

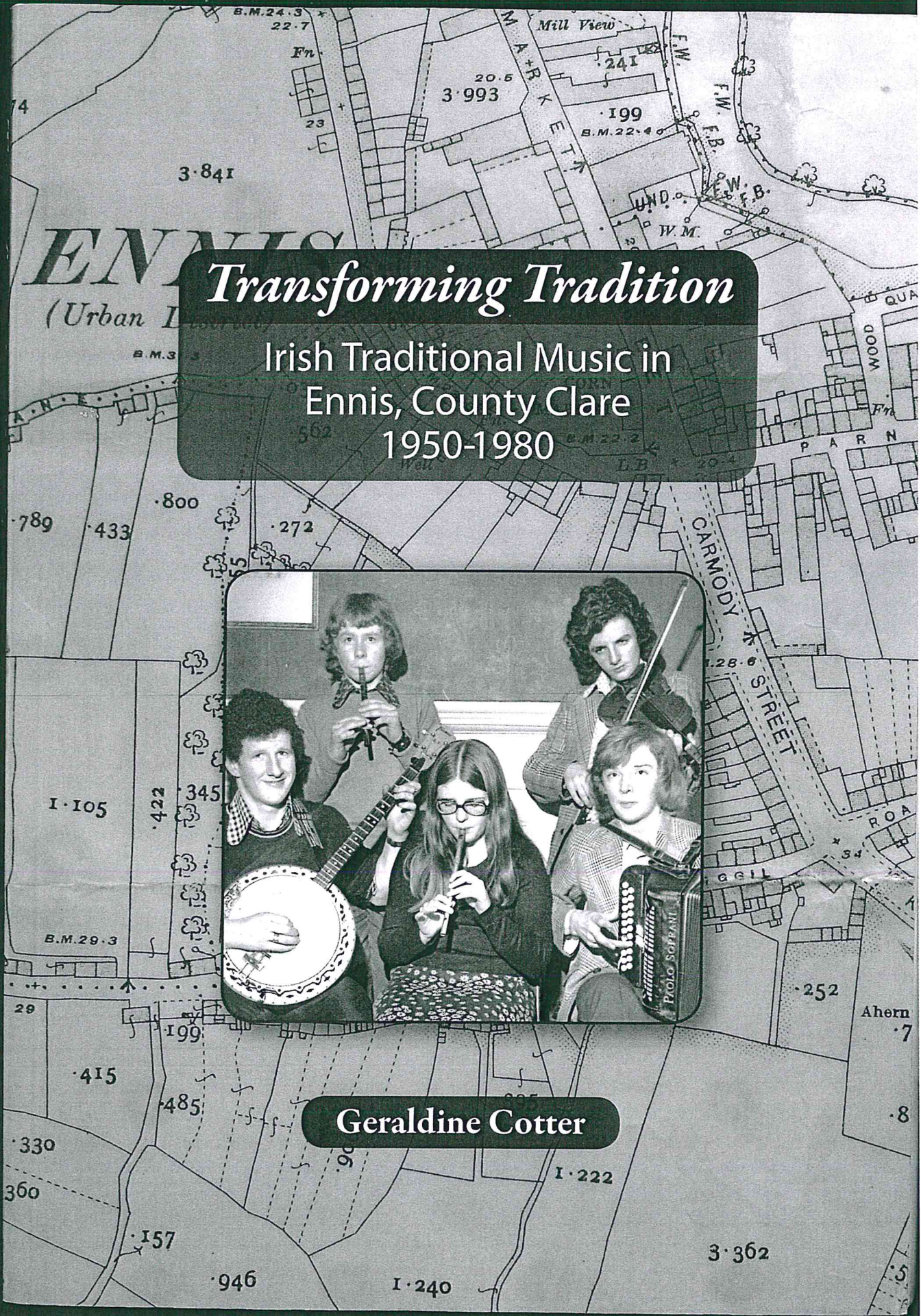
ENNIS
(Urban District)

Transforming Tradition

Irish Traditional Music in
Ennis, County Clare
1950-1980



Geraldine Cotter



CHAPTER FOUR

PRACTICE AS LEARNING

'The two-way interaction of experience and competence is crucial for the evolution of practice' (Wenger 1998, p.139).

This chapter is focused on the transmission of explicit musical knowledge in these classes, which were largely centred within an educational institution, the Ennis Technical School (the Tech) that people attended on a weekly basis from September to June.¹ Here, teachers transmitted knowledge, which was initially focussed on the basic skills necessary to play an instrument. Over time, this was adjusted to accommodate an emerging competition culture created through Comhaltas.² In this regard, teachers introduced novel pedagogies pertaining to literacy and performance and in particular revealed their individuality in terms of class management: Jack Mulker's storytelling and soft nationalist agenda, Brendan McMahon's use of dance, Gus Tierney's disciplined approach as a band trainer and Frank Custy's warmth, patience and egalitarian approach in wanting to give everyone a chance.

At the core of this chapter is the aspiration of Comhaltas to secure new and younger musicians for its organisation. Ennis during the 1950s and 1960s had undergone intense socio-economic and cultural change, which in turn mobilised Comhaltas to focus on issues of teaching and learning in order to maintain and guarantee the existence and continuation of its traditions. Wenger (1998) maintains that concerns about learning become more intensified when the world changes in an accelerated way, which often means refining its practice in order to ensure new membership e.g. there are times when learning is intensified such as in classrooms, through textbooks, teachers etc. (Wenger, 1998, p.8). He also maintains that social practice is a shared history of learning which has to be considered in the context of joining a community of practice such as Comhaltas, where a kind of catching-up is required i.e. developing the key skills necessary to allow us to participate and experience the world in a meaningful way.³ As a result of these classes Comhaltas, in many respects, became a container in which traditional music was encouraged to survive. In addition, by promoting these classes, which provided access to fundamental musical knowledge, Comhaltas facilitated aspiring musicians to acquire a level of proficiency to take part in traditional music sessions and other activities, ultimately allowing the organisation to grow and develop, as well as creating a generation of proficient musicians for the town. In this way a symbiotic relationship existed between Comhaltas and those who attended these classes.

In addition to the transmission of musical knowledge within an 'institution', I also consider the significance of less formal ways that musical skills were acquired, both prior to and subsequent to the formation of the first formal class. I am particularly interested in how the people who ultimately taught music in a formal way learned to play Irish traditional music themselves. While the focus of this chapter is primarily on the institutionally-mediated transmission of traditional music and it may seem that I am setting up a binary opposition of classroom-formal and community-informal, my intention is to show that these contexts were not fixed but were far more adaptive and nuanced. In his discussion of knowledge and 'knowing', Wenger recognises that if knowledge is considered to be pieces of information, it makes sense to have it transmitted in a classroom but, in addition, maintains that it is only part of 'knowing' and that it also involves active participation in a social community (Wenger 1998, p. 10). Accordingly, the explicit knowledge taught consciously and formally in this classroom setting i.e. the basic knowledge necessary to play an instrument, became a significant stepping stone on the pathway towards being able to participate more actively within a

¹ These classes, run by the Clare Vocational Education Committee (VEC) in collaboration with Comhaltas were initiated in 1961. See also chapter three.

² Competitions are central to the *fleadh cheoil* (literally feast of music). At these music festivals people of all ages compete in various categories and age brackets for awards. For more detail see Ní Fhuartháin (2011) Valley (2011) Comhaltas has been referred to in chapters two and three.

³ The concept of community of practice (Wenger, 1998) in relation to the Comhaltas organisation is discussed in chapter three.

community, thus allowing further learning to occur through social practice: the subject of chapter five.

The chapter is divided into three sections. In section one, I first consider family background i.e. the habitus of the family, as a motivating force behind musical choices, particularly when choosing to practice Irish traditional music and in influencing a sense of identity. Furthermore and in order to contextualise how traditional music was learned in the Ennis of the 1950s, I examine the learning experiences of two traditional musicians, Johnny McCarthy and Michael Butler, who learned before the formal classes in the Tech were instigated in 1961. While both of these men attended the classes there for a short period as adults, primarily they both learned, albeit in different ways, to play traditional music in their homes, without any planned formal instruction. Subsequently, in very different contexts, they became teachers of traditional music, Johnny as part of his role as a school teacher and principal of a primary school and Michael privately in his own home. This section draws from extensive interviews conducted with them in 2007 and 2008.

Section two is concerned with explicit and tacit musical knowledge and the process of its transmission in the new context of the classroom i.e. 'what is said and what is left unsaid, what is represented and what is assumed' (Wenger 1998, p.47). I examine what that knowledge was founded on, in particular looking at how the teacher's own pedagogies were personally orientated and the extent that the institutional ideologies discussed in chapter three underpinned them. I examine why and what type of musical knowledge was formally taught and what knowledge was taken for granted. I also identify what practices and knowledge were maintained, overlooked or neglected and how the content and repertoire was altered and adapted to suit new conditions. Through the lens of former students I focus in particular on the initial classes held in Ennis i.e. the Comhaltas/VEC classes taught in the Tech by Jack Mulkerer and Brendan McMahon. I also consider the role of Gus Tierney as a trainer for St Flannan's College Céilí Band, whose involvement was founded on his membership of the iconic Kilfenora Céilí Band. In this section I also consider the use of notation in the classroom. The recollections and commentaries of former students provide a rich textual narrative and commentary, evidencing the pedagogic practices and revealing how the classes worked. Additional primary sources include private music manuscripts, Seán Reid's private papers, Tom Barrett's private papers, books and minutes of VEC and Comhaltas meetings, all providing additional pedagogic information and experiential perspectives.⁴

The final section of the chapter focuses on two issues. Firstly, I examine musical instruments from a number of perspectives. I consider the use of the tin whistle as a gateway instrument to playing other instruments. I also look at the acquisition of new instruments, particularly looking at the motivation behind the instrumental choices made, including the role of parents in those choices and the innovative ways that funding was found to purchase them. Secondly, I explore some of the unsystematic ways that musical knowledge was acquired both inside and outside the classroom, illustrating that some of the practices which existed prior to the organised classes continued and that the sharing of musical knowledge was not totally dependent on formalised structures. This in turn illustrates the dynamic interplay between organisational/institutional structures and more informal methods of learning and also reflects on the notion of institutional learning being social and informal contexts having their own structural underpinnings.

Identifying the Habitus

Prior to the formalisation of transmission through the formal class structures established in the 1960s, it is evident from Breathnach (1971) and McCarthy (1999) that Irish traditional music was

⁴ One such manuscript is owned by Patrick O'Loughlin, one of Jack Mulkerer's first students in the Tech in Ennis in 1961. Tom Barrett also taught in the VEC and will be discussed at greater length in chapter five.

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being passed on informally by social and cultural life in the community and semi-formally through dancing masters and travelling teachers. In this section, I first introduce two musicians Johnny McCarthy from Ennis and Michael Butler from Barefield, a village four miles from Ennis. In examining their musical 'pathways' (Finnegan 1989) I not only contextualise how music was transmitted prior to the founding of the Comhaltas/VEC class in the Tech in Ennis but, in addition, I acknowledge their experiences of learning in a social context and draw attention to the variations in their experiences, which in turn informed how they chose to teach.

First of all and in line with Wenger's argument that the knowledge received in the classroom is only part of learning, I acknowledge the unconscious cognitive knowledge acquired prior to attending the classroom. It is widely accepted that knowledge is transmitted and received from birth onwards and indeed even before this. Children come under cultural influences from the time they are born. In his book *Outline of the Theory of Practice* (1977) Bourdieu examined the structures and practices that framed and influenced human behaviour and recognised that the habitus acquired in the family influences the structuring of the experience at school and in turn shapes later experiences:

'the habitus acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school experiences (in particular the reception and assimilation of the specific pedagogic message) and the habitus transformed by schooling, itself diversified, in turn underlies the structuring of all subsequent experiences (e.g. the reception and assimilation of the messages of the culture industry or work experiences) and so on, from restructuring to restructuring' (Bourdieu 1977, p.87).

In the first instance, I am applying this concept to a group of people who relocated from rural parts of the county into the town of Ennis. As a result of the economic growth of Ennis referred to in chapter two, there was an increase in the migration of people from rural areas of the county into the town. While people were drawn by the prospect of employment, the new housing estates which were being built added to the attraction of settling in the town. Although not a fixed group, they shared a habitus largely based on a rural way of life. Rather than adapting to a different lifestyle, they held on to many aspects of a rural way of life, leading to the reconfiguring of a rural habitus in this new urban setting, e.g. they gathered socially, frequented certain public houses and in terms of sporting allegiances often aligned themselves with their original home places, rather than with the town hurling and football teams.⁵ This pattern also carried on to the next generation. In the case of my family, most weekends were spent in the countryside, particularly visiting relations or attending events in Kilmihil, in west Clare, the birthplace of both my parents. Although I was born in the town, until I was in my early twenties I considered myself from west Clare rather than from the town. It was largely influenced by the attitude of my parents, who rarely socialised in Ennis and who, despite living in the town for fifty six years, still consider themselves from Kilmihil. In terms of their attitude as parents to the teenage culture of the town, I was permitted to attend any type of event held outside the town but I found it difficult at times to get permission to attend social events in the town. Furthermore, in my memory the term townie was to some extent derogatory, reflecting a degree of rural urban tension. In practice, although born and bred in the town I did not consider myself from the town instead I felt a deeper affinity to my rural roots, which was no doubt largely influenced by the outlook of my parents. Certainly this was my position until my adulthood when I finally embraced my 'Ennis' identity.

⁵ This is further supported by the early activities of Comhaltas in Ennis, previously outlined in chapter three. In regard to sport, Gaelic football and hurling are promoted by the national organisation, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) founded in 1884. These are amateur sports. For more regarding GAA activities in Ennis and County Clare see Byrnes (2010 and 2007).

This was also a dichotomy for many of my contemporaries who had rural-born parents. The prevalent view was that authentic traditional music was rural-based, associated with a rural way of life. Clearly as young traditional musicians we aspired to be accepted and since traditional music was not expected to have, or even acknowledged as having the possibility of, an urban dynamic at that time it was natural that we would draw on our rural roots.⁶ Vincent McMahon, a young fiddle player from St Michael's Villas, commented:

'We were from the town...from an early age I always associated music (traditional music) with the country...At that time people had to believe that you got the music from someplace. So, we were taken a bit more seriously, because the rural adult traditional music world could trace our music to our parents or grandparents' (personal interview McMahon Aug 2007).

