

AN-ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE IN IRISH  
TRADITIONAL DANCE-MUSIC

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Ireland is one of the very few countries in Western Europe that can still boast on the strong life of its traditional music. Without attempting to define 'traditional music' as a general concept, I feel entitled to speak of traditional music here since all Irish people, whether practising musicians or not, refer to the music concerned as traditional music. More precisely, this article is concerned with Irish traditional dance-music.

Nearly all traditional dance-tunes played nowadays are classified as reels, jigs, or hornpipes. These are categories of both dances and dance-tunes. In a study of musical form they can be described as systems of specific musical qualities (such as specific dancesteps, a specific number of dancers, a specific basic rhythm, tempo and combination of musical instruments) most of which can vary within certain limits. Although most musicians and other musical participants acknowledge in general the wide scope for alternative performances of tunes and dances, the performer has to take certain limitations into account to enable them to recognize a tune or dance as a reel, jig, etc.

However, such an analysis of formal structure is liable to disregard the much more narrow limits put to performances at actual musical occasions. Such musical occasions, which may be described as events involving people from specific social groups, specific behaviour with regard to the music and a specific style of performing the reels, jigs etc., may also be subsumed under certain categories. At present there are many such categories in Ireland, such as sessions in private or public houses, competitions, shows, concerts, dance-nights etc. Although even within these categories of social occasions performances are not fixed, the variety allowed for is much more narrow than the limitations referred to before would suggest.

This multiplicity of what I propose to call 'social genres' of Irish traditional dance-music has originated through processes of development and change over the last few centuries. Although the exact origins of the currently popular categories of Irish traditional dance-music are unknown, their increasing popularity shortly before 1800 may have been enhanced by travelling dancing masters, some of whom probably came from Scotland and Dublin (Breathnach 1971, ch. 5, Emerson 1972, pp. 113-118). These dancing masters were found all over the country in that period of increasing population density in the rural areas and reels and jigs appeared everywhere, together with

hornpipes and marches and, later on, polkas, schottisches etc.

After 1850 many tunes were collected by scholars, mostly from Dublin. In emulation of the collectors of ancient harp music who operated shortly before 1800, they presented the tunes collected in print to urban middle class customers as products of the Irish race. When towards the turn of the century Irish nationalism became increasingly strong, Irish traditional music became one of the symbols of Irish national identity. A revival of traditional music and dance started, centering around rural musicians, many of whom had migrated to the cities. The dance-music referred to formed the main stock of their repertoires. However, polkas and schottisches, quadrilles, marches and hornpipes slowly vanished; reels and jigs formed the two main categories.

Throughout the 1920's and 1930's traditional dance-music progressively disappeared both from villages and cities. In places where the music was still used, extensive changes took place both in music and dance. In the late 1940's a new revival started, mainly confined to pockets of musicians in Dublin, some rural areas and communities of emigrants abroad. During the 1960's this revival gathered nationwide momentum, although at present it seems to be on its way back.

It is during the revival years that the social genres were developed until they reached their present forms. Reels and jigs in particular were used on many different types of occasions involving different social groups and different types of behaviour. Such occasions are: sessions in pubs, which are either occasional and informal or regular (the audience usually dances only at the regular sessions), concerts, large dances, competitions, and performances of small bands of young urban musicians displaying many features of modern rock groups. Although, broadly speaking, the music in all these settings is regarded as being basically similar, and the performances usually - though not always - stay within the limits of variation indicated by many musicians, the specific differences between performances of music and dance within these social genres seem to be typical of these genres. In other words: there are, in music and dance, visible and audible aspects which are typical for specific kinds of musical occasion involving specific social groups and a specific use of the music, even though especially the music within these occasions is regarded as being basically of one stock throughout these various kinds of musical occasions.

Two issues in this development seem to me to be of interest for anthropological investigation: (1) How can we account for this multiplicity of socio-musical behaviour, and (2) How can socio-musical development in Ireland be explained?

