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Irish Music in Wellington:  
A Study of a Local  
Music Community.

by

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## ABSTRACT

The Irish session is a musical, social and cultural experience that has emerged from international popularisation and globalisation. In New Zealand today, communities of Irish music enthusiasts maintain links to an international arena, and the session is valued as a context for musical enjoyment and the affirmation of Irish identity. Throughout my research I immersed myself in Wellington's vibrant Irish music scene with fieldwork techniques that included participant observation, sound recordings, and performance. The major part of this study took place in two local Wellington pubs - Molly Malone's and Kitty O'Shea's – but I also observed sessions in other New Zealand cities and in Ireland. The similarities and differences between the two Wellington sessions were examined in detail and my research included extensive interviews with the participants. In addition to exploring Irish sessions in the context of two Wellington pubs, this thesis explores session instrumentation and repertoire, and aspects of cultural identity that include the participant's experiences with Irish music. This thesis also examines how individual session members actively contribute and link their musical training and background to a transnational Irish music community. By studying the individual and musical identities of those actively involved in the community, this thesis reveals that Irish music in Wellington is an active and dynamic scene made up of enthusiasts with a variety of musical and cultural backgrounds. With music as its heart, the Wellington session community, is simultaneously localised in New Zealand but extends outward and connects with Irish communities globally.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction and Approaching the Craic**

Every Monday night in the windy city of Wellington a group of musicians gather together and play Irish music. There are two sessions to choose - Molly Malone's or Kitty O'Shea's; both pubs are located in Courtney Place just a few blocks apart. I use the term 'choose' carefully as there are a number of reasons why a musician would attend one session over the other, such as the differences in instrumentation, the inclusion of songs and the repertoire. These reasons, and the distinct content of each session, will be explored throughout the following chapters. I participate in these music making events each Monday; by invariably starting the night at 8:30pm at Molly Malone's which is situated in the entertainment hub in the middle of the city. Inside a few people are scattered around wooden tables finishing off meals and sipping on pints of beer. The walls are adorned with posters of familiar Irish musical groups such as The Chieftains and The Pogues, and framed pictures of Ireland's countryside. At the far end of the pub a group of musicians talk around two small tables. I sit down, greet those present, and start assembling my simple-system Serry flute. Later in the evening I head down the road to Kitty O'Shea's, to play tunes, listen and observe. The process is familiar to me now but two years ago it was a new musical encounter.

My first experience with Irish music in Wellington was in March 2007 when I attended a ulleann pipes concert held by the Ullieann Pipe Association of New Zealand. It was here that I met Jonathan Berkahn, who told me about the Molly's session, invited me along, and encouraged me to bring my silver flute. Following his advice, I headed down to Molly's around 8:30pm. I was unsure what to expect but was certain it was a

‘performance’, so hesitantly I left my flute at home. When I walked into the pub about fifteen musicians were playing Irish tunes in the corner. Observing the atmosphere, which was warm and inviting, encouraged me to explore further this musical community in Wellington. Between the playing of tunes, the musicians talked amongst themselves about the music they had just played, including details about where the tunes had been learnt and by whom. A little later in the evening, a man carrying a fiddle case entered the pub and was welcomed into the group; seats were moved into a larger circle and more playing began. Two or three familiar melodies were repeated together, comprising a set, and by the end of the evening the musicians had played a large number of tunes on a range of instruments, most notably accordions. The melody was accompanied by guitarists, who were positioned behind the ensemble. Another musical element which added interest, apart from the conversation and sets of tunes, was the inclusion of ballad-style songs. This session experience at Molly’s was my first exposure to the Irish flute and I found its tonal qualities particularly intriguing. I went home very excited about the music I had heard. During the evening I had been told that another session occurred at Kitty’s – also each Monday evening but in contrast to Molly’s, that this (as we shall discover) was more focused on a specific Irish aesthetic.

Previous to these experiences, my introduction to Irish music began in high school. Saint John’s College in Hamilton had an Irish *céilí* group which met every fortnight to practise tunes and occasionally performed at school events, weddings and other gatherings. As a participant in this *céilí* group I had some exposure to the music; however, I was not aware of the session context until 2007. Some of the tunes played in the *céilí* group were the same as those at the Molly’s session. It was then the familiarity of some dance tunes

along with the encouragement of a few session members at Molly's that ensured I had my silver flute the following week ready to at least play the tunes I knew. From week to week a new experience, personality or tune would be introduced in the session, creating dynamic and lively occasions. Because of these interesting musical and social qualities I thought the session had many possibilities for further research through participant observation. I also became curious about the session community within Wellington.

### **Fieldwork Approaches**

My initial process of researching the Irish musical community in Wellington was through ethnographic fieldwork, employing the methodology of participant observation. I was largely influenced by the work of Timothy Rice in Bulgaria (1994), Anthony Seeger's study of Suya singing (1987), and Ginette Dunn's study of folk singing in East Suffolk, England (1980). Following the approach of Rice, who learnt the *gaida* (bagpipes) as a way to understand more about the music and culture of Bulgaria, I decided to learn the Irish flute, having been classically trained on the Boehm-style flute from the age of twelve. The transition between the two instruments was a challenge with embouchure, ornamentation, tone and repertoire differing extensively between them. I purchased a simple-system Irish flute and found the learning process both interesting and challenging (see Figure 1). I also found it essential to promptly learn a new repertoire in order to participate more thoroughly in the session community. The focused learning of tunes is separate from the session context; they are learnt from other musicians, during folk festival workshops, music schools such as *Ceol Aneas*, or from recordings and notation. Again I found it helpful to

discuss the music with the participants primarily to learn about the origins of tunes, ornamentation and how the music is organised together in sets.



Figure 1: Boehm Flute and Simple-System Irish Flute

By learning the flute and attending weekly sessions, the musicians quickly recognised my desire to develop my individual style and repertoire, so that I could both actively contribute to the session community. They were also willing to engage in the field work component of my research and in 2007 I undertook three formal interviews with musicians from Molly Malone's who discussed the music, learning process, session etiquette and their personal views of the session. Then, in 2009, I conducted and recorded a further twelve formal interviews with session musicians from both Molly's and Kitty's, and beyond that had extensive email contact with other session participants in both Wellington and other areas of New Zealand. The formal interviews generally lasted from thirty to ninety minutes. I transcribed them and generally emailed the participants the transcriptions for them to check (and sometimes change). During these interviews I learnt a great deal about a musician's individual style, the origins of the sessions, and the differences between Molly's and Kitty's became further defined. I found that focusing on the musicians' comments and quotes was an effective way of describing the music they play; hence,

throughout Chapter Three, for example, personal quotes from the musicians are included (Keil 1991, Rice 1994, Vander 1988). Throughout this thesis the full names of the participants are given when quoted to avoid any confusion for the reader. I also refer to the participants by their first name during the study as this is how they are identified within the community. All interviews are in my possession, as part of the approved ethical procedure at Victoria University.



Figure 2: Map of the Counties of Ireland (Boullier 1998)

My fieldwork process expanded in 2008 when I travelled to Ireland for two months and attended three week-long summer schools.



Figure 3: Session during the Drumshanbo Festival, County Leitrim, July 2008

In each summer school I participated in flute lessons, learning a great deal about ornamentation, variation, repertoire and regional styles. In all cases my teacher or instructor was born in Ireland and was from the region of the festivals in County Clare and County Leitrim (see Figure 3).



Figure 4: Weekly Session at Matt Molloy's Pub in Westport, County Mayo, July 2008<sup>1</sup>  
 I also spent some time accessing resources from Limerick University's 'Irish World Music Centre', which is a dedicated traditional Irish music program. Furthermore, I attended and

<sup>1</sup> David Doocey, left in the photo, joined 'Gráda' in 2008 and visited New Zealand in June 2009. He plays a set of reels on the attached CD (Track10).

observed a number of weekly sessions in County Dublin, County Galway, County Clare, County Mayo, County Limerick, and County Kerry (see Figure 2). The mixture of weekly community sessions, and those during summer schools in Ireland gave me a greater sense of the music, style, repertoire and history as it is played today in Wellington.

In addition to these experiences I was also involved in folk festivals in New Zealand. From 2007-2009 I attended folk festivals in Auckland, Hamilton, Otaki and Wellington, and from 2008-2009 I was a member of the Wellington folk festival committee.

Towards the end of my research I undertook a musical transcription of Pat Higgins' playing style. Pat recorded the musical example specifically for this purpose; he played the reel 'The Rainy Day' three times through in the same way it would be played in a session environment. Pat's playing is highly ornate and I found transcribing his playing to be a valuable experience. It revealed the regional style of playing that Pat adopts in his music-making along with the various ways phrases and notes that can be played. Accompanying this thesis is a CD of musical examples recorded in the community. Included is Pat's example as well as a range of field recordings at Molly's and Kitty's which highlight the different soundscapes between the two sessions. There are also recordings from *Ceol Aneas* in 2009.

## **The Study**

During my fieldwork investigation of regular participation and interviews, the shape of this study gradually emerged. I had several musical and social experiences, including my own acceptance into the group, and my observation of new-comers and visitors showed me that

'Irishness' was not the key to membership. While some players have Irish heritage and others have visited Ireland, in Wellington the session participants also have a variety of skills and cultural backgrounds. The community, therefore, is not solely based on heritage or genealogy. Furthermore, the pub context of the musical event was engaging and convivial. Often a thread of conversation would be present in the room during the music and I began to recognise the 'other' function of the evening, which was not opposed to the music, but endorsed the social and convivial context. I also found that although the session was a 'performance', it was unlike any experience in my classical training. It was more relaxed than a concert and the musical outcome was less predictable because, from week to week, the ensemble drew its music from performers of various abilities. I also found the rules of the community differed from an organised musical ensemble. In contrast to an orchestra, for example, the session has no fees or structured membership and no one actively ensured that some certain instruments are present each week. Also, although a session leader has a recognisable role it was not as obvious as the presence of a director or conductor. Finally, I discovered that a musician gained a wider knowledge of the music in locations and contexts other than the session, including workshops, private consultations with experienced musicians, during individual practice, as well by utilising notated collections and websites.

What emerged from these experiences and the knowledge of the music scene was this study, which is informed by my musical involvement and is grounded in the nature of Irish music. Music is the matrix around which this community is established, reforming on each occasion with the dynamic collaboration, the session. The session is a participatory community, generally without dedicated observers (although listeners are accorded respect

and in some cases are knowledgeable about the music) within which a unique musical practice takes place, for example the way tunes are played together, the development of skill in ornamentation and the improvised presence of voices and instruments. The session is as much as social occasion as it is a musical one. Building on these ideas, my study focuses on the music as much as on the people, their perspectives and experiences of the session.

## **Literature**

In addition to the fieldwork with musicians in Ireland and New Zealand I also undertook extensive library research. The literature available on Irish music covers many interesting aspects. There are a number of general Irish history texts which focus on the relationship between the music and history. These sources provide a sound foundation for understanding the changes to the music in the past, as well as incorporating contexts of traditional and contemporary music making. Ó hAllmhuráin's *Irish Traditional Music* (2003) gives detailed information regarding Irish music from medieval times through to the present day. Similarly, Gillen and White (1995) connect music and history, examining ideas of religion, nationalism and education.

Another group of sources I examined looked at music in a contemporary context, paying particular attention to the original function of the music as providing tunes for dancing. These include Breathnach's *Folk Music and Dance* (1971) which explores music, songs, dance, and instruments as well as aspects of style and music collections. Hast and Scott's, *Music in Ireland* (2004), which examines music, songs and dance, in a contemporary context that includes the global influence of Irish music and *Exploring Irish*

*Music and Dance* (1998) by Boullier, provides an introduction to Irish music with personal stories and staff notation of tunes.

From 2007, when I began exploring Irish music, I had some difficulty collecting resources about Irish sessions. While some of the books already cited comment briefly on sessions, there seemed to be very little written about them in detail. After talking with session musicians, Carson's *Last Night's Fun* (1996) was repeatedly mentioned. This book is poetically written and discusses sessions in Ireland and the people involved. Carson also wrote a more detailed study entitled *Irish Traditional Music* (1999) focusing on instruments, but with brief comments on the tunes, dancing and songs. Interestingly, session etiquette is discussed, with some hints about how to act and behave, either as a regular or visiting musician or as an active audience member. Ó hAllmhuráin also has a brief note on session etiquette in the last pages of his book.

Publications about Irish music include two A to Z guides. Namely Valley's *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music* (1999) is a useful reference and includes everything from types of dances, to contemporary Irish music artists, and Long's *The Walton's Guide to Irish Music*, (2005) a less detailed text than Valley's but still useful. Another practical and comprehensive source is *The Essential Guide to Irish Flute and Tin Whistle* by Larsen (2003). This book gives immense detail to Irish flute playing with particular emphasis on ornamentation. Also included in this book are a number of notated tune examples with a customised method of symbolising ornamentation, followed by full examples at the end of the text for students to practise, examples of this system of ornamentation are included in Chapter Two.

There is also a wide range of literature available about the Irish Diaspora and music, notably Williams *'Twas only an Irishman's Dream* (1996) and O'Connor's *Bringing it all Back Home* (2001), which both focus on Ireland and America and the way the music transformed due to emigration. Three PhD dissertations were also useful with regard to recent studies of Irish music sessions. The first was a sociological study conducted in Chicago by Deborah L Rapuano in 2005, the second by Hazel Fairbairn (Cambridge 1993) was rooted in ethnomusicology and focused on sessions in Ireland with particular exploration of the interaction and heterophony present in these events. The third dissertation was conducted by Helen O'Shea of Victoria, Melbourne in 2004. O'Shea's thesis was of particular interest as she had undertaken participant observation, playing the fiddle in sessions in Australia and Ireland. Her thesis examined 'how musicians that played Irish traditional music, but do not identify themselves as Irish, understand their relationship to Irishness' (O'Shea 2004:2).

To date I have not yet encountered any detailed studies of Irish music in New Zealand, nor any specifically regarding sessions. There are several books on the Irish people in New Zealand, notably *The Irish in New Zealand* (2002) edited by Patterson. This book examines the historical experiences of the Irish in areas of New Zealand; however, dedicated music study is absent. Therefore, to my knowledge, this study of Irish music is the first academic research to contribute to the field of Irish music in Wellington with a detailed focus on sessions and the musical community.

## Terminology

Throughout the following chapters I reference specific terminology which requires an explanation regarding my treatment of certain words, such as ‘session’, ‘session community’, ‘Irish aesthetic’ and ‘performance’. Also, important concepts and larger themes such as ‘identity’ and ‘transnational connections’ are discussed and explored throughout the thesis.

The session is a broad term for a group of musicians who gather together to play music. In Wellington there are several groups and activities that can be regarded as creating a session, including the Welsh Dragon Bar in Wellington, where, once a week, singers sit together in circles and perform a fusion of traditional unaccompanied ballads, sea shanties and contemporary songs, the Acoustic Routes concerts and jam sessions, and a variety of bluegrass and old-time jam sessions. Prominent in this scene is the Irish session, which is also commonly spelt in Irish as *seisun*, and this is the focus of the thesis. This session involves a unique approach to the music whilst maintaining participatory elements experienced in other areas of music-making around Wellington. Valley describes a session as ‘A loose association of musicians who meet, generally, but not always, in a pub to play an undetermined selection, mainly of dance music, but also sometimes with solo pieces such as slow airs or songs. There will be one or more “core” musicians, and others who are less regular’ (Valley 1999:345). The sessions in Ireland were a phenomenon of the folk revival and grew in popularity from the 1970s through to the present day (Ó hAllmhuráin 1998:154-163). Occasionally the core musicians were paid by the pub owners to ensure they attend and participate each week, as the music often attracts additional patrons. In

Wellington the session musicians are all unpaid; although, a bar tab of soft drinks or full bar is provided, depending on the location.

In her dissertation, O'Shea focused on the sessions in Australia and Ireland and discussed the overall sound of a session,

The sound is not the clean sound of studio production, nor the standardized playing of a ceili band, but a wide variety of simultaneous performances that invite the listening ear to join the musicians, tuning into one then another instrument as it emerges from the group sound. This is the sound of the session: an informal group performance that produces an almost-unison ethnomusicologists term *heterophony*. (O'Shea 2004:95).

The sounds that O'Shea refers to are also present in the various recordings on the attached CD of this thesis. Throughout the recordings other noises and sounds such as talking, tapping feet and cash registers can be heard, but these are apart of the session 'soundscape'.

In addition to the music, general manners and appropriate behaviour are expected in the session and are often referred to as 'session etiquette'. This is closely examined in Chapter Three. In regards to the session community, Long commented 'In the best sessions there is a sense of sharing, a sense of people making music and entertainment for one another. All participants are encouraged to contribute, not just those who are technically brilliant' (Long 2005:356). The social and musical characteristics of a session occasionally create the *craic* (fun), which is highly sought after by the participants when they play music together, promoting a sense of unity.

The session community, which is made up of musicians and some interested listeners, is a key aspect which I focus on in my research. This differs from the Wellington Irish Society which formed from Irish migrants moving to New Zealand. Each Friday and Sunday evening the club rooms on Fifeshire Street are open to members of the Irish society

to chat, have a drink, play some pool or watch a game of sport. In contrast, the session was not established solely from Irish migrants, which emphasises that the needs of the session community and the Irish society are diverse and varied. However, there is a lot of cross-over between the two associations, with concerts, parties and the occasional Friday night session involving session participants being held in the Irish Society club rooms.

The musicians involved with Irish music in New Zealand came from various backgrounds. Some are New Zealand-born and others have migrated to New Zealand from Ireland and the United Kingdom within the last twenty years. This diversity highlights the importance of the Diaspora which perhaps accounts for the speed at which Irish music was popularised on a global scale. It also stresses that the transnational links between Irish and New Zealand musicians are strong, these being constant communication with travel and resources shared between the two countries. Therefore, a consideration of both the Diaspora and transnational identity is a vital aspect of my research and I build on this work in ethnomusicology (Ramnarine 2007, Sugarman 1997).

Within the transnational community there are several differences between how the participants approach the music. In this way there is not one overall Irish aesthetic, but rather, a range of possibilities within the music making experience. The participants in Wellington view some aspects differently, thus creating varied session experiences. They are influenced by their backgrounds and connections to the transnational community and these links form a musicians' perception of what is 'Irish'. I will explore this idea throughout the thesis and examine how Wellington musicians perceive this concept.

A musical aspect which is important to understand is the way in which 'performance' is viewed by the musicians. The participants indicated the main reason they

played music in a session was primarily for their personal enjoyment and as contributors to the session community. They were generally not playing for a formal audience and regard their music-making as an informal gathering rather than a performance situation. Hast and Scott previously discussed this idea writing ‘Many unspoken codes of house party etiquette survive in the session, such as deferring to older players, allowing time in between tunes for conversation and storytelling, and keeping the emphasis on sharing within the group rather than performing for an audience’ (Hast and Scott, 2004:48). However, there are occasions when an audience is active and listening to the music being played. In these cases additional characteristics of a concert performance are included. Carson commented about these situations ‘They are a bit like the rules of conversation. The programme, what is talked about, will change according to who is there, and where they are, and whoever might be listening’ (Carson 1999:9). In this way the session adapts if the musicians want to respond to an audience; however, as I was repeatedly told by the participants, ultimately they are there to play music for themselves and with other like-minded musicians.

### **Background Information**

The history of Irish music spans from its mythical powers of defying death in battles in Medieval Ireland, transitioning through the dance music in the 1500-1800s, to its recognisable popularity experienced in *céilí* bands, The Chieftains, and the Riverdance phenomenon of the 1990s (Ó hAllmhuráin 1998). The tunes played in most sessions today were composed for dancers beginning in the seventeenth century through to the present day. These tunes are rooted in the Irish dance repertoire and include principally jigs, reels, hornpipes and polkas. Regional styles then developed, with tunes, variations and

ornamentation having contrasting treatment depending on where the melodies were learnt and from whom. The twentieth century saw much change for the function of the dance tunes.

Ireland experienced a significant decrease in population from 1856-1921 due to the famine, loss of jobs and land, and emigration. 'Ireland lost between 4.1 and 4.5 million inhabitants including one million unrecorded emigrants to Great Britain. Three million emigrated to the United States and Canada, while an additional 289,000 sailed to Australia and New Zealand' (Ó hAllmhuráin 1998: 112). This population change led to the Irish Diaspora where Irish culture and in particular music came to be played globally.

In the 1920s and 1930s Irish music began to be recorded and regional styles became popularised through commercial recordings of musicians in England and America. Notable was the Sligo fiddle style, which was recorded in New York in the 1920s by Michael Colman, James Morrison and Paddy Killoran (ibid: 126-127). These recordings and the popularity of Irish music in America continued, especially in eastern cities with large Irish populations such as Boston and Baltimore.

In Ireland, the Dance Halls Act was passed in 1935, which banned all house dances and dances in unlicensed halls in an attempt to control 'public morality' from the view of the clergy (Ó hAllmhuráin, 1998:131). This law silenced the music for many musicians, but in some cases, others began forming *céilí* bands in the alternative venues of parish halls. The growth of *céilí* bands blossomed in the 1940s and 1950s allowed the music to continue being played and enjoyed in communities.

By the 1960s, Irish music became comparatively standardised as a folk revival in Ireland was emerging. Musicians began playing in lounge bars and renewed interest in

regional styles was established. In the United States Irish music was popularised by the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem. Ballad style vocal music was performed to audiences in concert halls and on television, and this trend continued to grow into the 1980s.

Sessions began forming in the 1950s in Ireland although there are accounts of sessions occurring in the 1930s in the Sliabh Luachra region (Valley 1999:345). Sessions also developed in the 1950s in London, Ó hAllmhuráin described the London sessions:

For the immigrant, however, Irish traditional music acted as a welcome antidote to the pressures of an inhospitable cockney environment. After a week spent on a construction site, or battling with bedrock in a man-hole beneath the street, hordes of Irish workers thronged the Irish pubs in Camden Town, Cricklewood and Kilburn High Road on Friday evenings. Here the musicians, who shared their fate during the working week, offered them an occasion to renew their sense of community, before MacAlpine marshalled them to work again on Monday morning. Pubs like the Eagle in Camden town...all rang with the sounds of Irish music sessions. Their roster of house musicians reads like a litany of Irish music icons. (Ó hAllmhuráin 1998:143-144)

These London sessions highlighted the relationship between the music and its connections with Ireland. They also formed a sense of community among the musicians and listeners, reminding them of the home they had left.