Vincent McMahon revealed that the majority of those who lived in his locality, St Michael's Villas, an area which produced the largest concentration of young musicians in Ennis during the 1970s, had rural backgrounds — people who had relocated from rural areas of the county or as returned emigrants, including the Coffey family and the Hanrahan and the Roche families (who were cousins). At the same time, he also acknowledged the Skeritt family who were 'townies' but that they were related to the Conlans, who had a long-established dancing school in the town (personal interview McMahon Aug 2007). In drawing attention to their link with an Irish dancing school, he implied a connection through traditional music that may not have existed otherwise. Gabriella Hanrahan, who also lived in St Michael's Villas, observes that:

'One of the dynamics in Ennis which created this rich music scene was that in the area St Michael's Villas to Connolly Villas and over on to the Clare Road; the link in the musicians was they had rural parents. As children we were country children living in town and we had this tradition that was at odds with the mainstream tradition of rock and roll and everything else in the town' (personal interview Hanrahan Feb 2013).

My brother Eamonn's perception of identity is more subtle, in that he considers that living in the particular area of town made a particular difference in terms of involvement in the rock culture of the town (see map of Ennis fig. 4.1).⁷ He explains that:

'Maybe it was the side of the town I grew up in. We weren't in the enclave...You were kind of out of the loop...we were the first generation townies' (personal interview Cotter Jan 2008).

During the 1970s in Ennis, families still lived in the town centre above family businesses and I certainly had a sense of having a very different background from those who lived on the main streets above shops.

Although being from Ennis, as regards traditional music, Kieran Hanrahan was more conscious of his Clare identity than that of Ennis and very aware that it had value or symbolic and cultural capital. He reflected that:

'Once you told people you were from Clare you had kudos you know. The people would say 'aw sure 'twas no wonder you had the music'. I don't know whether that was a mythical thing or not' (personal interview Hanrahan Feb 2013).

Over time, the perception of Ennis changed and it became recognised in its own right as a vibrant centre for traditional music practice. In recent years the term townie is proudly used and in my

⁶ Allegiance to parental birthplaces also stretched to sport. For example musician and broadcaster Kieran Hanrahan, was loyal to the team in Clarecastle, the birthplace of his father, rather than the Ennis team, Éire Óg.

⁷ St Michael's Villas, St Flannan's Terrace, Clare Road and the Turnpike area.

experience it is now by and large considered a badge of honour. The move of traditional music from the periphery to the centre was the key to this.

Since the practice of traditional music had largely been a rural-based practice, it was natural that, over time, this too would be part of the reconfiguration. In the first instance it began as a result of the relocation of people to the town. Among the many musicians to relocate to Ennis from rural areas were banjo player Jimmy Ward, accordion player Joe Cooley and fiddle player Joe Ryan who were all three employed by Paddy Con McMahon, who was a significant employer of tradesmen.⁸ In addition, many musicians returned from abroad at this time, having emigrated to the large urban centres of the UK or the US. They settled in Ennis, rather than in their original localities e.g. concertina player Sonny Murray, who returned from London and instead of returning to Kilmihil in west Clare, settled in St Flannan's Terrace. Similarly, Brendan McMahon, originally from Miltown Malbay, a town about twenty miles west of Ennis and Gus Tierney originally from Kilfenora, a town about fifteen miles north of Ennis, settled in the town and subsequently became music teachers there. Many of these musicians were regular visitors to peoples' homes e.g. the home of musicians Tony and Brendan McMahon, whose parents were originally from Connolly, a village eight miles from Ennis, was regularly visited by accordion players Paddy O'Brien and Joe Cooley.⁹ As described in chapter one, the reconfiguring of the town continued, new housing developments were established. As these new settlers to the town had families, the next generation began to demonstrate an interest in traditional music.

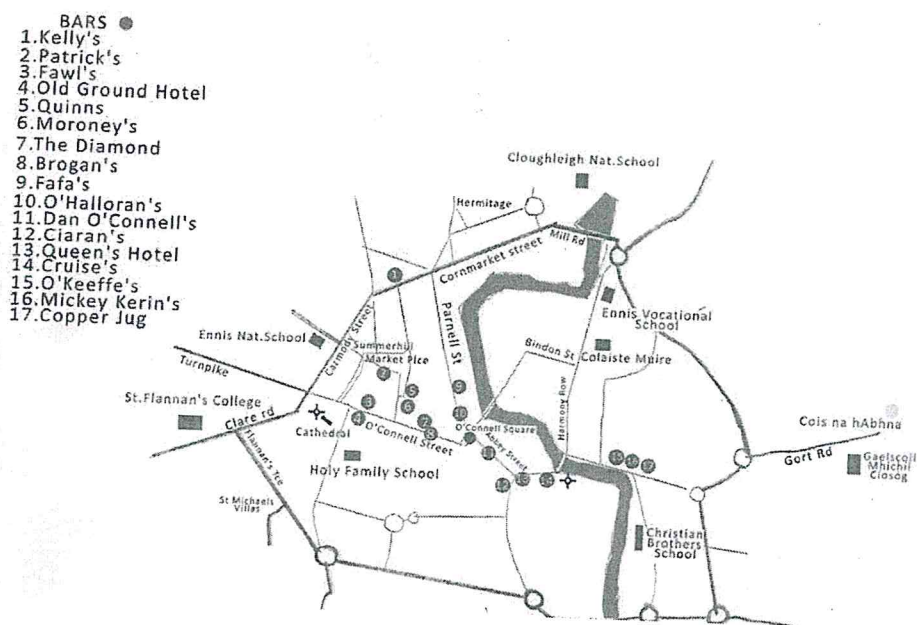


fig. 4.1 Map of Ennis (courtesy of Cillian Boyd).

⁸ Joe Cooley (1924-1973) was an iconic figure in traditional music, particularly as an accordion player. He was from Peterswell, County Galway. For a time in the 1940s, he worked in Ennis and spent a good deal of time in the McMahon household in Upper O'Connell Street, where he influenced Tony and Brendan in particular. The sessions that he played in at Markhams pub in Parnell Street are the stuff of legend. For further reading on Joe Cooley see Ó Chaoimh (2012, pp. 245-252) and Valley (2011, pp.162-164)

⁹ I refer here to Brendan, the accordion player, who was from Upper O'Connell Street, as opposed to Brendan referred to later in this chapter, a flute player and manufacturer, originally from Miltown Malbay who was a teacher of traditional music in Ennis.

In terms of demographics, as has been referred to already, there was a significant concentration of young musicians who lived in the western side of the town, in the St. Michael's Villas, St Flannan's Terrace and the Clare Road area. (see map of Ennis, fig. 4.1) Musicians such as RTÉ national broadcaster Kieran Hanrahan whose parents were from Clarecastle (father) and Ballynacally (mother), Paul Roche, a cousin of Kieran's: parents Clarecastle (mother) and father (Ballynacally); Vincent McMahon, whose parents were from Maurices Mills (father) and Tubber (mother); Kevin and Helen Murray were from Kilmihil (father) and Ballynacally (mother) and both of my parents were from Kilmihil.¹⁰

In my research I conclude that although the pupils who attended the classes in 'the Tech' were young teenagers from the town of Ennis, they were largely children of rural-born parents who tended to be lovers of traditional music. These pupils therefore were more likely to be aware of and receptive to Irish traditional music as a genre. While parents influenced a sense of identity, they also actively encouraged their children by providing access to the music classes, purchasing instruments and subsequently by facilitating them to attend community events such as *fleadhs* and other events organised by *Comhaltas*. In this way parents were not simply a stimulus in terms of *habitus* but, in addition, as experienced by Ruth Finnegan (Finnegan 1989, p.308), they played an active role in determining and supporting a particular musical route or pathway. Likewise, Lucy Green found that it was more likely that popular musicians came from musically interested families (Green 2002, p.24). The centrality of music as part of the social life of these families ensured music was promoted.

In terms of the transmission of traditional music in Ennis, as outlined earlier, during the period leading up to the class of 1961, the tradition was maintained primarily because of the position of Ennis as a market town. It was into this background that musicians Johnny McCarthy from Ennis and Michael Butler from Barefield, a village four miles from the town, were born.¹¹ While accepting that in the past traditional music was primarily transmitted orally and by osmosis, as borne out by the experiences of both these musicians, their experiences are more nuanced than that. Although just a small sample, they give an insight into learning in this way at this time in the Ennis area, exemplifying how music was an intrinsic part of life in both their homes, in relation to their families' active engagement in music making and in encouraging them in a variety of ways, ranging from providing access to instruments, to helping them to develop technically as musicians. Significantly, musicians were regular visitors to both of their homes, which was a significant factor in determining their progress as musicians.

Johnny grew up in a household steeped in traditional music; both his father (on drums) and his grandfather (on concertina) played with local bands, the *Fiach Rua Céilí Band* and the *Fergus Céilí Band* (fig. 2.2) and his maternal uncles were also musicians.¹² Johnny's experience is significant in that as an adult, along with other professional teachers in the town, he attended the classes in the Tech in order to learn to read staff notation. He subsequently taught his own students using this

¹⁰ St Michael's Villas, which was a tightly-knit community, produce an exceptional concentration of talented musicians in the 1970s. This list is merely a sample and is not comprehensive, either in terms of the families who attended or family members who attended the VEC classes. An exception to that was the Skeritt family, whose roots were in the town and who were linked to the Conlan School of dancing. Oliver, dancer and piano player and Peter, accordion, guitar and saxophone player, were well-known performers locally and nationally.

¹¹ Johnny was educated in the Christian Brothers School. He did his leaving certificate in 1955 and then trained as a primary teacher in St Patrick's training college, Dublin.

¹² Although the Irish title is written on the bass drum, the band was known locally as the *Fergus Céilí Band*. The term *steeped* is often used to describe musicians who have a strong family background in music; family members regularly perform. It is part of performing their lineage when introducing them in a performance context, so I am deliberately maintaining this vernacular word here.

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form of notation. Johnny's earliest memory was of listening to gramophone recordings of Michael Coleman, Hughie Gillespie, Sonny Brogan, William Mullally and the Aughrim Slopes.¹³

Michael's musical background was quite similar. His mother (Catherine O'Donoughue) played flute and his uncle played fiddle and uilleann pipes, while his maternal grandfather played the concertina as did his paternal grandmother. Both of Michael's parents were from Kilfenora, an area renowned for traditional music and dancing.¹⁴

Johnny has memories of his two uncles playing marches, waltzes and jigs on Clarke's tin whistles before they emigrated to England.¹⁵ He did not receive any basic guidance on the accordion, the instrument he now principally plays. Neither, he recalls, did he feel pressured or led in any way to start playing an instrument. Although he had access to tin whistles in his home, his first instrument was the accordion, a Hohner Black Dot accordion, which one of his uncles brought back from England. Johnny recalls seeing his father 'messing around with it.' He describes being drawn to it himself from that time:

'I begged and plagued my mother to get me an accordion and eventually they did...there was a shop in Parnell Street...They ordered it there; it took about ten years as far as I was concerned, but I suppose it was two months. So I got it eventually and I took it upstairs to my room and started playing away there' (personal interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

The lack of basic guidance in becoming proficient on the instrument caused some difficulty for him:

'I was playing away for a while and I thought I was getting on great and I wouldn't let anyone come up to hear me playing...eventually they said to come down and play a tune, so I said no, but I'll go over to Pappa, my grandfather...I played whatever few tunes I had...a waltz or two and a march. My father asked him how I was and he said 'he's making progress anyway, but are you going to let him play it upside down for the rest of his life?' My father was hopping mad. He hadn't spotted it himself...so I had to start all over again then' (personal interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

Johnny had the good fortune, according to him, at a later stage to come in contact with two musicians who showed him how to play the accordion in concert pitch. He describes the visits of concertina player Paddy Murphy to his grandfather's house:

'Paddy Murphy on Saturday would always call into my grandfather and they might play a few tunes together when he was going home, after being in town for the day and I remember Peter O'Loughlin saying he was in there a good few times as well, but anyway Paddy Murphy and my father says 'John is learning the accordion'...and he (Paddy) took it up and I will never forget, the reel 'Maude Miller' (he lilted the notes d'c#agf#adf#e...) I was amazed that a concertina player could play the accordion; not only that, but he was playing in a completely different key and that's when I first got an idea that I was playing everything in the wrong key. So I said to him 'how're you playing that, 'ah that's a C inside...play in the inside and when you want to get certain notes go to the outside.' It was a revelation, a complete accident, but that's how things happen...That was the first time I realised that...in order to play in concert pitch you had to do a certain type of fingering. I started all over again' (personal interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

13 These 78rpm recordings are regarded as iconic within the tradition. Shellac recordings were produced by companies such as Decca, Victor and Columbia in the 1920s-1940s. For further information see Spottswood (1990).

14 Kilfenora is the home of the Kilfenora Céilí Band which has a tradition dating back to 1870 (Vallely 2011, p.390).

15 These Clarkes tin whistles were in the key of C. They were very commonly-used and mass-produced instruments (Vallely 2011, pp. 748-750).

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This incident illustrates the consequences of not receiving guidance at an early stage. It is in direct contrast to the experiences of those who were later to attend classes such as those in the Tech, whom were guided through the process.

A few years later the idea of using the bass and playing in different keys was reinforced when Johnny was introduced to Johnny Pickering, an accordion player with Malachy Sweeney's Céilí Band, on the night they were playing at a céilí in the Queens Hotel, a major hostel in the town.¹⁶ He recalls:

'He sat down and played with me for about ten minutes and showed me things which were very useful to me; how to balance the box, to use the left hand and have some bit of harmony. He gave me about ten or fifteen minutes of his time and it was very intense and I learned a lot from it' (personal interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

Johnny himself is very conscious of the impact of meeting these two influential musicians. However, it nevertheless draws attention to the obstacles which can face a potential musician struggling to learn an instrument without direct guidance from a teacher. He is very conscious of the chance element of these encounters, noting:

'Just by accident, not by design. Paddy Murphy was out drinking with my father and my father said 'come up and have a bite to eat before going home or something' and Johnny Pickering just happened to walk into the Queens Hotel' (personal interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

Johnny's experience was similar to others of his generation, in that formally arranged teaching was not common. As corroborated by Johnny and, unlike for future generations of children in Ennis, the tin whistle or music in general was not taught in school, as he insisted when I asked him about it:

'No, absolutely not; anybody who was interested in playing music had to do it outside of the school. They had to do it at home' (personal interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

This was to change and from the late 1960s onwards: all the children attending Ennis primary schools were given the opportunity to learn the tin whistle as part of their school work. Growing up in the 1950s, Johnny was one of the few traditional musicians of his age living in the town. There was another accordion player his own age, Tony McMahan, who lived in another part of the town, so they did not meet each other until they were teenagers and did not have many opportunities to perform together.¹⁷ Tony was the only other contemporary musician referred to by Johnny; the other musicians he referred to in the interview were older than him. He draws attention to the difference between his musical interests and those of his peers during his time attending the Christian Brothers secondary school:

¹⁶ A céilí is a social gathering where people dance Irish traditional dances to music played by groups of musicians known as céilí bands (Vallely 2011, p. 116).

