Ted included, who did not join in the music.

I talked with Walker for several more minutes and then he went back to join the circle. Some of the musicians were talking to each other and playing occasionally, and others were playing fairly often and suggesting tunes for the group to play. At this point, there was a good deal of participation from the younger members of the group who began and played

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<sup>25</sup>This tune was recorded by Liam O'Flynn as "The Wet Pussy." See Liam O'Flynn: Uilleann Pipes and Tin Whistle, Folklore Society of the University of Pennsylvania FSUP T-101. It was also recorded by Willie Clancy on The Breeze from Erin: Irish Folk Music on Wind Instruments, Topic 12T184.

on many tunes. This continued until about 12:30 A.M. when some of the musicians began leaving. Several members of the audience had left before this time, one of them to go to work. Frank left and said goodbye, promising that I could visit him and talk to him about the music the next time I was in Rochester. The Club had cleared out at about 1:00 A.M., except for the bartender, Marty, and the four of us. Marty bought drinks for all of us and we talked for another half hour or so until everyone was ready to leave.

Because the Harp's Club was sold this past summer, the session had to find new quarters. A new location caused some concern among session regulars, although they were generally confident that the group would find a new home. In August, I received a post card from Ted McGraw saying that the group was meeting in a bar on Lake Avenue in Rochester. On 10 October, I attended a session at the bar.

The musicians were seated in the backroom in a cluster rather than in a semi-circle as they had been at the Harp's Club. This had something to do with the way the room was arranged, I believe, and also the fact that it was a smaller room. Because there was a door in the rear of the room, an avenue for traffic was created along one wall. Instead of having the large open space at the Harp's Club with traffic flow into the room only from one corner, the musicians had a traffic flow on one side of the room. This they compensated for by clustering in the corner of the room farthest from the bar, leaving an aisle open for people entering the rear door or for bar patrons using the rest rooms. A few members of the audience sat at a table near them and talked quietly. Other members of the audience sat in a group on the other end of the small room. (See Appendix for a diagram of this room.)



The musical interchange at the session was similar to what I had witnessed at the Harp's Club. The older musicians were all present-- Walker, Finucane, Ted, Marty, and Frank--but several new young people were in attendance. There were two hammer dulcimer players who had their instruments set up in one corner. A guitar player from Dublin also arrived, a banjo player had joined the group, and an older Irishman named Al Wrehn who played mandolin and tenor banjo was also there. In addition, Marty's brother Jack had come, and occasionally one of the members of the audience would ask him to play a tune. Although his attack is somewhat diminished by age, I am told that in his time Jack O'Keefe was an outstanding fiddler. He played the tunes requested on Marty's fiddle, and then returned the instrument to his brother.

Suggestions of tunes to play followed a pattern similar to what I had witnessed at the previous session. The music was well underway when we arrived, and after an hour or so some of the musicians quit to have drinks and converse. Several stayed in the group and continued playing. Others circulated in the audience for a while, and found their way back to the group. Frank Murphy, Sean Walker, and Tim Finucane had gathered down at one end of the room and continued playing. This group formed the nucleus of later musical activity as other musicians joined the group when they were ready to play again.

The musical interchange seems to flow in several stages during the sessions that I have attended. This flow might be diagrammed as shown on next page, Figure 1. Even when the large group has dispersed, the music-making is participated in by a smaller group composed of from two to four musicians. The group usually mixes conversation with its music, but its primary interest is in making music, and most of the conversation is