The popularisation of Irish music continued in the 1970s with groups such as The Chieftains, who with over thirty commercial recordings, helped to make traditional music accessible to new audiences in concerts around the world. Other bands followed The Chieftains success, such as Planxty, the Bothy Band and de Danann. The River Dance and Lord of the Dance phenomena also brought new attention and popularity to Irish music and dance (Valley 1999:319). The stage show became part of the 'celtic' movement which sprang from the renewed interest in 'world music' globally.

The music that was played in the *céilí* bands of the 1930s through to the super groups such as The Chieftains, was predominantly from the Irish dance repertoire. Today recordings from as early as the 1920s are used by musicians who revive them in sessions or professionally in recordings. There are numerous contemporary bands and individuals that play Irish music professionally, for example Lunasa, Gráda, Martin Hayes and Dennis Cahill, all of whom have also visited and toured New Zealand within the last five years.

### **Irish Regional Styles**

Regional styles in Ireland were an outcome of the isolation between counties. They resurfaced in the 1960s due to the growing popularity of Irish music, the accessibility of recordings and the increased ease of travel. Furthermore, in the 1960s Seán Ó Riada identified regional styles in both singing and instrumentation, particularly in the flute and fiddle. He later commented that in the 1970s specific characteristics were becoming subsumed into a more general style due to the ease of travel and ability to listen and copy various individual's style of playing (Long 2005:329). The musical identities differ in their treatment of tone, rhythm, ornamentation, variations and tempo, as well as through repertoire. The drive to recognise and preserve different regional styles is a current consideration for some of the Wellington musicians that I interviewed. I seek to examine what makes specific musical identity by exploring three different regional styles in Ireland.

Firstly, I examined the regional style of County Donegal. Donegal is located in the northern part of the republic of Ireland and is geographically near Scotland. This closeness to Scotland has influenced its regional music style. The fiddle playing in particular is forceful and insistent with a fast paced tempo and double stopping which create a sense of

rhythmic and harmonic urgency, which reflects the driving music of Scotland particularly demonstrated by the Highland pipes. The group Altan, have a distinctively Donegal sound which includes heavy fiddle bowing and a strong fast tempo and rhythm. In terms of repertoire, the musicians in County Donegal play more strathspey dance tunes than other regions of Ireland.

In contrast, the music of County Clare is slower in tempo and uses less ornamentation, focusing on the melody of the tune instead. County Clare is considered an important region in Ireland that has a strong musical tradition and a distinct regional sound. Notably from Clare is fiddler Martin Hayes (see Figure 5), who plays in the regional style with some modern adaptations making his playing approach distinctive (Ó hAllmhuráin, 1998:163). He plays a range of tunes together using tempo changes to excite and entertain listeners. His style of ornamentation is minimal and relaxed. Several music festivals and schools are held over the summer months which attract a lot of visitors and musicians to County Clare.



Figure 5: Martin Hayes at the Willie Clancy Summer School, County Clare, Ireland July 2008

Another region is Sliabh Luachra which includes County Kerry, County Limerick and North Cork. The music of this region returns to the similar faster tempo style encountered in County Donegal, but in contrast more ornamentation and swing is added to the tunes giving it a distinctive style. Specifically this region is also known for its playing and repertoire of polkas. The *Ballydesmond* polkas in particular originated in this region and these are regularly played in the Wellington sessions (Track 8 on the attached CD). Brendan Begley from County Kerry visited Wellington in 2008 and taught some polkas to the musicians. These tunes have since become part of the repertoire played at the weekly sessions.

Regional characteristics are present in many musicians' playing whether they are from a specific region in Ireland or have a preference for a particular musical style. Therefore, by exploring the musical traits in County Donegal, County Clare and Sliabh Luachra, the possible influences obtainable for musicians in New Zealand, are highlighted.

### **Irish Music in New Zealand**

A full study of Irish music throughout New Zealand exceeds the scope of this research. Therefore, to provide focus for the thesis, sessions in Wellington have become the central core, with folk festivals and the *Ceol Aneas* festival establishing complementary opportunities where Irish music is played.

### Background of Sessions in Wellington

The session scene in Wellington has been active for about eighteen years. According to my informants, interest in the session was stimulated by musicians from the folk scene and

migrants in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The folk scene, which popular during the 1980s in New Zealand, and was the place that many session musicians first heard and became aware of the Irish session. The growing popularity of Irish sessions at festivals was an important factor that lead to the eventual weekly sessions in Wellington. Alongside festivals was the importance of migrants from Ireland and Scotland to Wellington. These musicians were already aware of a specific Irish aesthetic and had participated in numerous sessions abroad. The musicians I interviewed emphasised that the arrival and enthusiasm of the migrants to New Zealand, along with the newly found interest from local folk musicians, allowed this musical experience to develop.

At the outset the sessions in Wellington were not a regular activity and the night would change depending on who could participate each week. The locations of these early sessions were commonly held at either Molly Malone's on Courtney Place, or at Kitty O'Shea's then on Manners Street, and also occasionally in various musicians' houses in Wellington (Ruairidh Morrison, 22 June 2009, interview). Then in 1991, Molly Malone's and the session musicians agreed to hold a session each Monday night, starting at 8:30pm. Ruairidh Morrison recalled these early sessions:

It seemed like a bunch of people arrived right about the same time... we all sort of congregated at a pub that had opened the year before, called Molly Malone's, and that was the obvious place to go to look for other musicians. We meet up with each other and started playing round about there, and we had a session going. It went on various nights. I think there was a Sunday afternoon session for a while, upstairs at Molly's. I can't remember when the Monday night session started. (Ruairidh Morrison, 22 June 2009, interview)

Pat Higgins recalled Ruairidh as having an important influence on the Molly's sessions:

It took a character like Ruairidh Morrison, who showed up a few years later, to have the confidence and the assertiveness to start a session in a pub. So it would have been a couple of years after I got here, maybe in 1990. (Pat Higgins, 27 July 2009, interview)

The session at Molly's continues each Monday and still includes some of the founding musicians.

In the late 1990s some musicians decided they wanted a different experience and began holding a session in a local community hall in Wadestown (Andy Linton, 28 July 2009, interview). Eventually they talked with the owners of Kitty O'Shea's, which had by now moved to Courtenay Place. The musicians were offered a venue to meet at each week and play their music, with Monday night becoming the chosen evening, as it is the quietest economically for the pub.



Figure 6: Session at Kitty O'Shea's Pub after the Wellington Folk Festival, October 27, 2008

Pat recalled his reasons for moving to the Kitty's session, 'I think people got frustrated by the fact that at the particular session down the road, it was very difficult to introduce new tunes; they had quite a stagnant repertoire' (Pat Higgins, 27 July 2009, interview). Ruairidh also wanted a different kind of Irish session experience and had similar reasoning to Pat's. He commented:

I honestly can't remember when I would have started going down to the Kitty's session, because I felt the repertoire at the Molly's session didn't change from week to week, we would be playing the same tunes ... so I was keen to have a different session and I think Pat probably was as well. (Ruairidh Morrison, 22 June 2009, interview)

Again the reasons for attending one session over the other were uncovered by Andy Linton when he came back from living in Canberra, which has a thriving Irish music scene.

The only session then, when I came back, and I was itching to go to sessions, was Molly's. For me it was a bit too all over the place, I was very focused on playing Irish tunes. I wasn't worried about people singing songs or worried about Bulgarian music or Morris tunes. (Andy Linton, 28 July 2009, interview)

The participants who left Molly's to start a new session highlight the musicians' contrasting ideas of the Irish aesthetic. Interestingly, there is no actual rivalry between the sessions participants and they often play music together at folk festivals and community gatherings. I was told by several musicians that there was no personal conflict at the time of the change or ever since. About this Ruairidh mentioned,

I find it quite interesting that sometimes people feel there is an element of enmity between the two sessions, but I don't really think that that is the case...we have just drifted off to our niche and they have drifted off to their niche and, if it wasn't for the fact that both of those pubs had live music every other night, if they happened on separate nights, I would happily go to the Molly's session frequently. Apart from the fact that I prefer the session at Kitty's and it is at the same time; and it is the same for those guys [at Molly's]. (Ruairidh Morrison, 22 June 2009, interview)

The overall sense of community is experienced by all musicians regardless of the session they participate in. The differences between the two sessions are interesting and these are examined in Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

Today, both sessions still occur each Monday evening and the musicians participate in the one that appeals to them, their musical experience and their personal concepts of a session.

## Folk Festivals

Folk festivals around New Zealand grew in status in the 1980s and continue to grow each year; at any given festival musicians gather for an Irish session. The larger festivals, such as the Auckland Folk Festival in January, the Wellington Folk Festival in October (see Figure 7) or Whare Flat Folk Festival in Dunedin at New Year, all draw a sizable number of session musicians. The group of participants at these festivals are larger; attracting a range of musicians of differing skill levels and repertoire.



Figure 7: Session during Wellington Folk Festival, October 2007

It is illuminating to contrast the musical experience of a weekly session and a festival session. Session etiquette is interesting to observe at a festival session as various musicians from around New Zealand come together, with different expectations of what is acceptable. The musicians I talked with described that in these situations the musicians are usually quite open and welcoming and allow more diversity than would normally be tolerated at their weekly session. Folk festivals are also a good opportunity for musicians

to hear varied individual and regional styles of playing. Since 2007 a number of Irish, Scottish and English musicians have travelled to New Zealand allowing the musicians to hear new repertoire. There were also occasional instrument workshops taking place for musicians, to learn new tunes as well as new techniques and information.

#### The *Ceol Aneas* Irish Music Festival

*Ceol Aneas* was established in 1999 in Nelson and has been held annually in June ever since. This Irish music school is run in a similar way to the summer schools I attended in Ireland during 2008. Initially, the festival was planned for flute players, but over the years it has grown to include a wide range of Irish instrumental and vocal classes (Pat Higgins, 27 July 2009, interview). Instrumental and vocal classes with tutors from New Zealand and abroad are held each morning for three consecutive days. Each afternoon work-shops are held with guest tutors. Here the musicians are able to discuss the music with the guests through a question and answer forum. In the evenings there are a range of activities for the musicians and the Nelson community, including concerts and a *céilí*. During the days the musicians gather at various locations and hold spontaneous sessions. Most evenings, after the scheduled event, sessions are held into the early hours of the morning.

The sessions at *Ceol Aneas* are a highlight of the year for a number of Irish musicians, and some come along chiefly to participate in sessions alongside a range of musicians (Andy Linton, 28 July 2009, interview). I attended this festival in 2007 and in 2009 and in both years Irish-born musicians were brought out to New Zealand to teach instrument classes. This allows the students access to a wide range of musical styles and

smaller class room situations where students can talk openly about the music and techniques such as ornamentation.

### **Thesis Outline**

This thesis seeks to examine the musical and social aspects of an Irish session. Chapter Two gives a detailed study of instrumentation, tunes and songs, with particular attention to understanding various ideas of Irish aesthetics. A comparison of these musical elements at the Molly's and Kitty's sessions is also given. Chapter Three examines the community, focusing on the musicians cultural and musical backgrounds. This chapter highlights the musician's opinion of Irish music by letting them speak through interviews. I focus on four musicians who are recognised as leaders within the sessions at Molly Malone's and Kitty O'Shea's. Chapter Four concludes the thesis with the broader themes of the session, aspects of transnational identity and the global experiences of local participants. Possible areas of future study are mentioned and the importance of this work is presented in summary.

A CD accompanies the thesis with musical examples of ornamentation and fieldwork recordings of the sessions in Molly's, Kitty's and *Ceol Aneas* in Nelson. The appendix provides track listings for the eleven sound recordings. All photos throughout the thesis were taken by the author during fieldwork observation from 2007-2009.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **‘Give us a tune’: Examining the Instrumentation, Tunes and Vocal Music in the Molly’s and Kitty’s Sessions.**

The Irish tunes and songs regularly played and sung during a session provide a basic foundation for the organised communities of Irish music enthusiasts and devotees in New Zealand. The music for a session in Wellington is created using a variety of instruments as well as the voice. The sounds that are commonly associated with Irish music have become popularised since the folk revival of the 1960s, the emergence of celtic music as world music and the Riverdance phenomenon. It is therefore interesting to examine how the two sessions in Wellington at Molly Malone’s and Kitty O’Shea’s vary and contrast in their ideas of the requirements and essential elements of the session. Whether they adopt the styles of the music as played for a dance, or instead are strongly influenced by the popularised music of the 1960s is vital in understanding the identities of each session.

This chapter explores this issue by initially examining the hierarchy of instruments used and the differences in their melodic, harmonic and percussive functions. The section is then followed by a detailed musical analysis of the tunes, the techniques of ornamentation, rhythm and variations as well as a brief overview of the learning process. The last section discusses the role of Irish songs and vocal music, focusing in particular on *sean nós* and the ballad.

### **Exploring the Instruments: The Function and Authenticity of Melodic and Accompanying Timbres.**

The instruments used in Irish music today have varying backgrounds and connections with the original instrumental heritage. There are many sources that examine these instruments, their introduction into Irish music, and how they became representative of the tradition (Breathnach 1971, Boullier 1998, Carson 1999, as well as Hast and Scott 2004). The appropriation of new instruments by Irish musicians and the changing form of the ensemble also have been influential in the transformation and evolution of Irish music from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Carson, 1999). In the last forty years a larger group of instruments have been incorporated into the core ensemble, such as the mandolin, banjo, guitar, and the bodhrán (ibid). In this chapter I focus on the ensemble as it is found today, rather than the historical details that have already been examined in other sources.

The instrumental music played today during the session illustrates some basic differences with its origins as dance music. When historically part of dance events, musicians played solo rather than in ensembles (Long 2005:355). With the development of the session in the 1950s, musicians accommodated the solo instruments into new ensemble roles as they played together in groups, *céilí* bands or folk groups. In Irish ensembles today, several instruments play the melody simultaneously, placing emphasis on the distinct timbre of each instrument. This type of ensemble sound is also typical of traditional Irish music as it is played internationally. Examining the functions of the various session instruments provides a basis for understanding the structure of the Irish music ensemble.

In order to explore the distinct roles of the instruments I have categorised them into two broad groups based on their primary musical function and as discussed with consultants during my field research. The two groups comprise: melody instruments, which play the tune and accompanying instruments, which are divided into two sections, harmonic and percussive instruments. As several sources already discuss individual descriptions of instruments (Carson 1999, Valley 1999, Hast and Scott, 2004), I focus on the role of each instrument and the relationship between melody and accompaniment instruments. Secondly, by examining the instruments at both Molly's and Kitty's, an understanding of the diverse session contexts and individual notions of Irish music ensembles is developed.

### Melodic Instruments

Melodic instruments are fundamental to the sound of the Irish session, yet each session varies depending on what instruments are played and the level of musicianship. I discovered that melodic instruments comprise a general hierarchy ranging from what is considered to be the most 'authentic' Irish instruments, to those that were recently incorporated<sup>2</sup>. In the following section I first describe the hierarchy of melody instruments.

Firstly the uilleann pipes and harp hold foremost importance, followed by fiddle, flutes, tin

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<sup>2</sup> Carson's book *Irish Traditional Music* outlines the history of each instrument beginning with descriptions of the uilleann pipes followed by fiddle and flute (1999). The harp is not mentioned until later in the book, which seems misplaced for this particular musical instrument. Carson described the harp as 'not regarded as a traditional instrument by traditional musicians' and went on to add 'Granted, there are those who play dance music on the harp; the result, however, is 'confused and disordered' to many ears' (Carson, 1999:37). This may be because the style of harp music has changed and is now based on techniques of the pedal harp.

However in contrast to Carson's view, the Wellington sessions have two harp players, one who plays regularly at Molly Malone's and another who plays occasionally at Kitty O'Shea's. During my research, interviews and session participation, the Wellington musicians did not disregard the harp in the ways that Carson described, but rather most enjoyed listening to, playing along with and learning tunes from the harpists. The harps are therefore considered a valued instrumental presence in the session context. More significantly, when an active audience was present, special attention was paid to the harpist, who would often be asked to play solo; so the punters could hear the sound of the instrument.

whistle, free reed instruments, mandolin and banjo. It is interesting to examine how the session musicians view the hierarchy of instruments and explore what they consider as authentic in playing Irish music.

The tunes are the core of the session and melodic instruments are therefore strongly valued and important within this context. Through an individual's musical or regional style, that is distinguished by subtleties in ornamentation, rhythm and variation, underlying features of the melody are highlighted. Players of melodic instruments also provide variations and rhythm to the tune, which gives it lift and additional energy. Informants also repeatedly described the importance of exact timing when playing a tune so that other musicians have a rhythmic foundation which encourages participation

In the Irish music ensemble, there is a degree of overlap and flexibility in the functions of some of the instruments. The accordions and harp for example are able to create both harmonic accompaniment and play the melody. However, when I discussed which category the musicians placed these instruments they stated that while these particular instruments are able to play harmony, ultimately they are considered melodic instruments, since they almost always play the tune during a session. The variability of grouping the instruments is also found for the guitar and mandolin, which can take on both melodic and harmonic roles in the ensemble. In the context of the session, the mandolin is considered primarily a melody instrument, while the guitar is usually classified as an accompanying instrument. Below I have summarised this information in a chart that identifies each instrument as primarily (P) and or secondarily (S) melodic, or harmonic instruments (see Figure 8).

<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Melodic Function</b>	<b>Harmonic Function</b>
Harp	P	S
Uilleann Pipes	P	S
Fiddle	P	
Flute	P	
Tin Whistle	P	
Button Accordion	P	S
Concertina	P	
Piano Accordion	P	S
Mandolin	P	S
Banjo	P	S
Guitar	S	P
Bouzouki	S	P

Figure 8: The Primary and Secondary Functions of Melodic and Harmonic Instruments

#### Accompanying Instruments: Harmony

Most of the musicians I spoke with considered the harmonic instruments to have a secondly role to that of the melodic group. However, most agreed that their inclusion enhances the music by creating additional drive and enthusiasm.<sup>3</sup> The guitar is relatively new to Irish music and commonly provides harmonic accompaniment. Hast and Scott explained, ‘It had little place in Irish traditional music until the folk revival of the 1960s. At first it was used primarily to accompany songs, but by the early 1970s, it was used to accompany tunes’ (2004:80). The role of accompanying instruments is to provide an interesting and accurate harmony. The skills of accompanying depends on their musical technique, awareness of key and metric changes most notably between 6/8 jig and 4/4 reel meters.

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<sup>3</sup> In most sources that describe session instruments, each melody instrument is given individual attention, whereas harmonic instruments, such as the guitar and bouzouki, are often grouped together at the end of the section.

### Accompanying Instruments: Percussion

The second category of accompaniment is the percussion instruments, which includes the bodhrán, bones, and spoons. Each provides a distinct type of rhythmic accompaniment to the melody, and the musicians that play these instruments need to know the subtleties about when specific rhythms are required to be played. Although percussion instruments are emphasised less during a session, percussionists must still have a good understanding of session etiquette and understand the ways their playing can influence the music. The timbre of the bodhrán is associated with the popularised celtic sound and often perceived as traditional; however, it is relatively new to Irish music and was made popular by Séan Ó Riada, who first used it in *céilí* bands in the 1950s due to its tonal qualities (Long 2005:44). Session members have described to me how a bodhrán can sometimes enhance a session, but also become intrusive if a musician plays it continuously through each set of tunes. Informed playing is consequently an important part of a participating in a session, and understanding the subtle role of each instrument leads to further acceptance within the Irish music community.

Having examined the general hierarchy of melody and accompaniment, I explore the local sessions in Wellington. The two session contexts at Molly Malone's and Kitty O'Shea's each present a contrasting study of instrumental usage. Each location has a varied and contrasting assortment of melodic, harmonic and percussive instruments, which distinguishes the overall timbre of the music at each place.

Case One: Molly Malone's



Figure 9: Molly Malone's Session- August 2009

Molly Malone's pub has an open and diverse session which often includes a wide range of Irish instruments (see Figure 9). Especially characteristic of Molly's is a unique presence of free reed instruments, including both button and piano accordions and the concertina. These instruments often produce a very high level of sound that can dominate the entire session. Compared to sessions that I observed in Ireland, it is unusual to have so many of these instruments present in weekly sessions. Also, the leaders and those who direct sets commonly play these free reed instruments, so they clearly define the overall sound of Irish music at Molly's<sup>4</sup>. In addition to the free reeds, music at Molly's includes a range of other melody instruments such as flutes, fiddles, harp, tin whistle, and mandolins.

The Molly's session usually has a strong representation of accompanying instruments, including three guitar players which enforce the idea that the session has a general folk music connection and is open and welcoming to musicians of all levels, not just strictly Irish players. Occasionally during a Molly's session the pub volume rises

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<sup>4</sup> The volume level free reed instruments at Molly Malone's lends well to both the occasional performance for punters, as well as ensuring musicians can clearly hear each tune being played in the session circle.

significantly and the musicians' desires to stay in time with one other are challenged. However, these nights usually produce a social connection between the punters and the participants and a strong sense of fun in making music. Through use of varied instruments an identifiable soundscape is produced allowing musicians at Molly's to participate differently from the context of the Kitty's session, while still representing the identity of Irish music.

### Case Two: Kitty O'Shea's

Some participants have described Monday night at Kitty O'Shea's as an advanced session, compared with Molly's. The gathering at Kitty's has clear boundaries regarding what instruments are emphasised and especially the diminished role of the accompanying instruments (see Figure 10).



Figure 10: Kitty O'Shea's Session- August 2009

In a typical Kitty's session, only one or two guitar or bouzouki players is considered appropriate. Similarly, only one bodhrán player is usually included and this person rarely

plays throughout the evening. Other accompanying instruments such as the bones and spoons are generally not played. Musicians at the Kitty's session have described these percussive instruments as 'unwanted', and participants will even ask percussionists to stop, as the instruments are not always considered proficient in enhancing the music.

This minimal role of the harmony and percussion instruments reflects the sessions that I attended in Ireland, where melody instruments dominated. In one situation in Feakle, County Clare, a sign was placed noticeably above the session reading 'Only one bodhran player per session please!' (see Figure 11).

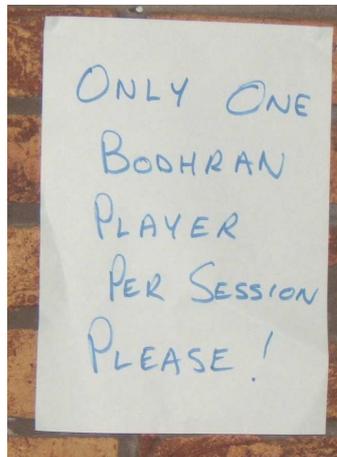


Figure 11: 'One Bodhran' sign' at Peppers Bar during Feakle Festival in County Clare, Ireland, August 2008.