¹⁷ Tony McMahan was from Upper O'Connell Street, Ennis; near the area called the Turnpike. He is a well-known musician and broadcaster with RTÉ. His home was a place where legendary musicians such as Joe Cooley and Paddy O'Brien visited. His older brother Brendan also plays the accordion. Both parents were originally from the Kilmaley area, about eight miles west of Ennis. In a personal interview, Tony's sister Ita McNamara née Mahon, recalled the importance of traditional music in their home. Their mother played the concertina and their father the fiddle. Of the six in the family, she played piano for a number of years, Tony and Brendan played the accordion and Chris played the mouth organ. As well as Paddy O'Brien and Joe Cooley, she also recalls that their home was regularly visited by musicians Seán Reid, referred to throughout this book and concertina player Sonny Murray (personal interview McNamara 2012).

'When I was going to school, doing my leaving,¹⁸ all the boys in my class were into Elvis Presley and rock and roll, Bill Haley and the Comets...I was more interested in traditional music but I would be completely cut off from them musically. We had nothing at all in common. 'Twas strange; anytime I was ever travelling anywhere, to fleadh or anything, I was with people at least a generation older and if I was doing something good on the accordion, they were the only people who would know what I was doing' (personal interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

The importance of Ennis as a market town and as a centre of employment is evident in Johnny's story; Paddy Murphy on his way to or from Connolly, Joe Cooley working for Paddy Con, Peadar O'Loughlin dropping in on his way from Kilmaley, Johnny Pickering doing a gig in the Queen's Hotel.

In some respects Michael Butler's experience of learning the basics differed to Johnny's. Similarly, Michael's parents had strong musical roots in Kilfenora, a well-respected centre for traditional music. Michael's mother, Catherine (née O'Donoghue) played the flute and although his father didn't play an instrument, other members of his family did. Unlike Johnny, he began playing traditional music on the tin whistle before moving on to the accordion, the instrument on which he is best known for performing.¹⁹ Again, unlike Johnny, Michael received some direction from his mother. He remembers liking the instrument and 'blowing into it and making notes,' when he was just four or five years old. He also recalls at a later stage sitting opposite her and copying her fingering as she played tunes on the tin whistle. For him, this experience was natural; his mother played the tin whistle and had the capacity to teach him, even if informally. This experience gave Michael the opportunity to progress without having to overcome the type of obstacles faced by Johnny. Although Michael subsequently played the button accordion, he first played a piano accordion, which he got on loan from his cousin for a few weeks:

'I spent every waking hour of the following week trying to bring tunes out of it... (in terms of keys and the use of the black keys) I'd get my mother to play the tune with me so I'd have the same. I didn't realise what I was doing, but that's how it was' (personal interview Butler Jan 2008).

Michael did not begin playing the button accordion, his principal instrument, until he was twelve or thirteen, when he was given a Hohner Black Dot accordion. Again he learned this by trial and error, allowing his ear to guide him. As a young teenager his father brought him to the early Comhaltas sessions.²⁰ Here, joining in with the older musicians, he increased his repertoire and developed as a musician. He describes being gently reprimanded by Martin Byrnes, one of the dancers, for playing too fast:

'He told us to slow down and 'watch our feet' (the dancers' feet) and watch the rhythm and play to that' (personal interview Butler Jan 2008).

This section has pointed to the experiences of two key musicians who would later become teachers of Irish traditional music. Although in different ways for both of them, musical knowledge was transmitted orally and informally, outside of structured interactions, through simply doing and

¹⁸ The leaving certificate, commonly called the leaving or the leaving cert, is the final examination in the secondary school system in Ireland.

¹⁹ The practice where beginners learn the tin whistle before moving on to play other instruments is now a typical teaching method and is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

²⁰ The Ennis branch of Comhaltas was started in 1958 and meetings were held in Bridie and Martin Byrnes' house and subsequently in the Landmark room in the Queens Hotel, as discussed in chapter three.

observing.²¹ This account of their background and their informal learning experiences provide a backdrop to understanding the similarities and differences as the transmission process changed. Their experiences give an insight into learning at this time in the Ennis area and exemplify how music was an integral part of life in both their homes. In both cases, the incentive to learn an instrument was personally motivated. Significantly, both musicians had access to musical instruments and to regular traditional music sessions in their homes and outside. In addition, following on from a period of experimentation with the instrument, reminiscent of what Tim Rice described as 'noodling' (Rice 1994, p.68) they both received some guidance, even if purely on an *ad hoc* basis.²²

PEDAGOGUES/CLASSROOMS: THE START OF A NEW ERA

This section concerns the transmission of musical knowledge in the new context of the classroom. Through the lens of former students I focus in particular on the initial classes taught by three teachers: Jack Mulkere, Brendan McMahon (the first two teachers in the classes in the Téch) and Gus Tierney, who was a band trainer in a local boys' secondary school, St Flannan's College.²³ I examine their appointment as teachers and look at how their musical backgrounds influenced their *modus operandi* as teachers. I discuss how the classes operated, the adaptive processes that they took, particularly in teaching some aspects of musical knowledge. In this regard I examine the use of notation systems and the interaction between oral and literate approaches, a crucial facet of the transmission process.

Jack Mulkere

On the recommendation of Seán Reid, whose significant role as musician and coordinator has been referred to in chapters two and three, Jack Mulkere (1898-1982) was appointed as the first teacher in Ennis.²⁴ It was noted:

'...the instrument on which he is specially qualified is the violin and in addition to being a competent performer, he can teach pupils to read and write music and to write down tunes or airs as they hear them played or sung...He has been teaching the violin all over south-east Galway and parts of Clare since 1924 and is mainly responsible for the high standard of traditional music in these areas' (Reid, VEC minutes 4/11/1960 item 23).

The emphasis placed by the VEC on a literate approach to music education was also a phenomenon encountered by Ruth Finnegan in her work. She maintained that 'what was written was to be valued and analysed and what was not written was not worthy of scholarly study' (Finnegan 1986). This, together with the fact that Jack Mulkere was a well-known traditional musician and teacher, made him acceptable from both the perspective of the VEC and Comhaltas. In the view of Gearóid

²¹ For further reading on informal learning processes see Cotter (2005), Crannitch (2006) Hughes (1978) Ó hAllmhuráin (1990) and Veblen (1991).

²² Rice (1994, p.68), observed a young boy 'following' the gaida playing of his grandfather, through which he learned but with no clear teaching. Rice described this as noodling, 'following' someone's playing, mimicking their movements, without understanding the melodic, metrical or ornamental structures of the music.

²³ Gus Tierney also taught in a parish hall, the Maria Assumpta Hall and was one of the first musicians in Ennis to teach in his own home.

²⁴ There is reference in the same minutes (4/11/1960 item 23) of a delay in the commencement of the classes the previous term despite the sanction for them from the Department of Education. The delay appears to have been in selecting a teacher. From Crusheen, a village a few miles outside Ennis, Jack Mulkere had an established reputation as a teacher of traditional music in his own locality and in south-east Galway.

Ó hAllmhuráin, Ennis-born academic and traditional musician, Jack Mulkere was well-regarded for both his ideological as well as his pedagogical background:

'When Comhaltas emerged in Clare in the 1950s Jack Mulkere would have been seen as an ideological figure, a pedagogical figure, just as the same way Seán Reid was an ideological figure' (personal interview Ó hAllmhuráin July 2008).

Jack Mulkere was an active member of the cultural nationalist movement, the Gaelic League. In choosing someone like him, they were confident that there would be no challenge to their nationalist ethos. In *Class, Codes and Control* (1971) Bernstein argues that power is in the strength of the boundaries as opposed to within the frame, which 'refers to the strengths of the boundary between what may be transmitted and what may not be transmitted, in the pedagogical relationship (Bernstein 1971, pp. 205-206). Although it was the teacher who ultimately dictated the repertoire, what was taught and the actual transmission process itself, in essence the power rested in the hands of those who chose the teacher.²⁵

Originally from Kiltartan, County Galway Jack moved to Crusheen, County Clare in 1938. In addition, through his father Pat Mulkere, he had links to the Gaelic League and had a strong sense of nationalism as a result of his father's involvement in the revivalist movement (Collins 2003).²⁶ In an interview with Niall Behan (Collins 2003) Jack recalls many meetings both in his own home and in Coole Park with Lady Gregory, Jack Yeats and William Butler Yeats and the fact that his father taught Irish to Lady Gregory (Collins 2003).²⁷ Jack's background fitted in with the ethos of both Comhaltas and the VEC and hence, Jack Mulkere was a natural and strategic appointment as first teacher on the new scheme.

Jack as pedagogue

In this section I look closely at the teaching practices of Jack Mulkere. Focussing on how he taught using staff notation and referring to manuscripts and interviews with former students. My overarching aim here is to establish how his classes operated both in terms of the transmission process itself and in terms of the pedagogic materials of his classes such as Jack's use of books, the blackboard and live performances with visiting musicians. I view his approach as being multi-modal and deeply influenced by his own musical background as well as by his strong sense of nationalism.

Jack was well-known both as a musician and teacher prior to commencing teaching in Ennis. There were many musicians in his family. His mother played concertina, his father was a singer and his uncle played the fife. He was largely self-taught on the fiddle, encouraged by both his parents and later by a schoolteacher Miss Barry (Collins 2003). In 1922 he joined the Gort Fife and Drum Band where he learned to read staff notation under the tutelage of Pat Salmon, a retired British band master.²⁸ He taught throughout County Galway from the early 1920s and was one of the founding members of the Aghrim Slopes Céilí Band, who had broadcast regularly on 2RN, the national radio station of Ireland.²⁹ When he married Angela Fogarty in 1938 and moved to Crusheen,

²⁵ The VEC committee in 1960 was chaired by Rev Canon P J Vaughan and the members included another priest, a senator and members of the local authority; an all male committee.

²⁶ This movement relates to the revival of interest in Ireland's Gaelic heritage and the growth of Irish nationalism from the 19th century.

²⁷ Lady Augusta Gregory (1852-1932) of Coole (outside the town of Gort) was an author, playwright and poet, actively involved in the Irish literary revival and had a keen interest in folklore and the Irish language. With others she established a branch of the Gaelic League in Kiltartan, the main aim of which was to restore the Irish language. She was also along with poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) instrumental in the establishment of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in 1904 (Grey 2000, pp. 223-236). Jack B Yeats (1871-1957), a brother of William was a painter.

²⁸ Gort is a town in County Galway, a few miles from Kiltartan, where Jack lived.

²⁹ Since then the radio station has been renamed *Raidió Teilifís Éireann* (RTÉ)

he expanded his teaching practice into many parts of County Clare, including Crusheen, Barefield, Corofin, Toonagh and Ruan. Father John Hogan, a student of Jack's in Durra House, Crusheen recalls his first class of 1939.³⁰ He notes:

'We had a class the night the war broke out, because they used to do a lot of talking by the fire. That was 1939' (personal interview Fr Hogan June 2007).

Fr Hogan remembers his early lessons in which Jack's teaching appears to be very formal and formulaic. He recalls how they began with the:

'...rudiments of music; EGBDF and FACE and then 'the first finger on the E string is F' and that; he taught it that way...everyone had a manuscript...I'm sure they got them in Ennis, a sheet with five lines and four spaces....he taught us (by) jigging it' (personal interview Fr. Hogan June 2007).³¹

Fr Hogan also remembers being shown how to play vibrato, a technique whereby a more pulsating tremolo effect is created. It is a common technique used in classical music but which would not generally be considered favourably from the perspective of an Irish traditional music aesthetic, although some fiddle players use it when performing slow airs:

'I remember he trying to get us to do the vibrato as he called it...he'd be telling us to practice it on the table 'put your hand down on the table and do this vibrato...he used to encourage us to go in front of a mirror to practice with the bow, to keep it straight...he would have known about the long bow' (personal interview Fr Hogan June 2007).

to which Jack listened and played. Jack's son, Brendan recalls hearing him playing Fritz Kreisler's *Liebesleid* and other classical pieces, for which he had staff notation.³²

Jack's use of staff notation was apparently inspired by his use of Batt Scanlon's tutor, *The Violin Made Easy and Attractive* (1923), indicating his connection to the global flows of Irish music publications. The book contains many tunes which Batt Scanlon had transcribed from George Whelan, who had taught music in north Kerry and south-west County Clare at the turn of the 20th century. The book was self-published in San Francisco, California and was priced at \$1. The book begins with a tutorial system rather like that used by Jack in his classes. It also contained a number of slow airs, which Jack loved. He received the book as a gift from a friend of his, Frank Fahy, *ceann comhairle* of *Dáil Éireann* (chairman of the parliament) at the time. Frank was secretary of the Gaelic League and Jack had supported him when he was running for election in south County Galway.



fig. 4.2 The cover of Batt Scanlon's tutor.

³⁰ Fr John Hogan, fiddle player and teacher in St Flannan's College, Ennis where he also attended as a student before entering the seminary in Maynooth.

³¹ 'Jigging' is another word for lilted or dydling, the manner in which the melody of a tune is sung to a vocable. See Valley (2011, p.403)

³² Brendan Mulker, director of the Irish music programme in the Irish Cultural Centre in Hammersmith, London has been an influential teacher for many years. He has taught hundreds of students in the London area, many of whom are prominent recording artists and performers.

In one of the opening pages, Batt Scanlon refers students to another publication, O'Neills, which was published in 1903 and contained 1,850 tunes organised according to tune type."