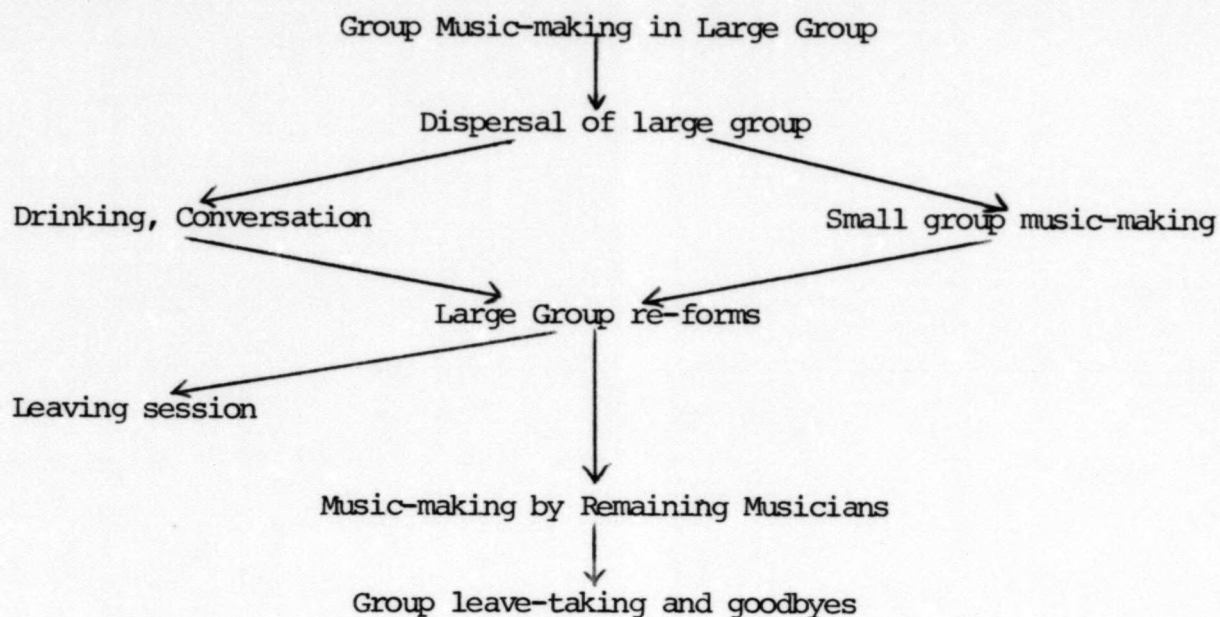


Figure 1

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centered on this theme, as in the conversation reported at the Harp's Club between Sean Walker, myself, and the tin whistle player. Often the other musicians simply join in the music-making of this small group. At other times, the musicians who left the circle cluster to converse with the audience will resume the seats they held initially and this small group will break up its interchange, focussing attention back on the larger group. The larger group, in turn, is broken up when several of its members leave the session. The remaining musicians play in a re-formed, smaller group.

I am unable to determine when the session originated as a context for Irish music. O'Neill describes afternoon meetings of the Chicago musicians group with which he was affiliated that seem to meet the criteria for a session as I have described it.<sup>26</sup> Musicians in the past undoubtedly gathered to play informally among themselves. Yet, I can find no mention of this practice prior to the time when O'Neill wrote.

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<sup>26</sup>Irish Folk Music, p. 44 and passim.



Marty says that he attended no sessions in County Clare--music there was played only for dancing or for practice. Frank says that during the long winter nights in County Mayo, "...a couple of guys would get together that has, that knows a few tunes, maybe you play them for hours, you know. The end you'd be, the few tunes you'd have would be perfect." This type of playing was only the preliminary for Frank to learning more tunes so he could play for dances. It clearly was not an end in itself. As Frank describes it, the session was a practice for beginning musicians, not a context in which beginners could exchange freely with masters of the art as in American sessions in Rochester and elsewhere.

My own feeling is that the session developed because of the declining interest in traditional Irish dancing. This has occurred in Irish communities in America because of acculturation, but is also in evidence to a lesser extent in Ireland and England. For example, Tony Gray discusses the fashions in dancing in Ireland--and specifically mentions show bands featuring electric guitars, drums, saxophones, and trumpets. The bands, he says, are popular because they "put on a show" as well as playing the music. They play "jazz dances" and the show band boom is big business in Ireland. Even the clergy have abandoned their opposition to it. But, Gray adds, folk dances like "The Walls of Limerick" are less often heard in the ballrooms, and ceilis are on the wane.<sup>27</sup>

The present does not seem to be as dismal as the one Gray paints with the rise of interest in Irish traditional music, the emergence of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann as a force in preserving and extending the traditional music of Ireland, and the popularity of the Fleadh Cheoil

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<sup>27</sup> Tony Gray, The Irish Answer (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1966), pp. 365-366.

and the Feis. However, Gray hints at why the session has become a necessary context for many musicians who play Irish traditional music-- it is the only way, in many cases, for them to keep their music alive. It is the only chance that many of them get to play their music since they seldom play together in their homes. Thus it serves as both a recreational outlet and as a symbol of ethnicity, a tie to their native land.