This sign highlighted the instrumental hierarchy found within the Irish ensemble, as well as the desire by musicians to insist on a particular ensemble organisation and sound. The Kitty's approach to the accompanying instruments is similarly based on the organization of sessions found in Ireland today, where melody instruments dominate the overall event.

In addition to the ensemble make-up, the particular melodic instruments especially flutes and fiddles played at the Kitty's session comprise what some sources describe as those with traditional Irish characteristics (Long 2005, Carson 1999). The leaders of the

Kitty's session play flutes and fiddles and commonly each session has approximately six or seven musicians, most of whom play the fiddle or flute with one accompanying musician. Other melodic instruments sometimes heard at Kitty's include the mandolin and banjo; as previously mentioned a harp player also participates occasionally.

At Kitty's today both the choice of the melodic instruments and the role of the harmonic instruments reflect the instrumentation of sessions in Ireland. It is of no coincidence that the Wellington musicians I talked with described the music of the Kitty's session as a reflection of the personal experiences of sessions they attended in Ireland and the United Kingdom.

By examining the role of these three groups of instruments at Molly's and Kitty's a perception of the sound is formed. The differences in the case studies demonstrate how the Molly's session is open to everyone and that is shown by the types of instruments played and in particular how harmony and percussion instruments have an almost equal position with that of melody instruments. Whereas at Kitty's the instrumentation reflects that of Irish sessions where fiddles and flutes dominate the melody instruments and there is a limited role for an accompanying musician. These contrasting approaches reflect the varied experiences of the musicians and how different ideas of the session are emphasised through the role of instruments.

### **Tunes: The Oral Tradition, Ornamentation and Personal Preference.**

The widely recognisable sound of Irish music today is based on tunes that originally derived from the dance repertoire. Since the folk revival of the 1960s and a growing familiarity and popularisation of Irish music, reels and jigs have dominated the sound

associated with traditional Irish music. In the following section I explore how musicians learn new tunes and build their repertoire. Next, I examine the different types of dance tunes which are played as part of the Wellington sessions before moving my focus to stylistic features. Through the three processes, tune repertoire, individual styles and learning methods, the Irish music communities form their perceptions of an Irish aesthetic.

### The Process of Learning Tunes

Musicians in Wellington learn Irish tunes in various ways, including gaining repertoire from other players, through recordings, written notation and the internet. No one way is preferred by all musicians; however, some participants have explained that learning orally is considered the most authentic and traditional way of acquiring new tunes. It is important to understand that although tunes are learnt indirectly through participation during the evening, it is generally uncommon for a musician to formally teach a new tune in a session. In a session situation the musicians have the opportunity to listen to a variety of tunes, and find out tune titles so they can acquire the tune and then participate the following week. After regular attendance at weekly sessions musicians become familiar with the melody and start to contribute. If a tune is in multiple parts or in an unusual key however, sometimes it is necessary to learn a tune using a formal approach. There are many methods to learning new repertoire and some of the advantages and limitations of these are described below.

One way of learning tunes is through formal instruction with a teacher. Some musicians choose or have the opportunity to learn the music from an advanced player with knowledge and repertory. In Wellington there are three or four session participants who are

professional musicians and also actively teach students. There are a small number of Wellington musicians who obtain these formal lessons on a regular basis and the speed in which they learn the techniques of ornamenting and build their repertoire is noticeable. Therefore, as part of my research in ethnomusicology, I attended formal lessons with two of the Wellington teachers in a similar approach to Timothy Rice who undertook *giada* lessons from an experienced Bulgarian musician in the field (Rice 1994). At the beginning of my learning process my initial lesson concentrated on breathing and tone, which are both important aspects of flute playing. The second lesson, in which I learnt to ornament the tune *Out on the Ocean*, was slightly prior to my trip to Ireland in mid 2008. These experiences with a skilled musician enhanced my knowledge of ornamentation and preparation for research and participation in Ireland.

Another method by which a musician can learn new tunes and gain an understanding of Irish music is by attending classes at summer schools in Ireland or *Ceol Aneas* in Nelson. When I travelled to Ireland I attended three week long summer schools: Willie Clancy and Feakle in County Clare and Joe Mooney's in County Leitrim. Each summer school had a different teacher with a varied focus on tunes and technique. When I attended the Willie Clancy summer school, the morning was divided into two hour blocks of learning with a break in between them. The instructor organised the class by teaching two tunes each day. Ornamentation was included and explained once the basic structure on the tune was learnt. The teacher would first play the entire tune and then break it into separate sections; the students would then play it in turns until the entire tune was learnt. The teacher then notated the tune in *abc* form and included markings for ornaments such as rolls, taps and possible places to take breaths. The third summer school was also in County

Clare and had a similar format to the Willie Clancy event in regards to how tunes were taught and the repertoire included in each occasion.

The second summer school varied from the two I attended in County Clare. It was held in Drumshanbo in County Leitrim and appeared to retain some characteristics of a regional style, which was especially identifiable in the repertoire. The teacher's style was slightly varied to that of the summer schools in County Clare, as she decided to teach a variety of tunes, including commonly played sets and popular local tunes that students, who were visiting the region, were unfamiliar with. This allowed the students variety and the ability to play both new tunes from the Leitrim region, as well as familiar tunes that are commonly heard in sessions, such as *The Maid Behind the Bar*. By learning local tunes I was able to participate and contribute to the sessions at the local pubs in Drumshanbo.

New Zealand also has an Irish music school that is based on the format of the schools I attended in Ireland. *Ceol Aneas* is held annually in Nelson in June, with classes in the morning and a range of workshops and sessions in the afternoon. This summer school is held over a three day period and instrument tutors are from New Zealand, or sometimes from abroad such as Australia and also Ireland. The individual teachers and the styles they transmit expose students to a variety of sounds and knowledge while also extending a musician's repertoire.

In contrast to schools, another way to learn tunes is to informally play with a group of musicians. I have participated in several of these gatherings where a small group of participants congregate and take turns teaching the group a new tune. The tunes are taught orally in this situation by learning small phrases and connecting them together to complete the entire tune. These events are an informal and communal experience for the musicians

where they can play tunes and socialise with each another. In 2009 these gatherings began to take place at the Wellington Irish Society on Friday evenings. The meetings occur regularly in Wellington when interest among musicians is expressed.

In contrast to these various methods of group learning, some musicians choose to learn tunes individually. Recorded examples from CDs or the internet are commonly used by musicians who learn tunes orally from these sources. Recordings usually highlight regional sounds as well as individual styles of playing and ornamenting tunes, which all enhance a beginner's knowledge. There are also many published collections of notated tunes available that contain helpful tips on technique and style. One of the most commonly used collections that some Wellington musicians learn from is called *Begged, Borrowed and Stolen* (1979), which was published in Adelaide. This book has 100 dance tunes that are compiled into sets of two or three. Some of these sets are played as written and learnt in Wellington, particularly at the Molly's session. Another very popular collection of tunes used by Wellington musicians is *O'Neill's 1001* (1995). This is a rich source of examples, and a helpful reference when remembering or learning a melody.

Lastly, musicians also learn new tunes by using media available on the internet. There are a number of helpful sites which give advice and information, as well notation or *abc* format for tunes. Particularly, [www.thesession.org](http://www.thesession.org) is one helpful site which lists sessions, recent recordings, has an extensive database of tunes and also has a member's forum where session musicians can discuss topics of interest. Also [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) has a wide variety of recordings and videos of Irish music, including individuals playing tunes in informal contexts and professional performances. Session musicians in Wellington discussed how they use these websites to learn new tunes by watching videos, playing

short recordings as well as using the staff notation or *abc*. Both of these sites are open and accessible to the public to download recordings, tunes and notation; therefore, it is important to understand that versions of a tune or title may vary. The differences of a tune are interesting as they represent individual and regional histories associated with each melody.

Within these various ways of learning there are advantages and limitations for each. Some musicians I interviewed believe the only authentic ways to learn a tune is orally, as it is the traditional method and allows for better retention of the tune. In contrast some musicians have mentioned that notation has limitations as the accent, emphasis and ‘feel’ of the tune is lost. In addition, once notated, the individual variations of a tune can become fixed as the tune is not always able to grow and change in the same way when orally transmitted. Notated versions do serve a purpose, however, and many tunes may have been lost without the collections currently available. The notations are also a useful source when a reminder of tune phrase is required or when learning a particularly complex phrase. Musicians I talked with emphasised that whichever learning methods a musician applies, the tunes need to be practised regularly and different methods of ornamenting tunes need to be explored. In this way, the tunes are successfully maintained in both the memory and fingers, ensuring greater participation in a session.

#### Identifying the Dance Tunes Played in a Session

The tunes of traditional Irish music are set in several different rhythms such as the jig, reel, hornpipe and polka. As part of the learning process musicians must understand the rhythmic differences between tunes in order to create the appropriate energy in their

playing. Musicians also stressed to me the importance of knowing which types of tunes work together in sets. Some of the musicians at the sessions in Wellington have lists of tunes which are always categorised according to their rhythm.

The jig is believed to be the oldest Irish dance form that is still being played today. It was popularised in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century in both Ireland and England before moving into Europe (Long 2005:197). There are three types of jigs and each takes on a slightly different rhythm. The single jig is in 6/8 meter, the double jig is also in 6/8 although sometimes 12/8, and the slip jig is in 9/8. Long described how the three meters are used for different dances,

The double jig (*port dubalta*) used what is called ‘double battering’ whereas the single jig (*port singil*), which is usually faster, uses only ‘single battering’ steps. The hop of slip jig (*port luascach*) derives its name from the light hopping, sliding and skipping movements associated with it. (Long 2005:197-198)

Each type has a different swing to it, and when a musician combine jigs together in a set, an understanding of the different rhythms is crucial.

Alongside the jig is the reel, which is perhaps the most popular type of tune in a session, particularly at Kitty’s. The reel is in 4/4 metre and exhibits strong accents on the first and third beats. It is a fast-paced tune and was usually played for both step and set dancing. It is also believed to have its origins in Scotland, with the earliest reference to it in 1580 (Long 2005:327). In Scotland it was referred to as the *reill* but later became popular in Ireland and since that time many more reels have been composed (Hast and Scott 2004:67). Reels were the first type of tune that I began learning from other musicians and are discussed as favourite tunes played by flute players in Wellington.

Hornpipes are the third type of tune that are commonly played in Wellington, particularly at the Molly's session. The hornpipe is in 4/4 meter like the reel; however, it is usually played in a slower tempo with a syncopated rhythm which reflects the type of dance it was originally used for. Hast described the hornpipe as 'used by dancing masters for intricate show pieces. The heavy stepping in the hornpipe made it only acceptable for male dancers' (Hast and Scott 2004:68). There are fewer hornpipes in sessions and they are sometimes regarded as beginner pieces as they can be played slower than a reel but still reflect a strong 4/4 beat.

The last type of dance tune that is important to mention is the polka. The polka was introduced to Ireland in the late 1800s and quickly became popular in the south-west part of Ireland, including Cork, Kerry and Sliabh Luachra (Hast and Scott 2004:68). The polka is in 2/4 meter and is usually played with emphasis and swing; they can be either in a fast or slow tempo. The slower tempo version of the polka has been adopted in the County Clare which adds to its regional identity.

In a Wellington session a wider selection of tunes are also played. Musicians sometimes choose an air, waltz, mazurka, strathspey, morris tunes and even the occasional blue grass or 'old time' tunes, which contribute to the dynamics and diversity of the sessions. These characteristics emphasise that New Zealand musicians have a wide assortment of styles and dance tunes that are present from week to week, although Irish tunes would dominate the evening. The Molly's session in particular has a wider combination of dance tunes reflecting the varied cultural and musical backgrounds of the musicians. The musicians who attend the Kitty's session almost strictly play jigs and reels,

which also reflect their personal views of an Irish session, highlighting musical aspects that are fundamental to the session.

### The Structure of Tunes

Irish dance tunes commonly have a clear structure and are comprised of two, eight-bar phrases which are repeated twice forming a thirty-six bar tune. These phrases are usually written in eight-bar sections AA'BB'. The form is one of the most common structures for a tune and is found in the reels *The Wedding Reel* in D Major, *Miss McLeod's* in G Major and *Brenda Stubbert's* in A Dorian; and the jigs *Morrison's* in E Dorian, *Cliffs of Moher* in A Dorian and *Out on the Ocean* in G Major. Repeated phrases with variations are sometimes only a bar or two towards the end of the eight-bar phrase and may include a group of notes that connect the phrases together. The variations also can be longer than one or two bars such as in *Brenda Stubbert's* where the second part of the A section is brought back in the last part of the B section. If the tune is then divided into four-bar parts it would be played AA'AA'BB'BA'. Boullier describes the differences of the A and B sections, 'The 'A' music or first eight bars is known as 'the tune' and is played twice, comprising sixteen bars. The 'B' music, known as 'the turn', is then played twice, producing another sixteen bars' (1998:28). The musicians I interviewed typically did not use terms such as 'the turn', but instead called the entire thirty-six-bar section 'the tune'. However, the first half of a two part tune was referred to as the 'A section' and the second half the 'B section' by the musicians but were usually reserved for a tune learning situation to define the various parts of the tune, rather than discussed in the session context.

Other variations, aside from this standard form, are also present within the Irish repertoire. Occasionally, the A part of a tune will only be played once before moving onto the B section. For example *The Mountain Road* is played in the AB form and then repeated several times before moving onto the next tune in the set. Another type of tune structure occurs when tunes in four or five parts are played; such as the four part jig in D major, *The Lark in the Morning*. This tune is usually played AA'BB'CC'DD' and is often repeated at least once more before another tune is introduced.

The tunes in an Irish session are usually placed together in 'sets'. The sets commonly consist of three tunes, all of which are in the same rhythm, such as a set of jigs, or a set of reels. The keys or modes of Irish tunes are important for a musician when deciding what to play in a set. Breathnach discusses the modes of Irish tunes in great detail: 'The four notes on which Irish traditional music ends are, to give them their solfa names, Doh, Ray, Soh, and Lah...although this method of naming them is liable to mis-interpretation...each exists in its own right and possesses its own tonic or fundamental note'(1986:9). Cowdery found this description problematic stating, 'The controversy seems to stem essentially from a tendency of some scholars to think of scale (or mode) as a property of a musical item, rather than as a kind of background grid which folk musicians use to structure their melodies'(1990:15). He concludes by stating 'Most authorities on Irish music seem to not distinguish between the purely pentatonic, the mostly pentatonic, and the purely hexatonic scales; such distinctions, though confirmable by ear, are problematic on paper' (ibid). These descriptions of modes and keys offer some explanation of the complexities in categorising tunes, especially when ornamentation is added with the

inclusion of additional notes, such as dominant sevenths or both minor and major thirds within the same tune.

A variety or variation of keys and modes is often taken into consideration when a musician plays a set of tunes. The tunes are commonly played together with three repeats before the change into a new melody. A modulation into the second tune is common, with tonal movement to the relative minor often preferred. In the last tune the key usually returns to the initial tonal area. The process of combining tunes together in sets can be complex and usually requires an awareness of key signatures, harmony and a large repertoire of Irish dance melodies. There are a number of established sets in the Wellington sessions, often when a musician starts a tune, the other participants will know exactly what other tunes follow in the set. But this can change depending on the energy of the session or the number of musicians playing along. If, for example, a musician starts a tune that no one else knows, it would be very uncommon for the musicians to then play three repeats of the tune; instead, they would usually play it twice before moving onto a more familiar tune. When it is time for the next tune the leader will call out 'hup' or 'change' or signal with a gesture such as raised eyebrows or a nod. They will often stop playing for a bar or two while the leader starts the next tune. Then the musicians who have learnt the tune will continue to participate and play along with the leader. Those who do not know the tune will stop playing and possibly join in the third and final tune of the set if they have learnt it. The leader is also able to control the tempo, usually selecting an appropriate speed for the other musicians present. When the tempo is set other musicians can join in, occasionally problems occur when the tempo increases. In sessions I have attended in

Wellington when this has occurred, the set sometimes ends abruptly, with the musicians aware of two competing tempos at the same time.

During the interviews with musicians in Wellington we discussed how they put tunes together in a set. Firstly, Jonathan Berkahn recalled his considerations when starting a set of tunes and stated,

Most jigs will go with most other jigs, unless they get a bit slidy (sic) with not many notes in it, for example Calliope House, but generally most jigs will go together. That's not true of reels, different reels will go at different speeds, some will be more swung than others. I actually think it is quite a knack to put reels together that will marry happily. So, I am always thinking about that, what's another reel with a similar feel to it. And then it's the question of key; same key is OK in a session, up a step is alright, down a step is a bit odd, up a fifth, down a fifth, they're all right. There are only a few connections which are seriously odd. So, I'm thinking about key and the type of tune we're in and the sort of feel it has. (Jonathan Berkahn, 4 May 2009, interview)

The key and feel of the tune is important for Jonathan when starting a set of tunes. In addition to Jonathan's comments, Pat Higgins considers that it is essential to always change the keys of tunes within a set. He discussed his process of starting a set in a session,

I find if you are starting a set off that you have worked out in your head, [you should think about] what a good modulation and key change would be. Because I hate when people play three tunes all in A minor, or three tunes in G, its much better if you can add some energy by changing key, so I have often rehearsed that actually, you come into the session thinking, I must put that tune with this tune because the key change would be fantastic, you know, and obviously it is good to tell people before hand so they are ready to change with you. I would try to, for example I would do something, like start off in E minor maybe *Drag Her Around the Road*, then come up a notch to A minor or even better come into a major, E minor into G, and the ideal would be to go up into A major as well, that's a great energy lift, but not everybody has leant tunes in A major, I don't know many tunes in A major, because on the flute the G#'s make it very difficult, I put a bit of thought into it. (Pat Higgins, 27 July 2009, interview)

Both comments above show various considerations when starting a set of tunes. Importance is placed on key and choosing tunes that other musicians will recognise. These

aspects sometimes create a perceived ‘authentic’ sound by the musicians; and they also distinguish the advanced players from the beginners within a session.

The Wellington sessions demonstrate a number of sets, which are unique to each session. They can be formed in various ways, either by tune names, events or experiences in a musician's life, because they are published in that way, or because they always seem to be played in the same order. At the Molly's session there are a number of sets that are played almost each week. A range of sets come from the collection of tunes *Begged, Borrowed and Stolen* such as *Blackthorn Stick*, *Rakes of Kildare* and *Haste to the Wedding*. The warm up set is always played at the start of session which comprises the three tunes *Fairy Dance*, *Princess Royal* and *Speed the Plough*. The Wellington session also has sets like the *Armstrong Polkas* which consists of two *Ballydesmond* polkas with a nameless polka in the middle. Ruth Armstrong described how these tunes became part of the repertoire in Wellington,

Well last year [2008] at *Ceol Aneas*, Chih and I were in the flute class taught by Muireann Nic Amhlaoibh who is from County Kerry and she asked us what did we want to learn, and Chih asked her to teach us some Kerry Polkas, so she taught us the first two polkas that are in that [Armstrong] set and I was quite taken with them, and went away and practised them up and brought them back to Molly's and was quite determined to get them into the repertoire and get people to learn them. And when she taught us the first tune which she said was called *Maggie in the woods* but I think it is one of the *Ballydesmond polkas*...so basically what we have now is the two *Ballydesmond polkas* with this nameless polka in the middle. (Ruth Armstrong, 7 June 2009, interview)

This description shows that tune names are not always necessary, as they are sometimes changed, or put together to comprise a new set under a new name. The *Armstrong Polkas* are often played at the sessions at both Molly's and Kitty's in Wellington, and their

inclusion demonstrates how a set of tunes or single tune, learnt during a festival, can become part of the repertoire.

### Ornamentation

There are several ways to add style to a tune and the most noticeable approach is through ornamentation. Boullier described the tune as the ‘bones’ with each individual musician providing the ‘flesh’ through ornamentation (Boullier 1998:27). In this way two musicians never play the tune in exactly the same way; yet they can still play together because the basic bones or structure of the tune is constant. Each musician can produce ornamentation that is specific to the instrument they play. This section concentrates on how ornamentation is produced by the flute, as I have the most understanding and experience with this particular instrument. When I began learning the Irish flute I quickly became aware of the role of ornamentation in creating either an individual style or recreating an Irish regional style. In 2007, after the advice of session members in Wellington I purchased a Seery flute; it is made of a delrin polymer compound which makes it ideal for travelling, and it also has large finger holes to ensure a rich tone is produced. The simple-system Irish flute is typically made of wood with six holes in the in the key of D Major and is based on the pre-boehm silver flutes (see Figure 12). Keys can be added to the flute to create chromatic pitches and the overall tone is rich and mellow which contrasts to the boehm-style flute which has clear and bright tonal qualities. Through various lessons both privately, during summer schools in Ireland and festivals in New Zealand from 2007-2009, I have been exposed to various techniques of playing the flute and differing ways to produce a particular sound. There are three common ways to ornament a tune on the flute; the first is

by embellishing the notes. The second is through articulation and the third is through breathing.



Figure 12: Ruth's German keyed flute, Chih's Eamonn Cotter wooden flute, my Desi Seery delrin flute. (Top to bottom)

The first system of ornamenting a tune with the flute is by using techniques known as a 'cut', 'tap', 'roll' or 'crane'. A 'cut' and 'tap' both interrupt a note briefly to add variety and style, in a similar way to a grace note. The 'cut' comes from the note above and a 'tap' from the note below.

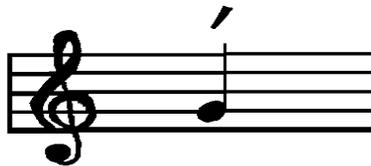


Figure 13: 'Cut' (Larsen 2003: 121)

A 'cut' is commonly heard just before a note, when two notes are repeated, or in the middle of a single note (see Figure 13). Larsen has added the symbol above the note to indicate a 'cut', this system of notation is unique to Larsen but recognised by many musicians including flute player, Matt Malloy (ibid:2003:Back cover).



Figure: 14'Tap' (Strike) (Larsen: 141)

On the flute a ‘tap’ (also referred to as a ‘strike’) is produced by quickly hitting or lifting the fingers onto another note (see Figure 14). The speed in which this action takes is important as it must not alter the rhythm.

A ‘roll’, which is also referred to as the appoggiatura in classical music, is usually played on a long note or repeated note and is made up of five pitches which are played quickly and evenly (see Figure 15). It is made up of a ‘cut’ and ‘tap’ ornament.