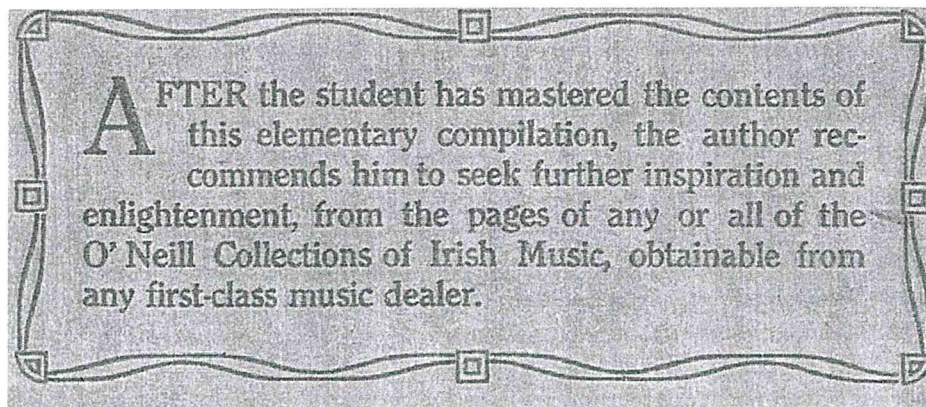


fig. 4.3 One of the opening pages of Batt Scanlon's tutor

Preface

Many "would-be" traditional players seem to think that traditional playing consists, among other things, in holding the fiddle anyway and bowing anyhow.

This book goes to show that quite the contrary is the case.

Its author was a pupil of George Whelan, a blind musician born in Clare who taught in North Kerry. It is quite clear that he not only understood traditional music but also that he had a systematic method of bowing which he instilled into his pupils persistently and consistently all his life.

It is George Whelan's spirit that has inspired the author of this book. Therefore it may truthfully be said that George Whelan might have written the book himself.

No better recommendation could be given to this work than to say that it is written by one who was directly in touch with one of the greatest traditional fiddlers of his day and who has had years of teaching experience and knows the difficulties which have to be overcome.

I wish this book every success as it is the first real guide to the correct playing of this class of music.

*C. G. Hardebeck
Professor of Irish Music,
The University, Cork*

fig. 4.4 The preface of Batt Scanlon's tutor.

The preface, written by Carl Gilbert Hardebeck (1896-1945), professor of music in University College Cork, not only gives a general introduction to the tutor, but in addition refers to George Whelan, Batt Scanlon's teacher, commending his teaching methods, which are represented in this

33 For further reading on Capt Francis O'Neill and his popular collections of tunes published in Chicago, from 1903 onwards, please see Carolan (1997).

book.³⁴ As will be evidenced later with Patrick O'Loughlin's fifty-year-old manuscript, Batt Scanlon's book in effect links the teaching of George Whelan with Jack Mulker's. In addition, the Irish Traditional Music Archive (ITMA) states that it was:

'...hardly by accident, Scanlon's book was published in the opening years of the new Irish free state. It seemed to have been influenced by a Gaelic League spirit and by the publications of his fellow Munsterman Capt Francis O'Neill of Chicago. Scanlon dedicates the volume to another Irish activist, the famous San Francisco-based priest. Rev Peter C Yorke³⁵.

In addition, Batt Scanlon was later a music teacher in the San Francisco area and operated the Scanlon School of Music during the 1920s.

The eighty-eight pages of Batt Scanlon's book contain fourteen pages of the rudiments of music e.g. the basics of staff notation, holding and tuning the violin, on bowing, tone, scales and a chart of the fingerboard, including third position.³⁶ It also contains over 120 tunes including airs, marches, jigs, reels and hornpipes. Patrick O'Loughlin, a student of Jack's in Ennis, has a record of similar information in the manuscript which he has retained for over fifty years. As can be seen from Fig 4.5, page one is dated 20th April 1961, the date of his first class.³⁷ It is also headed the rudiments of music. This reflects Fr Hogan's experience of Jack's *modus operandi*: the notes of the staff are outlined, both as 5 lines and 4 spaces and as a scale passage, including leger lines. He also identified the positions of the notes on the four strings of the fiddle. The scales of C, D and G are written in two registers. Note values are also written from semiquaver to demisemiquaver, a semidemisemiquaver which is more commonly called a hemidemisemiquaver.³⁸ He explained terms such as slur, tie and triplet, pause, dotted notes, signs for up and down bows and wrote out three bars of the rhythm of a reel (fig. 4.6).

34 Prior to this appointment in 1918 he was an organist, teacher, collector and publisher, originally from London. Although blind, he used a braille board, frame and stylus when collecting songs (Vallely 2011, pp. 324-325).

35 <http://www.itma.ie/digitallibrary/book/violin-made-easy>.

36 As in the title of the book the term violin was used as opposed to the fiddle.

37 According to Patrick, Jack insisted on them writing the date on the manuscripts so that they could assess their own progress and according to the VEC records the first class was early that week on the 17/4/1961.

38 In his tutor, Batt Scanlon included from semibreve to demisemiquaver and also uses the American terms based on fractions e.g. whole note (semibreve) to thirty-second note (demisemiquaver)

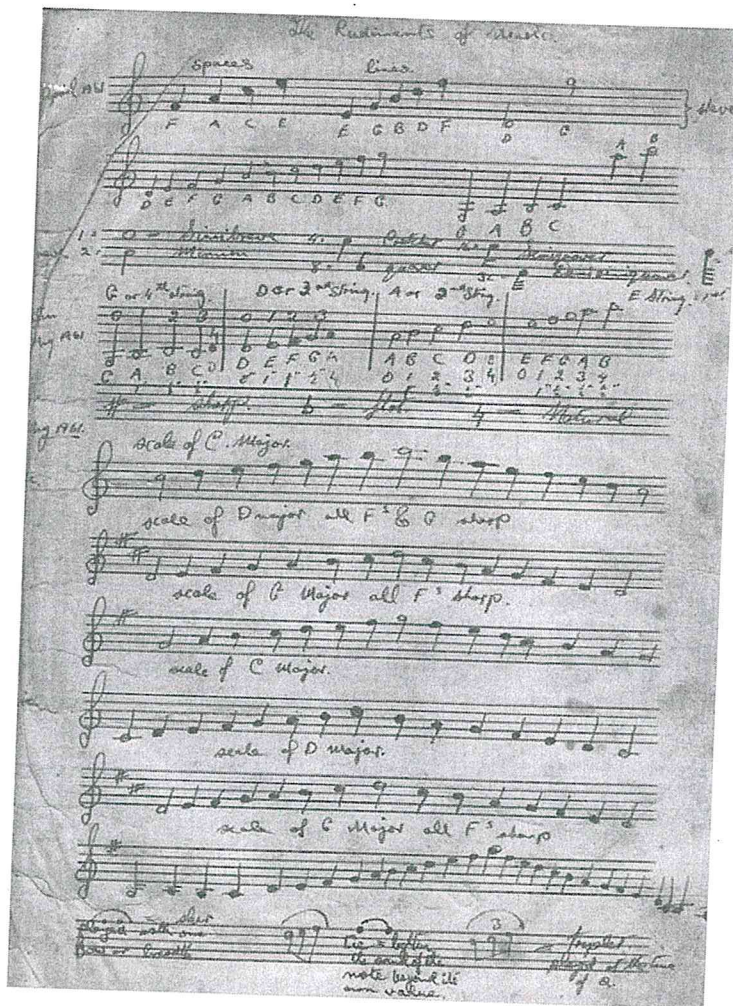


fig. 4.5 Music manuscript pg.1 (courtesy of Patrick O'Loughlin).

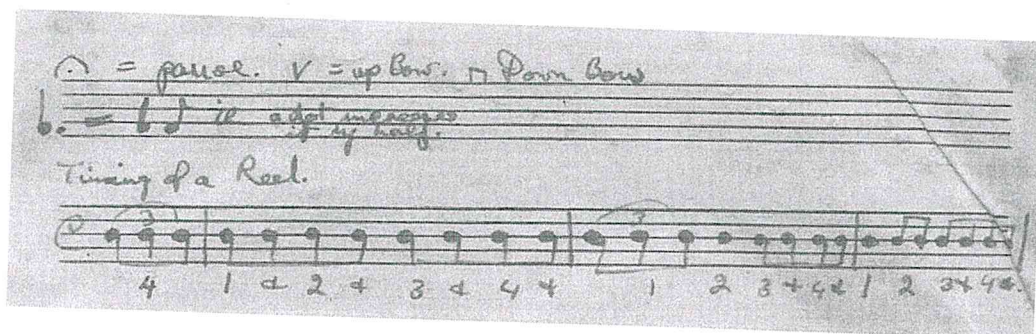


fig. 4.6 Music manuscript page 2 (courtesy Patrick O'Loughlin).

Musician and broadcaster Séamus Mac Mathúna recalls Jacks bowing and the emphasis he placed on producing a good tone when even just playing a basic scale:

'You'd see him bowing the scale with great vehemence and artistry. Some people used to say that even the scale could sound great if played right, compared to what was happening all around...The emphasis was more for the fiddle than for anything else and there was a good few there learning the fiddle' (personal interview Mac Mathúna Jan 2007).



fig. 4.7 Jack Mulkere (*Clare Champion* 22/2/1974, p.7).

Both Séamus and Patrick remember Jack using the blackboard a lot in his teaching and recall that there was always something written on the board.³⁹ Patrick O'Loughlin notes:

'that's the way he wrote it on the board, marked in the positions of the notes on the four strings and the D with the fourth finger. He used terms like crotchet and quaver' (personal interview O'Loughlin Feb 2010).

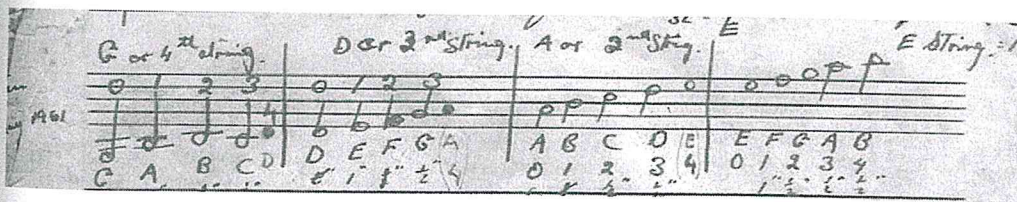


fig. 4.8 Manuscript, section of page 1 (courtesy of Patrick O'Loughlin).

³⁹ Jack's son Brendan is a well-known teacher of traditional music in the London area where he has taught for over forty years. John Boyd, a former pupil of his from 1977-1983, recalls that he did not use the blackboard but instead provided sheets, copies of tunes notated on manuscript. Occasionally he copied pages from books such as O'Neill's 1850 (personal interview Mulkere Apr 2013).

In the tune *The Wearing of the Green* dated 1st of May (fig. 4.9), some notes which could be played on open strings are marked to be played using the 4th finger of another string. In the tune *The Foggy Dew* dated 3rd of May, in addition to the above, Jack also inserts bowing.

Patrick O'Loughlin describes the approach that Jack took when teaching a tune, evidencing the VEC's somewhat relaxed approach to teaching, as discussed in the previous chapter:

He'd play the tune and we'd play it and we'd play individually and he'd correct us; bit by bit, maybe a bar at a time at the start, but as you got it you'd do half the tune and then he'd move to the next person...he'd get around to everyone...about 20 in the class...Some parents came in with their children. The children might not have been good to pick it up, but the parents did. There was a man, Chandler, a plumber and he came in with the daughter and he learned to play the fiddle' (personal interview O'Loughlin Feb 2010).

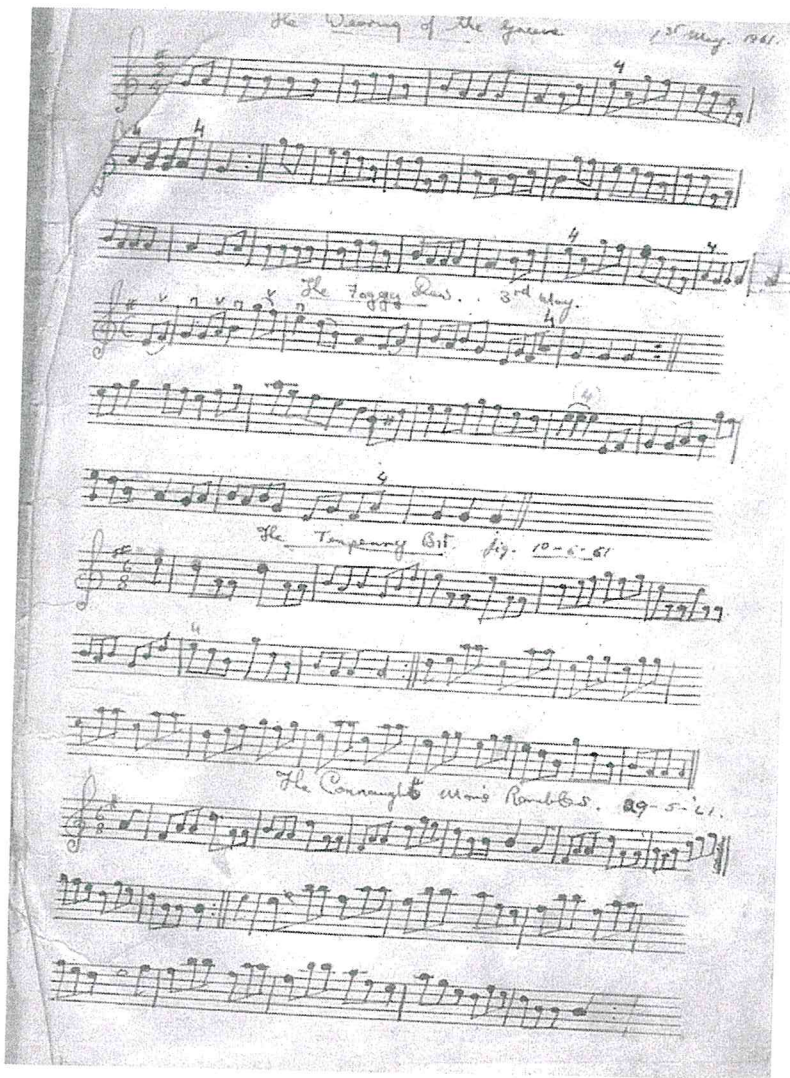


fig. 4.9 Music manuscript, page 3 (courtesy of Patrick O'Loughlin).