It is clear that, although the session has reached its present importance in Rochester probably in the last few years, it is the most important single context for Irish music in the city. It is held more frequently and draws more musicians than does any other event. It is also an enjoyable, sociable, and friendly context for the musicians to play in and provides an opportunity for them to direct the flow of music, rather than have someone else arrange the events for the evening.

#### Representational Contexts

The "representational context" is a fourth type of context in which Irish music is played in Rochester. There are many single events that fall in the category of events which I call "representational contexts." They have in common that the music is played largely for a non-Irish audience, and that the musicians use their music to represent facets of Irish culture and in effect, their ethnicity.

The folk festival is one such event. The Irish musician's club has participated in several festivals during the past few years. One was held this past June at a museum in downtown Rochester. When I visited the session in October, Frank was selling tickets to another event, an international folk festival to be held at the end of the month. Frank



said that he always enjoyed seeing what the different groups do at these events. Frank described to me what the group did at the Festival in June: Al Wrehn sang a few songs, and then the group played jigs, reels, and hornpipes; afterwards, several of the children who had accompanied them danced for the audience. Unlike the sessions, the events were not spontaneous, since Frank had prepared a program that the musicians could follow. Frank said that the Festival audience enjoyed the presentation: "...it went over pretty good, yeah, it did." The musicians present similar programs at old men's homes and in similar institutions, often accompanying the children who exhibit their dances, Marty said.

Several of the musicians have also played at St. Patrick's Day celebrations at local night clubs. Marty, for example, played in March 1974 at a nightclub called "The Top of the Plaza" with the local dancers.

These events enable the musicians--who are all articulate men--to present an important part of their cultural and personal lives. In so doing they inform their audiences about the music they are playing by introducing tunes, talking about the tunes, instruments and instrumental styles, and remarking on aspects of life in Ireland pertinent to the music-making. They enjoy doing this sort of thing--as obvious in their enthusiastic response to my own interest in Irish music, as well as comments made to me during my fieldwork.

However much the musicians enjoy performing in this sort of situation, the Festivals are sporadic at best. Since few clubs in Rochester book Irish music very often, they do not get much of a chance to play in club performances. The session and the Feis remain their two primary outlets for the music.

### Conclusions

The contexts in which Irish music is played in Rochester, then, include the house party or dance, the Feis, the session, and the various representational contexts. The dance, most important of the contexts historically, involves the musician as part of a group event that is characterized by informality in its initial organization and internal development. Music and dancing are part of a whole event which also includes singing and story-telling. The dance and house party are mostly focussed toward the young of a community, although older people also participate. The dance was extremely important as a context for the music in Ireland, and, until the 1960's, had changed and adapted to America. Since then, however, dancing in the Rochester Irish community has become an infrequent entertainment. Indeed, it is most often seen in the form of institutionalized dancing at the Feis. These competitions, derived from informal competitions once held at ceilidhs and house parties, are an unpleasant context for playing music according to the musicians. They are rigid and do not allow for musical give-and-take between several musicians. In fact, although live music is necessary for Feis competition, musicians often perform alone and are subject to the whims of competitors for the tunes they play, as well as the tempo at which the tunes are played. This fact makes the session far more attractive to the musicians. At a session, they are able to relax and exchange tunes informally with their fellows. Indeed, since the musicians are directing the session, there is no pressure to perform; instead, performance is offered when a musician knows the tune being played. Each session seems to move through stages of music-playing and conversation before it breaks up for the evening. In the representational contexts, such as performances



at a folk festival, the musician represents his ethnicity for others;  
he functions as an example of Irish culture for his audience.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS

Through fieldwork, interview and research in ethnographies and novels, I have delimited and explored four important contexts in which Irish traditional music is played by immigrant Irish musicians in Rochester, New York. In examining dancing, the Feis, the session and representational contexts, it may be seen that these contexts are presently of varying degrees of importance to the musicians today. The session is the most vital of the contexts; the dance is declining in importance, although vested with nostalgia because it has close ties to the old country and a typically Irish way of life. Musicians dislike the Feis as a place to play their music. Representational contexts--folk festivals and the like--give musicians a chance to display their ethnicity, but are infrequent occurrences.

