

MARK FITZGERALD AND JOHN O'FLYNN (EDS), *MUSIC AND IDENTITY IN IRELAND AND BEYOND* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014). xiv+325pp, ISBN 978-1-4724-0966-9, £110 (hardback), ISBN13:978-1-138-24797-0, £37.99 (paperback).

In the 2010s, when Ireland has purportedly had both its postcolonial and post-nationalist moments, why do we continue to consider music and identity in Ireland within a nationalist framework?<sup>1</sup> This question may seem obvious to the point of unspeakability: after all, Irish musicians, composers and scholars—as well as politicians—have long worked to assert Ireland's political and creative sovereignty and to make sense of collectively and individually confounding histories of colonialism, emigration, migration, ethnicity/race, economic boom and hardship, language politics, and so on. That national identity continues to hold great importance is not surprising, but is it still of primary importance? What is left if we move beyond focusing on national and ethnic identity in scholarship about Irish cultural production?

These questions remain challenging. For those concerned with art music in Ireland, the tension between imagining music as something that can transcend the everyday (including ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc.) and the fervent wish to claim an Irish art-music heritage has centred on questions of national identity and has marginalized investigations of other kinds of identity (especially when those other kinds of identity—like homosexuality—might historically have been considered to be at odds with the ideal Irish subject). In the meantime, conservative understandings of national identity have provided both a rationale for supporting traditional music along with an imperative to limit it to the role of representing an imagined and idealized Irish normativity. In this set of unresolved tensions and in the polarity of art and traditional music (reinforced by scholarship in both art and traditional music), popular musics face their own set of issues around so-called 'authenticity'.

*Music and Identity in Ireland and Beyond* simultaneously provides an opportunity to continue working out these anxieties over what constitutes 'Irish' music and identity and presents multiple perspectives that the editors hope can agree to coexist. By returning to the longstanding and fraught topic of how music and nationalism intersect to create an imaginary Irishness, this collection grants some space to the seemingly eternal battle between art music and traditional music in Ireland, but does not allow this struggle to dominate the conversation. Instead, the editors assert that musics (plural) join to do the work of constructing Irish identity, and that continuing to fight

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1993) and Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997).

for the primacy of one genre over another is unproductive. They argue that a multiplicity of sounds and perspectives is preferable to uniformity, and ask us to expand our contemplation of 'Irish' identities beyond the island of Ireland and 'specificities of place and ethnicity' (3). The inclusion of chapters on popular music, 'Celtic' music and music in African communities in Dublin complicates the art/traditional binary and helps move us beyond an oversimplified understanding of music in Ireland.

Any attempt to grasp the intricacies of identity and music as they inform and create each other must first begin by defining the parameters of 'identity'. Quoting sociologist Richard Jenkins, O'Flynn and Fitzgerald understand 'identity' as the 'basic cognitive mechanism that humans use to sort out themselves and their fellows, individually and collectively' (4).<sup>2</sup> The editors frame the volume as working on two axes: the relationships between individuals and collectives, and the interaction between static and fluid conceptions of identity and identification. Thus, the editors seem to resist monolithic ideas about what constitutes identity, and by extension, Irish identity.

That I automatically wrote 'identity' instead of 'identities' points to my main criticism of *Music and Identity in Ireland and Beyond*—and indeed, of much scholarship on music in Ireland. Despite the editors' expansive views of what counts as 'identity' and their promise of attention to multiple ways of experiencing Irish identity, the volume's preoccupation with nationality is at the expense of other forms of identity—a gap the editors acknowledge through the inclusion of a rudimentary literature review in the introduction. This is a missed opportunity, even if the editors might have needed to solicit several additional chapters to integrate race, gender, sexuality, language and ability more fully into the overall picture of music and identity that the volume presents. Consideration of women and LGBTQ musicians and composers is largely absent from this volume—and it need not have been, given the rich histories of women like Annie Patterson whose musical lives were informed as much by their Irish identities as they were by their gender. The number of scholars working on such topics has increased dramatically since the book was in preparation in 2011 and 2012, as demonstrated by the first and second Women and Music in Ireland conferences that occurred in 2010 and 2012, and this volume would have benefitted from the inclusion of some of the excellent research presented at those meetings and elsewhere. The editors are to be commended for a significant inclusion of women authors, however: out of sixteen authors, six are women—though the near-absence of women in the 'Historical Perspectives' section of the book gestures toward the under-representation of women in Irish and Ireland-focused historical musicology. The representation of

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, third edition (Routledge: Abingdon, 2008), 13.

scholars of colour is a more complicated topic at the moment, given the relatively recent increase of non-white members into Irish society, but I hope and trust that institutions of learning and the field of Irish-music studies are contributing to dismantling wider systemic and societal barriers to non-white students and scholars. Doing so will ensure that future volumes will be able to incorporate a more racially diverse authorship.