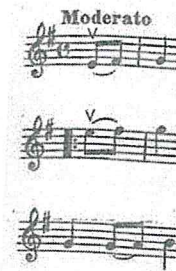


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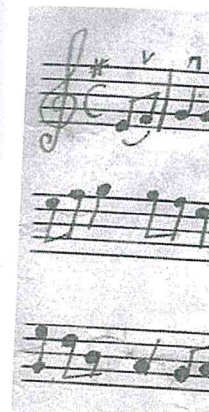


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'My memories would go to be delicate...very hornpipes.....T. very strong, pa.

THE FOGGY DEW

29

As in the O'Neill Collection



fig. 4.10 One of Batt Scanlon's version of *The Foggy Dew* (Scanlon 1923, p. 29)
(There are three versions of this in the book).

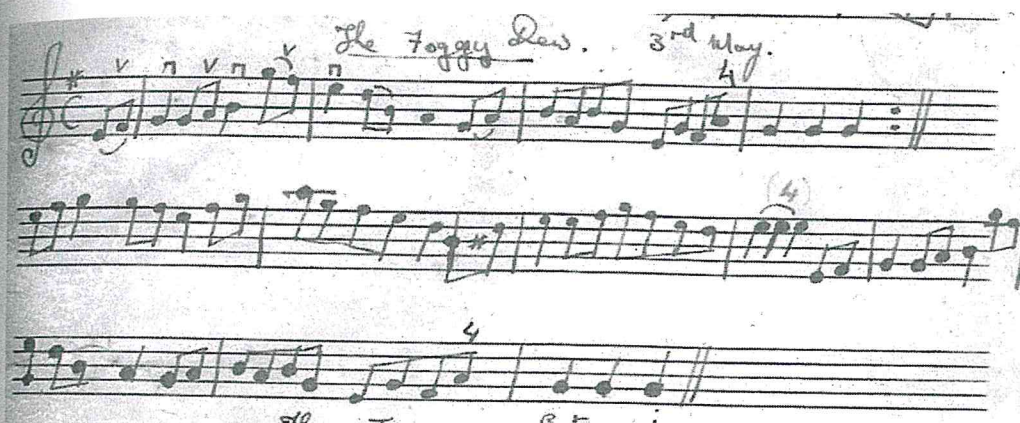


fig. 4.11 Music manuscript page 3. Jack Mulkere's version as copied from the blackboard by Patrick O'Loughlin (courtesy of Patrick O'Loughlin).

In comparing the two versions of *The Foggy Dew* (figs 4.10 and 4.11), it is clear the Jack is influenced by this book. The bowing is much the same and he suggests using the 4th finger on the D string instead of the open A string. In terms of repertoire, Jack had a great interest in slow airs and liked to know the history behind the airs in order to represent them better. He once explained this approach while adjudicating at a competition and suggested to the competitors that they play 'part of it softly, more of it rather loudly and maybe some parts of it rough' (Collins 2003, p.79). His son Brendan also recalls Jack's air playing:

'My memories of his playing, they are scant, except the memory of him playing when we would go to bed and supposedly sleep, which we didn't...his playing of slow airs was very delicate...very emotive and very powerful...I have memories of him playing set dances, hornpipes.... The Blackbird was a great favourite of his...I do recall that his bowing was very strong, positive, vibrant sound' (personal interview Mulkere Jan 2013).

He taught the slow air, *An Chuilfionn* or *The Coulin* (figs 4.12. and 4.13).⁴⁰ Considering his love of the Irish language it is curious why he used the anglicised title rather than the Gaelic one but perhaps he simply used what was the more common spelling.



fig. 4.12 Scanlon 1923, p. 36.



fig. 4.13 Jack Mulkere's version (courtesy Patrick O'Loughlin).

There are many similarities between the two versions, the inclusion of terms associated with western art music, such as diminuendo, ritardando, bowing and phrasing.⁴¹ There are some differences also. Batt Scanlon includes pauses in bars eight and sixteen, more fingering than Jack and a direction to play 'with soul'.

His love of airs dates back to his childhood. Jack recalls an occasion at primary school when Lady Gregory, school manager, visited and asked him to sing an Irish song for artist Jack B Yeats (1871-1957), poet William B Yeats (1865-1939) and Douglas Hyde (1869-1949) founder of the Gaelic League and first president of Ireland. He remembered singing *Grá mo Chroí mo Chrúiscín*. He also loved the singing of John McCormack and the *sean-nós* singers from Conamara.⁴² In this respect Mulkere emerges as a cosmopolitan teacher who, albeit indirectly, created a link with art music. This, combined with the fact that he was musically literate, was referred to when his name was

⁴⁰ This is a well known air based on a song of the same name. This air is often favoured by classical musicians such as well-known Irish classical violinist Geraldine O'Grady.

⁴¹ The addition of bowing and phrasing terms are certainly from the classical music tradition. 'Diminuendo' means to gradually play softer and 'ritardando' means to gradually slow down.

⁴² John McCormack (1884-1945) was a world-renowned Irish tenor who performed operatic works as well as popular Irish songs such as those composed by Thomas Moore. *Sean-nós*, meaning 'old style' is a style of singing in the Irish language (Vallely 2011, p. 627).

proposed as a teacher of these classes in the VEC notes. It was used to justify employing him as a teacher. He in effect was a transitional teacher, who used classical music approaches to teach traditional music. Yet although, as referred to earlier in this chapter, it appears that he was open to other styles of music, this openness did not stretch to jazz. As recorded in an interview of him by Niall Behan, the growing interest in jazz in the 1920s and the fear that it was overpowering Irish culture was a motivation for him to commence teaching:

'In the early days of 1923 or 1924 jazz music was sweeping Galway and I decided that there was only one alternative to it, because I was very interested in all Irish things including the language, the games...we were up in arms against foreign influence sweeping us, sweeping our Gaelic heritage away from us....so I decided that I'd take classes here and there, although at the particular time, for little or no money' (Collins 2003, p.18).

Although staff notation was the primary means used by Jack, it is clear that he did not totally rely on it as a true representation. As Séamus learned to read staff notation, he remembers a trick that Jack used, to teach the 6/8 rhythm of a jig:

'What I remember best was, for the jigs to think of the word 'merrily'. They came up with 'rashers and sausages' since and various other things but this thing was just to think of 'merrily' (personal interview Mac Mathúna Jan 2007).

Likewise, musicians frequently visited the class, thus providing further guidance on what the music should sound like. While these musicians did not necessarily play the repertoire being taught, they did play popular local repertoire. Séamus recalls the comings and goings of some of these musicians to the class:

'Jack regularly brought in musicians to play for the students in the class, for example John Joe Casey (fiddle) would be there and John Joe would maybe have a couple of the beginners over in the corner (helping out)...Peter O'Loughlin, Seán Reid, Gus Tierney and he would say "that's the way you'll be" (personal interview Mac Mathúna Jan 2007).

Séamus also refers to the fluidity of the student numbers:

'My recollection is that there were always a few people giving a hand. I was given a job calling the roll [attendance]. There might be two children and maybe two parents there as well...And maybe for the twelve that enrolled there might be another twelve' (personal interview Mac Mathúna Jan 2007).

Séamus continues his description of the atmosphere and the general operation of the class:

'...a mixum-gatherum of fiddles, flutes, couple of accordion players. I can't remember now, but there always seemed to be a mixture anyway...different age groups...fairly hectic in fairness and there were children who were slightly out of control. It was great fun and you'd come out of it saying, that was hectic. A lot of us had a new tune going home and he was fond of the airs too and of course he was very passionately proud of the music. This was a time that there was always was idealism about the music; that it was important, nearly holy. I remember one man saying to me 'that's next to God'...a lot of the old people had a very strong conviction about what was good and bad, what belonged and very close to that would be this conviction about the importance of the music and how important it was to play it well' (personal interview Mac Mathúna Jan 2007).

Séamus's descriptive narrative of the class draws attention not only to the gentleness of Jack's

pedagogic approach but also highlights the passion that existed for Irish traditional music at the time. Another student of Jack's was Frank Custy, principal of Toonagh national school, who was the first school teacher to attend the class in Ennis.⁴³ The first class he attended was on November 22nd 1963, the day that US president John F Kennedy was killed (Ó hAllmhuráin 1974, p.4). Frank had a strong interest in sport but had no background in music. He decided to attend Jack's class because he wanted to provide a music programme in his school. He remained just one step ahead as he taught what he had learned in Jack's class to his pupils. Frank recalls his experience of being in Jack's class:

'Jack was an inspiration. Here was me coming out of the training college with all these things, I knew everything about teaching...but to see Jack working was an inspiration. The atmosphere he had in his classroom and the way he inspired people to do things, affected me, more than the actual music to tell you the truth...He had a major affect on me as a teacher' (personal interview Custy June 2007).

It is interesting that while the VEC required that a teacher of traditional music would ideally have a teaching qualification, Frank, who had one, found that he learned from Jack who did not. Despite his professional qualifications as a teacher, Frank was in awe of Jack's approach, because of the feeling he created:

'Even if you never wanted to learn music, you'd go to his class because of the happy atmosphere that was there....and remember he had a very mixed class now, because he had every age group. He had children and he had middle...I was in my early twenties and he had older people there' (Collins 2003, p.55).

Frank has a very vivid memory of storytelling as part of the class, although Patrick O'Loughlin, who was in the same class, does not remember this, which highlights the variation in individual recollections, especially in terms of the personal nature of what creates an impression from person to person. Frank recalls that he told stories and that 'he was a kind of a *seanchai*.'⁴⁴ He talked about the fairy whitethorn bush, the black and tans and the tune in between' (personal interview Custy June 2007).

After a short while Jack became aware of Frank's credentials as a teacher and saw it as an opportunity to further the cause.⁴⁵ Frank recalls that 'He was fantastic but when he discovered I was a teacher he had me doing the blackboard work for him...Mulkerer was a professional music teacher' (personal interview Custy June 2007). Frank continues emphasising that Jack's focus was not on perfection but on encouraging his students:

'He had a skill of not making people feel embarrassed because of the quality of their music. He was a perfect example of how things should be...it wasn't just the music that meant a lot to me, he meant a lot in my attitude towards the school and towards teaching' (personal interview Custy June 2007).

His methods and attitude to teaching were in contrast to the formality that Frank was trained in at teacher training college. He considered him 'an inspiration, especially to me because of my teaching background...his classes were very formal, even though I said they were very good; they were very organised' (personal interview Custy June 2007).

Despite the dispute with the Department of Education regarding cutbacks, Jack continued to

43 Toonagh is an area about four miles north of Ennis.

44 A *seanchai* is a storyteller.

45 The cause in this context is generally considered to reference the promotion of Irish culture and generally a nationalist agenda, not always with equal passion.

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teach in Ennis and other places for many more years. Jack's legacy as a teacher lives on through his son Brendan in London, a regional connection to Ennis. There is also a direct link from Jack's to Frank Custy's teaching in particular in Toonagh, a village four miles from the town. (Frank's teaching is discussed in more detail in chapter five.) The teacher who succeeded Jack Mulkere in the Tech was Brendan McMahon and in many ways continued to honour Jack's legacy while also developing and honing his own teaching practice.

Brendan McMahon

As in the case of Jack Mulkere, Brendan McMahon's appointment was sanctioned by the VEC on 14/1/1969 on the recommendation of Mairtín Ó Dubháin, then secretary of the county board of Comhaltas. The minutes state that: 'Mr Mulkere considers himself unfit for the work due to age' (VEC minutes 14/1/1969 item 25).⁴⁶

Brendan was a flute player and flute and harp maker and just returned to County Clare from London. He was originally from Ballyvaskin, Miltown Malbay and emigrated to London in 1949, returning to live in Ennis in 1962. He began teaching in 1970. Akin to Johnny McCarthy's and Michael Butler's experience, Brendan was surrounded by traditional music both in his home and in the community. He has a clear memory of being fascinated by Willie Clancy's flute playing.⁴⁷ Brendan notes of Willie Clancy:

'He used to send me out to dip the flute in the barrel and I'd be sitting there waiting patiently 'til he'd ask me. I think he used to send me out when it didn't need to be done at all. I remember falling asleep with my elbow left on his knee and my hand under my chin and he was playing at eleven or twelve at night and I was so taken in by the flute that I was falling asleep and I didn't want to go to bed at all, but I fell asleep eventually down on his knee and my mother put me to bed. I was probably only eleven or twelve, very young at the time' (personal interview McMahon Jan 2007).

He also has vivid memories of social events such as country dances, *swarees*, wren dances and visiting his neighbours the McKees.⁴⁸ He recalls:

'When I started playing, I used go over to McKees, up the hill, to McKees of Dromin. Joe McKee played the flute, his mother played the concertina, Jimmy played the violin...a lot of people used to come on cuaird there as we called it and you'd have Mrs, she'd play for the sets and she'd be dying laughing at the lads battering with the boots.' The lads would come in with the hobnailed boots and they'd be knocking sparks off the floor with the boots...I learned a lot of tunes, but my first few I learned from Joe' (personal interview McMahon Jan 2007).

These experiences inspired him to learn to play and he recalls learning his first tune, *Miss*

⁴⁶ At that stage, Jack Mulkere was aged 71.

⁴⁷ Willie Clancy (1918-1973), a piper and whistle player, an icon of the tradition. *Scoil Sambraidh Willie Clancy* was established on his honour following his death.

⁴⁸ Country dances were dance parties held in rural Ireland in peoples' homes, prior to the enactment of the Dance Hall Act in 1935. For further reading see (Valley 2011, pp. 195-200). Wrens day (*lá an dreoilín*) is traditionally held on the 26th of December. The celebration involves dressing up in straw suits or colourful clothing and parading through the countryside or the streets accompanied by bands of musicians. See Aoife Granville (2012), Valley (2011, p.758). Money collected by the wren boys, in County Clare at least, was used to fund a house party called a *swaree* a corruption of the French word *soirée*. The food and drink left over from this party was used at another called a scrap dance. The tradition of the wren still exists and is generally used as an opportunity to fund raise for local charitable organisations. *Swarees* died out in County Clare during the 1980s.

⁴⁹ Going on *cuaird* means paying a social visit; storytelling, song music and dance were common activities associated with this practice.

McClouds, from Joe McKee and then the reel, *The Heather Breeze*.⁵⁰ His description of learning from Joe is similar to Michael Butler's description of sitting opposite his mother, listening, watching her fingering and copying what she did:

I became left-handed you see, because the two of us had two sugán chairs (seats made from woven straw) and we'd sit opposite each other, facing each other and you see the way he held the tin whistle." I'd be the same, but it's a mirror image I was getting, so where he had his right hand, I had my left hand, but it made it a lot easier for me to learn, because the fingers were the same. But that's how I learned. He'd move his fingers and I'd watch his fingers and I'd pick up. 'Twas slow...He slowed down to zero and started with just each note and as I was picking up he kept a bit ahead of me but we'd finish up playing it together' (personal interview McMahan Jan 2007).