Yet neither of these two questions can be detached from the more general problem: What is the nature of the relation between people (or rather groups of people) and the musical activities in which they take part? This may go so deep as to be unanswerable by observable evidence only. This does not excuse us from gathering and analysing as much possible evidence as can be found.

In the next paragraph I will explore some points made by scholars who have worked in this field of study. After that I will try to give some provisional answers to the questions mentioned, based on information gathered during my fieldwork in Feakle, a rural parish in east Co. Clare, in 1975.

#### Approaches proposed by Merriam, Lomax and Blacking

Anthropologists have tended to avoid musical topics, either from lack of interest or from a supposed lack of competence. Music is often regarded purely as form, the structure of which may be studied by music theorists and musicologists. Yet some anthropologists and ethnomusicologists have tried to study music as form-focussed behaviour. It is worthwhile investigating the approaches of three scholars who have devoted much attention to the study of musical behaviour from an anthropological point of view.

According to Merriam the student of music has to give a description of a circuit of conceptual behaviour - physical behaviour - musical sound (from which there is a feedback to conceptual behaviour, partly through the perception and judgements of the audience, in the social framework within which the musical behaviour takes place); in relation to this circuit, learning behaviour has to be studied as well (Merriam 1964, p.33). In speaking about the relationship between music and society Merriam writes that culture shapes music (p.28); '...in a very real sense...music reflects the culture of which it is a part'(p.47). One may notice that culture is, in metaphorical terms, described as an acting person; the writer speaks about '...the limits within which a culture recognizes and sanctions variations..' (p. 50). Music on the other hand is assumed to contribute to the continuity and stability of this culture (p.225). This assumption is also stated in other words:

'In music, as in the other arts, basic attitudes, sanctions and values are often stripped to their essentials; music is also symbolic in many ways, and it reflects the organization of society' (p.13).

We may recognize in these ideas the structural-functional notion that institutional complexes of human behaviour, like music, have a function in relation to the continuity of society and culture, and are

themselves perpetuated through a consensus on values governing this behaviour among the members of the society concerned. In the specific case of music, its functions result at least partly from the supposed reflection of values, attitudes and social structure in musical activity and musical form.

A related approach is advocated by Lomax. He writes that song style is 'a pattern of learned behaviour, common to the people of a culture' (Lomax 1968, p. 3) and maintains that a song style is a symbolization of social norms and social structure (p.7). 'Song represents an immediate image of a culture pattern' (p.6).

A major enterprise of Lomax has been the construction of a world map of folk song styles and a comparison of this map with a map of 'cultural styles'; in the process of this comparison, he formulated a number of hypotheses on the relation between certain aspects of musical structure and certain kinds of social norms, attitudes and structures. As he states it, 'if song performance and life-style vary together, one is the reflection and reinforcement of the other' (p.6). Here again we find the idea that musical behaviour reinforces culture; culture is seen as a system based on consensus on values and norms (this assumption of consensus is even basic to the construction of a world map of cultures since such a map presents only one cultural style within one area). Music can fulfil this function in culture, since it reflects or symbolizes social norms; according to Lomax, song style (and dance style) summarizes those norms on which there is the highest degree of community consensus (p.15).

One of the assumptions underlying the operations in Lomax' research is the idea that these social qualities in music can be observed in musical sound by any one who has received a small amount of training in handling a 'trait' list in which aspects of this musical sound is classified. Blacking, on the other hand, maintains that only after long musical and social participant observation one may be able to evaluate these social qualities of musical behaviour. Yet as he states it, 'an ethnomusicological analysis... sees a piece of music as part of a unitary system of culture' (Blacking 1974, p.78). Within this culture music has limited functions: 'If it can do anything to people, the best it can do is to confirm situations that already exist' (1973, p.107). 'The chief function of music is to involve people in shared experiences. The form the music takes must serve this function' (1973, p.48). About this form the author states that it has features in common with a range of social institutions (1974, p.78). The shared experiences referred to are qualified as '...their experiences in the culture of

which the notes are signs and symbols' (1973, p.52). In a sense Blacking's approach is more sophisticated than those of other writers. He does not, like Lomax or Merriam, present the investigator of musical behaviour with a system of categories which must be filled with data. Instead, he gives due attention to the complexity of music in society. Yet, although his analyses put much more emphasis on interaction between people than is usual within structural-functionalist writings these people appear much more often as 'man' than as actual men or women.