While some chapters do invoke race, gender and sexuality—most notably, O’Flynn’s refreshingly cogent discussion of whiteness in the context of ‘Celtic’ music and Fitzgerald’s sensitive treatment of composer Frederick May’s homosexuality—overall, intersectional approaches yield to the book’s focus on national identity.<sup>3</sup> The volume is a snapshot of its time and place, and, indeed, I believe that the inclusions and exclusions in this volume productively call attention to gaps in scholarship: for example, the welcome inclusion of Matteo Cullen’s chapter on musical communities in African Dublin demonstrates the need for scholarly attention to the activities and experiences of musicians of all kinds who live in Ireland—not just those of the white and ethnically Irish men who populate most of the rest of the volume.

Although I find that *Music and Identity in Ireland and Beyond* does not quite fulfil the promise of such an expansive title and is not quite the book I had hoped it would be, it is nonetheless a valuable collection that significantly advances scholarship on music and national identity in Ireland. Within the scope that O’Flynn and Fitzgerald set for the volume, it is successful, and aside from the caveats above it is remarkably balanced in its attention to a variety of musics in Ireland. The book is organized into three sections: ‘Historical Perspectives’, ‘Recent and Contemporary Production’, and ‘Cultural Explorations’. In their excellent introduction, Fitzgerald and O’Flynn problematize the binaries between art and traditional music, Protestantism and Catholicism, and unionism and nationalism, and several chapters work to explore these tensions, including Barra Boydell’s exploration of Irish music and Anglo-Irish identity in the eighteenth century, Jennifer McCay’s examination of the composer Kevin O’Connell, and Ruth Stanley’s essay about BBC Northern Ireland. A general reader might miss some of the nuances of this volume as a collection of work that intervenes in particular debates in Irish-music studies, but most of the chapters stand on their own, and some (particularly those by Boydell, Fitzgerald, Stanley and O’Flynn) should be appropriate for upper-level undergraduates in courses that examine Irish musical identities. Some

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<sup>3</sup> Intersectionality is the concept that every person can claim multiple facets of identity that amplify or complicate their experience of disadvantage or privilege. See Kimberlé Crenshaw, ‘Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics’, *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989), 139–67.

essays may be less accessible because of the density of their prose, and this volume would have been improved by a stronger editorial hand to ensure that all chapters presented their arguments clearly.

The first two sections, 'Historical Perspectives' and 'Recent and Contemporary Production', are perhaps a reminder of the weight that historical studies in Irish music are given (or are asked to carry)—although, as Adrian Smith reminds us in his discussion of Raymond Deane, a 'thriving musical culture' does not require an 'unbroken tradition' (147). The chapters in these two sections present evidence of thriving scholarly and musical cultures, whether around art, traditional or popular music. In 'Irish Music and Anglo-Irish Identity in the Eighteenth Century', Barra Boydell investigates tensions between class and nationality that emerge in the use of traditional music in Anglo-Irish contexts. This chapter is especially welcome for its attention to frictions between commentators and musicians and adds an important dimension to previous work on the era. Martin Dowling argues in 'Traditional Music in the Irish Revival' that the 'vacuum at the top'—the relative absence of support for art music—may have 'allowed for an evolution more strongly coloured by the class fractions of the towns and hinterlands, further from the influence of the metropolis and the state' (47). In 'Re-appropriating the Early Twentieth Century into a Chronology of Irish Composition', Edmund Hunt asks whether anxiety over Ireland's not having a national 'school' has affected how we think of early twentieth-century composition and argues that this question gives us a way to think about more recent composition as part of Ireland's musical history rather than as an anomaly. By providing a way of contextualizing recent composition, Hunt's chapter also provides needed continuity that should augment scholarship on contemporary music in Ireland. Fabian Gregor Huss's treatment of Bax and Moeran in 'The "Irish Music" of Arnold Bax and E. J. Moeran' complicates past scholarship that investigates these composers' work, whether claiming them as 'Irish' composers or disqualifying them from such consideration. Mark Fitzgerald takes both an historical and an historiographical approach to the biography and work of Frederick May in 'Inventing Identities: The Case of Frederick May', and seeks to tease out the concerns of music commentators who have written about this relatively unstudied composer. Deftly weaving contemporary commentary on traditional, art and 'popular traditional' musics in 'Music Broadcasting on BBC Northern Ireland, 1924–39', Ruth Stanley asks how programming 'sought to reflect the national character of the newly formed state of Northern Ireland through music broadcasts that specifically addressed Irish, Ulster and Ulster-Scots identities' (103).