Maybe he was just impatient but, unlike others of his generation, Brendan found it difficult to learn by ear and decided to learn to read staff notation. However, he did this through a very circuitous route. Using sheet music, *Tacair Port* (collections of tunes), a Comhaltas publication which was given to him by Willie Clancy, Brendan learned to read the notated version of *McCloud's Reel*, a tune he already played, by painstakingly working out the relationship between the notes on the stave and the sound of them on the tin whistle. He describes the enormous effort he made:

'He (Willie) just handed me the sheet without playing them...it was staff notation...I had heard about that. I'd put the sheet down and play the tune and stop at a certain note and follow the bars of music...I'd mark down the notes and go on and stop at another note and that one down and I made out the scale, but I had no lines of course; I had the notes and the number of fingers...I learned the jig off and Willie was amazed that I could learn it from the book without being taught the music' (personal interview McMahan Jan 2007).

His love of traditional music, dancing and his knowledge of staff notation were significant in his practice and shaped Brendan's pedagogic approach.

Brendan as pedagogue

Brendan's classes were attended by a huge number of town and country children. The classes included musicians of all standards, of all age groups who playing a variety of instruments. Typically however, beginners started on the tin whistle and then many progressed to the fiddle or the flute and occasionally the button accordion. Over time, as the demand for classes grew, students were graded and separate classes became available for specific instruments. In a method not dissimilar to Jack Mulker's approach, he describes beginning by teaching the scale of D:

'I taught all instruments because I used to teach from the board. I felt that if you show them the scale, I used to mark the scale on little strips under the strings so they'd know where the fingers were for the different notes. I'd get them all to play it and I'd know if someone was playing a wrong note and I'd go down and correct them' (personal interview McMahan Jan 2007).

Although the tin whistle was the first instrument taught in the music classes, in the case of my younger brother Eamonn, he does not recall being actually shown how to hold the tin whistle noting that he 'never had an individual lesson; I picked it up at home and learned the tunes at the Tech'

⁵⁰ In my experience these are far more difficult than one would expect a complete beginner to attempt to learn. I think that he has possibly attempted simpler tunes in advance of this.

⁵¹ He recalls that the Clarke's tin whistle in C was used, fiddles were tuned down a tone and the German concertinas were also in C.

(personal interview Cotter Jan 2008). This is, I expect, because he had access to a tin whistle at home and had no doubt 'noodled' (Rice 1994, p.68) prior to attending his first class. Regardless, this type of instruction — formal instruction — was not readily available to those who wished to learn other instruments.

Once his pupils were able to identify the notes of the scale from staff notation, Brendan quickly introduced tunes, which he largely taught by pointing out the notes on the blackboard. In this way he felt he could teach instruments which he did not necessarily play himself. He describes the following:

'I used to play the tin whistle and I felt if I could teach the tin whistle without playing it... from the board, I should be able to teach every instrument from the board, because I felt that it was up to the individual themselves to put in their own input into it once they have the basic notes and timing right' (personal interview McMahon Jan 2007).

Brendan also considered it easier to keep a large group playing together if they were following the pointer on the board and that otherwise they might play at their own individual paces and not listen to those around them.

Brendan McMahon was determined that all his students would learn to read music. Although pupils copied down the music into their manuscripts from the blackboard, he also on occasion provided photocopied sheets. He describes:

'I used get them to write the music down to the manuscript, but I used also photocopy for them. At the time we had an old Gestetner and used get a sheet for every one of them, but I'd make them write it down while they were at the class and give them a while writing the music...I'd give them the flyer and tell them to copy that...They'd have started it in their books but a lot of them wouldn't have it finished...by copying it they learned how to write it as well...they didn't have tape recorders' (personal interview McMahon Jan 2007).

The work of teaching was not confined to what took place within the classroom. In order to alleviate some of the work, he developed a labour-saving device which saved him time writing the tunes on the blackboard each night.⁵² He recalls:

'I used to do a lot of work before I'd go down, I'd have to have the sheets ready. I had a flip board and it was handy. I'd have all the tunes written out and I had a piece of piping with felt on the end of it and an ink pad and I'd do the dots (note heads) with that and fill in the things afterwards, the crotchets' (personal interview McMahon Jan 2007).

In terms of repertoire Brendan McMahon always got students to both sing and play the Irish national anthem. Knowing this piece of music was important for any musician at the time, since it was regularly performed at the end of concerts, in a show of national pride for some and simply as the thing to do for others. Like Jack Mulkere he too was a lover of slow airs and taught *Róisín Dubh*, a very popular air at the time.⁵³

'I used to start them with simple tunes that sound nice...I used teach Róisín Dubh and then I used to start off with things like the Belltable Waltz or Lord Inchiquin and then

52 Although not for writing on a large scale, piper Ted Furey developed a similar system for writing notation when he transcribed the music of piper Johnny Doran. He ensured the consistency of the size of the note heads by drilling a hole in a piece of perspex and using it for writing out the notes (Fegan and O'Connell 2011, p.131).

53 *Róisín Dubh* was one of the traditional pieces orchestrated by Seán Ó Riada in his musical score for the film *Mise Éire*. For further reading on O'Riada see Ó Canainn (2003).

we went on with a nice jig, one that was easy to play' (personal interview McMahon Jan 2007).⁵⁴

Brendan also taught the standard local repertoire of dance tunes and although he also regarded these as simple tunes they were complex for people who could just play a scale. Nonetheless pupils did manage to learn them in time. Once his pupils had learned a few tunes, instead of selecting tunes himself, Brendan allowed them to choose from a number that he would play himself for them. It was also one of the ways that he maintained his pupils' interest. He explains the necessity of sustaining their interest:

'The most important thing is to keep their attention...I wouldn't teach them what I thought they should learn. I'd ask what tune they'd like and I'd say 'which of these would you like to learn' and they'd mostly ask you for the one they knew themselves' (personal interview McMahon Jan 2007).

Although he also refers to teaching ornamentation, in my own experience of being a pupil in his class in the early 1970s, I have no recollection of this. Given that he continued to teach for many years I conclude that he adapted his methodology based on his teaching experience. Brendan describes including the ornamentation in the notation:

'I used to write grace notes and all that for them. I'd put a bar of music on the board and fill in the grace notes...those pip notes and get them to play those' (personal interview McMahon Jan 2007).

Another significant feature of his classes was the connection he made between the music and set dancing.⁵⁵ As both a set dancer and a musician himself, he was concerned that pupils would connect both aspects of the tradition. Jack Mulker's approach differed in that he connected the music he taught with other aspects of Irish culture. In addition, he did not face the same challenge in controlling large class numbers. As well as connecting music and dance, because of a strategy of starting each two hour class with set dancing, the excess energy of younger pupils was used up, which helped with class management. Brendan explains:

'I used to do an hour of dancing first and then an hour of music. Two hours I used to do and of course by the time I had the dancing done, they'd all sit down. Jim Lyons [CEO of the VEC] came in one night...he said 'Brendan, how do you do it? How do you keep such order?' (personal interview McMahon Jan 2007).

This strategy was particularly important for him on nights when the class numbers were extra large. He explains that:

'at bingo night I'd have about six extra, there were about six in some families coming in and they'd only be two of them registered...I had sixty four or sixty five there...it was a pure cod for me. I was doing it for Comhaltas' (personal interview McMahon Jan 2007).⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *The Belltable Waltz* was composed by Maurice Lennon, fiddle player with the group Stockton's Wing, a popular Irish music group of the 80s that was formed in Ennis; two of the members had been part of the music classes in Ennis in the early 1970s. Since this tune was composed by Maurice following their performance in the Belleable Theatre in Limerick in the late 1970s, it was obviously one which Brendan taught later in his teaching career rather than in the classes which I refer to in this chapter.

⁵⁵ Set dancing is a social dance-form which originated in France as sets of quadrilles. Different versions of the dances are danced to music of local areas. For more information see (Vallely 2011, pp.193-195).

⁵⁶ The relaxed, malleable way that teachers and the VEC operated is referred to in detail in chapter three.



fig. 4.14 A photo of Brendan McMahon with some of the pupils of his class in Ennis.⁵⁷

In the above image fig. 4.14, the pupils are concentrating, all looking up at the blackboard, with the exception of one who is being guided by the teacher. The variety of instruments includes a melodica, two piano accordions, a banjo, a mandolin and the remainder playing the tin whistle. The relaxed atmosphere was similar to what was experienced by pupils in Jack's class, though achieved in very different ways, for though these men were successful teachers and encouraged their pupils, Jack enthralled them with stories, while Brendan engaged his pupils in dance.

Over time pupils became more interested and motivated in improving their technique and in increasing their repertoire and the demand increased for private one-to-one tuition, especially from well-known icons of the music tradition. One such musician was Gus Tierney. Although he did not teach in the VEC classes, he did teach on a one-to-one basis in his home as well as in the classroom, firstly as a trainer for St Flannan's College Céilí Band and subsequently in the Maria Assumpta hall in Ennis. While his work illustrates the changing nature of the transmission of Irish traditional music, in particular it exemplifies a new way that older musicians were more formally integrated into the process.

Gus Tierney

In the opinion of writer and educationalist Stephen Cottrell, 'the idea of establishing some connection with a perceived tradition seems often to be important to musicians' (Cottrell, 2004, p.40). This could certainly be applied to Gus Tierney (1922- 2004), as he was well-known for his repertoire of unusual tunes and many people attended lessons from him as a consequence of this and the fact that he was a leading fiddle player with the renowned Kilfenora Céilí Band.

Gus was a reluctant pedagogue and had to be persuaded to teach. This experience was not unusual. Tim Rice found that in his research in Bulgaria that 'tradition was learned but not taught' (1994, p.65) and found that most musicians he came in contact with had never taken a lesson themselves

⁵⁷ The caption for the photo fig.4.14 read '*Ag déanamh ceol i gcontae an Chláir* [making music in county Clare], part of the traditional music class of 1964. The teacher is Breandán Mac Mathúna [the Irish language version of his name], chairman of Clare County Board' (*Treoir* 1970 Vol. 2 No 6, p.5).

and had no idea how to give one. This was not exactly the case for Gus, since he had received tuition from fiddle player Jim Mulqueoney, who introduced him to staff notation.

Gus's role as a band trainer

St Flannan's Céilí Band was very successful under his guidance. The initial band laid the foundation for a succession of bands and all-Ireland céilí band awards were won by bands in 1971, 1976, 1978 and 1979.



fig. 4.15 The first St Flannan's Céilí Band, which won the all-Ireland fleadh in 1971
(*Treoir* 1971 vol 3 no 4 p.15).

Firstly, I will briefly outline the canon in relation to practice and repertoire in a céilí band. A céilí band consists of ten musicians playing a variety of instruments e.g. three fiddles, two flutes, an accordion, a banjo, possibly a concertina or another accordion, piano and drums. The rhythm is provided by the drum and the piano which also provides a harmonic accompaniment. The remaining instruments play the selection of tunes in unison, with occasional use of octave playing. The performance begins with introductory taps to set the tempo, sounded either on the block or alternatively as chords struck on the piano. The melody instruments then start together and continue together until the set of tunes is complete. It is a very structured and disciplined style of performance. Gus Tierney, because of his vast experience playing with the Kilfenora Céilí Band, was considered an expert in terms of training bands in this style.⁵⁸

I use the term 'train' in this context, to differentiate from the instrumental teaching which took place in the VEC classes and elsewhere. Although individual tuition was occasionally required, in general the guidance given related to how to operate as a band. Band members generally had reached a certain level of performance before being asked to join the band i.e. they were all able to learn new repertoire without too much difficulty or without needing a great deal of personal guidance. Former band member Vincent McMahon describes Gus's focus when training the band in St Flannan's College:

⁵⁸ Gus Tierney also trained the Naomh Eoin and St Fachnan's Céilí Bands through the 1980s. These were also successful in both *slógadh* and *fleadh cheoil* competitions.

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'Obviously you'd play the tune as he had written or was agreed; that there was a balance across the instruments; that the accordion wasn't too loud; drums giving a decent rhythm and a consistent rhythm and tempo; and like all bands now, the fiddle being strong...Gus Tierney was very good to put together a céili band. He had a great ear and if any of the instruments were playing different notes he'd pull you up straight away...he was great to get the balance right' (personal interview McMahon Aug 2007).

This is reinforced by Eamonn Cotter, who recalls the concentration involved and outlines the scope of the Sunday morning practices:

'They were long enough, fairly intense...just play over and over, practicing the finishes. He'd move people around. I suppose it was getting the optimum sound out of the instruments. If some instrument was too loud he'd shift them back to the back line... everyone playing the same version of a tune and starting on time and finishing on time; keeping an eye on each other. Gus didn't believe in people going into the foetal position when they play. That's the one thing that any seasoned band player tends to play maybe not the best posture, but certainly a straightened posture. As a band player, his belief at the time was that you watched, you stayed awake - you didn't close your eyes and go into a trance...The tuning, playing in an ensemble you have to make sure your instrument is in tune...In the band you got a broad variety of tunes. You got the whole spectrum: jigs, reels hornpipes, marches. You developed your repertoire. I suppose similar to a class but with the band you had concerts, competitions. It put the whole thing in perspective' (personal interview Cotter Jan 2008).

Eamonn continues, outlining Gus's thoroughness:

'He was a stickler for detail. It was all: we'd start and then back again. We might practice the starts. It was all about the competition more than the music...The starts were important, tuning was very important, speed, drive' (personal interview Cotter Jan 2008).

Gus expected his pupils to practice and used the term 'practice'. The element of practice is associated with the formal transmission of music. Turino refers to 'the shift in thinking of music-making as a social activity to music as an object' (Turino, 2008, p.24). Although he links this to the rise in the recording industry, however, at the early stages of learning, music is often objectified i.e. pupils practice their music; they are told by their parents to 'go and do their music' in the same way as for their school homework. While this was an aspect of formal transmission, in the case of the transmission of traditional music in Ennis, it did not preclude social activity. The objectifying of elements of music-making was a stage of learning; part of the pathway to becoming a musician i.e. gaining the competence in order to participate socially.