The decline of interest among Irish immigrants in this country in traditional Irish activities such as the house party and dance has resulted from a confluence of many factors. As pointed out by numerous writers,<sup>1</sup> the dance was primarily a young people's activity, with older people participating when moved or urged. Since immigration slowed to a trickle after 1950, not only have there not been new young people from Ireland coming to the United States, but the people who arrived here during the great waves of immigrants in the late 1940's and early 1950's are getting older. Financial pressures and increasing age have taken their tolls

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<sup>1</sup>See Arensberg, p. 189; Synge, Aran, pp. 108-109; O'Donoghue, In a Quiet Land, pp. 155-156, p. 165; and elsewhere.



among them. In addition, acculturation has caused many second-generation Irish-Americans to spurn traditional ethnic entertainments. Our fast-paced culture offers many other attractive forms of recreation and pleasure to all, and even musicians sometimes abandon their music to pursue other pastimes. Social life and culture are changing in Ireland, too, and this change is reflected in visits to the old country and in letters from relatives still in Ireland. Many people in the "ould sod" are losing touch with their traditional culture. Faced with amenities of life and electronic means of entertainment, the Irish are abandoning traditional means of entertainment. Even at dances, show bands are the vogue. Ceili music is out of style, and waltzes and foxtrots are played for dancing. Frank Murphy said,

Yeah, they're getting away from it, falling away from it all together. Ah, even the ah, even the kids now that's growing up over there [in Ireland], like say in the last fifteen or twenty years, you know, they don't even know how to do an Irish dance. Would you believe that, Ted? I've seen some of them, met some of them coming out here, and said, how about "The Stack of Barley," or something, and they didn't know the first thing about it. Never, didn't know how to do it. And, ah, back in the 30's, that's all they knew how to do is dance them dances.

In County Kerry, where Bridget McGraw grew up, house parties are now rare events.

All this has, of course, greatly affected the playing of Irish music in Rochester. Traditional contexts for the music are largely abandoned now, and the Feis, while it does encourage youngsters to dance traditional Irish dances and exposes them to live traditional music, is a disagreeable context for either music or dancing. The mechanical competition with its concomitant stress lacks the enjoyment of the informal house party.

The traditional contexts for the music involved the musician as only

part of a whole. His performance was necessary so that others could dance, and while they danced others waited their turn for the floor. Musician, audience, dancers were all functioning actively together in the context of a social event. Their roles were all equal in that all performed functions necessary to the role of the other participants involved in the event. The musician did not often play without someone dancing; the dancers did not like to dance without a musician to play. Performance of music and dance, along with other entertainments common at such informal events, moved smoothly and organically, following the feelings of the group at any particular moment (not a pre-arranged program). The musician held a high-status role, but good dancers were equally respected. Dances were community-focussed events, and were dependent on a strong community to provide dancers and musicians.

With the disintegration of a tight Irish community in America has come a disinterest in the dance as a peculiarly ethnic entertainment. This has resulted in the rising importance of the session and of such representational contexts as folk festivals as contexts for traditional Irish music. Usually, none of the Irish members of the audience dance at these events. Indeed, non-musicians are relegated to a passive, totally nonparticipatory role. They are limited in their response to expressions of approval, a minimum of verbal interchange with the musicians, and the buying of occasional drinks for musicians. Although the musicians enjoy an audience, the session could just as well be held without spectators. They are no longer necessary to the structure of the event as they were at a dance. The session is totally directed by the musicians; at a dance, they were part of the event, but at a session, they are the event.