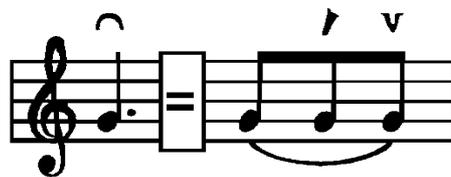


Figure 15: ‘Roll’: A ‘cut’ and ‘tap’ (Larsen: 163)

The last type of ornament is the ‘crann’ which is an ornament frequently used by uilleann pipers, and when used by other musicians, imitates the tonal qualities of the pipes (see Figure 16). The ‘crann’ is made up of two consecutive ‘cuts’ and usually played on lower notes such as E and D. It is considered by some musicians to be the most complex ornament as it requires a lot of practice because more pitches are played together, at a fast but even tempo. All of these ornaments alter the sound of the notes and create style and variety to the melodies. The placement and type of ornament usually changes with each repeat of the tune, so although the melody is repeated three times it is never the same for each.



Figure 16: ‘Crann’: two consecutive ‘cuts’ (Larsen: 231)

The example of *The Banshee* (see Figure 17) notated below, was transcribed by Grey Larsen and uses the symbols for ornamentation that have been demonstrated above.

Larsen comments about the ornaments ‘They are not meant to illustrate any style in particular, but they do inevitably reflect my own playing style to some degree...The ornaments shown may not work as well with your [the reader’s] style of playing as they do with mine, so feel free to alter them, build upon them, ignore them, or substitute your own ornamentation’ (Larsen 2003:333). This freedom to change ornaments highlights that each musician will play a tune differently and there is not one way for any tune to be played or transcribed.

The image shows a musical score for 'The Banshee' in 2/2 time, featuring two parts: A Part and B Part. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The A Part consists of two staves of music, with the first staff starting with a box labeled 'A Part'. The B Part consists of two staves of music, with the second staff starting with a box labeled 'B Part'. The score includes various ornaments and articulation marks, such as slurs, accents, and first/second endings. The B Part ends with a double bar line and the marking 'D.C.' (Da Capo).

**Figure 17: The Banshee (from Larsen 2003:348)**

The second way to ornament a tune is through articulation. In classical flute music the articulation is clearly marked and it is assumed that unless a slur is added above notes they will be tongued. However, this kind of detailed written direction for individual notes is not usually included in notated Irish tunes; therefore, the articulation depends on the musical choices of each player.

The third way to add ornamentation is through use of breathing. During *Ceol Aneas* in 2007, a flute tutor explained that because breathing is a necessarily part of flute playing

it should be considered an ornament. The places breaths can be taken create different phrases and rhythmic emphasis which adds variation to the tune. The duration and placement of the breath are both vital in ensuring the rhythm stays constant. The musician can also decide to leave notes out from the original structure of the tune, and omit them for a breath. This technique when used with appropriate placement creates drive and a clear sense of phrasing. It is important to vary where a breath is taken through the repetitions of a tune, otherwise it might become expected by a listener. When this occurs the phrasing can become stagnant and the energy may be lost. All of these examples need practice and require a musician to regularly listen to recorded examples of this music, or learn from advanced players who understand the ways ornamentation can be used. In this way, a musician will learn when and how to use ornaments in order to produce a personal playing style.

Through the above methods of ornamentation, musicians create individual styles. The position of these ornaments and the quantity is important throughout a tune. An over use of ornamentation can also become problematic, especially if the tune becomes unrecognisable to other musicians. Hence, instrumental practice combined with listening to musical examples is essential. In 2008 I attended the Willie Clancy summer school in County Clare the teacher taught the tune first and added ornamentation later to the notes which were longer, or repeated which added style. Also during the second and third repeat of the tune, different ornaments would be played allowing the tune variety each time it was played. By learning a tune in this way, I became aware of the several places in the melody where ornamentation could be played. It was then a balance of understanding what could be played in each repeat of the tune, to develop interest, style and personality.

### The Importance of Rhythm

Another way to vary a tune is through rhythm. Each tune has a standard rhythm which is established in the meter, a double jig in 6/8 meter and a reel in 4/4 meter. Musicians in Wellington have explained that melody instruments are able to play the tune as well as accent the standard rhythm through the skilful use of ornamentation. Their role is fundamental to the session, while accompanying instruments are sometimes regarded as additional.

The emphasis on rhythm depends on the chosen individual or regional style of playing which can range from heavy, staccato and lively to flowing, ornamented and barely accented. On a flute there are a variety of ways to choose a desired rhythm, for example, the classical flute usually places importance on an even tone and unaccented breathing. In contrast a musician playing a simple-system Irish flute places rhythmic importance by incorporating the classical style, as well as producing intentionally accented breaths, continuously shifting phrases and broad tonal qualities. In this way rhythm is used to enhance an individuals playing.

### Transcription of *The Rainy Day*

To understand more about how a tune could be played differently each time it is repeated, I decided to transcribe a recording of the reel *The Rainy Day*. The reel is in A Dorian and is also in the AA'BB' format. I asked Pat Higgins, who is known for his Sligo-Roscommon style of flute playing in Wellington, to record this reel three times through so I could examine the differences in ornamentation, breathing and rhythm throughout the tune. After examining the different places these techniques were used, I emailed Pat and asked him

whether he noticed a difference between playing the tune in a controlled environment and in a session. He commented ‘I’m sure I played them differently. In a session you are usually playing with others, there is more support, and nobody is listening for errors. In the studio alone, I’m a little less relaxed and putting pressure on myself to get through without making mistakes’ (Pat Higgins, 8<sup>th</sup> February, 2008, personal email). I decided to obtain a recording in a controlled environment because it would be clearer to distinguish the ornaments and because Pat’s playing is highly ornate and flowing, it would give a clearer idea of the ways a tune can be played. The melody will always be played differently in regards to the context it is heard and will change from session to session depending on who else is present and the energy that develops throughout the evening. Therefore, I thought it more helpful to use a formalised recording, which would likely differ just as much as in a session, but would be clearer to observe.

Figure 18 shows the first time through the entire A section of the tune. I decided to use the same system as Grey Larsen (Figure 13-17) to notate the ornamentation. I have also added breath markings throughout the figures. In the last bar of Figure 18 I have used a diagonal line to represent the way Pat starts on a low A and over blows to reach the A that is an octave above. This technique allows the A and B section to smoothly and interestingly transition.

♩=116

Figure 18: The Rainy Day- The Entire A section First time through.

The following figures 19-22 show the first four-bar section of the melody each time it is repeated. This four-bar section comes back four times and is played six times in total throughout the recording. Each version is notated so observations can be made regarding how each time there is a slightly different version as different techniques are used or omitted. By examining the notation we can see how Pat plays each repeat slightly differently which adds drive and interest throughout the tune.

Figure 19: Four-Bar Section- Second repeat, First time.



Figure 20: Four-Bar Section- Second repeat, Second time.



Figure 21: Four-Bar Section- Third repeat, First time.



Figure 22: Four-Bar Section- Third repeat, Second time.

The recorded example is also included on the attached CD which is useful to listen to alongside the notated examples above (see Figure 18-22).

### Melodic Variations and Tune Names

Any given Irish tune has a number of melodic variations. Some consist of larger phrase sections, or recognisable melodic contours which can be identified as part of a particular tune, but may be played with a new tune name or within a different tune. In addition some variations refer to small changes that a musician makes from varying one or two notes within the melody. Occasionally, the variations of a tune are obviously different among the musicians. I have attended sessions in Wellington where a visitor has started a tune that had different variations from what the other musicians knew. In this extreme case, although the tune was recognisable to the other musicians, the two variations could not be played smoothly together. This highlighted that each tune often takes on many small

changes, depending who is participating, where the player learnt it and the context where it is heard. Cowdery discussed the idea of variations: ‘On any level, a tune model is a living potential which may unfold slightly differently in different situations, but which can always be recognizable as its self’ (1990:44). She examines this idea further by observing sixteen different recordings of the tune ‘The Blackbird’ which is notated as a slow air, set dance, hornpipe and reel. Some notation is given which explores the ornaments used in the tune. The variations change depending on a musician’s style of playing and the instrument. Cowdery commented on tune variations: ‘When the whole tune is repeated we begin to see which parts of the melody are more variable and which parts are more stable, adding up to a tune model as a field of possibilities within a basic contour’ (1990:74). The musicians I talked with described that the variations of a tune needed to be subtle and be played without changing the overall structure of the melody or rhythm.

In the sessions at both Molly’s and Kitty’s there are a number of tunes with similar melodic phrases that have different names<sup>5</sup>. The titles of a tune change depending on the historical background of the melody, where it is played and from whom it was learnt. In Ireland, I learnt a tune called *The Old Silver Spear* in County Clare. After returning to Wellington, I taught the tune to some session members. Some of the advanced players were already familiar with the tune but knew the tune as *The New Mown Meadows*. Other tunes that have multiple titles that are heard at the Wellington sessions are the jig *Over the Ocean* also referred to as *Out on the Ocean*, or the reel *The Banshee* which is also known as *McMahon’s*. Tune names sometimes have interesting stories but there can also be confusion over the name of a tune, especially newly composed tunes. An example of this is

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<sup>5</sup> The study and history of tune variants and their developments is interesting and complex. A detailed study would be valuable in understanding how tunes have changed since they were composed and how different parts can be linked together; however, it is beyond the scope of this study.

in *The Wedding Reel* which is played on the Lunasa recording ‘The Merry Sisters of Fate’ in the set *Morning Nightcap* (Lunasa 2001 CD recording). However, this tune was composed by Donald Shaw from the band Capercaillie. Donald named the tune *McLeod’s Farewell* and it was originally written in E major, not D major which is heard in the Lunasa version. Confusion over tune names often occurs among musicians when tunes are learnt from differing sources.

Tune variations are interesting to examine and help clarify some of the confusion between different tune names that have similar melodic structure. Most of the musicians I talked with knew of several melodies by various tune names and vice versa. They explained that the variations were created by the techniques the tunes were transmitted and this ensured that Irish music continued to be a part of a living tradition where the tunes changed and altered depending on their context.

### **‘Will You Sing us One from The Pogues?’: From the Old Style *Sean nós* to New Ballads in Sessions.**

Among Irish musicians, the difference between ‘tunes’ and ‘songs’ is important. Irish tunes are instrumental melodies and originally composed for dances often as jigs and reels. In contrast, songs refer to various types of vocal music. While songs have a small role in Irish sessions both in Ireland and the Kitty’s session, at Molly’s, they are often sung and convey an interesting musical element during the evening. In the following section I examine the role of vocal music and explore contexts where songs are sung during sessions. Irish vocal music has frequently had a close connection to historical events. For hundreds of years the history of Ireland has experienced immense changes and upheaval from the Diaspora, rebellion and emigration through to civil war and ‘the troubles’. In a response to these

changes songs were composed in various styles, most commonly the ballad. A range of sources are available describing the role of singing in Ireland and explore not only *sean nós* and ballads, but also lays and come-all-yes (Shields 1993, Sawyers 2000). In Wellington songs are often enjoyed by the music community and hold particular importance in sing-a-rounds during folk festivals as mentioned in Chapter One.

There are two genres of songs that are sung in at the Molly's session. Firstly, are traditional Irish *sean nós* singing. *Sean nós* is an Irish language term meaning 'old style' and is commonly performed in areas of the Gaeltacht, which are Irish speaking areas in the west of Ireland, Connemara and in northern areas such as County Donegal (Long 2005:348). The term *sean nós* refers to a solo, unaccompanied style of singing in the Irish language (Hast and Scott 2004). Carson has described the musical aspects of *sean nós* singing, 'the song is the way it is sung; since there is no absolute melody, one is free to interpret it as one wishes; the song is the totality of the effects that may be developed at any time' (Carson 1999:50). The *sean nós* repertoire sung today was composed mostly between 1600 and 1850 in Ireland, and the composers generally remain anonymous (Hast and Scott 2004: 98). Concerning the importance of words in *sean nós* singing, Sawyer writes, 'when applied to singing, ornamentation means slightly varying the notes or stopping and prolonging them. The singer may stretch certain syllables...In traditional Irish vocal music, it is the lyrics that are of paramount importance' (Sawyer 2000: 9). The poetry of this genre often reflects aspects of the community, recalling and affirming time-honoured stories. Today the lyrics of the songs do not always hold the same importance and are often sung for entertainment rather than in response to the social or political environment.

Although *sean nós* are more frequently sung at house parties and informal gatherings in Ireland and New Zealand, they are also occasionally performed today, in the Irish sessions. In a session I attended in County Clare in July 2008 for example, the entire bar was hushed into silence during one particular *sean nós*. Guided by the unspoken etiquette rules, no one spoke for the duration for the song, the listeners then followed with a short applause and murmurs of appreciation and approval. In New Zealand however, listeners are usually unaware of appropriate etiquette during songs, and consequently the singers often prefer not to compete with the pub volume and instead sing *sean nós* in more suitable and quieter situations. For example in several folk festivals I have attended, towards the early evening when the tunes players start to become tired, *sean nós* singing is often performed among the musicians. Moreover in weekly sessions, musicians who are present during a song may also be unaware of the proscribed etiquette, occasionally a guitarist or other musician provide a soft accompaniment for the singer, a practice generally avoided in Ireland.

The second type of vocal music commonly sung at the Molly's session in Wellington is the new ballads which were popularised in the early 1960s notably by the Clancy Brothers. The history of this vocal music is often associated with the Child Ballads and various collections from Robert Burns in Scotland and Thomas Percy of England. The old ballad was 'a narrative poem usually intended to be sung or, to put in even simpler terms, it is a song that tells a story' (Sawyers 2000:146). Traditionally, their general characteristics included simple rhythms, common tune phrases, hyperbole, incremental repetition and straight forward narrative (ibid: 147). The ballads were based on European models and often comprised of a large number of verses (Long 2005:28). Ballads were

constantly evolving depending on the context in which they were sung, specifically, names were frequently changed ensuring the story was never recalled in precisely the same way. This change and variation was also experienced in tunes which would never be played exactly the same way twice. In the early 1960s the ballad was popularised in the folk revival and referred to as ‘ballad group boom’ (Valley 1999:19). The old collections were often now refashioned and shortened for their new audience as a form of entertainment. The ballads often had American influences and were recorded by several bands.

During the 1960s groups such as the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem played ballads in Lounge bars that were ‘developed in response’ to the economic, social and political changes (ibid: 20). The ballads in this new context were predominantly political and narrative songs, ‘The songs themselves found varied formats and storytelling in them merged with description, lyric effects etc’ (Valley 1999:19). The new ballads also ‘allude to the environment or to known individuals, using well-known Irish airs, sometimes in pastiche form, and often by a known author’ (ibid). Describing the narratives of the songs, Shield wrote ‘the accidents of life are told in rational order and in detail; catastrophe, shipwreck, arbitrary acts of crime or war provide the context of basic human experience’ (1993:111). Shield commented further, ‘they take on the conception of narrative song as a kind of journalism’ (ibid). In response to the popularization of ballads, Valley commented ‘today the ballad-group tradition lingers on in Ireland, Europe and the US...performers sing in Ireland and the US for drinking audiences who like ‘singalong’ material that they are familiar with’ (1999:21).

In terms of musical performance, the ballad differs from the *sean nós* by the presence of an instrumental accompaniment, usually in the form of a guitar. This

accompaniment is generally very simple melodically and rhythmically and is modal. In addition the chorus is often sung by the large group, with each verse sung by one individual.

Both *sean nós* and new ballads are the two types of songs commonly sung at the both the Molly's session and at folk festivals in New Zealand. In discussing the musical practices of these ballads, Dave Barnes commented, 'singing should be unaccompanied because you can stop and pause and put a bit of a gap in' (David Barnes, 24 July 2007, interview). By singing unaccompanied a singer also has a greater opportunity for stylistic freedom in the song, which can lead to identification or even ownership of the song. Describing the importance of etiquette involved with song ownership in East Suffolk, Ginette Dunn wrote 'singers may sing another's song after acknowledging the true ownership of the song in public, or requesting permission from the owner before the performance at which he will not be present' (1980:202). Some musicians, particularly those with a smaller repertoire, are unlikely to teach their songs to other singers, as a way to guard their pieces. During my interviews, Dave Barnes repeatedly mentioned his willingness to share his songs with others, in order to circulate an awareness and appreciation of the music. While Barnes is respectful of the repertoire of other singers, he believes songs must be heard and passed on in order for them to be sung in 'sixty years time'.

Songs are rarely sung at the Kitty's session as they take the focus away from the tunes. Instead songs are sung in specific situations such as singing-sessions or at house parties where an audience is aware of appropriate etiquette behaviour. In contrast, the session at Molly's usually accommodates a few songs and if a visiting singer is present,

even more songs will be performed. This openness to vocal music highlights the general folk influence of the participants, who generally enjoy the mixture of songs and tunes in each session. Frequently, songs are sung when an active listening audience is at the pub, or if someone either a punter or musician has a request. The session at Molly's generally has three or four regular musicians who know the lyrics and enjoy singing during the session.

Dave commented on singing at the Molly's session,

It's in the mood [of] the pub and what level to do it... I prefer doing songs with a chorus in that situation, so everyone can join in, which they do which is good. I'm very conscious there's enough stuff going on, I don't want it to be a performance from me. (Dave Barnes, 24 February 2009, interview)

The notion of 'performance' is engaging in this context, because normally when a ballad is sung in a session, it is generally considered more of a spectacle or performance by the participants.

In contrast *sean nós* are only occasionally sung and during the few times I have heard them at Molly's, the punters have continued to talk throughout the song. *Sean nós* is perceived as more of a contribution to the session circle rather than a performance for the listeners. In this way, the context of a *sean nós* is similar to that of instrumental tunes: they are both played predominantly for the musicians taking part in the session. In contrast, the notion of a formal 'performance' is, as suggested by Dave Barnes, a trait of the ballad, which, due to its popularity, often takes place with active listening audiences.

The most frequent songs that I witnessed sung at the Molly's session from 2007-2009 during my research were the ballads, *Molly Malone* and *Fields of Athenry*, both were usually performed with guitar accompaniment. *Molly Malone* is obviously popular as the namesake of the pub. The lyrics are set in Dublin city and describe a beautiful fish monger who walks through the streets crying 'Cockles and mussels, alive, alive, oh'. The second

ballad, *Fields of Athenry* was written by Pete St John, is set during the Irish famine of 1845-1850 (Monks Solutions, 2007, website). Dave explained the history of the song, 'It's based on an incident in the Famine when an English lord thought he'd make a bit of money by importing corn. Sadly, he got some variety that was no use for food. I don't know if anyone actually was transported for nicking it, but highly possible' (Dave Barnes, 26 November 2009, personal email).

Verse One: By a lonely prison wall I heard a young girl calling  
Michael they have taken you away  
For you stole Trevelyan's corn  
So the young might see the morn  
Now a prison ship lies waiting in the bay

Verse Three: By a lonely harbour wall she watched the last star falling  
As the prison ship sailed out against the sky  
For she'll live in hope and pray for her love in Botany Bay  
It's so lonely round the fields of Athenry  
(Dave Barnes, 26 November 2009, personal email).

This song was written in 1979 and reached the Irish top ten chart when it was released on an album by Danny Doyle. Both *Fields of Athenry* and *Molly Malone* are recognised Irish songs, especially heard at major sporting events in Ireland. Because of their popularity, they are also often sung during sessions. The various types of songs sung in a session are an important part of the soundscape and develop both a unique musical identity and reflect the participant's enjoyment of both songs and tunes throughout the gathering.

### **Summary**

The musician's ideas about Irish identity in music are distinctive and challenging. The Wellington sessions at Molly's and Kitty's adopt different attitudes towards a session and the repertoire that is played. Each musician draws on their own experience, playing style

and background which informs the types of tunes they play, the way they ornament them, and the choice of instrumentation. These aspects also determine the session that musicians attend in Wellington.

Examining the sessions at Molly's and Kitty's shows these various differences. Firstly, instruments played at Molly's can include any number of melody or accompanying instruments but there is a particular dominance of free reeds and guitars. Secondly, the repertoire at Molly's is more inclusive of other types of tunes and beyond the prototype of 'jigs and reels' session. Thirdly, ballads are often sung at Molly's. Commonly, the players at Molly's were drawn to the session from a general folk music basis and this 'all-comers welcome' approach is encouraged by openness session leaders. The musicians at Molly's learn through a number of ways, but often a copy of *Begged Borrowed and Stolen* has pride of place on a table in front of the musicians during the evening.

In contrast, the Kitty's session has several participants who have direct experience of sessions in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Because of these connections some musicians consider their approach to be more authentic compared with that at Molly's. At Kitty's the instruments are mostly melodic with a predominance of fiddles and flutes: songs are rarely sung. The repertoire consists of Irish jigs and reels with occasionally a Scottish set. The Kitty's musicians commonly learn tunes orally and pay particular attention to the sound they are trying to produce through stylistic features such as ornamentation and rhythm. These differences highlight the particular ways Irish music is played and experienced in Wellington today.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Exploring the Session Community: Musicians, Leaders, and Identity.**

The session community establishes a specific musical identity among the participants. This identity is worthy of exploration in order to understand why Wellington musicians play Irish music. It is also intriguing to ascertain the foundations of this community to help explain why so many people with varied backgrounds and identities, both musically and culturally, come together to participate in the session and contribute to the Irish music community.

In this chapter I seek to understand why individuals participate in Irish music and how this participation shapes their personality. I examine both musical and individual identities. The section on Musical Identity explores the participants' foundations of Irish music, and the Individual Identity focuses on the social aspects of the session. I also question the importance of 'Irishness' and whether having Irish heritage allows the musician a greater sense of authenticity when participating in the music. Next, a detailed account of four individuals who are the leaders of the session is considered, regarding how their identity changes the way the session is organised. The last section of the chapter addresses etiquette and includes some personal experiences from the session musicians in Wellington.

Communities are an essential part of society and a multiple variety can coexist in any one individual. In examining the broad significance of community membership, Schuler comments that 'communities are the heart, the soul, the nervous system, and the lifeblood of the human society' (1996:1). There are often set boundaries, such as location and interests, but the ease of communication and travel allows communities to be fluid and

often problematic to define. The session community is primarily a music community. Music is the reason people come together, but other social aspects ensure they keep coming back each week to participate. The session community has several shared foundations including conviviality and culture, a sense of education in terms of learning about the music, as well as information and communication (Schuler 1996:12). Conviviality is vital to the session community, Schuler comments 'conviviality is something to which people make contributions, and at times, from which they take comfort' and it 'embodies the idea that people are part of a greater association' (Schuler 1996:35). The social aspects as well as communication with each other and continuous learning about the culture and tradition of the music all assist in establishing bonds that unite the participants together. These ties then develop into strong friendships, becoming almost as important as the music-making.