It will be clear from the data presented on Irish music that a consensus on norms governing musical behaviour, although occasionally presented verbally by musicians and others, does not actually exist. This seems to be the case even in a small place like Feakle. Such a consensus is lacking not only where musical behaviour is concerned but in relation to social behaviour in general. When the assumption of consensus on social norms is rejected, we have to reconsider the function of music for those who participate in it in order to explain why they take part in this music. If no consensus on norms exists it becomes problematic to state that music reflects and reinforces norms or values. As we will see in the case of Feakle, a unitary system of culture does not exist in the sense of a geographically defined or static system. In this perspective it makes less sense to say that music reinforces culture. At least one will have to define both culture and reflection in a very definite way.

While the approaches of the writers mentioned does not enable us to cope with the variety of social genres even within such a small place as Feakle, where some of these genres are both musically and socially exclusive although the music used is in all cases regarded as traditional dance-music, they are no more helpful where understanding of musical change and development is concerned. To be sure, none of the writers mentioned denies the phenomenon of musical change; Merriam and especially Blacking devote a good deal of attention to this matter. But their discussions often seek to explain developments from outside influences involving acculturation (Merriam 1964, p.164), from 'historic accidents' (ib. p. 305), from 'cultural drift' or from actions of individuals (ib. p.317), or from incorporation of social groups (Blacking 1973, p. 73). Indeed when the stability of musical culture would be protected from change by a consensus on musical norms by all groups within a particular society, any change has to be caused by something 'abnormal' something outside the system. Yet when change is always delegated to causes outside the system studied, this would mean that

a study of change falls effectively outside the scope of anthropological investigation. Such a conclusion would be rather unsatisfying. We will have to look for another way of coping with change if we are to explain the abundance of changes within Irish musical life.

Blacking gives a partial solution to this problem when he suggests that musical changes may be part of manipulations of the balance of power within a society (Blacking 1971, pp. 204-205, 207-208). And he states in general 'Musical acculturation may be... part of conscious attempts to balance... or to change relationships in society, or to move to another social system' (Blacking, not published yet). Here Blacking clearly points out the possibility of choice. In the following section I will introduce to the reader the musically relevant social groups in Feakle with some of their musical choices; I will try to account for some of the reasons they have for their choices.

#### Local social genres of Irish traditional dance-music in the parish of Feakle.

I will give the reader some information on social genres of traditional dance-music currently popular within the parish of Feakle, in order to give an idea of the great variety of genres of this music. But before this, the main local social groups have to be discussed.

Like many other parishes in the west of Ireland, social life in Feakle has been strongly influenced by a heavy population decline during the last 130 years (see Brody 1973 on some of these consequences). Between 1840 and 1965 the population of the parish dropped from  $\pm$  4000 to  $\pm$  700. As in other parishes, there is an overrepresentation of the older agegroups, and of men. Older bachelors with small stagnant cattle farms form a significant part of the population. Since 1965 the population has increased, reaching 800 in 1975. Contributing factors have been an increase in employment in nearby areas together with greater mobility, and a growing shortage of jobs in Britain. As a result a part of the population consists of younger families with schoolgoing children. The number of worker-farmers (Franklin 1969) with families is also increasing. However, a number of families manages to make a very good living by working the farm full-time; these farmers co-operate intensively with regional agricultural advisory services. Other social groups are shopkeepers and publicans, and some large landowners, who were formerly the main employers of local agricultural labour.