One may expect that other changes accompany this change in social

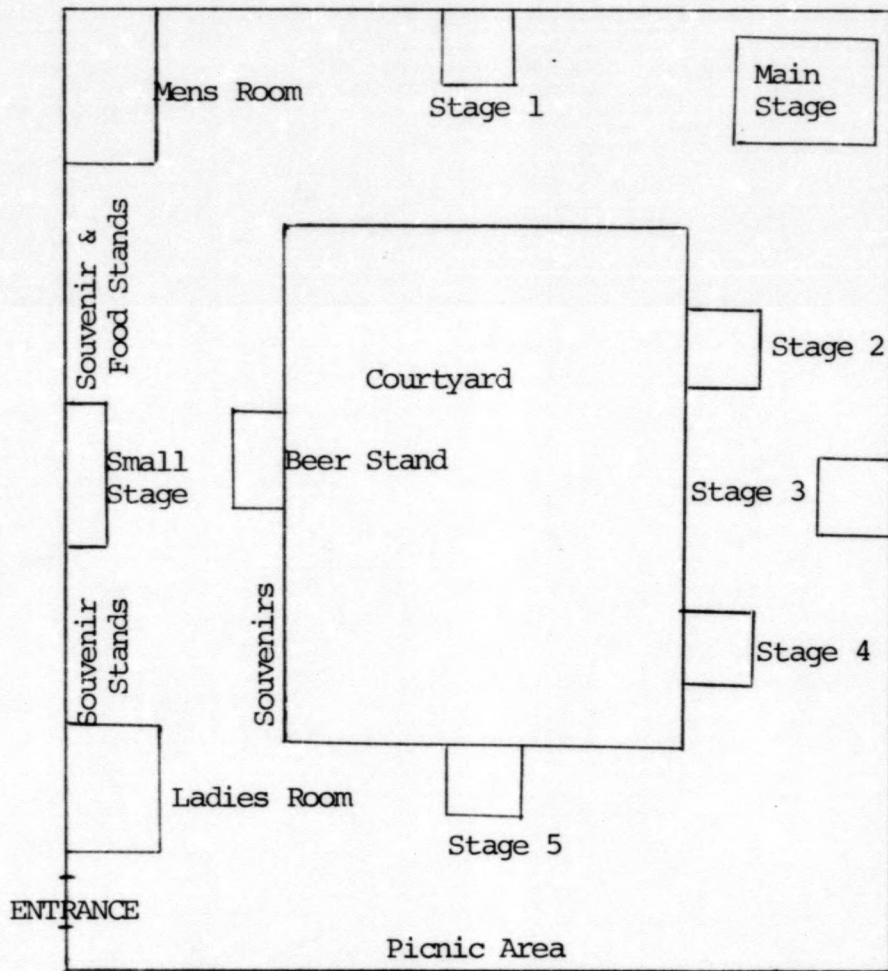


context, and they deserve to be explored further. For example, the music at a session changes. When divorced from their function in a dance context, Irish dance tunes--and this includes most of the tunes played at the Rochester session--become accelerated in tempo. The musicians enjoy playing them faster as a demonstration of their virtuosity. One might expect as well that with the change in focus of the social event from community to individual, the musician's status among his immigrant peers might be eroded. I was not able to answer this question in my present fieldwork.

It is clear that the changes in the social context of Irish music parallel a breakdown in the ethnic ties that in recent memory bound the Irish community in Rochester. Although there is a resurgent interest in Irish music among young Americans in Rochester (and, indeed, elsewhere), it remains to be seen whether this interest will spread to Irish immigrants in the city. The musicians will continue to do their part in keeping their musical traditions alive because of an inner need to express something about themselves. Music plays an important role in their lives as a source of pleasure and an expression of ethnic identity. Marty, for one, believes that he would play music no matter where he came from: "I suppose if I was born in Poland...sixty years ago, I'd probably be playing Polish polkas...." Traditional music is a gift that will always be important in some people's lives.

APPENDIX

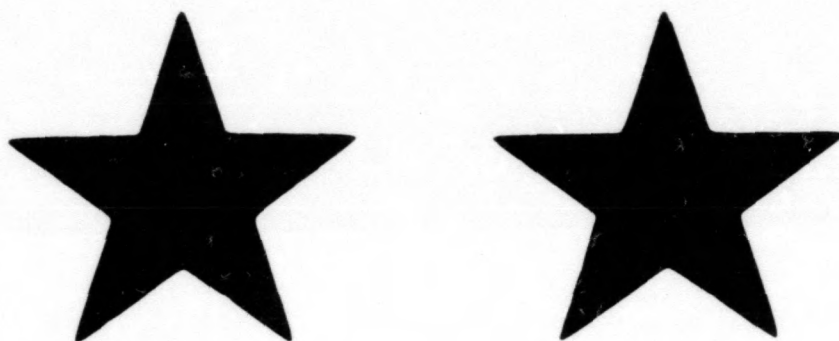
Diagram of Feis Site



(Not to Scale)