The role of music in creating communities is important and is a central aspect of understanding how they exist for Irish sessions. Here music unifies the group and brings individuals together into a shared musical experience that becomes part of their collective identity. The main purpose of a session is meeting together to play tunes, the session community is therefore organised by people who are 'like-minded to some degree' (Schuler 1996:3). In the case of Irish sessions in Wellington, the music, and specifically the tunes are the foundation of this particular community. In addition to the enjoyment of the music, however, members of the session community also experience friendships, mutual respect, socialisation, a shared place for music-making, shared experiences with music, and knowledge. These musical and social aspects ensure the musicians are fulfilled

in their music-making and communal experience, validating their continued participation from week to week.

In this chapter I let the musicians describe the session community focusing on its primary function, the music, in tandem with the social aspects. In a similar way, Rice described the importance of presenting research through the multiple voices of the participants involved (1996: 8-9). In order to comprehend the identities of the session community, it is crucial to talk with the musicians, about their ideas and on the music they create. Using formal and informal interviews, I actively conversed with a broad range of people involved with Irish music in Wellington in order to explore and understand the session community. I found that the idea that music is the primary function of the session was generally accepted, but that there was a rich gradation of perceptions about the musical and social mix. Andrew James, a recent participant in Irish music commented on these issues,

There is a definite sense of community because there are people you are hanging out with every week for a good couple of hours. I guess because it is such a small community, you feel welcomed quite quickly, or you can feel welcome quite quickly. I haven't been playing tunes that long, but I already feel that quite a lot of the people that I play with are good friends of mine. (Andrew James, 9 June 2009, interview)

While Andrew felt accepted from the beginning of his participation, ChihLeng Tham had a different experience; she explained,

At first when I went I noticed it was very cliquey. I think the cliques have formed from friendship bonds, probably nothing more than that. I think when I first came I didn't know anyone at Kitty's and there was an age difference because they are all older... It just seemed that Molly's was the place to be. (ChihLeng Tham, 15 June 2009, interview)

The differences that Chih mentioned refer to the two sessions, at Kitty O'Shea's and Molly Malone's. The friendship bonds that Chih discussed are also important to James

McNamara. James plays at both the Molly's and Kitty's session, he commented about the session community,

Yes there is a sense of community and I think the two sessions have sort of opened up a bit as well, more recently. Alongside going to the session on a Monday night and just playing, you see these people you know at festivals and there is the odd house session, or having a go at learning tunes at some ones house or whatever. I feel like I have made a few friends through the music scene and it does feel like there is a sense of community amongst the people playing the music. (James McNamara, 10 June 2009, interview)

James believes that the many social aspects of the session community are all based around the music; yet, he also feels that friendship and group belonging are crucial aspects to the session. These social aspects are important to Andy Linton who plays at the Kitty's session, he commented,

I think for me the session is a nice extension to the weekend, so the weekend doesn't end till Tuesday morning. I like the music, obviously but it is also the craic, you catch up with people you know. I would say people like Pat and Ruairidh are people I would socialise with, and it's because of the music. But I would probably socialise with them anyway now, if we all stopped playing we wouldn't stop seeing each other. (Andy Linton, 28 July 2009, interview)

Andy believes the friendship bonds between some of the participants are strong and at present go beyond the musical draw that initially bonded them. These bonds are inevitable as some of the musicians have been playing together for almost twenty years. While the social side is important, Dave believes that the music is the primary function of the session.

He explained,

The session community fills different needs for every individual. It has not been a community need for me. It fitted in with what I liked doing, but I am already involved in social communities in other areas of folk music, especially in the Morris [dancing] and the singing. However, it's quite neat having the little group that is the session; it is actually quite a nice little social scene. But problems can arise when the session is answering as much or more social elements for people as the playing itself, sometimes it can counter the playing. (Dave Barnes, 24 February 2009, interview)

This view is shared by other session members such as Melanie Brown who agrees with Dave that the central role of the session is the music. She stated,

The community wouldn't exist without the music. So as individuals, we are all there in the very first instance for the music; we don't know the people who are going to be there, were not going along looking for new friends, we are going along because we want to play the music with other people who can play the music. The rest is a bonus. (Melanie Brown, 22 June 2009, interview)

The idea of the music being central to the session, with social aspects as secondary, was highlighted to me again when Ruairidh Morrison shared the following story. He recalled,

In about 1988 or 1989 a bunch of us, who played at the Victoria bar session at Glasgow, decided we would go down to Miltown Malbay for the Willy Clancy summer school. We rented a house and we travelled down in three vehicles as there was around ten of us. None of us knew each other at all, it hadn't entered our heads until we were sitting in this car and we asked 'so what do you do?' and 'what's your surname?' and 'where are you from?'. We didn't know each other at all, yet we had been playing music together for years. We had a good time down there of course. So there was a community, but it was exclusively about the music. I also think the same sorts of people tend to be drawn to the music, so it's not that hard to be friends with the musicians that play at the session that you go to. (Ruairidh Morrison, 22 June 2009, interview)

This story reveals just how much the music is central to the session community, and that for most musicians there is also a social bond within the group. As in all communities many aspects are important, and while the primary factor of the session is based on music, the social interaction still holds an important role. Conviviality and friendship ensures the musicians create individual identities as well as musical identities.

I have discussed how music is central to the session community, and in order to explore the various identities of this community a discussion of identity is required. Turino has written that, 'Identity involves the partial selection of habits and attributes used to represent oneself to oneself and to others by oneself and by others; the emphasis on certain habits and traits is relative to specific situations' (Turino 2008:95). In this definition the term relates to the individual who can create and shape their identity through the habits

and attributes they hold. The way music is played and enjoyed highlights the particular identity it holds in a particular context. Today, the session participants construct their individual identities by the way they contribute to the music community; however, a few decades ago the music was linked with a political identity.

The tunes played at the session have their origins in the Irish dance repertoire. This repertoire had connotations as a symbol of nationalism as well as political associations, which can be considered in both positive and negative perspectives. Music has often been used to shape national identity and unite or divide a country. This concept was seen in Ireland during its turbulent history. There are several examples of political control over Irish music, such as promoting Ireland as an independent country with a 'nationalist agenda' or the control of the Dance Halls Act in 1935 (Hast and Scott 2004:36). Music was a political tool used to create or destroy this sense of national identity. Hast and Scott have commented about the troubled history of Ireland and its music in their book *Music in Ireland*, they stated 'the long years of struggle under British colonial rule, the impact of three centuries of emigration, and the formation of modern Ireland' (2004:19). They then explored how Irish music had some positive connections with early national identity,

Traditional Irish music and the dance emerged as important symbols of cultural and national identity in the struggle to create the Irish nation. Many of the contexts for music were designed to bolster national pride in the developing Irish state (Hast and Scott 2004:19).

We can observe from this quote that the music had its roots in a type of national identity. This original identity of the music has since extended its reach and had become more widespread.

Today, Irish music is no longer played in Ireland alone or symbolises nationalism for Ireland. Instead it has taken on several new roles and become part of a more

individualist identity. In Wellington the participants contribute to the session community which develops their individual and musical identities.

### **Musical Identity**

It is important to understand the multiple layers that exist within the Irish music community. Basically the session at Molly Malone's and the session at Kitty O'Shea's both enjoy their own sense of community. However, these communities are linked in several ways, not only musically, because they are both Irish sessions, but also socially. Some musicians at Molly's and Kitty's have participated in music-making together, contributed to both sessions, and played together at festivals and house parties. These links of participation as well as friendships among the sessions bridge the gaps between the Wellington session community. There are many layers to the communities and they all involve numerous musicians, visitors and the occasional active listener. During my research a focused study on the participants has developed, by analysing their musical and social identities.

I initially approached the Wellington Irish music scene in order to understand more about musical identities within the session. I became a participant observer in order to fully grasp the music and understand more about the musical and social aspects of the community. In order to successfully participate I developed my musical skills and built my repertoire, a task which still continues. Developing these skills allowed me to partake in a wider capacity and allowed me entrance into more advanced sessions and invitations to more exclusive events such as house sessions. John Baily has previously discussed the importance of becoming a skilled performer as part of research in ethnomusicology, saying

that, 'one of the main advantages of learning to perform is that one comes to understand the music from the "inside". The structure of the music comes to be apprehended operationally, in terms of what you do and by implication, what you have to know' (Baily 2008:122). He goes on to add, 'It can provide one with an understandable role and status in the community, and it can be useful in early orientation' (ibid:125). Baily learnt Afghan music in the field and described three ways in which his musical performance had limitations: technical skill, size of repertoire and style. These three aspects can also be applied to Irish music. However, the term 'performance' is problematic when referred to in the session.

The musicians do not consider the session to be a formal performance in the common usage of the word. A performance usually requires an audience, but because the session is held in a public space, punters are generally always present. Therefore, the musicians do not consider themselves performers while they are playing in a session, even though some are professional musicians, playing in bands and teaching music to others. When a musician is skilled in these three areas, technical skill, size of repertoire and style, they are likely to have qualities of a professional musician and a session member. Although the musicians may consider the session to be an informal gathering rather than a performance, the location of the session, a local pub, can create confusion for the punters. Christopher Small describes the many types of performance in his book *Musiking* (1998). He began by exploring the multiple examples of what is considered 'performance' and opened with a formal setting,

In a concert hall, two thousand people settle in their seats, and an intense silence falls. A hundred musicians bring their instruments to the ready. The conductor raises his baton, and after a few moments the symphony begins. As the orchestra plays, each member of the audience sits alone, listening to the work of a great, dead, composer. (Small 1998:1)

This description works for a range of other 'performances', in stadiums, supermarkets, to a housemaid at home singing to herself. If we consider all these to be performances then we are opening our perception of what a performance is. Furthermore, we can consider the session to be, in the context of Small's book, a performance. However, this wider context of the word is not the one session musicians generally have in mind when asked if they think the session is a performance and whether they are performers. Small's definition of the expression was not put to the participants, instead, the musicians generally associated the term 'performance' in a formal context whereas the session was regarded as an informal musical occasion. For me, the confusion partly comes from the location of the session. Usually, live performance at a pub would consist of a band, and while some musicians are initially inclined to think the session is a band, they soon realise they are not focused on the punters but on the group itself. This type of participation and music making has been described by Small as 'Musicking', 'To music is to take part, in any capacity in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practising, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing' (Small 1998:9).

From my early experiences of the session I was quickly told that the session was not a performance and instead the musicians play for themselves and the other participants. This is seen physically in several ways and also through choice of repertoire. Firstly, if we examine the physical ways we find that seating is important. The Molly's session, for example, is seated below the stage around two round tables. The musicians sit in a circle facing each other. At Kitty's a similar situation is present; the musicians sit under the staircase around the corner from the main door and once again sit tightly in a circle facing

each other. The musicians all sit together and importantly, they are facing each other and not the punters. They are not on stage and they do not usually engage in conversation with the punters during the session. Secondly, through repertoire choice the musicians show they are playing for themselves, not an audience; they play mostly a range of tunes with the occasional song at Molly's and mostly jigs and reels at Kitty's. At no point does a musician stand and announce the next set, as we would expect in a formal performance for example, instead the players discuss the repertoire amongst themselves, or someone will simply start off a set of tunes. Both these ways demonstrate that the musicians are playing for themselves, at this stage they show no interaction with the punters and do not play music in order to entertain them specifically. Ruairidh shared his personal experiences of being a session musician,

When I am playing in the session, I am playing for myself only and the other people immediately around me. I don't feel there is any pressure on me to perform at a particular level, and I don't feel like I am under observation. (Ruairidh Morrison, 22 June 2009, interview)

James has similar views about playing in a session; he commented,

I don't really ever get nervous in a session, but I do get nervous about performances, and I also find that in a session you're sort of playing for yourself and if you are playing to anyone, it's to the musicians sitting around you who actually know something about the music that you are playing. (James McNamara, 10 June 2009, interview)

Pat also agreed that the session is for the musicians primarily and even described an audience as sometimes having a negative impact:

Well I kind of dread mainstream New Zealand audiences because they don't understand the tunes, this music is quite obscure really. It's not main stream, I mean they think they are listening to Riverdance and then sometimes you get this ignorant thing where they want a song by 'The Pogues' and nobody has sung a song all evening and I find that quite irritating. I think for me anyways, I have always been at the session for myself, I am not actually trying to entertain the audience because it is not really a concert situation at all. (Pat Higgins, 27 July 2009, interview)

Pat described that when an attentive audience was present he enjoyed it, although he said he has only really experienced this in Ireland. He recalled an experience,

I went to Fleadh in Letterkenny in Donegal a few years ago and the pub was jam packed, we were like sardines in a can, but it was fantastic you know and people were really polite and the atmosphere was really fantastic. They were just so warm and appreciative of the music as well. They had a huge awareness and respect for the tunes that were being played. (Pat Higgins, 27 July 2009, interview)

Ruth described a similar awareness that in Ireland when musicians sing the entire pub will become silent. I also experienced this silence at a session while attending a festival in County Clare in Ireland. Because it was an Irish music festival, the town was overtaken with musicians; therefore, the audience would have been mainly a knowledgeable audience with an awareness of session etiquette. In New Zealand the 'audiences' are less aware of what is going on in a session situation and often continue conversations throughout the performance.

Questioning further, I discussed with musicians the role of the audience in a session. I asked the musicians their views on an audience and it quickly became apparent, that while they played for themselves, each night was different and sometimes the audience changed the atmosphere of the session. I found this most commonly associated with Molly's, which musicians described as being more diverse. Dave Barnes, the session leader, talked with me about the audience and how they can have an impact on a session:

I feel we play better, more precisely and play tunes we all know when there is such a listener [audience]. And I guess the biggest influence from a crowded audience on a holiday or something, is that we have to make ourselves heard, while not disparaging them or shushing them up. On these crowded nights we play and sing old favourites as we often have requests. (Dave Barnes, 27 September 2007, personal email)

Here Dave discussed his awareness of the audience and mentioned that when the pub becomes louder and crowded, the format of the session adapted. This is not regarded as a

negative aspect by the musicians. In addition, the ‘random factor’ of the Molly’s session has been described to me as part of the appeal of playing there. Grant who is a regular at the Molly’s session commented about such nights,

It’s the random people, who stop by, who also make it fun. Notably was a Kapa Haka group who did a Haka, and Jonathan Lemalu [who sang Danny Boy]. The young tourists; especially the week one lad said he had an accordion at home that he had not played for years, and asked to play mine. His mates thought it was great because he could still get a tune. Or the young Irish girl who suddenly realised for the first time, that people do the stuff forced on them at school [tin whistle lessons] for fun. Or the various conference’s that visit during the holidays. (Grant Wright, 12 June 2009, email interview)

There are a range of groups that Grant described and in some cases, I have been present when such visitors have come into the pub. They can have either a positive or negative affect on the session and I think it depends on the personal mood of the musicians and visitors. For example, if a musician wants to play a few sets of tunes with the others, but some punters come in and request songs and tunes or ask to play the instruments, then the session musician will more than likely go home thinking ‘I hope next week is better’. Whereas if the musician is more open to the unpredictability and gets involved in the evening, then those are the nights where he or she may discover the *craic*.

In terms of repertoire, Dave described to me that the audience can sometimes have an influence on the tunes he plays. He explained,

You are always conscious it is public, and the public are aware of us and one of the things we have to be aware of is the pub is a business, they have punters coming in and you want to keep them comfortable so they will come back. The audience pick up more on songs, but we won’t want it to be a singing fest, so you drop in one or two. Ill play the Scottish set if it looks like someone will get up and dance. If the pub needs a bit of a wake up I’ll do Dingle [Regatta], because then when we all start singing it the third time through they [the audience] turn around. (Dave Barnes, 24 February 2009, interview)

Through songs and repertoire Dave includes and interests the audience by adding his identity to the session. He is also aware that the session is held in a popular local pub and that the patrons to some degree need to be comfortable.

A third aspect that I discussed with the musicians was the different style of playing in a band situation. Professional band members play regularly in pubs around Wellington and are paid to perform their music. A number of session musicians at both Molly's and Kitty's take part in bands which play during the week and on weekends in pubs, and cafes around Wellington. James McNamara from 'A Scholar and A Gentleman' (see Figure 23) discussed the differences of performing in front of an active listening audience,

I find it is quite different playing in a session than playing in a performance. In a performance you want to make a good impression but you're also generally playing to a lot of people who aren't so familiar with the music, and you suddenly try to adjust, well this happens to me anyway, to what I think will make it interesting for people. I think when we put sets together we sometimes would try to vary it a bit. Last time we did a performance, I did a set where I started with a slow air and then played some reels, which again is basically trying to create this obvious variety to keep people interested, if they are not particularly excited by a set of three of the same types of tune. I suppose we pay more attention to the instrumentation as well, the fact that Jonathan can play the whistle as well, we will try to vary that a bit, so we would have an accordion set, a fiddle set, then a fiddle and accordion set, then a fiddle and whistle set and all the combinations. Also, we alternate quite a lot between the songs and the tunes and we will usually try and put in all kinds of tunes, not just all reels, so we do jigs, polkas, mazurkas. So I think that might be the main thing really, the kind of obvious variations and creating a sense of variety, whereas in a session it's quite a concentrated kind of music-making really. You can go into a session where you don't hear anything more than jigs or reels. (James McNamara, 10 June 2009, interview)

James described how his playing changes in a performance through repertoire, the inclusion of songs and more experimentation with instruments. Other musicians I talked with agreed with James that repertoire choice became a main difference when performing for an audience.



Figure 23: 'A Scholar and a Gentleman' James McNamara and Jonathan Berkahn  
26<sup>th</sup> August 2009, Welsh Bar in Wellington

When I talked with Ruairidh Morrison from 'Bally Scully' he explored this idea further,

When you are on stage you are there to be observed, you are there to provide entertainment, so we would still play Irish music; but anything that we play, even if we like it, if it creates a bad reaction often we will drop it from our repertoire. But if a piece of music, songs or tunes, produce a good reaction from the audience, we will tend to keep it in there. But the music we play in 'Bally Scully' is much more orientated by what people [the audience] think. (Ruairidh Morrison, 22 June 2009, interview)

Ruairidh mentioned how he changes the repertoire of the band if the audience does not give a positive reaction to a set or song. This awareness and ability to change repertoire is a main difference between performing on stage to an active audience as opposed to informally participating in a session context. The audience has a direct influence in what is played and how it is heard. However, in a session situation the audience do not control what is played, and as I mentioned earlier, the musicians are playing for themselves not for

the punters who may or may not become a listening audience, the 'audience' influence is indirect.

The term 'performance' takes on a new context when referred to in a session. The musicians ultimately consider the music making they create to be for each other, rather than for an audience. The session is a participatory form of music making and holds a different function to that of a band performing for an active audience.

During discussions and interviews about the session identity, the participants' musical groundings were discovered. I found that the players came from a mixture of four different backgrounds: those with experiences of sessions in Ireland, those with exposure to general folk music, those who had learnt rock music and those who were classically trained. The participants described how they became involved in the music and how their various groundings impact the way they play music today.

The musicians that were born in Ireland had first hand experience and exposure to Irish music. Melanie has described how she learnt the fiddle at the age of eight from a local musician Jim McGill, who wanted to pass on the tradition. She talked about her early session experience,

There was a bunch of kids all playing different instruments. So I started learning fiddle when I was eight and we went along to the session when I was nine or ten. We went along to one of the local pubs from 8-10pm or whatever, it was like the kiddie version of the session and we played before the adult session started. So we got to play the tunes that we knew as a sort of kiddie group and then there was this merging point where the adults and the kids were playing together and then it was just the adults. But yeah Jim was in that session, and that was a Thursday night in McCarol's Pub, and apart from Jim who died fifteen years ago, the same musicians that were forty year olds and are now in their sixties to seventies, are still there, playing in the same place, you know, thirty five years after, playing every Thursday night. (Melanie Brown, 22 June 2009, interview)

Here Melanie described the Irish session where she learnt part of her tune repertoire. In this pub in Ireland the same musicians still regularly attend the session each week, showing there must be a strong sense of community present.

The second kind of musical background for the session members was through exposure and involvement in the folk scene. Those with a background in general folk music often heard Irish tunes previous to their involvement in the session and by meeting people and participating in folk festivals, they became enthusiastic participants of the Irish music community. Grant Wright recalled his introduction into the folk scene,

I was a late starter in the folk scene. My first festival was the Wellington Folk Festival in 1978 or 1979 and that is when I heard my first full-on Irish sessions. I lived in Taranaki then and no one was playing Irish tunes there at that time as far as I knew. I moved to Palmerston North and in 1980 the local Morris side, which had recently formed, approached me to play for them. They had a pair of Irish musicians who played for them [during] practise[s] but were not always available to play for weekend dances. They would play Irish tunes at practise and I picked up some of them. There were sometimes jam session in homes around Palmerston North and I started to learn some of the tunes from that period. I decided to acquire a concertina and started to play from late 1980. I moved to Auckland in 1981 and went to the Auckland Folk Festival regularly from 1982. I got some tunes from *Begged Borrowed and Stolen*, after hearing them in jam sessions. Then I moved to Wellington in 1992. I had known Dave for a number of years prior through Morris and Folk festivals. I understood from him that the session had been going for a year or so and now I have become a regular. (Grant Wright, 12 June 2009, email interview)

The folk scene attracted many musicians with musical interests; Irish music was just one of those aspects. The musicians I talked with who have a background in folk music are also frequently interested with, and participate in other areas of folk music such as singing and Morris dancing.

The third type of musical background exhibited by the session members is rock music. A small minority of Irish musicians have experience with rock music as highlighted in figure 24. The musicians I talked with that had a rock background discussed that this

background meant the instruments they first learnt were generally not typically played in an Irish session. However, their musical skills were adapted for Irish music, particularly on the guitar. Often a rock background also means the musicians were not classically trained on a particular instrument and in most cases are self taught and typically learn by ear which is useful for Irish music. Andrew James, for example played in metal bands in high school; he discussed his musical background,

Well I kind of grew up in a house where my parents aren't musicians but they are quite big fans of a lot of kinds of music, and I grew up listening to rock music. Then when I was eleven or twelve I started playing guitar and then in high school [I]... got into metal and rock, and I was playing in metal bands in Nelson and different kinds of things. (Andrew James, 9 June 2009, interview)

Andrew learnt a lot from bands and playing with other musicians has allowed him to learn skills and become a multi instrumentalist. In the past year Andrew has learnt mandolin and banjo for the sessions and has adapted his guitar style in order to contribute and participate more within the music-making.