Between these social groups there are a number of observable differences. Although the division between those who live in the nuclear village and those who live in the 'townlands', i.e. the wide stretches

of land surrounding this village, is often articulated, as is the division between farmers and 'business people', the most striking and most often mentioned differences have to do with the structure of the households, and with the behaviour of its members. Very important is the large number of women and youth belonging to the families of business people and of 'strong farmers' (the active farmers mentioned before, who operate on a full-time basis, are often called progressive or strong farmers). The worker-farmers usually have families as well. The small farmers are often older bachelors; there is a striking absence of women and young people in the small farmers' districts. The differences in household structure are related to different attitudes. When a man is called 'a small farmer' this does not necessarily imply that he owns a small piece of land. Although the quality of the soil in the small farmers' districts in the west and southwest of the parish is usually bad, farm sizes may be considerable. But the land is used in a very extensive way: only a few cows are milked, and a small number of cattle roams through the fields. The bachelors who usually work these farms do not emphasize steady work and the maximalization of profit. Much work is done co-operatively by several farmers, on a basis of equality. Many small farmers tend to go out every night to visit several pubs in the nuclear village. Here they meet friends and establish instantaneous drink exchange circles with two or three together. Drink is strongly valued in this social group, as is conviviality. The shortage of women and younger people within this group partly causes and reinforces the social attitudes.

The strong farmers stress the importance of family life and self-support. If they co-operate at all in the farmwork this is done on a strictly economic basis. They do not go out often, but devote much time to their families, and to the education of their children. The women of this group have a stronger preference for family life, luxury and urban fashions; their strong representation in this group makes these attitudes stand out even more clearly. Strong farmers do not visit pubs or create drink exchange circles; indeed many of them are teetotalers and see drink as a major enemy to their work, their families and their social status. Much emphasis is put on the moral value of living a decent life of hard work in a quiet and decent rural village.

Many of the worker-farmers take part in the circles in the pubs. Indeed it is often said that the money earned in factories functions as beer-money.

In all cases, the visiting of pubs is mainly the men's business. Women do not visit local pubs, except occasionally on a Sunday and during

holidays, and on the regular dancenights of some pubs. Even in these cases they must not come unaccompanied.

Young people try to avoid local social life and prefer to visit nearby regional centres like Scariff, Ennis and Limerick, in small groups. They also occasionally visit small villages in the area. This is not to say that they never enter local pubs nor participate in local activities; but in general they like to avoid local social control whenever it is possible.

These various social attitudes are manifested within the various local genres of music. In each of these genres, one or two of the local social groups figure prominently. By far the most frequent genres are those of sessions in pubs. There are two main types of session here, informal and formal. Informal sessions involve some players, especially fiddlers, and a listening audience that happens to be present. Most participants are small farmers, and some worker-farmers. Within drink exchange circles music seems to be equivalent to drink: the players are often given free drinks. It is remarkable that these sessions usually take place in bigger pubs, which are also visited quite often by younger people (both girls and boys, the former usually from nearby villages) and tourists. The small farmers listen more attentively than others, and one wonders why these sessions do not take place in the small pubs which are frequented nearly exclusively by members of this social group.

Other sessions, often called 'ballad sessions' although in Feakle no singing is involved, are regular dances which take place one night a week in some of these bigger pubs. Here the music is played faster, with a strong emphasis on the accordeon. Nevertheless the 'tunes' played are to a large extent the same, and participants in both types of session refer to the music as 'the same'. In these sessions both small farmers and worker-farmers take part; those who have wives and grown-up daughters usually accompany these to the dancenight. The strong farmers avoid these sessions, since they do not like the drink and conviviality.

Members of the social group of strong farmers however do take part in other social genres. First of all, there are occasional large dances in the community centre, where music is played by 'ceili bands' consisting of several fiddlers, an accordeonist, a fluteplayer, a drummer and a pianist. Here no alcoholic drinks are sold. All social groups take part in these dances.