# **CORRECTION**



***PRECEDING IMAGE HAS BEEN  
REFILMED  
TO ASSURE LEGIBILITY OR TO  
CORRECT A POSSIBLE ERROR***

## Feis Competitions

(Reproduced from Feis Booklet)

### DANCE EVENTS

**BEGINNERS** - Open only to dancers who started instruction since Sept. 1, 1975.

<b>GIRLS</b>	<b>REEL</b>	<b>JIG</b>	<b>BOYS</b>	<b>REEL</b>	<b>JIG</b>
Under 8 Yrs.	B1	B2	Under 8 Yrs.	B11	B12
Under 9 Yrs.	B3	B4	Under 9 Yrs.	B13	B14
Under 10 Yrs.	B5	B6	Under 10 Yrs	B15	B16
Under 12 Yrs	B7	B8	Under 12 Yrs	B17	B18
12 Yrs & Over	B9	B10	12 Yrs. & Over	B19	B20

#### **NOVICE**

Open to those who have not won an award in competitive dancing prior to Jan. 1, 1975 (Except as Beginners)

<b>GIRLS</b>	<b>REEL</b>	<b>JIG</b>	<b>HORNSPIPE</b>	<b>SLIP JIG</b>
Under 8 Yrs	1	2	-	-
Under 9 Yrs	3	4	-	5
Under 10 Yrs	6	7	8	9
Under 11 Yrs	10	11	12	13
Under 12 Yrs	14	15	16	17
Under 13 Yrs	18	19	20	21
Under 14 Yrs	22	23	24	25
Under 16 Yrs	26	27	28	29
16 Yrs & Over	30	31	32	33

<b>BOYS</b>	<b>REEL</b>	<b>JIG</b>	<b>HORNSPIPE</b>
Under 8 Yrs	34	35	-
Under 9 Yrs	36	37	-
Under 10 Yrs	38	39	40
Under 11 Yrs	41	42	43
Under 12 Yrs	44	45	46
Under 14 Yrs	47	48	49
Under 16 Yrs	50	51	52
16 Yrs & Over	53	54	55

#### **SOLO OPENS**

For those who have won awards in previous competitions, prior to Jan. 1, 1975 (Beginners excluded)

<b>GIRLS</b>	<b>REEL</b>	<b>JIG</b>	<b>HORNSPIPE</b>	<b>SLIP JIG</b>	<b>SET DANCE</b>
Under 8 Yrs	56	57	-	-	-
Under 9 Yrs	58	59	-	60	-
Under 10 Yrs	61	62	63	64	-
Under 11 Yrs	65	66	67	68	69
Under 12 Yrs	70	71	72	73	74
Under 13 Yrs	75	76	77	78	79
Under 14 Yrs	80	81	82	83	84
Under 16 Yrs	85	86	87	88	89
16 Yrs & Over	90	91	92	93	94

<b>BOYS</b>	<b>REEL</b>	<b>JIG</b>	<b>HORNSPIPE</b>	<b>SET DANCE</b>
Under 8 Yrs	95	96	-	-
Under 10 Yrs	97	98	-	-
Under 12 Yrs	99	100	101	102
Under 14 Yrs	103	104	105	106
Under 16 Yrs	107	108	109	110
16 Yrs & Over	111	112	113	114



## SYRACUSE CHAMPIONSHIPS

Entrants in Syracuse Championships may not compete in any other Solo dance events, but may compete in Figure events.

Entrants must list name(s) of set piece(s) on back of Entry Card.

**Minor (Under 13 Yrs)** 115. Girls 116. Boys  
Competitors in either must dance the following:

- A. Lead up and two (2) steps of Reel
- B. One set dance of own choice

**Junior (13 and Under 16 Yrs)** 117. Girls 118. Boys  
Competitors in either must dance the following:

- A. Lead up and two (2) steps of Reel
- B. Set Dance of own choice

**Senior (16 Yrs & Over)** 119. Ladies 120. Gentlemen

Competitors in either must dance the following:

- A. Lead up and two (2) steps of Reel
- B. Two (2) set dances of own choice, but must be in contrasting tempo.