The use of notation in the classroom

'In a way, every notation is intelligible only to those who are initiated in the particular style of music for which it has been developed...a notation may be deceptively simple yet can in fact function very efficiently for those familiar with the musical style it represents' (Gen'ichi 1986, p.253).

Although the general perception exists that Irish traditional dance music has been transmitted aurally and I agree that in the past this may be so, it is also clear from what has been revealed through this chapter that there was far greater use of notation in the transmission process than has been commonly appreciated. In addition, over time, an increasing overlapping of aural and literate sys-

tems continued in the transmission process in Ennis and no doubt in other centres.

While traditional music was largely transmitted aurally, staff notation was also used, albeit by the minority. Paddy Murphy and Peter O'Loughlin learned much of his repertoire through fiddle player Hughdie Doohan. Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin refers to the introduction of the reel called *The Moving Cloud*:

[The Moving Cloud] was learned aurally from the fiddling of the local postman, Hughdie Doohan, who had a rare ability to read music from O'Neill's Music of Ireland, which was published in Chicago in 1903 and enjoyed biblical status among Irish music communities by the 1920s and 1930s. Doohan, who was a key member of the local Fiach Roe Céili Band, made well sure that his cohorts (whose skills of musical acquisition were primarily aural) would not want for access to the largest data bank of traditional Irish dance melodies in the world at the time⁵⁹

In his lecture *The Use of Notation in the Transmission of Irish Folk Music* (1986) Breandán Breathnach mentions the influence of in British army bandmasters as one reason for the use of staff notation:⁶⁰

Musical literacy among traditional players was more frequent than one might expect, a fact attested by the many manuscripts collections that have survived. In some cases this ability to read music has been acquired when the scribe had served as a bandboy in some regiment in the British army (Breathnach 1986, p.4).

Martin Clancy, a travelling fiddle teacher (who used staff notation), spent time in Tulla and Newmarket-on-Fergus, a village about fifteen miles south and also in Ennistymon in the northern part of the county. According to Seán Reid, interviewed by Harry Hughes, a director of the international music school *Scoil Samhradh Willie Clancy*, Martin Clancy was born around 1842 in the Newmarket area near Ennis and was a professional bandmaster in the British army:

*He was an accomplished professional musician in both the classical and traditional moulds...He went to the states where he met Michael Coleman and James Morrison... Michael Coleman named a jig after him, Martin Clancy's Jig*⁶¹ (Hughes 1978, p.114).

In particular, knowledge which had been for the most part transmitted aurally began to be increasingly transmitted through literate means in the classroom, although it was adapted by the teachers to suit their pedagogic styles. Moreover, it was not relied on in isolation; a sound source was always available and in addition, notation in this case was not as fixed, to the degree that it is in western art music:

The score in the world of classical music is both an accurate model for performance and a model of performance and plays a major role in the economy of that music. In classical music, notation is used primarily in an operational role (in its use by both performer and composer) but it also has a representational aspect in that it can represent the music for the purpose of analysis or even in the common practice of following a score in performance (Keegan 1996, p.338).

As already outlined, Jack Mulkere was introduced to staff notation in this way but over time

59 Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin in http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/music/heartland_clare_concertina/newfound_wealth.htm.

60 As already referred to, Jack Mulkere learned to read staff notation as a member of a fife and drum band in the nearby town of Gort.

61 Fiddle players Michael Coleman and James Morrison, who emigrated to the United States in the early 1900s, were iconic figures whose 78rpm recordings have been highly significant effect in the transmission of repertoire throughout Ireland.

...ted it to suit his pedagogic aims. He provided details such as ornamentation, phrasing etc. to students. However, in general, the term 'directional' notation, as put forward by Niall Keegan, is more representative of the notation that Jack Mulkere, Brendan McMahon and Gus Tierney used, which was:

'a signpost in the processes of transmission, providing essential information for the traditional rendering of a tune (that is the basic outline of the tune) but only being a small part of a transmission process' (Keegan 1996, p. 339).

This type of notation provides the basic information required to play the tune rather than details such as phrasing, variation and ornamentation. The transcriptions are written by insiders for insiders and include only the information that is basic to the particular tune. Variations, ornamentation and phrasing were rarely part of these transcriptions. Although tunes were written on the board by teachers and copied into manuscripts, there was also an element of aural learning as tunes were demonstrated by the teacher as well as by local musicians who performed for the class.

Notation: in practice

Ultimately, the notation served as a mnemonic device and students' engagement with notation varied. As related earlier, both Jack and Brendan used staff notation as part of their pedagogic approach. I already described Brendan's tortuous introduction to the system. Jack, on the other hand, was an easier passage. As I mentioned in chapter one, I remember sitting at the back of a class in order to avoid being asked to play in my own. I could not see the board sufficiently and instead tried to transcribe the tune from the teachers playing. I relied heavily on my aural skills, in order to avoid being singled out to play. I remember another instance of someone being asked to play a tune from a music book the teacher put in front of him. He wrongly assumed that it was the tune written on the board, which the teacher had been playing. He played it perfectly but of course confirmed the teacher's suspicions that he had not been learning from notation at all, but by ear. In a particular teacher, Tom Barrett, the successor to Brendan McMahon in 1970, was determined that his pupils would all be proficient readers of staff notation. In my case by default I picked up a skill to compensate for my shyness to play in front of the class. The other pupil honed his aural skills in his attempt to avoid learning literacy skills.

However, despite the emphasis placed on notation by the teachers, my brother Eamonn reckoned that most students depended on 'picking up' the tunes aurally:

'If you didn't have the good ear, you probably by default had better reading skills...you often see people; they carry the books but they tend to be slow learners in terms of picking it up' (personal interview Cotter Jan 2008).

In the classes during the 1960s and throughout the '70s traditional music was taught through staff notation, even though tonic sol-fa was the system utilised by many teachers in the educational system at the time. Other notation systems, e.g. graphic systems, letter systems, which later became commonplace, were not used by the Ennis-based teachers during this period. Many primary teachers used tonic sol-fa to teach traditional music but adapted it to suit. Tin whistles in the key of D were used, therefore when all six holes were covered, the note D sounded. The notes D, E, F#, G, A, B and C remained doh, ray, me, fah, soh, la, te regardless of the key the tune was in. For the purposes of reading a tune, doh was fixed on D, even if a tune was in the key of G. Frank Custy recalls his introduction to tonic sol-fa:

'I had seen people doing tonic sol-fa. The first couple of tunes I got off Martin Mullins [a neighbouring musician] who lived up here and who was a great old musician who could write down tunes in tonic sol-fa; everything in the key of G - noting C# for tunes that were

in the key of D but he didn't change the doh which an awful lot of people especially nuns and people like that changed the doh around so they'd talk about the key of D and they'd talk about the key of G and get kids all mixed up. He never mentioned keys but wrote it down' (personal interview Custy June 2007).

Kieran Hanrahan had the same experience as a student as a student in Ennis CBS primary school:

'It would have been all doh, ray, me at school...when we went to the Tech afterwards, it was ABC and the staff notation...I think initially doh ray me meant where the fingers were on the whistle, because, it was a C whistle, so when we went to the learn from the VEC we were equating doh ray me with ABC...there was only one doh and that was all fingers down in the whistle; it didn't matter what key it was' (personal interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).

Frank Custy, principal of Toonagh national school and a celebrated teacher of Irish traditional music in his school, was a former pupil of Jack Mulkeré.⁶² Like Jack Mulkeré, he initially adopted staff notation as his preferred system but, in due course, mainly because of his experience as a primary teacher, he created a lettering system which has been taken up by many since. He was particularly concerned that students with learning difficulties would be discouraged from playing, if they had to negotiate a complicated system such as staff notation. In addition Frank considered that because of the aural nature of the music, grouping of letters would be sufficient for people to learn from. Regarding students who were academically weak he said:

'Staff notation would turn them off straight away. That's why I changed to letters and then I started organising the letters so that they wouldn't be 'higgledy piggledy'. You see some people teaching through letters and except you knew the tune you couldn't learn it. They didn't put in the structure. So I put in the same structure as staff notation but I discovered that some of my weakest kids academically were my best musicians which I was very proud of' (personal interview Custy June 2007).

Adapting to the needs of students is part and parcel of being a teacher and it was clear to Frank that it was necessary for him to revise his use of notation. He describes that the idea developed through:

'...experience and experience. If I gave it to them in staff notation they'd spend half the day writing it down, which I couldn't afford and then they'd spend another half day converting it in to letters so I said what's the point and do it direct and at least I would have it right' (personal interview Custy June 2007).

The scope of the classes

In this section I examine how music was transmitted in the classroom. Up to this point the teaching of traditional music had largely been outside of the structures found in schools. On entering the formal setting of a classroom, it became re-contextualised from its original setting and modes of transmission absorbing some of the pedagogic rituals inherent to the classroom and to western art music; evidently traditional music was not greeted here under its own terms. In terms of pedagogic processes, theoretical knowledge and scales were taught before tunes but, once the scale was mastered, pupils were quickly introduced to repertoire. A new tune was introduced at each lesson and over time pupils increased their repertoire. The first tunes tended to be marches and slow pieces but, as pupils became more proficient, Irish traditional dance tunes such as jigs, reels, hornpipes and set

62 Frank's work as a pedagogue is highlighted in chapter five. He has taught thousands of pupils, adults and younger people, among them Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, Kieran Hanrahan, Paul Roche, Sharon Shannon, Seán Conway, Mary Custy, Tola Custy, who have all gone on to perform as professional musicians.

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dances were introduced. In general, the tunes taught were part of local repertoire and were generally transcribed by the particular teacher. In the 1960s and 1970s the number of written resources was limited, nonetheless some teachers copied tunes from collections such as *O'Neill's Music of Ireland* (1903) or *Ceol Rince na hÉireann*, Breandán Breathnach (1963).⁶³

In the initial classes the focus was on the basic learning of an instrument i.e. fingering the notes correctly, while all other aspects of the music tradition were acquired elsewhere. In addition, during the 1970s there were no specialist classes for individual instruments and teachers were prepared to teach instruments that they did not necessarily play themselves. The large classes were made up of pupils of different levels of experience, every age group and various instruments. Over time, as the demand for classes grew, they became standardised according to instrument and level of experience. As classes continued to flourish, new ones were created and by the 1980s classes emerged for specific instruments, particularly as students became interested in being taught technical skills or learning new repertoire in preparation for competitions at *fleadhanna cheoil*. Specialist classes for specific instruments emerged as the demand grew e.g. Eamonn Cotter taught the flute and Michael Butler the accordion. In these classes elements such as ornamentation, variation, phrasing, breathing, bowing etc which had not generally been part of the process of transmission in the classroom became part of the structured transmission process. The notion of learning by simply picking it up through being present among practitioners became more remote, as aspiring musicians tried to fast track their development through formalised teaching mechanisms.

In addition, Irish traditional dance music, which had been for the most part transmitted orally, now began to be increasingly transmitted through literate means in the classroom. Kari Veblen found that teachers placed a great emphasis on memory development and ear training and that they introduced tunes by ear in the first instance and then followed up with some form of notation (1994, p.26). Music, in the Ennis classes during the 1960s and 1970s, however, was taught through staff notation, even though tonic sol-fa was the system utilised by many teachers in the educational system at the time. Other notation systems e.g. graphic systems, letter systems, which later became commonplace, were not used by the Ennis-based teachers during this period.⁶⁴ Although some teachers notated details such as ornamentation, phrasing, in general, the term 'directional notation' (Keegan 1996, p.339) is more representative of the notation provided by them.

Stylistic elements of performance in traditional music are personally interpreted and are not part of the notation. In this regard, the transcriptions given to pupils were written by insiders for insiders and provided the basic information required to play the particular tune, rather than details such as phrasing, variation and ornamentation. In terms of the iconic processes central in the learning of a traditional form referred to by Turino (2008, p.7) i.e. recognising patterns such as structures, typical rhythms, melodic motifs, in my experience in the 1970s these elements were not formally focused on in class, but instead were learned aurally. While the tunes were notated on the blackboard and copied into manuscripts by the pupils, there was also an element of aural learning, as tunes were also demonstrated by the teacher and on occasions by visiting musicians to the classrooms.

⁶³ Captain Francis O'Neill's book *Music of Ireland*, published in Chicago in 1903, contained 1,850 tunes and was a popular source of tunes for traditional musicians in Ireland (Dillane 2009). Similarly, tunes collected by Breandán Breathnach were published in four volumes from 1963, by *An Gúm*, the Irish state publishing company. Two more volumes of his collections have been published since his death in 1985 (Vallely 2012, pp. 83-84)

⁶⁴ Frank Custy, although he used staff notation initially, over time he changed to a lettering system and created charts of all the tunes he taught. In this method instead of writing the notes on the stave, he wrote the letters out and barred and grouped them as they would be in staff notation. This adaptation of staff notation was to suit his policy as a teacher, which was to make music accessible to everyone regardless of ability. He had found that staff notation was an obstacle to pupils who had difficulty reading and had also observed that his students were already writing out the letters under the notes so he decided that he would bypass the stave altogether. In due course other teachers followed.

The pedagogic model was put in place by Jack Mulkere; however, the teachers during the 1970s employed their own unique strategies and methods e.g. Brendan McMahon, a set dancer and a musician, was concerned that pupils would connect both aspects of the tradition, therefore began each music class with set dancing or Frank Custy, by adapting staff notation to suit the needs of his students.