The fourth kind of musical background is that of a classically trained instrumental background. Often, this training suggests that the people are able to read music and have an understanding of musical theory, such as the complexities of key signatures and rhythms. Jonathan is classically trained and recalled his observations:

In 1989 I went to a workshop at the end of the year and brought the last imprint copy of *Begged, Borrowed and Stolen* in New Zealand. So [in]1990 I came to Wellington for university. But I was aware of this book, I had this book, I played it on recorder, I didn't know any of the tunes by heart except for Nancy's Jig. I did a lot of busking actually on the recorder, so I was aware of these tunes, I thought it was a great way of writing music, just tune and chords and I tried to do it myself. So I was aware of that, I was also studying organs slightly later on, because that's one of the things I do, and then music history at the end. But the Irish session made sense to me. I sort of came into it when there was a boom in Irish music, in the mid 90s. So I think one of the reasons it is a happening scene is because of the after affects of that bulge in the mid 90s. I am interested in Irish culture because I am interested in Irish music, rather than the other way around. Also the thing is,

music for music sake is what does it for me, and so that sort of thing, the functional music that lost its function, tends to appeal to me. (Jonathan Berkahn, 4 May 2009, interview)

Jonathan approaches the music differently from those without a comprehensive education in music, he is very aware of timing, articulation, harmony, and the many concepts learnt through classical training and performance.

These four musical backgrounds are all different and in some cases they overlap. The table below summarises the musical backgrounds of the musicians I interviewed (see Figure 24).

Name	Born in Ireland	Folk Background	Rock Music Background	Classical Background
Andrew James			•	
Andy Linton	•			
Bernard Wells		•		•
ChihLeng Tham		•		
Dave Barnes		•*		
Grant Wright		•		
James McNamara				•
Jonathan Berkahn			•	•
Maeve Leonie		•		
Melanie Brown	•			
Pat Higgins	•	•		
Ruairidh Morrison	•**			
Ruth Armstrong				•

\* Dave was born in England and became involved in Morris dancing in the folk scene.

\*\* Ruairidh was born in Scotland but has a lot of experience with sessions in Ireland and Edinburgh.

Figure 24: Musical Background of Session Participants.

Each individual learns the music in a number of ways; from formal teaching or being self taught through to being influenced by other musical styles. By exploring the

ideas of performance and audience, then looking at the musical backgrounds of participants, a stronger concept of the musical identities is presented.

### **Individual Identity**

Individual identities are central aspects to my research on Irish music in New Zealand. By exploring the distinct identities I was able to understand more about the roles of the musicians within the session community. The following section focuses on how musicians became involved in Irish music with particular attention given to four session leaders, and also examines session etiquette. I talked with, and interviewed, several Wellington session musicians about their individual identity. Their responses reveal the differences in backgrounds, personalities and experiences that are apparent within the session community today.

New Zealand has become 'home' to many Irish men and women for over one hundred years. It is therefore not surprising to discover that most session members have some Irish ancestry. I wanted to ascertain if these connections to Ireland were the reason the musicians were playing Irish music and how they found meaning in the music. Evidently non-Irish participants played Irish music; hence I wanted to discover how they sought connections to the music. I asked myself a range of questions: Were the migrant musicians looking to recreate a musical experience of their homeland? Were New Zealand-born musicians with Irish genealogy trying to retain their ancestry and heritage by participating in this music? Was it purely an active musical community in New Zealand where people were encouraged and invited to participate?

Through the interviewing process I learnt much about the cultural identities of the musicians and whether they found having Irish heritage or being born in Ireland important and essential in playing Irish music. I first talked with the musicians who were New Zealand-born with Irish heritage. Ruth Armstrong discussed how having Irish heritage but living in New Zealand encouraged her interest to visit Ireland,

My Dad is Irish, but he was born in New Zealand. My grandfather moved to New Zealand when he was a teenager and my grandmother was born in New Zealand but her parents had migrated just before she was born. But because of my dad, because he is pretty much a first generation New Zealander, I have Irish citizenship and an Irish passport. That sort of sparked off my interest in it to start with, before I went over [to Ireland]. (Ruth Armstrong, 7 June 2009, interview)

As she states, Ruth is aware of her Irish heritage, which was an important catalyst to her introduction with Irish music. In a similar way, Andrew James commented on his cultural background,

I do have Irish heritage on my Mum's side. They were all Irish immigrants at some stage. They came to New Zealand in 1856 on the Edwin Fox which is the boat in Picton Harbour, I only recently found this out though. They were mostly from County Cork and County Kerry. (Andrew James, 9 June 2009, interview)

Like Ruth and Andrew, James McNamara was born New Zealand and also has Irish heritage:

Yes, but it [Irish heritage] is quite a long way back, I don't have any links with any living people in Ireland. But my parents have both done a lot of family history research, so I guess I am fairly aware of ancestors who came out from Ireland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century mainly, also in the early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They were from all around, there was a branch of the family from County Armagh, County Tyrone, Clare, Limerick, it seems I think McNamara is the second most popular name in County Clare, they abbreviate it to 'Mac' so that is probably where some of my ancestors came from. (James McNamara, 10 June 2009, interview)

The three individuals above are all New Zealand citizens with Irish heritage. While having distant genealogy may partly contribute to their interest in Irish music and culture, because

their heritage was often established several generations ago, other influences, such as travel or an interest in language, may better explain why they become interested in playing Irish music.

Other musicians I interviewed were born in either New Zealand or overseas but did not have Irish heritage. Jonathan Berkahn talked with me about how he became interested in playing Irish music:

Well, I'm not Irish. I'm involved in Irish music because its cool, because there is a fair bit of it going on, but it might have quiet easily been Eastern European folk music or German folk music. It's just because it's there, if it wasn't there, I wouldn't do it I guess. (Jonathan Berkahn, 4 May 2009, interview)

In contrast to Jonathan who was born in New Zealand, ChihLeng Tham is from Malaysia and moved to Wellington in 2003. Chih also has no Irish heritage, yet she is passionate about the music,

My Mum used to have a lot of folk and American folk music. And there was a 'Chieftains' cassette, their 'Live in Belfast Concert' and on that there were solo pieces in a medley and each player had a little solo. And obviously Matt Molloy came on and it was like 'Bang, right on, that's great, if he can do that, so can I'. When 'The Chieftains' visited [Kuala Lumpur] I brought a ticket straight away, that would have been when I was in Malaysia, when I was around fifteen. I had also heard a bit of Riverdance. So after the concert I went and got more CDs but I couldn't really find a lot, only really 'Best of the Celtic Bands' and the closest I could find was 'Lord of the Dance' which is a little off tangent. (ChihLeng Tham, 15 June 2009, interview)

Chih's skill and technique on the flute ensure that she is welcomed and accepted into the session, regardless of her musical or cultural groundings. This demonstrates how musicians in the session community without Irish heritage maintain their individual identity to reflect their musical interests.

Still other session members in Wellington were born in Ireland and the United Kingdom. The most obvious differences I found between these individuals and others already mentioned was their experiences with sessions in Ireland, their clear ideas of what

a session is, how the tunes are played in Ireland, and an understanding of session etiquette.

This experience brought a developed sense of musical style, which is sometimes regionally based. Andy Linton, from Northern Ireland, discussed his experiences,

I grew up in Ireland and when I was about sixteen or seventeen I started getting interested in song, and so I went through a period there from sixteen to twenty three when I was quite involved in that. I didn't grow up in a family that had traditional music as part of our background or anything like that. I grew up in the north of Ireland and my family were protestant. Irish music was Catholic music, and in fact both my parents were very religious and very non conformist. And if it wasn't hymns we didn't sing them. (Andy Linton, 28 July 2009, interview)

Andy then became involved in tune playing in sessions, and for three years lived in Canberra where the Irish session scene thrived. He later moved to New Zealand in 1991 and was a founding member of the Kitty's session. Another member of the Kitty's session also born in Ireland is Melanie Brown:

I am from Ballycastle, Co Antrim and I started playing fiddle when I was eight, I had always wanted to play the violin, but I wanted to play classical violin and I used to see orchestras on the TV and hear classical music and I would think 'wow I would love to play violin, that would be fantastic'. But I lived in a small country village, and there were no teachers and there was no money and it was just something that I was never going to do, well certainly not at that age. And then from my Irish dancing class there was an announcement that an old man called Jim MaGill, who was from the area, wanted to teach kids the fiddle for free, if they could get hold of a fiddle. I ran home to mum and I thought this is the next best thing, playing fiddle, it's not exactly a classical violin but it is close. So, my Mum and Dad found me a fiddle and I started to take lessons with Jim and I loved it. Jim was in his seventies, and he hadn't played fiddle for twenty years, but for some reason he decided to take it up again and pass it on to the local kids, and he taught heaps of kids in the local area, and basically helped revive the music. He taught a whole generation of people. (Melanie Brown, 22 June 2009, interview)

Melanie learnt tunes and would attend the sessions with Jim. From a very young age she was exposed to the sound of Irish music and regional styles of playing. She also learnt about the dynamics of a session community and the importance of session etiquette. Pat Higgins was also born in Ireland but he had a later introduction to the music:

I'm a farm boy from rural County Galway and we didn't go anywhere to play music, there was no music in the village, there was no body playing music from where I came from. This was 1981. There would have been sessions in Galway but as say, I didn't have a vehicle, I didn't have a drivers licence so I never went to a session in Galway when I was living there. There were no sessions locally at the time, probably ten or fifteen years later there would have been and there probably are now. My cousin came down to the farm in the holidays, when I was twenty one, and she had a tin whistle and a book on how to play the tin whistle, so I borrowed the book and I realised I could teach myself to play the instrument. Before that I had developed a love for Irish music, but I had only been listening to it, as apposed to playing it. So I spent the summer at home with the tin whistle and the book, trying to teach myself, and listening to snippets on the radio, on Irish radio. And this was the first time I realised you could play your own music. (Pat Higgins, 27 July 2009, interview)

Pat began playing Irish music in his early twenties and after moving to New Zealand, he became even more passionate about playing and soon decided to learn the flute. In addition to the above musicians is Ruairidh Morrison from Scotland, who began playing Irish music at a young age and regularly attended sessions and festivals in Glasgow and parts of Ireland in his twenties:

Well I grew up in Scotland and there is a big connection between Scottish and Irish music. When I was young, my mother and Father had a hotel and of course it was a location for parties, more than sessions really. We didn't ever have sessions, but in the bar at night people would take out guitars and sing, and play musical instruments, accordions, tin whistles, that sort of thing. Anyways I found a whistle down the back of a sofa and I started to just play with that, and we listened to quite a lot of folk music on records as well, the Dubliners, and some of the Scottish bands, it was all just music as far as I was concerned. I didn't really distinguish what it was or what nationality it was. (Ruairidh Morrison, 22 June 2009, interview)

The musicians who were born in the United Kingdom also became exposed to sessions in Ireland and often by learning from these people, in a festival or summer school, the transnational links between the communities are highlighted and developed. When asked how important is it to be Irish or have experience of sessions in Ireland, Melanie commented,

I think it is really important for players who haven't grown up with it and experienced it, to go over there and experience it themselves. So they know

what it is like and so that they can incorporate it into their way of playing and so they can understand the music and how it all works and how it all happens over there. Because otherwise, you are at risk of not quite getting it or playing something slightly different or maybe just not understanding the context. That said, there are plenty of sessions in Australia and New Zealand where the players haven't gone and done that and some how, they may not have experience of a session in Ireland but they join the session and the session is working and its working like a session in Ireland would. Presumably somehow it started off with people who knew what that was like. (Melanie Brown, 22 June 2009, interview)

Ruairidh made similar comments about the importance of having personal experiences with Irish sessions,

A lot of the playing, the standard of playing is so phenomenally high that people can sometimes find, nowadays especially, that you have to be that good to get anything out of playing and I would recommend for all Irish musicians that they should do what you did last year [2008] and travel around and go to the festivals and fleadh, because it is good craic, but I don't think it's the only way to go. And if you don't want to go to Ireland I think you can still have a perfectly valid session experience, because the music and in particular the playing in sessions is all really voluntary and any approach is a valid approach. (Ruairidh Morrison, 22 June 2009, interview)

These musicians have shared the ways they became involved in Irish music and how they create their individual identity. The main difference was those born in or near Ireland had personal session experience and knew what a session was in Ireland and how it was organised. However, the players without that experience or Irish heritage can still actively participate in Irish music, and through tune repertoire and control of their instrument, they become accepted as valuable session musicians

While migrants from the United Kingdom may have an initial advantage to approaching the music because of personal experiences, knowledge and an overall understanding of sessions in Ireland; in the Wellington music community having this grounding is not a crucial aspect of a player's participation.

An individual's identity is often maintained and this is demonstrated each Monday in Wellington at Molly's and Kitty's, where musicians from a range of cultural

backgrounds come together, forming a community dedicated to playing tunes from the Irish repertoire. To determine the differences between the sessions, I examined each musician's musical and cultural foundations and compared that with the session they participated in. Figure 25 summarises which session each musician I interviewed, commonly participates in.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Session</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Session</b>
Andrew James	<i>Kitty's</i>	Jonathan Berkahn	<i>Molly's</i>
Andy Linton	<i>Kitty's</i>	Maeve Leonie	<i>Kitty's</i>
Bernard Wells	<i>Both</i>	Melanie Brown	<i>Kitty's</i>
ChihLeng Tham	<i>Molly's</i>	Pat Higgins	<i>Kitty's</i>
Dave Barnes	<i>Molly's</i>	Ruairidh Morrison	<i>Kitty's</i>
Grant Wright	<i>Molly's</i>	Ruth Armstrong	<i>Molly's</i>
James McNamara	<i>Both</i>		

Figure 25: Table of Musicians and their Preferred Session Location.

Interestingly, those with personal experiences of sessions in Ireland tend to play at Kitty's and those with an understanding of general folk music choose to play at Molly's.

The session leaders at Molly's and Kitty's create varied identities in the way they organise the music-making: through repertoire choice and sets, the role of songs, and function of harmony instruments. The primary aim of the session is coming together to play tunes; however, for many participants the session also provides social associations and friendships with other musicians.

In order to explore the ways in which leadership alters the identity of a session, I interviewed four people who other participants regarded as holding a leadership role.

Quickly similarities became apparent among the leaders. In each case the musician has been playing Irish music for several years, often developing a particular style of playing and a large repertoire of tunes. Three out of four musicians were born overseas in Ireland, England and Scotland, the fourth is a New Zealander and all the leaders are males in their late thirties to fifties. While women are an active and integral part of the Wellington sessions, the male leadership reflects the ways that sessions are led in Ireland. In this way the gender identity informs how the session is structured (Valley 1999:151)<sup>6</sup>. While some similarities are present, each leader is different in the way they want the session to be organised. These differences ensure the sessions at Molly's and Kitty's have fluid identities and therefore attract a particular type of musician to participate.

#### Case One: Dave Barnes

Dave Barnes is the session leader at Molly Malone's in Wellington. He leads the group musically through tunes and songs and encourages the session to be fun for those playing as well as providing entertainment for active listeners when present.

The session is for everyone. To me that's the greatest fun, seeing people find it and drop in and start playing, and do things they wouldn't have thought they could do. (Dave Barnes, 24 February 2009, interview)

Dave was born in England and has been part of the folk scene in New Zealand since he moved here in 1984. He was the president for the Wellington Folk Festival from 2001- 2008.

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<sup>6</sup> For more in depth information on the role of the gender within the session, refer to Valley 1999: 150-151.



Figure 26: Dave Barnes Playing his Button Accordion.

Dave is interested in other areas of the folk scene such as Morris dancing and playing music in the Britannic Bedlam Morris group. He is also a member of 'Full Fathom' where he sings selections from his large repertoire of songs. He holds a leadership role in the singing sessions at folk festivals around New Zealand and the sing-a-round on Tuesday evenings in Wellington which began towards the end of 2009. Dave identifies some connections between the various types of folk music in which he participates,

I am drawn to Irish music in a similar way to Morris dancing, and I would draw this parallel, we don't do Morris because it is old and we don't play the music because it is Irish. We play it because we like it. We dance for the same reason that men four hundred years ago, three hundred years ago, two hundred years ago, one hundred years ago did, because it is fun to do. You don't play it because it is Irish; you play it because it is fun. (Dave Barnes, 24 February 2009, interview)

Dave is not looking to participate in musical activities because of a specifically defined cultural identity, but rather he participates in sessions because he enjoys them. Having Irish heritage is secondary according to Dave, reinforcing that the community is created

through the music, rather than through heritage or background. The session is open and welcoming, which is fundamental to understanding how Dave creates a particular session identity at Molly's.

Dave is currently the session leader and has a guiding role in the session identity through the organisation, repertoire and role of songs. When discussing the repertoire at Molly's he commented,

Usually I start the tunes that I can remember at the time; though we do have basic sets which have evolved around *Begged, Borrowed and Stolen* material. We do tend to stick to these sets, particularly in the first hour and a half because you never know who is going to come in, experienced or beginner. You have to present tunes that people pick up and get familiar with, and start to add their personal style to it. (Dave Barnes, 24 February 2009, interview)

From Dave's comments, it is apparent that repertoire choice changes the atmosphere in a pub. He mentioned how the sets played in the first hour and a half are regularly heard from week to week, because a beginner will start to learn these tunes and be able to participate very quickly. This can also be a restriction; but by not changing the repertoire often, the session becomes geared towards beginners, who can easily join in and within weeks will have learnt several sets of tunes. Dave intentionally leads these sets at the beginning in order to keep the session accessible for all levels of participants.

Molly's is located on a popular corner in the city of Wellington. Due to this location the pub is visited by tourists, tour groups, visiting musicians and so ultimately maintains a random element. Dave commented about the session atmosphere in these occasions,

Because it is an open session it can be like a potluck dinner, you don't know what's going to come along. We make the most of what we've got. The sound we like is when the audience is coming back at you. They want something that they can tap their toe too, and when they dance you know it is working. (Dave Barnes, 24 February 2009, interview)

While dancing is not part of a session, occasionally punters in the pub will spontaneously dance to the music.

Each Monday night Dave will sit in the same seat watching punters come in, reading the atmosphere of the pub. If there is an audience he will talk with the group, and if requested, will sing a song or two (for example CD Track 3). Dave also looks out for musicians who may want to join in the session. This awareness of the punters is unique in the identity that Dave creates for the session. He commented,

The session at Molly's is both a public performance and a private gathering. You are always conscious it is public, and the public are aware of us. It is an open session and you still want it to sound quality. If someone new comes along they can have a go, obviously there is scope for this, and it is up to the leader to work it out... It's also important that we keep an eye out for patrons who appear interested. They may be musicians, or they may simply enjoy coming along regularly to listen; more so if we acknowledge them and make them welcome. (Dave Barnes, 24 February 2009, interview)

Dave makes visitors feel welcome by talking with them and often asking them to start a tune if they feel comfortable. Through choice of repertoire, acknowledgment of beginners and visitors as well as the audience, Dave attempts to makes the session enjoyable for everyone. As mentioned above he will often sing a song if requested, he commented on this,

I read the mood of the pub before singing songs. Irish songs are not really what I've done so much of and I'm very evidently a 'Pom' [English citizen] when I'm singing, except when I used to over do the *Ill Tell Me Ma* bit. I don't just want to do songs for the session, if it's the same ones every week. I prefer doing things with a chorus in that situation so everyone can join in, which they do, which is good. There are a lot of people that want to sing and I'm very conscious about what is going on, I don't want it to be a performance. (Dave Barnes, 24 February 2009, interview)

By ensuring songs have a place in the music-making; identity is reinforced further for the Molly's session. Dave wants the Molly's session to be for everyone, not just instrumentalists but inclusive of singers as well. Almost weekly, musicians who want to

sing a song or two will join the session and wait through several sets of tunes until they get an opportunity to sing.

We can observe through Dave's direction how the Molly's session is inclusive of musicians of all levels, and while the tunes are the primary focus, he is happy for beginners, visitors and singers to attend and participate. This inclusiveness creates an open session and provides greater interaction with the audience. When listeners request songs, the group willingly performs them, if an audience member desires to try the bodhrán, they are usually given the opportunity, and if they want to join in a song, depending on the situation, they can usually perform. All these aspects from Dave's leadership create a sense of identity unique to the Molly's session.

#### Case Two: Jonathan Berkahn

Jonathan Berkahn plays the piano accordion and tin whistle at the Molly session. He has been actively attending sessions since 1999 and because of other commitments generally turns up to the session later in the evening, bringing with him a large repertoire of tunes and the occasional song. He commented,

I get there at 9:30pm so there is almost like a 'changing of the guard' that happens, there are twenty or fifteen people playing away, and then after they go, the session thins out to half a dozen of us ... There are less of us so you hear each other a lot better, and you can bring out all the tunes you have been practising. So its quite a different sort of session about half way through, not because anybody said this is how the session works, but just with Dave and the others leaving early that's just how it works. That's cool you get two sessions for the price of one. That would be a unique way of doing things to Molly's, I suspect. (Jonathan Berkahn, 4 May 2009, interview)

Here Jonathan described the idea of two identities within one session; these identities are produced because of different leadership. I wanted to examine the ways the session adapts

later in the evening when Jonathan takes on a leadership role. Jonathan explained how a musician must master their instrument in order to become a skilled player; hence; when he starts tunes he is aware of the musicians present and what they have learnt and what speed would work well. He talks about how he uses his instrument to lead the session. He stated,

There is no attempt to shape the sound globally at the Molly's session, as you would in an orchestra, chamber ensemble or band, because or as a consequence, it is a fairly individualist approach to the sort of noise that is being produced. I think there are some people who have a clear idea of what they are trying to produce, but other people probably don't. I have an accordion which is quite loud and can actually make a fair dent in the noise, so there are things that I do to try and improve the general noise that is produced, for example I try to play very clearly and articulately and accurately and [at] the same speed as the majority of the people there, and if we end up with two or more speeds then I'll weigh up with one or the other. (Jonathan Berkahn, 4 May 2009, interview)

Jonathan described the ways in which he tries to unite the sound of the session. He does this particularly with his instrument, and musical experience in combining sets. Jonathan discussed,

There is a certain amount I can do in which I shape sets, because Molly Malone's has its own fixed sets of tunes, as a consequence all the other sets I play are made up on the spot. I start a tune because I feel like playing it, and then about three quarters of the way through I think what's another tune that will go with this one and then I usually think of something in time which usually works. Therefore, that shapes the sets as a whole because what I do is I go from whatever tune I happen to have in mind, often to a fairly obscure one but always make sure I finish with one that everyone knows, or nearly everyone knows, so you have that good finish. I guess in my playing there is a sense of responsibility towards the sound as a whole, which may be slightly atypical of a session musician. (Jonathan Berkahn, 4 May 2009, interview)

Jonathan has studied music and is well aware of the influence the accordion has to the overall sound. He typically tries to make the accompaniment interesting and chooses tunes in sets that complement each other. Jonathan tries to play recognisable tunes and this brings the session together in the sense that as a musician, you are always listening for what tune may follow.