## FIGURE DANCES

AGE GROUP	3 HAND	4 HAND	6 HAND	8 HAND
	REEL	REEL	DANCE	DANCE
	121	122	-	-
	123	124	-	125
	126	127	-	128
	129	-	130	131
	132	-	133	134

## CHOREOGRAPHY

135. JUNIOR (Under 14 Yrs) - (Not less than 8 nor more than 16 dancers.)

136. SENIOR (14 Yrs. & Over) - (Not less than 8 nor more than 16 dancers.)

## IRISH SONGS

Competitor to sing one (1) song from list below. Must sing two (2) verses, or one verse and chorus, if appropriate. May use own accompaniment.

## SELECTIONS

The Bold Fenian Men	Kitty Of Coleraine
The Boys from the Co. Armagh	A Nation Once Again
The Castle of Dromore	The Snowy-breasted Pearl
Down by the Glenside	The Spinning Wheel
The Hills of Glenswilly	Terrence's Farewell
Killarney	Twenty Men from Dublin Town

135SBoys & Girls (Up to 12 Yrs) 138. Ladies (Over 16 Yrs)

136SBoys (12 to 16 Yrs) 139. Gentlemen (Over 16 Yrs)

137. Girls (12 to 16 Yrs)

## IRISH (BUTTON) ACCORDIAN

138AUnder 12 Yrs - Traditional Air & March or Reel of own choice

139A12 to Under 16 - Traditional Air & Reel or Jig of own choice

140. 16 Yrs and Over - Traditional Air, Reel & Set Dance of own choice

## PIANO ACCORDIAN

141. Under 12 Yrs - Traditional Air & March or Reel of own choice

142. 12 to Under 16 Yrs - Traditional Air & Reel or Jig of own choice

143. 16 Yrs & Over - Traditional Air, Reel & Set Dance of own choice

## FIFING

144. Under 12 Yrs - Traditional Irish March & American March

145. 12 Yrs & Over - Traditional Irish March & American March

## ART EVENTS

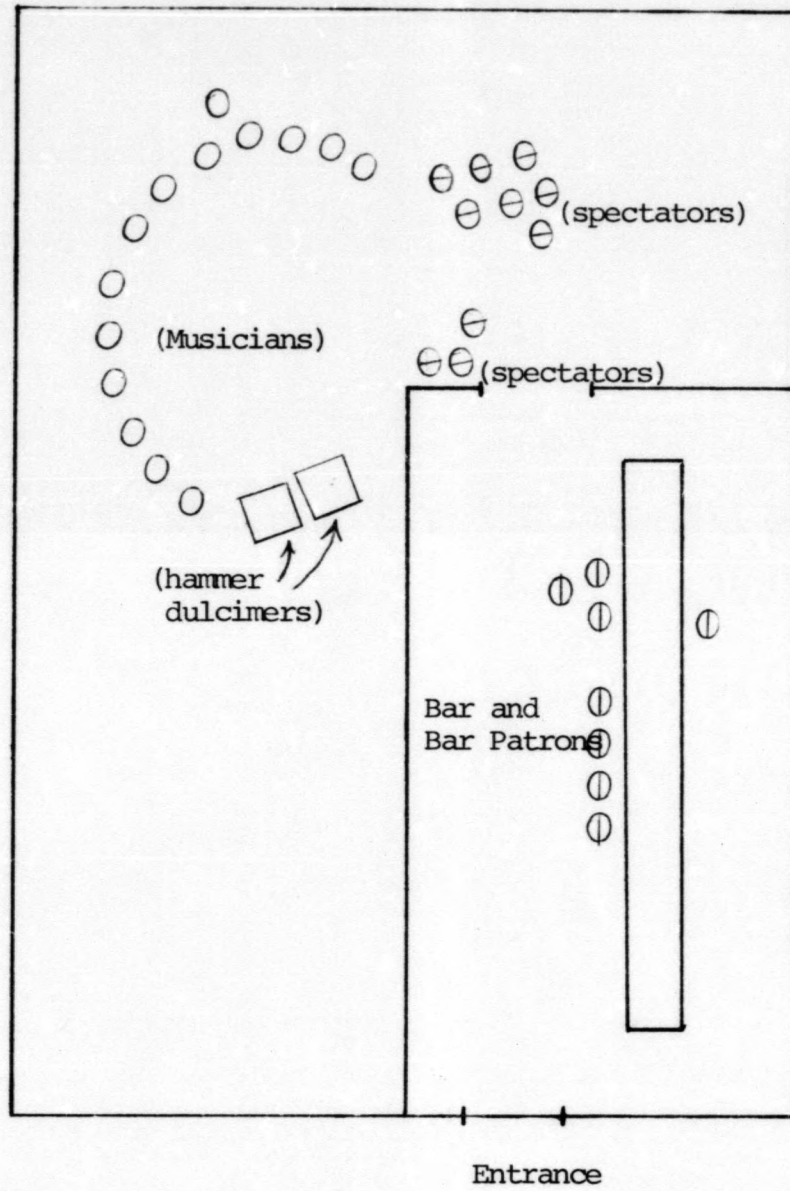
All entries must be ready to be hung for display. Entrant's name and address must appear on back of each entry. Only one (1) entry in each category. \$1.00 Entry Fee per entry.