The subjects found in the second section, 'Recent and Contemporary Production', range from art music composition and commentary to discussions of popular artists, thus contradicting the assumption that such topics cannot speak to each other. Fore-

shadowed by the editors' thoughts on binary oppositions, Jennifer McCay discusses 'Ulsterness' as a hybrid identity rather than as a binarized Catholic/Protestant way of being in the world in 'Issues of Identity in Northern Ireland through the Music of Kevin O'Connell'. In a corner of scholarship dominated by examinations of long-departed composers, McCay's treatment of a living composer is especially refreshing. Enlivened by quotations from Raymond Deane (a curmudgeon's curmudgeon!), Adrian Smith's 'The Honourable Tradition of Non-existence: Issues of Irish Identity in the Music and Writings of Raymond Deane' discusses the commentator's complex relationship with Ireland and Irishness. Using a 1951 recording of 'The Copper Plate' (in which dancing and commentary are audible) and Afro-Celt Sound System's 1996 recording of 'Éistigh Liomsa Sealad', Kari Veblen's 'Dancing at the Crossroads Remixed: Irish Traditional Musical Identity in Changing Community Contexts' asks how 'perceived notions [of community] balance with emerging global contexts' (151). Isabella van Elferen's 'Morrissey's Gothic Ireland' uses ideas of the Gothic to examine themes of diasporic Irishness, Catholicism and explicit sexuality as they relate to individual subjectivity and media self-presentation in the singer's artistic output. And finally, Noel McLaughlin's 'Post-punk Industrial Cyber Opera' argues that critical discourse on U2's transition from the blues-inflected *Rattle and Hum* to the more synthetic sound of *Zooropa* illustrates changes in Irish national identity characterized by the 'uneasy synthesis' of 'traditional' and 'modernist' discourses (198).

Taken as a collection, the chapters in this volume provide interventions into current and longstanding debates, but, most excitingly, several demonstrate new and perhaps previously unimagined directions for research on Irish music and music in Ireland. The final section, 'Cultural Explorations', features several such chapters. Matteo Cullen focuses on the musical practices (including consumption) of three African social groups in Dublin—a reggae club, an African Pentecostal church and 'African Night' at a city-centre nightclub. In part by demonstrating that the musical practices of Africans in Dublin are not homogeneous, Cullen also identifies and combats stereotypes to portray a 'positive image of "African Dublin"' (222). 'Kalfou Danjere? Interpreting Irish-Celtic Music', John O'Flynn's investigation of gender and race in contemporary Irish-Celtic music, is a valuable addition to the regrettably small amount of serious scholarship on the genre. I hope that this chapter will prove a point of departure for more robust inquiry into these issues. Eileen Hogan's 'Music in Ireland: Youth Cultures and Youth Identity' likewise begins to fill a gap both in the literature on showbands and, as the author points out, on youth studies in music in Ireland. Unfortunately, its tripartite focus on punk, showbands and traditional music leaves little opportunity for in-depth discussion, and I hope that the author and others will soon flesh out this tantalizingly brief essay. And as the only chapter that substantially addresses Irish-language politics, Thérèse Smith's 'Gael or Gall? Musical

Identity in Early 1970s Cape Clear Island' presents an important reminder that discussions of language in the context of music have been less plentiful than would be ideal. She applies a postcolonial framework to discuss the modalities and effects of silencing the voices of native speakers, appropriation (adopting the metropolitan language) and abrogation (rejecting the metropolitan power).

Harry White's epilogue offers a stringent critique of scholarship on Irish traditional music, in which he issues a rallying cry for those working in this field to move beyond 'empirical assent to antiquarian models of collection and recension' towards a more rigorous practice of 'historical interpretation and sociological discourse' (274). While I find it a little puzzling that he targets traditional music in a volume that includes more work on popular and art music, and wish that he had chosen more recent sources to back up his claims, I agree with White's provocative assessment. He rightly takes the field of ethnomusicology to task for its insistence on the foundational dichotomy of insider/ outsider—but it is also worth pointing out here that Irish-traditional-music scholarship finds itself within another similarly dangerous binary bind. The study of Irish traditional music is in a tenuous place, caught on the margins of the American-dominated field of English-language ethnomusicology, which continues to construct itself as 'non-Western' and uninterested in history and historiography. At the same time, Western music history largely excludes the study of traditional music, and has tended to ridicule vernacular genres for their supposed simplicity. How can Irish-traditional-music scholarship move forward if it remains marginal in both fields—in one for not being 'ethnic' enough, and in the other for being *too* 'ethnic'? In this context, it is not surprising that scholarship on traditional music has adopted mouldy methodologies from historical musicology and has shied away from ethnographic work in a genre where the force of the insider/outsider binary represents both the threat of community censure and, as White suggests, a barrier to critical inquiry.<sup>4</sup> This untenable position begs questions about music, identity and disciplinarity that I hope future work will address.

In its commitment to polyvocality, *Music and Identity in Ireland and Beyond* represents a small step towards beginning to work out some of the disciplinary issues that White points out in his epilogue—disciplinary issues that affect more than just the

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<sup>4</sup> Here, it is worth noting that most published ethnographic work on Irish traditional music comes from scholars outside Ireland, who can (and sometimes do) make good use of this critical distance. Unfortunately, as a largely English language-based genre with a widespread diasporic presence, Irish traditional music outside Ireland is often seen as an 'easy' topic readily available for entry-level student projects rather than as a valid area for professional research that requires nuanced thinking and a great deal of ethnographic savvy.

Fitzgerald and O'Flynn (eds), *Music and Identity in Ireland and Beyond* (2014)

study of Irish traditional music. I look forward to reading work inspired by this volume that addresses its gaps, and that takes on the challenges presented by the scholars who have contributed to this project.

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