Figure 27: Jonathan Berkahn Playing the Piano Accordion.

Something unique in Jonathan's playing is the way he organises sets of tunes intuitively. Jonathan discussed this process,

All my sets are sort of made up on the spot. I always consider who is present as well, I mean that's the best thing about putting sets together, for example if I feel like interrupting someone's conversation right now I will play a tune they happen to know. So knowing what tunes people play, for me, that's really important because that's how you shape the social interaction of the evening, by making sure every body has enough to do basically and its how you shape the set as a whole because, the more people [that] are piling on towards the end, the better the sound is. (Jonathan Berkahn, 4 May 2009, interview)

Jonathan adds his identity to the session through a conscious awareness of the repertoire he plays. In this way we can see how he changes the sound of the session at Molly's later in the evening.

### Case Three: Ruairidh Morrison

Ruairidh Morrison is the session leader at Kitty's. He was born in Scotland and began playing Irish music after finding a tin whistle in the back of a sofa after a house party. By the age of twenty he had learnt many tunes and had joined his folk first band. He got his flute in 1981 and ten years later began learning the fiddle. In 1991 he moved to Wellington and quickly became involved in the session community, firstly by participating at Molly's and then moving to the Kitty's session once it was established. I talked with Ruairidh about identity and leadership; he commented,

The leadership of the session is an unusual thing, because an ideal session is almost democratic, the best sessions are the ones where there doesn't seem to be a dominant personality because everyone has a shared understanding. However, sometimes you only get to that shared understanding by someone previously deciding how it's going to be. (Ruairidh Morrison, 22 June 2009, interview)



Figure 28: Ruairidh Morrison Playing a Tune on the Fiddle.

The Kitty's session is usually led by a core group of musicians who have been playing together for many years. Together they have created their ideal identity within the session.

Ruairidh had first hand experience with sessions before moving to New Zealand. Therefore, he tries to structure the Kitty's session in a similar way to that of the sessions he attended in Scotland and Ireland. He stated,

I think the philosophical style of the Kitty's session is not something that was created by the participants there but rather it is a version of sessions that we have attended over the years. It's quite similar to the Victoria bar session that I used to go to in Glasgow, similar to sessions in Edinburgh, similar to sessions in Ireland where the old boys are still going thirty years later... So Pat Higgins and myself over the years have probably gently steered it in that direction, but not because it was our idea, or our leadership that has lead the session to be what it is, but rather, we just translated the notion of that kind of session to Kitty's. (Ruairidh Morrison, 22 June 2009, interview)

Ruairidh has a sense of authenticity as a session musician as he has participated in sessions in Ireland and Scotland. I asked Ruairidh about aspects of the Glasgow sessions that he introduced to the Kitty's session; he responded,

I think there is a common purpose to play mainly instrumental tunes from the Irish dance repertoire, in unison, and to try and play them three times through in sets of two or three, so its not that complex but people who want to do other things, things other than that find that they probably don't get a warm welcome at Kitty's. (Ruairidh Morrison, 22 June 2009, interview)

Ruairidh described what he meant when referring to 'other things'. Most commonly it referred to singers, some general folk musicians especially guitarists, as apposed to Irish musicians and the audience who request songs, such as popular ballads from bands such as The Pogues.

Ruairidh wants to ensure that the Kitty's session is organised within particular boundaries, creating a specific identity, different from that of the Molly's session. He commented about the two sessions 'we have just drifted off to our niche and they have drifted off to their niche'. Kitty's niche therefore means it is potentially exclusive, advanced and participants have a growing tune repertoire and style of playing. Songs are

almost never heard, as tunes are the primary purpose. These boundaries ensure participants play a current and changing repertoire amongst a small group of like minded musicians.

#### Case Four: Pat Higgins

Pat Higgins was born in rural County Galway. When Pat was twenty one years old he began playing tin whistle on the farm. In 1987 he visited New Zealand and a year later decided to move to New Zealand permanently. Originally he became involved in the folk scene, playing guitar and singing songs. It was not until the session scene was established in Wellington in 1991, that Pat purchased an Irish flute. He has been playing at the Kitty's session since it started. He talked about the early sessions,

People like Ruairidh Morrison showed up and brought real self confidence, almost like an authenticity to the session, because I was a relatively new player and I wasn't so certain. So a single individual can make a big difference... I think people got frustrated by the fact that, that [at the] particular session down the road it was very difficult to introduce new tunes, they had quite a stagnant repertoire ... Sessions have a life and it's the same in Ireland they have an ebb and flow about them, they come and go. (Pat Higgins, 27 July 2009, interview)

Pat holds a leadership role at the Kitty's session. He has developed a particular regional style of playing. Although he is from Galway he plays in more of a Sligo-Roscommon style which is largely based on years of listening to Matt Malloy, a renowned Irish flute player. Pat's sound and ornamentation bring a perceived authenticity to the session, even though he developed his style while living in New Zealand. Pat commented,

The flute was like an impossible dream for a while because it was a challenging instrument and there was nobody to teach me and I didn't have a lot of money for buying instruments, so I delayed getting a flute for a long time. Actually because I was living in New Zealand I was more open to the idea of the possibility. It is possible that if I had stayed in Ireland I would have delayed becoming a flute player even longer... Now I play [the] flute based on a Sligo-Roscommon style. Its like we're all going around with a sound in our head and were all just aiming to keep moving towards that

sound. I suppose I tried to get there by listening to the likes of Matt Malloy.  
(Pat Higgins, 27 July 2009, interview)

Through his style and ornamentation Pat has become an admired player at the session. He has a large repertoire of tunes and will often encourage other session members to start sets. He discussed how he puts sets together,

Usually I would tell the people what tunes I am about to play, but it depends how big the session is... it's much better if you can add some energy by changing key so I have often rehearsed that actually, you come into the session thinking, I must put that tune with this tune, because the key change would be fantastic you know and obviously it is good to tell people before hand so they are ready to change with you. (Pat Higgins, 27 July 2009, interview)

As a session leader it is important to choose repertoire and sets of tunes that complement each other. As Pat mentioned, he has practised this skill as he wants good transitions in order to keep up the energy through a set. This shows how Pat's identity is evident when leading a set of tunes.

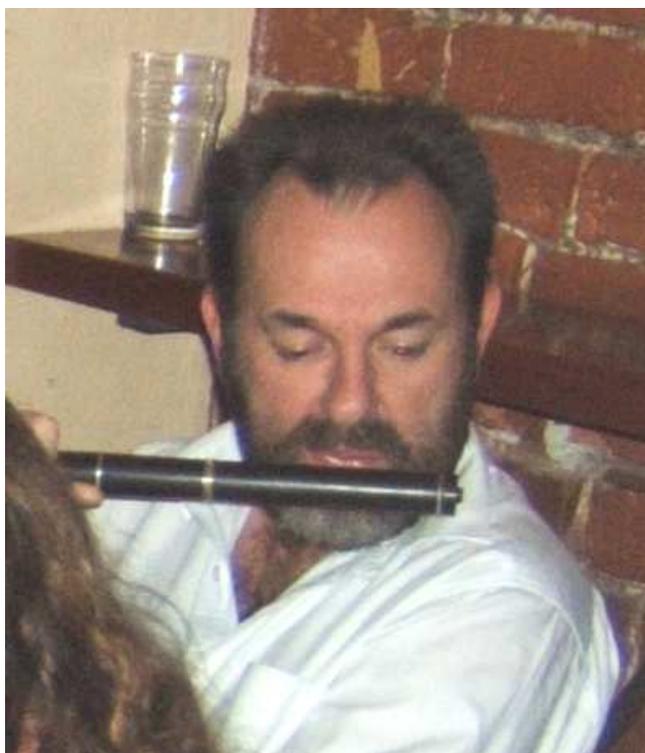


Figure 29: Pat Higgins Playing his Flute.

In the third case study Ruairidh mentioned some boundaries of the Kitty's session. Pat discusses these boundaries, in relation to why songs are not heard at the session. He stated,

That is another political aspect of the sessions. There was a dominant personality in Wellington who was involved in setting up the session and rightly or wrongly that person influenced us in thinking, if you allow songs, you're inviting every guitarist in Wellington to come along and sing some three chord trick song. And to some extent I agree with this theory, that you cast a wider net and you end up with a lower standard or a lower common denominator. You're not going to get excellence in tune playing if you include everything from 12 bar jazz to country and western. But if you become more elitist and you don't allow songs, you end up with a much narrower scope and a more focused experience of the tunes, so that's why at Kitty's we don't have songs. (Pat Higgins, 27 July 2009, interview)

Pat leads the session through his tune repertoire and style of playing. He also views sessions in a similar way to Ruairidh, in that Kitty's is recreated from the sessions that they have experienced in Ireland and Scotland. Pat talks about the boundaries and specifically the reasons songs are not included, which gives the session a particular identity. It was in New Zealand that Pat became so passionate about Irish music, which again demonstrates that you can be in New Zealand and create meaning from Irish music; location is secondary, especially when an encouraging, transnational community is obtainable.

We can see from these four case studies that each leader has varying ideas of an Irish session. Molly's has an open session that is inclusive and encourages beginners, through a regular tune repertoire, and singers by allowing them to perform. In contrast Kitty's is more tune focused and is based on the leadership experiences of Ruairidh and Pat, who attended sessions in Ireland and Scotland. Although Molly's and Kitty's are organised differently, they still are both types of an Irish session, and through leadership different identities are created ensuring musicians participate fully and enjoy the musical experience.

## Session Etiquette

An important aspect of the session community is being accepted both musically and socially. During a session, etiquette is adhered to which ensures the participants maintain appropriate behaviour. The importance of these rules varies depending on each musician's understanding of them. Carson wrote about session etiquette in his book *Irish Traditional Music* (1999) and he gives examples of appropriate behaviour when using tape-recorders and cameras. He also talked about where musicians sit and how and when listeners should give applause. He described the events during a session:

To the casual observer, a pub session of traditional music may appear haphazard and undisciplined: tunes are struck up at seemingly random intervals, for no discernible reason; some musicians may not join them at all, but may engage in conversational topics apparently unrelated to the music; and some punters (i.e., non musicians) may, at unpredictable moments utter inarticulate cries of what might be encouragement. The temptation is to think that any kind of behaviour is permissible. In reality, the session, like any form of social or artistic discourse, is governed by a complex set of implicit rules. (Carson, 1999:55)

Carson's introduction brings to light the atmosphere in which the session is situated, while musicians seem to be acting casually to a visiting observer, they are in fact participating within the boundaries of a session and conducting their behaviour in a socially appropriate way.

There are several protocols present in a session, but generally the people I interviewed referred to etiquette as using 'manners and common sense'. When I learnt that there was a semi-formal way of conducting behaviour in a session I was interested to learn the rules, how they were applied, and what happens when they are disregarded. In each situation context is essential and often etiquette will depend on who is playing together and where they are playing. The participants also discussed that during house sessions for

example, etiquette is loosened and becomes general politeness and manners, it is important not to be the only person starting tunes, and to make sure you play tunes that most people will know. On the other hand, if a musician is visiting a session in a new location, etiquette becomes more essential. I asked several session musicians from Wellington about their thoughts and personal experiences concerning session etiquette. They shared information about why these rules are present and how they can ‘make or break’ an evening.

The following six musicians all had different views on etiquette, showing that the rules are open to interpretation:

It sounds very formal, ‘session etiquette’, but I think for me it is just normal good manners. (Andy Linton, 28 July 2009, interview)

It is pretty important, but people who don’t know any better will be forgiven for not understanding it, up to a point. (Melanie Brown, 22 June 2009, interview)

It can sometimes get in the way of having a good time. Session etiquette can become a set of session rules that if you break [them] you become ostracised and there is a risk of that happening. (Ruairidh Morrison, 22 June 2009, interview)

Just things that everyone ought to know, like if one person starts a tune, don’t cut them off and don’t speed up another person’s sets. It is not just for Irish music, but for any kind of music, it is a similar respect for someone and respect for someone’s playing and things like that. It is things that often beginners may not understand. (Andrew James, 9 June 2009, interview)

Session etiquette is something that is just going to be there, it’s not something you decide to have. It is just part of the dynamic of a group of people being together, but yeah we need to work in ethical ways in all areas of life including our music. (Bernard Wells, 7 October 2007, interview)

In a place like New Zealand, where there aren’t that many Irish musicians, you could argue that session etiquette is less important because if you start excluding people because they don’t obey the rules, you end up eroding the pool of players, because there is only a handful to start with. That wouldn’t matter in Ireland, where there could be dozens and dozens of young teenagers showing up every week. On the other hand, playing music together is like having a conversation and if we both start talking at the same time, we’re not going to listen, so it’s really important people listen to each other musically as well. (Pat Higgins, 27 July 2009, interview)

Each of the six musicians treated session etiquette differently. While some assumed it was simply a normal part of the session, others felt the etiquette boundaries were restrictive.

Investigating the behaviour musicians hold when discussing session etiquette allows us to understand more about the session community and the way the participants become accepted into it. In his book, *Irish Traditional Music* Carson approached session etiquette as a list of 'dos and don'ts' without little exception. The diversity of approaches regarding etiquette was expressed, among the participants during interviews. When I asked them about their personal experiences, some quickly wanted to move off topic, while others reacted uncomfortably as if session etiquette was not publicly spoken about. The important aspect I soon learnt was that rules needed to be occasionally enforced, and when an individual's behaviour was unacceptable they would promptly be asked to change their conduct in order to conform to the identity of the session. This may result in hurt feelings and sometimes even anger and resentment. However, some musicians willingly shared their personal experiences of etiquette, highlighting how an individual's behaviour could directly transform the identity of a session.

After attending sessions in various parts of New Zealand and in Ireland, I have experienced instances where session etiquette had been compromised. For example, occasionally a musician will use the session as their individual performance outlet and exclusively play unfamiliar Irish tunes or examples of European folk music. An even more serious case is when the tunes played are not from the Irish dance repertoire. When these individuals dominate the session other members can become frustrated and in some cases leave. Still another case is when a musician is occupying a seat in the session circle and the session identity changes. For example, the session becomes too advanced or the tune

repertoire becomes unfamiliar. In each example the musician should remove themselves from the circle or offer their seat to a more advanced musician. Similarly, if a musician leaves the circle temporarily, the seat should remain unoccupied until they return or offer it to another musician. This can sometimes occur in larger sessions where musicians may be unfamiliar with each other or the behaviour required.

Several musicians shared their personal stories and thoughts with me, focusing on occasions when etiquette had been compromised. Pat recalled a session he was visiting for the first time,

One time I was in Ireland, I actually ruined a session in Tipperary with musicians from the North. Socially, they were great fun; however, there was this one other guy that I had met and we were all hanging around and they told me 'look we're going up the road to this other place' but they didn't tell him, but I did not know that bit so I brought him along with me, and of course they didn't want him to come. I was a blow in and I didn't know the interconnection between these people, so I realised after 'oh they would have preferred if he hadn't been there' but nobody said anything. (Pat Higgins, 27 July 2009, interview)

Here Pat described the potential problems when visiting a new session. These problems can also be experienced in the Wellington session as Ruth commented,

I mean we don't tend to have a lot of singing in our sessions anyway, but on the very rare occasion where I have sung something in the session, it has been a bit hard and quite distracting if someone is right beside you and they are talking about something. (Ruth Armstrong, 7 June 2009, interview)

In a session in Ireland if someone sings then the whole pub will become silent and if people make noise, session members will glare at them or say 'shhhh' or 'a bit of hush for a song' until they stop their conversation (Fairbairn 1993: 28). These ideas about respect and protocol are something that is not generally present in New Zealand as the audience is unaware, yet in this case it was inside the session, the musicians generally should have identified and respected the singer with silence as she sang. I asked other musicians what can disrupt a session, Melanie Brown responded,

Accompanists sometimes, if they are not skilled can ruin a session, by failing to be aligned with the groove. Playing wrong chords, you would think would be the major crime; but, it's that subtle, not quite getting the rhythm exactly right, [that] is the biggest killer of the session, and the biggest spoiler of fun for everyone else. And another *faux pas* is to continuously start tunes that no one else knows and just play them and use the whole thing as your floorshow for the evening. That wouldn't be very acceptable either. If you did it once and think 'bugger, no one knows the tune', then its fine but next time round you would probably not bother to continue playing or you try and play a common tune that you are sure someone is going to know. (Melanie Brown, 22 June 2009, interview)

Here Melanie described two aspects when etiquette can divide the session. Firstly, when an accompanist is not playing in time, and secondly, when a particular musician is treating the session like a performance and dominating the session. Ruth discovered that while a musician may be skilled, they still need awareness; she described a session at a New Zealand folk festival,

There was also the session at a folk festival with the fiddle player who obviously did not have much awareness of session etiquette or if he did, he ignored it. Which actually completely destroyed the session, which was a shame, because it was a really awesome session up to that point. And it was interesting. It was a bit of an eye opener because you could see that technically he was pretty talented but there is more to it than talented playing. (Ruth Armstrong, 7 June 2009, interview)

Jonathan experienced a similar experience with a session member at Molly's who was providing accompaniment. He recalled,

The jig of slurs is a D major Jig, that was a G major/E minor second half, quite interesting. Athol Highlanders is in A major and has great high energy. Anyway, we were crashing through the jig of slurs, sailed into the Athol highlanders in A, while my friend, was crashing along in D, madly off into the sunset in D, We were shouting A, Buddy, A, A, A. Anyways he went to the session once, and of course he is not going to grasp the subtleness and sophistication and just kind of launches into it. The people just gradually turned their seats away from him and of course he just played harder and louder, and they turned more and more away. (Jonathan Berkahn, 12 April 2007, interview)

Here Jonathan described the session members reacting by tuning their seats away from the particular musician. I asked Ruairidh about other ways that musicians are made aware that

they are breaking etiquette, he told me ‘Sometimes someone in the session, if they are feeling self confident will ask those players to modify, or to leave. But that would happen more commonly in Ireland actually; they are much less tolerant in Ireland’ (Ruairidh Morrison, 22 June 2009, interview). Bernard Wells also described some personal experiences of session etiquette. He stated,

I have had examples where people have refused to play a tune with me because they thought it was too old and boring, like someone introduces a tune and they say no. I think that is incredibly rude, and I would never do that to anyone else ever. So that kind of thing I think is inexcusable but I have experienced it. (Bernard Wells, 7 October 2007, interview)

Bernard’s account highlights how repertoire choice is also considered, by some musicians, to be an important aspect of etiquette. He further commented;

Some players like to work on the current tunes that they are all regularly playing. What that means for me, is that if I am not working on the latest current ones that they don’t necessarily want to play tunes that I learnt with them four years ago. But I am always happy to play my old tunes with whoever. (Bernard Wells, 7 October 2007, interview)

This again emphasises that repertoire can become part of session etiquette and that to become accepted and contribute; a musician sometimes needs to play tunes that are familiar and current.

Lastly, etiquette becomes important when a musician is visiting a different session. He or she has to approach it in a vigilant way compared with how they would attend their regular session where they know the musicians and repertoire. Pat discussed visiting musicians at Kitty’s,

If someone is visiting the session in Wellington and comes in with an instrument, I would always make an effort to include them, I would actually tell them ‘sit in’ and they would probably understand that as ‘get your case out and start playing’, you know. It is nice to do that, because people have done that for me in the past. Then I always ask them to play a tune as well because it is nice to hear other people’s music, and then that is putting them under a lot of pressure depending on where they are at, they have to start off

a tune in front of all these strangers you know, but that is what they are there for, you know. (Pat Higgins, 27 July 2009, interview)

Andy also commented about sessions he has participated in. He mentioned that when visiting a new session it is important to listen to the level of musicians and repertoire and ask the question ‘what will I contribute?’ He explained,

I’ve been in places where I have felt it isn’t appropriate to sit in on a session, pubs where there is some gas sessions, with some absolute great players and you need to ask yourself ‘If I wander over there and I could probably persuade them to let me stay, but would I add anything to this?’, I might enjoy myself but what about everyone else. (Andy Linton, 28 July 2009, interview)

Musicians I interviewed described how approaching a new session in a sensitive and polite manner will ensure that etiquette is followed. Often the musicians will be welcoming and invite the visitor to start a set of tunes. Ruairidh explained what is required from a musician when asked to play a set,

Most players that go to sessions have a bit of a party piece to play just in case they are put on the spot, if someone says ‘come on now give us a tune’ and you’re expected to play one that not everyone is going to join in to. There’s two examples of this, because sometimes you are invited to start a tune where they are saying ‘we want you to be in this round table kind of scenario where there is no one in charge’ and there is another scenario where people are saying ‘we have heard you playing, we cant hear you terribly well because it is in the session environment, it sounds like you are a good player, I wouldn’t mind having a listen at your playing’ and then you would be expected to play that party piece or maybe if you were from Scotland or Ireland, they might say ‘give us a Scottish tune’ so usually people will keep a couple of tunes up their sleeve to respond to that sort of situation. (Ruairidh Morrison, 22 June 2009, interview)

Learning what is required of a musician ensures they contribute rather than impede the music-making. Ruairidh explained what can happen at Kitty’s when inappropriate behaviour is experienced,

If a stranger walks into a session and starts to disrupt it through their playing, quite often it will be nipped in the bud, particularly for two reasons, either we don’t mind if we offend some blow in that’s not going to be here next week, or if they are going to here for a bit longer we should give them an

indication about what sort of behaviour is acceptable to us. (Ruairidh Morrison, 22 June 2009, interview)

Therefore a musician needs to understand the social requirements when entering a session.

In Bernard's experience, there are several considerations to acknowledge when attending a new session:

Well I would probably expect if I sat there with my instrument looking eager I would think if they were polite, they would invite me, and if they didn't invite me then I would ask. And I might just have a listen and see what kind of level the session was at, because you don't really want to jump into a session that is way above your head. And then realise you just can't cut it. You are better to listen and just find out what people are playing. And if they are polite they will ask you, if they are not polite and very tight they may not ask you, some people want sessions with their friends and they don't just want anyone joining in and that's also fine. There is no reason why they shouldn't want you to play with them, you can always ask and they can always decline, and I wouldn't even be offended if they said 'no, we are just really playing our repertoire, sorry mate' or if they are playing something they are working on for the next week, so you just go somewhere else. (Bernard Wells, 7 October 2007, interview)

As he discovered, some musicians only want to play together in an exclusive group, and not include casual visitors. In most cases I have experienced, if a musician is polite and follow the rules of session etiquette they will be invited and included into a session. By examining the various ideas of what a session means to the participants, and the ways behaviour is conducted, I was able to learn that there was not just one correct way of doing things. However, according to Carson in order to be accepted as a session musician some of the etiquette must be adhered to. Carson wrote specific rules which appear the only way to do something, but I would argue that each context is different and what is appropriate in one session, may not be appropriate in another. As a musician it is vital to have respect and consideration, and as mentioned common sense and manners when approaching new situations. These tools enable a musician to contribute to the session by providing

something new and interesting, without causing disruption for other musicians and ultimately ensuring their acceptance in the community.