Under 8 Yrs: General Art (Painting-Sketching, etc.) with Irish theme

Under 12 Yrs:	Under 16 Yrs:	16 Yrs & Over:
148. Pencil	151. Pen & Ink	154. Pen & Ink
149. Charcoal	152. Watercolor	155. Watercolor
150. Watercolor	153. Oil or Acrylic	156. Oil or Acrylic

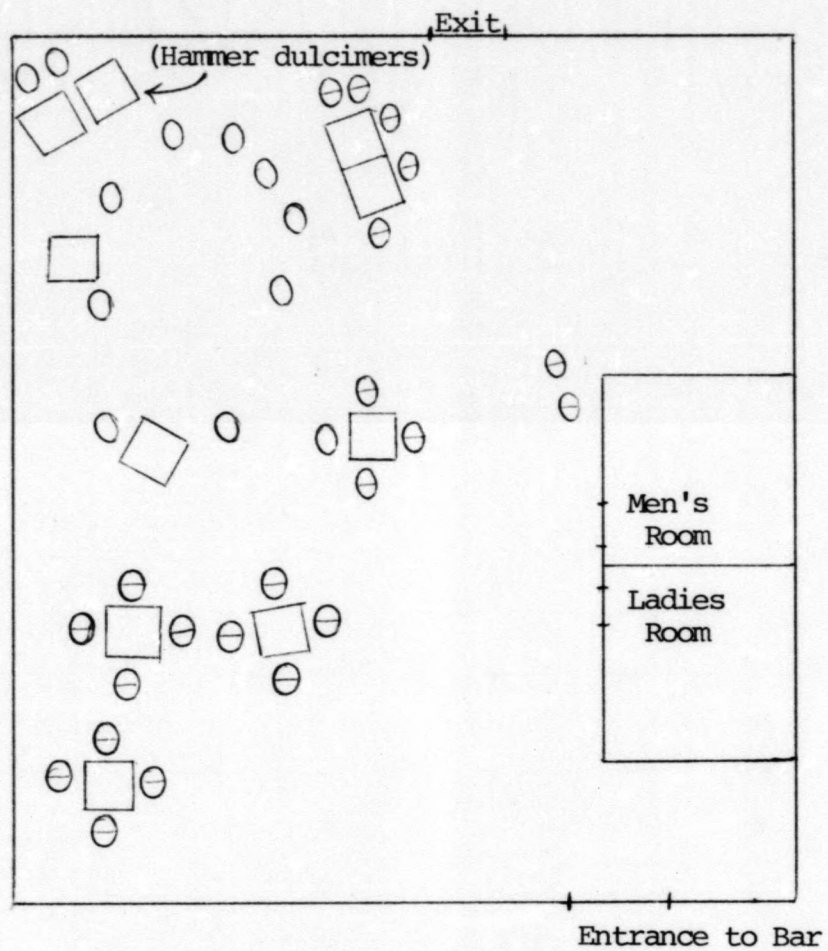


Diagram of Harp's Club Interior



(Not to Scale)

Diagram of Bar, Scene of Second Session



KEY	
Musicians	○
Spectators	⊖
Tables	□



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