INSTRUMENT PREFERENCES

It was not unusual for people to play two or three instruments well; however the tin whistle was and still is a gateway instrument to playing other instruments. In the case of all the musicians referred to, the tin whistle was the instrument of choice to begin with, possibly because it was inexpensive to purchase but also because it an easy instrument to learn to a basic level. Well-known concertina and fiddle player Sonny Murray (1920-2009) remembers receiving his first tin whistle from Santa when he was seven or eight (personal interview Murray Jan 2007).⁶⁵ Likewise, although Kieran Hanrahan's principal instrument is now the banjo, like most of his contemporaries at the time he began playing traditional music on the tin whistle.⁶⁶ He recalls:

'We played the tin whistle; you know those aluminium whistles, they were generally in C...When we came up in the world, then we got Generation D whistles. When they arrived they were the big deal. Before that you had the aluminium ones and the Clarke's wasn't that long gone' (personal interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).⁶⁷

Tin whistles were mass produced so their quality varied from one instrument to the next. Music teacher Brendan McMahon, referred to earlier, was also a flute maker and was regularly asked to refine tin whistles by his students. Although tin whistles were cheap to purchase, they were not discarded unless they could not be fixed. Again Brendan came to the rescue and repaired the damaged tin whistles. Kieran recalls an incident where Brendan was able to repair a badly damaged one:

'One of my longest memories; we used go down past O'Halloran's in Ard na Gréine when we'd walk from St Michael's to the Tech. The [our] parents weren't running around taxiing like we do, so we'd walk and Rochie [Paul Roche] and myself would generally go together and Mike [Kieran's brother] and whatever other members of the family were going. I remember going one day and he [Paul Roche] had the tin whistle up the sleeve, but slipped in the ice and bent the tin whistle with his elbow...Brendan McMahon was the one man that could repair tin whistles at the time...it was new technology to us, the fact that he could actually straighten a bent tin whistle...he used to run a piece of metal through it and sort out the bore as well. They were dear whistles as well...you couldn't be going weekly for a new whistle that's for sure' (personal interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).⁶⁸

65 Sonny was originally from Kilmihil, about twenty miles west of Ennis. He emigrated to London in the 1940s and returned in the late 1950s and settled in Ennis.

66 He also plays the mandolin and harmonica.

67 For further reading on the tin whistle see Vallely (2011, pp.748-750).

68 At that time it was possible to walk to the classes. There was no sense of it being dangerous at any level. Nowadays, children are driven to and from classes by their parents or other adults. It is also common practice to travel distances for private lessons from musicians with particular expertise. This is a subject for future research and not within the scope of this book.

Acquisition of other instruments

Although not everyone ventured through that 'gateway', those who did progress to other instruments appear to have gained more opportunities to perform socially (the subject of chapter five). Choices of instruments were sometimes made based on personal preferences and other times initiated by parents or other adults. Economic reasons played a large part in deciding if a new instrument could be purchased in a family situation. At times budding musicians were attracted to an instrument as a result of trying out someone else's. Having the opportunity to play in a band also increased the chances of accessing a new instrument, where instruments were chosen and purchased to fill a need in a band. For example Patrick Nugent learned the accordion because it was considered by his parents that it would blend in well with the instruments being played by other members of his family. His older sister Mary played the tin whistle and later the flute, his older brother Michael and his sister Josephine played the fiddle. In a personal interview (Sept 2008) Patrick recalls, if they wished to play in competition together, it was considered important that one of them would learn the accordion and he was selected. Choice in this case was based on aesthetic considerations.

The parents of students attending the classes in the Tech were people who loved listening and dancing to Irish traditional music, although they were generally not traditional musicians themselves. While the role of parents in the domain of habitus has been outlined and it is obvious that facilitating the attendance of classes is fundamental, parents encouraged in other ways, such as purchasing instruments.⁶⁹ Ruth Finnegan emphasised the importance of parents in terms this type of support:

'If a school child was to learn an instrument seriously either at school or privately then parental support was of the essence. Quite apart from the cost of lessons, parents had to provide facilities for practicing (no light imposition on family living) and finance for sheet music, for equipment like music stands and eventually the instrument itself' (Finnegan 1989, p.308).

This type of parental support was also maintained in Ennis. The parents of musician Kieran Hanrahan bought him a banjo when he expressed an interest in it, having heard Enda Mulkere (Jack's son) playing it. Similarly, my parents were always willing to supply instruments to any of us, at any time. They purchased a flute for my brother Eamonn from Paul Davis, a well-known instrument dealer from England. It was a big occasion collecting the flute from the home of the Lewis family in Spiddal, County Galway.⁷⁰ Guidance was sought from musician Peadar O'Loughlin, who inspected the flute in order to make sure that it was up to standard. Similarly, my sister Eimear recalls getting her first fiddle, a ¼ size, from Santa. This had been purchased from fiddle player John Kelly (1912-1987), who had a shop in Capel Street, Dublin.⁷¹ Over time the cache of instruments grew in our home to include an accordion, two fiddles, a concertina, two pianos, a mandolin and numerous tin whistles.⁷²

⁶⁹ I referred earlier to the role of the parents of Johnny McCarthy, Michael Butler and Sonny Murray in purchasing instruments.

⁷⁰ The Lewis family are well-known performers of traditional music. Liam plays fiddle and banjo and now lives outside Ennis. His sister Patsy plays concertina and now also lives near Ennis.

⁷¹ John Kelly, fiddle and concertina player, was originally from Rehy, Kilbaha in the Loop Head peninsula in Co. Clare. He was a member of the Castle Céilí Band, Ceoltóirí Laighean and Ceoltóirí Chualann, an innovative Irish traditional ensemble formed by Seán Ó'Riada.

⁷² It was natural that pianos would be purchased. According to my mother Dympna Cotter nee Lernihan, a piano was the first piece of furniture bought by her parents when they returned to Ireland having lived in New York for many years. She and her sister Mary O'Neill née Lernihan were encouraged to learn the piano and subsequently became piano teachers. Dympna taught for over sixty years in Ennis and throughout the west of the county. She

The funding of instruments for school bands was occasionally an issue. As described in chapter three, local primary and secondary schools established school bands, primarily as a result of teachers attending the initial classes in the Tech. While many of the pupils possessed their own instruments, sometimes creative ways were used in order to obtain the necessary funding to purchase extra instruments for céilí bands. Sometimes this was related to aesthetics and reproducing the instrumental line up of well known céilí bands such as the Kilfenora or the Tulla Bands.

One innovative approach involved the collaboration of St Flannan's College, a boy's secondary school and Coláiste Muire, the girls' secondary school.⁷³ At that time the Department of Education offered a grant towards the purchase of orchestral instruments. However, in order to qualify for the grant, certain marks had to be achieved in the state orchestral examination. The grant was solely for the purchase of orchestral instruments. However, St Flannan's College didn't have an orchestra and Fr Hogan, the bandleader, wished to purchase flutes and fiddles for the school céilí band. A solution to his dilemma was reached when the boys in the céilí band joined forces with the orchestra in Coláiste Muire, under the direction of Sr Paul and Sr Flannan. The grant was given and the money was divided between the two schools. It was as a result of this that my brother Eamonn first began playing the flute. He had already been learning the tin whistle in the classes in the Tech, but when he began as a secondary school student in St Flannan's College he was asked to join the school céilí band, something he had been hoping for. Flute players were needed at the time, so Eamonn was given his first flute as a result of this orchestral exam.

Unsystematic or undirected learning

While dependant on the personal motivation of the person being taught, it is reasonable to assume that learning occurs in a classroom. However, in line with Wenger's concept of social learning (1998), it also occurs in other ways and in other contexts, even when obstacles suggest otherwise. In this section therefore, I show how learning occurred in random ways, revealing that while obstacles sometimes existed, they did not necessarily inhibit learning.

As well as purchasing the banjo for him, Kieran Hanrahan's parents arranged for him to meet another banjo player, Jimmy Ward.⁷⁴ However, as recalled by Kieran, this was just in order to tune it for him. Kieran recalls this meeting:

'My father arranged to meet up with Jimmy Ward outside Kelly's pub, on his way home from work, to tune the banjo. We brought it up in a black plastic bag, sat in the car with the legs out the door and tuned it up and said 'there you are now' and back in the plastic bag and down home and out to Frank Custy' (personal interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).

At a later stage Kieran visited Frank Custy but, as described by him, this experience was also casual.⁷⁵ He recalls:

prepared her pupils for examinations with the Royal Irish Academy of Music, which for many years were held in our home in Ennis. Her sister was also a piano teacher. They were both former pupils of De Regge, referred to in chapter two. The willingness to purchase instruments did not stretch however to the purchase of a guitar. One of my sisters recalls that as a teenager she had a wish to play the guitar but my parents, while not actually refusing, did not buy one. This was possibly because of their association of the guitar with popular culture.

73 Mingling with the opposite sex was actively discouraged at the time, so the collaboration of two single sex schools was very unusual then. The attitude softened nevertheless from then on, particularly in the context of musical events. I remember playing piano with St Flannan's College Céilí Band on a number of occasions, as did my sister Eimear, on fiddle although she recalls on one occasion being in disguise as a boy.

74 Jimmy Ward was a well-known flute and banjo player from Miltown Malbay, who was a regular performer with the Kilfenora and the Laichtín Naofa Céilí Bands.

75 Although Frank had learned the fiddle as a pupil of Jack Mulkere, he also played banjo, now his principal instrument.

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'I still remember in the kitchen of the house and he stood up and he put his leg up in the stool and he put the banjo up and he said 'why don't you try Paddy's Return' so he said 'try that tune' and of course we were familiar with Paddy's Return because we had learned it in the classes, so that was it' (personal interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).⁷⁶

Sometime later he had the good fortune to be introduced to Barney McKenna's banjo style through Seán Horan, who happened to be visiting a neighbour of Kieran's. He recalls:

'He understood Barney McKenna's playing. He was able to tell me. So I went up to him for a bit maybe on a Tuesday night and do a bit. He was living in Shannon's house and when he'd come back visiting - he was about for about six months I'd say. But he gave me the basic rudiments of the banjo' (personal interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).

Importantly, the easy access to sound sources was a basis for what Matt Cranitch refers to as 'latent knowledge,' knowing what the music should sound like, or at least when it sounded right (Cranitch 2006). This was undoubtedly the case for Kieran and, despite the hurdles he had to overcome, he became an accomplished banjo player. Similarly, my first experience of attempting to play traditional music on the piano was fraught with stumbling blocks. I had already played piano for many years, initially taught by my mother and subsequently by Sr Albeus, who taught in St Zavier's Convent of Mercy.⁷⁷ On the occasion of a county fleadh being held in the town, my mother, a piano teacher, was approached and asked to encourage her students to enter the piano competition. I did and as a consequence was invited to join the Gortbofearna Céilí Band, because they were advised they needed a piano player.⁷⁸ I had no idea how to play in this context and one of the band organisers Flan Garvey, principal of Gortbofearna national school, delivered a reel to reel tape recorder to my home and told me to practice with it. At that time I had limited experience of playing Irish traditional music on the piano and had no idea how to approach vamping.⁷⁹ The fact that Flan Garvey was not a musician certainly did not help and when I asked him what I should play, his instructions were simply to 'go oompah, oompah.' In due course I figured it out myself, but not without the added pressure of having to transpose up a semitone, because our piano was not in concert pitch. In addition, the piano in Gortbofearna national school, where the practices were held, was even further out of tune, so the only occasion where I had the opportunity to play in concert pitch was at the actual competition itself. It was an overwhelming experience.

My experience was not unusual. My brother Eamonn recalls that he did not receive any tuition geared specifically to the silver Boehm system flute, which he was given as a result of the Department of Education instrument grant referred to earlier. Eamonn recalls this experience:

'It was probably 1973 or 1974; I was playing that heap of rubbish. Sure like everything else in those days, you were handed an instrument and told to 'go away and learn it'. There was no such thing as one-to-one' (personal interview Cotter Jan 2008).

Eamonn also recalls a funny incident where another flute player in St Flannan's Céilí band was puzzled because he couldn't produce a good tone from the new flute. Nobody had noticed that he was trying to play with the cleaner still stuck in the flute. All of these examples illustrate the type of problems faced by young musicians at that time, not far removed from the experiences of earlier generations.

⁷⁶ The jig *Paddy's Return* is a very popular tune.

⁷⁷ At that stage I had progressed through all of the Royal Irish Academy of Music piano examinations and many grades of London College of Music theory examinations.

⁷⁸ Gortbofearna is a townland about ten miles west of Ennis. At that time the band rehearsed in the local national school, which closed in 1974 when it amalgamated with Inagh village national school four miles away.

⁷⁹ Vamping is a style of piano accompaniment used in Irish traditional music. For further reading see Cotter (1996, pp 33-45) and Vallyly (2011, pp. 541-544).

In addition, in my experience during this time, it was common that aspects of traditional music practice, such as ornamentation, variation etc were not part of the discourse among traditional musicians nor, as already referred to, were they part of the formal transmission process. As a teenager, a friend demonstrated the technique of playing the ornament, which I later learned was called a roll.⁸⁰ I remember her playing a popular reel called *The Earls Chair*. Similarly, Eamonn recalls learning to play a roll from an older student, Michael Coffey. In this way, although relating to a different genre, Lucy Green found in her research that young popular musicians learn from their peers through 'Peer observation, imitation and talk' (2005, pp. 91; 27).

In this manner, young musicians who were able to produce ornaments such as rolls, cuts etc, passed it on informally to those who were not. Similarly, Mary Nugent learned how to do a 'roll' from a prominent local musician Peadar O'Loughlin, who happened to be visiting her uncle when she was there (personal interview Nugent July 2009).⁸¹

Formal and social

These experiences illustrate that although the transmission of musical knowledge was becoming more formalised in the classroom, it was not consistently so and to a certain degree serendipity continued to pertain to how some people acquired musical knowledge. Whereas prior to the 1960s, the primary means of acquiring the tradition had been through informal means, by 1980, following the development of classes for traditional music, the balance moved towards a more formal approach and attendance at formal classes became standard practice. Here, the fundamentals were learned and other musical knowledge was acquired more informally and socially. While the organised transmission of traditional music in the classroom was happening, an informal process similar to that referred to earlier by Johnny McCarthy and Michael Butler co-existed. At the outset their experiences were largely informal, with minimal intervention. The experience of the next generation however, was principally formal to start with and informal subsequently. It is clear that while there are key differences in how musicians of different generations learned the basic skills of playing traditional music, certain elements continued to be transmitted the same way. This is in line with Finnegan's concept of musical pathway where she maintains that pathways are 'already-trodden.' Furthermore, they were:

'...abiding routes which many people had taken and were taking in company with others...nor could they survive without people treading and constantly re-forming them; new paths were hewn out, others again to be extended and developed through new routings by the individuals and groups who patronised them' (Finnegan 1989, pp.306-307).

While the pathway to learning traditional music in Ennis may have been constant for a long time, it was re-formed as a new pattern emerged, whereby, a period of classroom-based learning preceded learning through social practice.

80 A roll is a common ornament used in Irish traditional music. In fact, although I used ornamentation in my playing and as a classical pianist I was aware of the terminology used in classical music, I did not become aware of the actual terminology until I began studying music as an undergraduate in University College Cork.

81 Mary Nugent is a well-known flute player, teacher and academic, sister of Patrick Nugent who was referred to earlier.