### **Summary**

This Chapter has examined the musical and individual identities of the participants within the local scene. The session community in Wellington is multicultural with a range of musicians from New Zealand and abroad. The ways in which the participants become involved and participate within the community is an important aspect of the Irish music in Wellington. By looking at individual backgrounds we were able to see the various ways that people became interested in Irish music and whether having Irish heritage largely influenced their involvement. Often the musical grounding of each participant impacted how they approached the community and frequently determined which session they preferred participating in.

In addition the way musicians view and acknowledge etiquette also highlights their individual identities and understanding of a session. During sessions and folk festivals the musicians are able to express themselves musically and socially, their bonds are strengthened by the combined musical experiences. On these occasions an encompassing sense of community is enhanced among the participants.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Conclusions and the Larger Issues Explored: The Irish aesthetic in a global environment**

“The contemporary world of diaspora and cultural flows provides a framework in which people can live hyphenated lives: living in one nation-state, but identifying and participating in the culture of another” (Henry Johnson 2007:88)

My focus for this study has been the music and community of the Irish session in Wellington. After almost three years of participating within this community I have discovered not only a wealth of knowledge, and experiences, both in New Zealand and in Ireland, but I have also developed as a musician, established many strong friendships within the community and allowed Irish music and culture to become a part of my individual identity. By examining the identities of musicians and their connection to Irish music and transnational communities, this thesis reveals that Irish music in Wellington is an active scene established by musicians with a variety of musical and cultural backgrounds. The session participants seek meaning in this music-making by actively contributing and linking their musical ideas to Irish music communities. This study is important for New Zealand as it presents information about a thriving local and transnational community and illustrates how musicians maintain multiple identities through musical and social interactions. Music is at the heart of the Irish session communities, which are continuously growing in both New Zealand and internationally.

Today, Irish sessions are experienced and enjoyed by musicians and enthusiasts globally. In Ireland, traditional sessions have become popularised and marketed as tourist attractions, especially during the summer months. Yet, not all sessions are principally for the booming tourist market as my participation in sessions during festivals, summer

schools and various pubs has revealed. Interestingly, each of these distinct gatherings have very different characteristics and traits that are iconic and identifiable to Ireland. During my research in New Zealand and in Ireland, I was able to explore the Irish aesthetic as experienced transnationally.

During the Willie Clancy summer school in July 2008 in Ireland, I was surprised at how many non-Irish musicians were present. At one stage I was sitting amongst a small group of musicians, none of whom were Irish; instead they came from Germany, Austria, Italy and the Faroe Islands. In that room I was the only musician with English as my first language. But, despite our different countries of origin, we played and experienced a variety of Irish tunes in a meaningful way, into the early hours of the morning, thoroughly enjoying the *craic*. That evening demonstrated to me how widespread and popular Irish music is, and also suggested the wider importance of Irish music and the session for people and communities internationally.

### **Investigating an Identifiable Wellington Sound**

Following my research experience in Ireland, I questioned whether the sessions in New Zealand developed an identifiable and distinctive sound. In particular, I wanted to explore whether Wellington had a local style of playing which reflects the Irish regional styles. This analysis would help explain how participants could come together and create a collective approach to sessions in Wellington. The characteristics of a regional style are expressed in a number of ways; however, I will focus on the way musicians initially use ornamentation and then choose repertoire.

By examining the way Wellington musicians use ornamentation, we can begin to understand the distinctive characteristics of Irish music in Wellington, an approach central to Johnson's study of *Diwali* soundscapes in Wellington (2007). Some of the musicians' play their instrument in a regional style. One of these participants is Pat Higgins who plays in a Sligo-Roscommon style. During my interviews, he commented that he is predominantly influenced by Matt Malloy, whose playing is often characterised by highly ornate phrasing. In a festival situation Pat's flute style stands out and is recognisable to other musicians from Wellington and other parts of New Zealand. Although he is from County Galway, Pat did not learn the Galway style, his experiences with music largely flourishing after his arrival in New Zealand. Instead, Pat decided to play in a different regional style, preferring the tonal qualities and characteristics of the Sligo-Roscommon region.

While the playing method of some musicians reflects a particular Irish regional style, most other Wellington musicians have developed individual styles and have a wide spectrum of tunes, styles and ornamentation to select from. They choose to play a range of dance tunes, and determine how they sound by adding a strong rhythmic drive or providing highly ornamented fluid phrases to tunes with a slower tempo. In addition, the musicians have often listened to a selection of bands and individuals, and sometimes try to imitate or reinterpret Irish regional styles. These playing styles contain a variety of stylistic and rhythmic features are often passed on to other participants when sharing tunes thereby influencing the overall sound of the session.

Secondly, the potential regional style in Wellington is observed through the selection of repertoire. By examining the types of tunes played and how they are put

together in sets, it is possible to consider whether an identifiable sound is present in Wellington. Often one person will teach a group of participants a tune, which is then played by the entire group with the same melodic variations. This altered version of the tune is potentially unique to the particular session, promoting its identifiable style. The same version may vary in other sessions depending on where the tune was originally acquired.

In a similar approach, some sets of tunes become familiar among players and contribute to the overall style and sound of a particular session. While several sets are recognisable from published tune collections and recordings, others are created by session members who enjoy how the tunes sound together. Therefore, the repertoire selection partly creates a sound identity that is unique to each session. The particular traits of a session are also created by the musicians present, how long they have been playing together and by the types of tunes and aesthetics they enjoy. By comparing how the sessions at Molly Malone's and Kitty O'Shea's use ornamentation, repertoire and other traits such as songs, the presence of an overall Wellington regional style may arguably be identified.

The Molly's and Kitty's sessions can be identified separately through the musicians' differing use of Irish characteristics. These differences signify two divergent Irish soundscapes in Wellington. Yet, in both instances the central element is the instrumental tunes that are played commonly in sets. Therefore, because the two sessions can not be generalised collectively, it is difficult to identify any one particular style that is identifiable to the Wellington musicians. Looking further at the transnational connection shows that the musicians play in a way that would be recognisable to Irish-born musicians

and is therefore closely connected to the music in its homeland. The participants choose to play the music in this particular way rather than altering it substantially from how it is played in Ireland. Hence, it is also revealing to focus on the relationship between each musician and their understanding of the Irish aesthetic in order to understand why they belong to the session community.

### **The Individual Identity and the Transnational Relationship**

The musical and social characteristics vary between the Molly's and Kitty's sessions and are determined by the participant's interpretation of what an authentic Irish aesthetic is and their interest in maintaining it in New Zealand. This interpretation differs depending on the musician's background, their reasons for participating in Irish music-making and their personal connection to, and experience of, the transnational Irish music community. Examining the individual identities of the musicians assists in determining why they participate regularly and how their experiences inform their understanding of the Irish aesthetic.

Some session musicians, including those that do not have ancestral links to Ireland, expand their own identity or envision themselves as part of a larger Irish music community, by bonding with Irish music and culture. In discussing the notion of cultural identity, Turino stated, 'Any given individual belongs to a variety of nested cultural formations of lesser to greater size, specificity and intimacy' (2008:116). He then used the example of a family unit to demonstrate how aspects of community are experienced. These social elements are also present among participants involved in the session. According to Turino,

Families typically develop special words for things, ways of operating together, jokes, memories, and narratives about the family, all this is based on the strongly indexical nature of such intimate social units because of a wealth of shared experiences (Turino 2008:116)

Turino's idea connects with musical communities, where a sense of belonging is established among the participating musicians because they enjoy the music and social aspects.

Similarly, there are many shared experiences, memories and jokes among the musicians that comprise the session communities, both in Ireland and New Zealand. For example, polkas are primarily associated with County Kerry; therefore, when a set of polkas are played with a high level of energy, musicians and listeners will shout out 'Up Kerry' in enthusiastic support. Similarly, in Wellington a variation of this is heard when a set of polkas are played. A large number of session players currently live in Karori, a suburb of Wellington city. When a set of polkas are played in Wellington, 'Up Karori' is often exclaimed. This certainly amuses the session players, but an outsider to the Irish music community, such as a casual visitor to a pub, may often be confused by this comment. This music-making experience assists and creates a sense of shared community for the participants. In many ways, the musicians are 'performing' their community each Monday evening and internalising multiple identities as they begin to regard Irish music and culture as a subsequent part of their individual distinctiveness.

In contrast to those without Irish heritage, the participating musicians born in Ireland and the United Kingdom who later migrated to New Zealand have personal experiences with sessions in Ireland and approach the music very differently. Often these musicians have a clear idea of what a session is and how it should be organised. They also predominantly take on leadership roles within the session and have focused directions and

conceptions about the Irish aesthetic they want to create. However, they also must continually adapt their experiences to New Zealand contexts. For example, because there are fewer musicians who play Irish music in New Zealand, the communities often feel that it is important to be inclusive and encouraging to beginners; but in Ireland groups can choose to be more selective. In discussing the larger issues of migration Turino wrote,

Immigrant communities are a distinct type of cultural formation in that the members are dispersed geographically across state boundaries and combine habits based on models from their original homes and their new 'host' society home; they also create new habits based on their experiences as immigrants. (Turino 2008:117)

One of the key differences between the two session communities is the inclusion of immigrants from the United Kingdom. The Kitty's session has a large number of migrants and this influences the way they play and conceive of Irish music. In contrast, the Molly's session generally comprises New Zealand-born musicians, which also influences their musical choices. Both sessions create different musical environments based on each participant's experiences and background with Irish music. However, because the community is reasonably small, the musicians adapt their preferences and often play together in larger groups during festival situations. These larger session environments demonstrate the role of merged participation and how the players derive meaning from their cultural experiences in making-music.

The musicians I interviewed discussed how the social elements of the community added value to their identity. In *Ethnicity Without Groups* Rogers Brubaker describes the layers of a person's individuality, 'As a category of practice, it is used by "lay" actors in some (not all!) everyday settings to make sense of themselves, of their activities, of what they share and how they differ from others' (Brubaker, 2004:31-32). Therefore, in order to understand how musicians create value from a session context, it is valuable to consider

the ways they participate. In discussing this idea in relation to music, Turino commented, 'Participatory traditions offer the condition for flow for people at all skill levels. I suggest people are attracted to participatory performance for this reason' (2008:181). Turino highlights the influence that music-making has in creating social bonding and group identity, and how active participation is important.

Within the Irish session there is scope for individual creativity through playing styles and approaches. Hast and Scott explain 'There is a balance between the celebration of individuality... and the strength and sociability of the community' (2004:18). While examining how playing Irish music shapes the musician's identity, I was able to realise how being part of the Irish music community was a key factor for people participating in the Wellington sessions. Hast and Scott summarise the appeal of the Irish music community by saying, 'Musicians feel linked both to the rich repertoire of songs and tunes and the social world that surrounds performance - the people, places, historic and political events, and way of life that gave life to the music (ibid:135). Based on my interviews with musicians, this sociability is a contributing factor to why the music is enjoyed by the participants. Similarly, Irish summer schools and folk festivals in New Zealand create conviviality and a sense of community among the musicians.

These community links within New Zealand are associated with the transnational bond to Ireland. The relationship between Ireland and New Zealand is well established and provides musicians access to numerous stylistic and musical features. Individual professional musicians and groups from Ireland frequently travel to New Zealand during festivals and tours, stimulating knowledge of new styles and a varied repertoire. These experiences provide the opportunity to hear and learn about individual playing styles.

Through personal stories, sharing favourite tunes, information about musicians and instruments, various internet sites, ease of communication and frequent travel, the relationship between the two countries is well connected and strengthened. For example, I was also a part of this transitional flow, when in 2008, after I spent two months in Ireland I had learnt a range of new tunes. I returned to Wellington and taught the melodies to some session members. By sharing these tunes, other participants were able to learn new tunes in the style that was currently played in specific regions of Ireland. Also the musicians who already knew the tunes from a few years ago were commonly able to learn slight variations of the tune or a new title for the melody.

As in New Zealand, sessions in Ireland also have varied characteristics. I was often told by musicians that when visiting a session it was important to understand the music being played and whether or not you would positively contribute to that session. Pat Higgins discussed the sessions he attended and visited while in Ireland. He commented,

Every time I go home now I go to *fleadhs* and things, and sometimes I sit in on sessions and I have a great time. But I always try and check out the music people are playing, you know. Like if they are playing Northern tunes, and I wouldn't know any of them, I would probably be happy to just listen. (Pat Higgins, 27 July 2009, interview)

Pat's experience highlights that the Irish aesthetic is developed differently in parts of Ireland, and there is not one overall formation, instead multiple ideas of a session are created by musicians who have varied experiences. Andy has also travelled to Ireland several times and recalled a session experience,

Yeah when I go back [I play in Ireland]. And I have had some fantastic experiences doing that, I think one of the weirdest ones I had was being at a session in Tubbercurry, and I had the bouzouki and there were four pipers in the pub and I had an absolute gas session. Because I could play as loud as I wanted, there were four sets of pipes and I could really let rip, and we had a ball of an afternoon and it is just that whole thing about being able to get into a session

with a whole bunch of people that you have never meet before and you'll never see again, and have a great time. (Andy Linton, 28 July 2009, interview)

The flow and relationships between Ireland and New Zealand are important elements of the transnational connection. The players as well as performers often travel abroad, which strengthens the bond between the two countries. These transnational associations between Ireland and New Zealand strengthen the individual identities of the musicians and develop their approaches to the Irish aesthetic within the Wellington session community.

### **Expanding the Global Phenomenon: Irish Sessions around the World**

Several session musicians in Wellington have expanded their understanding of the Irish aesthetic and the way they play music by participating in sessions outside of New Zealand. By visiting these musical evenings in other parts of the world, the players are able to explore how soundscapes are shaped differently or similarly to sessions in New Zealand. Some musicians that I interviewed from Wellington, for example, have participated in sessions in cities in Australia and Germany. Their initial experiences in local scenes within New Zealand and during festival situations, gave them knowledge of the diverse repertoire, etiquette behaviour and stylistic features present. Andrew James attended the National Folk Festival in Canberra during Easter in 2009 and commented on his experience:

There is nothing in the Wellington weekly sessions that is anything like what I saw in Canberra. There was a session in one spot every night in this big hall with thirty musicians, who were in their early twenties, and they were all Australians and amazing players. That is probably the pinnacle of Irish music in Australasia, the National Folk Festival sessions...It is an unfair comparison to compare what happens on a Monday night in Wellington to what happens once a year in Canberra. (Andrew James, 9 June 2009, interview)

When James McNamara travelled to Germany he attended two different Irish sessions and discussed how the evenings were similar to Kitty's and Molly's in Wellington:

In Germany there was one session I played at in Potsdam which was very much like the Kitty's session; a group of people who knew each other pretty well and were pretty active about learning new tunes and there was a good standard of playing. Then there was another one I went to in Berlin itself and that was more of a sort of session where people were learning a bit more...I suppose the difference was at the Potsdam session, most of the people were Germans who had lived in Ireland, whereas at the other session they were Germans who were interested in Irish music, but hadn't necessarily spent much time in Ireland, so I suppose they were more influenced in the Irish ways of doing things in Potsdam...the general cohesiveness was a bit more noticeable and it was quite a good session. (James McNamara, 10 June 2009, interview)

Although the musicians I talked with commonly assumed a musician does not need personal experience and knowledge of sessions in Ireland, the musicians who do have that familiarity generally adopt the same approaches as Irish born musicians when they play. In addition, the skills a musician learns in the Wellington sessions can be used to help them approach sessions around the world. The Kitty's session in particular reflects the Irish aesthetic that is linked directly to Ireland.

The session phenomenon is present in almost every city within New Zealand and throughout many parts of the world. Significantly, it is also a social gathering for the musicians who participate and build friendships. Regardless of the language barriers in non-English speaking countries, in a session the musicians communicate through music. Specifically, it is the tunes that are the constant and fundamental element to the collective understanding of a session.



Figure 30: Irish session at Peppers Bar in Feakle, County Clare: August 2008.

As New Zealand is distant from Ireland it is important to understand that musicians without Irish heritage or birth are attracted to playing the music because they enjoy participating and belonging to the session community. Notable are the differences between Molly's and Kitty's, and how an individual's experience changes how they view and play the music. These changes are often directly related to their experiences of sessions in Ireland, which demonstrates the influence of the transnational community. The links between New Zealand and Ireland are strong and encourage musicians in New Zealand to play in a variety of musical styles.

The transnational relationship is also extended globally in sessions and Irish musical events around the world. The closeness of the music communities between countries was demonstrated when I travelled overseas and returned to New Zealand. In Ireland I meet and stayed with a woman who played and studied Irish music. A year or so later her friend was planning to visit New Zealand, so she contacted me. I met her friend and introduced him to the session community in Wellington, which he found very welcoming. I later found that he moved to Australia and coincidentally met up and played

tunes with one of the Wellington session members who was visiting Melbourne at the time. These connections confirm the closeness between Irish music communities because of travel and events such as festivals. In a similar way, summer schools in Ireland highlight the music's international appeal and demonstrate how new musicians, who are drawn into this environment to play Irish music, will ensure that sessions continue to develop and provide participatory environments for musicians for many years to come.

The session community and Irish music in New Zealand are worthy topics for further study. There are many areas upon which research could focus, such as analysis of musical elements, the context of repertoire, and music community studies. A similar study of the Auckland Irish music scene, which is the largest in New Zealand, would be interesting as a comparable study to this research. Furthermore, the folk community in New Zealand which supports the Morris dancing tradition and the singing traditions is ripe for study. More ambitiously, a focused study of regional folk festivals would be valuable. In my experience actively participating and contributing within the studied community is essential and allows greater access to information, experiences and a wider overall understanding of the music and the participants.

Today, when I walk into a session, whether it be in New Zealand, Ireland or somewhere else in the world, I feel assured that my knowledge and training will enable me to participate in some way with, a range of musicians that are passionate about Irish music. It is the music that brings the people together, and it is their drive and excitement that keeps them playing Irish tunes. I can also be assured that when I walk into a local session in Wellington, an evening of tunes, friends and new events will transpire. The sense of community which I first encountered on Mondays at Molly's and Kitty's and I later

experienced in sessions around New Zealand and in Ireland, showed me that people will always have tunes to play and friends to meet when they participate in the vibrant Irish music session.

## APPENDIX

## Compact Disc Contents

- |    |   |      |
|----|---|------|
| 1. | <b>Session at Molly Malone's, Wellington: August 2009:</b><br><b>Lead by Dave Barnes</b><br>'Proudlock's Hornpipe' (Hornpipe)<br>'Hangman's Reel' (Hornpipe)  | 3.22 |
| 2. | <b>Session at Molly Malone's, Wellington: August 2009:</b><br><b>Lead by Dave Barnes</b><br>'Dingle Regatta' (Slide and vocals)   | 2.21 |
| 3. | <b>Session at Molly Malone's, Wellington: August 2009:</b><br><b>Sung by Dave Barnes and session members</b><br>'I'll Tell Me Ma' (Ballad)  | 2.44 |
| 4. | <b>Session at Molly Malone's, Wellington: August 2009:</b><br><b>Lead by Jonathan Berkahn</b><br>'Sligo Maid' (Reel)<br>'Silver Spire' (Reel)<br>'Swinging on the Gate' (Reel)  | 4.53 |
| 5. | <b>Session at Kitty O'Shea's, Wellington: August 2009:</b><br><b>Lead by Pat Higgins</b><br>'Geal gCua na Féile' (Air)<br>'Sheep in the Boat' (Jig)<br>'Winnie Hayes' (Jig)<br>'Letterkenny Jig' (Jig)  | 9.06 |
| 6. | <b>Session at Kitty O'Shea's, Wellington: August 2009:</b><br><b>Lead by James MacNamara and Jonathan Berkahn.</b><br>'High Road to Glin' (Reel)<br>'Lucy Campbell's' (Reel)<br>'Humours of Tulla' (Reel)<br>'Paddy's Trip to Scotland' (Reel)<br>'Dinky's' (Reel)<br>'Gravel Walks' (Reel) | 9.21 |
| 7. | <b>Session at Kitty's O'Shea's, Wellington: August 2009:</b><br><b>Lead by Ruairidh Morrison, Ang Kidd, James McNamara</b><br>'Calum's Road' (Strathspey)<br>'Tongadale' (Reel)<br>'Tamlin' (Reel)  | 5.28 |

8. **Session at *Ceol Aneas*, Nelson: June 2009:** 5.18  
**Lead by Ruth Armstrong, Andrew James, ChihLeng Tham**  
 Armstrong Set:  
 ‘Ballydesmond 2’ (Polka)  
 ‘Unknown Polka’ (Polka)  
 ‘Ballydesmond 3’ (Polka)  
 ‘Sweeney’s’ (Polka)
9. **Session at *Ceol Aneas*, Nelson: June 2009:** 5.44  
**Lead by BB, Neasa Scanlon and session musicians.**  
 ‘Drag Her Around The Road’ (Reel)  
 ‘The Golden Keyboard’ (Reel)  
 ‘Greig’s Pipes’ (Reel)  
 ‘Merry Blacksmith’ (Reel)
10. **Session at *Ceol Aneas*, Nelson: June 2009:** 4.02  
**Lead by David Dooney**  
 Three Reels during the session musicians with Gráda.
11. **Recorded example of a reel, Wellington: January 2010:** 1.55  
**Played by Pat Higgins**  
 ‘The Rainy Day’ (Reel)

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

<b>Ruth Armstrong:</b>	7 June 2009, Interview
<b>David Barnes:</b>	24 July 2007, Interview
	27 September 2007, Email correspondence
	24 February 2009, Interview
	26 November 2009, Email correspondence
<b>Jonathan Berkahn:</b>	12 April 2007, Interview
	4 May 2009, Interview
<b>Melanie Brown:</b>	22 June 2009, Interview
<b>Pat Higgins:</b>	27 July 2009, Interview
	8 February 2010, Email correspondence
<b>Andrew James:</b>	9 June 2009, Interview
<b>Andy Linton:</b>	28 July 2009, Interview
<b>Maeve Lonie:</b>	15 October, 2009, Interview
<b>James McNamara:</b>	10 June 2009, Interview
<b>Ruairidh Morrison:</b>	22 June 2009, Interview
<b>ChihLeng Tham:</b>	15 June 2009, Interview
<b>Bernard Wells:</b>	7 October 2007, Interview
<b>Grant Wright:</b>	12 June 2009, Email Interview and correspondence

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