Traditional music is taught by one of the local musicians. Most (young) pupils belong to strong farmers' and business people's households. There are also regular competitions, in which the best pupils

take part together with others from the area. Here, as in the informal sessions, dance-tunes are played for listeners, and while at dance sessions 'old time waltzes' figure together with reels and jigs although they are not considered to be traditional music, these are absent in the genres of listening. In competitions and shows, stepdances are used; the 'steps' are regarded as more traditional than the 'sets' which are usually danced to jigs and reels. Yet the same tunes may be used for both types of dance.

Other genres are occasional concerts by regional musicians, or by urban music groups which are especially popular by the youth, and broadcasts and records.

Figure 1 summarizes the main social groups, their household structures, their prevailing social attitudes and their preferences for local social genres of traditional dance-music.

SOCIAL GROUP	HOUSEH. STRUCTURE	SOCIAL ATTITUDES	SOCIAL GENRES
small farmers	male bachelors	drink, conviviality	<u>informal</u> & <u>formal</u> s.
worker-farmers	family	drink, conviviality	<u>informal</u> & <u>formal</u> s.
strong farmers	family	family life	teaching, show, competitions,
large landowners	family	family life	concerts
business people	family	depends on business	

Fig.1

It may be understood from this figure that the success of the formal dance-sessions depends to a large extent on the attitudes of the worker-farmers, who bring their wives and grown-up daughters to the dance. Those groups which are family-oriented avoid the sessions in pubs. What is not shown is the fact that all groups participate in the occasional large dances.

Fig. 1 is restricted to genres of traditional dance-music. Some other types of music are, in various social genres, available in the area. In centres like Scariff and Ennis pop groups may be heard, and discotheques operate. Broadcasts and records make many other types of music available. One may say that only for the small farmers traditional dance-music is their first and often only choice. The worker-farmers usually appreciate waltzes, ballads and s.c. country&western songs together with the traditional music. The strong farmers prefer ballroom dances and classical music, and traditional types of music such as 'slow airs' and gaelic songs. The young people, although they take part in the large dances, prefer pop and rock music; some like the performances of traditional music by urban pop-group - like bands.

Most of the genres mentioned have been developed during the last few decades, or even during the last decade. The correlation between social groups and social genres, - which by no means is a pure 100% correlation - which we have discussed up to now, may be seen as resulting from choices made by individuals belonging to these social groups. If these choices would only concern the matter of drinking in company, or devotion to family life, there would be no point in pursuing the musical differences between these genres. However, actual choices by members of the social groups are very often expressed as preferences for certain musical styles. Moreover, when people listen to traditional music played out of context, for example by means of record or tape, they will comment on its musical features and qualities; and their comments are related to their own musical preferences, i.e. to their preferences for the musical style which is used within the social genres of their choice.

As indicated before, many jig or reel-tunes are heard throughout the various genres, and indeed people recognize them as 'the same tunes'. Whenever the actual musical differences between the performances within various genres are discussed - as is often done especially by musicians - these are commented upon in terms of preferences for the playing of particular individuals, although they occasionally state their preference for the musical style of a social genre as a whole. Most people are very interested in the personal musical style of the players. These differences in style are partly responsible for the musical differences between the genres, for most musicians exhibit a very strong preference for a specific social genre, and will hardly play within the context of another. As a result one finds the local musicians clustered within the various social genres. The musicians within these clusters specialize in specific ways of performing the dance-music.

*This is*  
why there are clearly audible and definable differences in the musical performances of different genres.

A very clear example may be found in the speed with which tunes are played. Reels have to be played at a pace of MM 90 to MM 126 in order to be generally recognized as a reel. For jigs the limits are MM 100 and MM 130. All these tempi are manifested in the foottap of the musicians, which is both audibly and visibly observable. But at informal sessions a deliberate pace is taken - with a foottap of  $\pm$  MM 104 for reels and MM 110 for jigs. The pace is much higher at dance sessions, with  $\pm$  MM 116 for reels and MM 126 for jigs. These differences are heard and commented upon by many of the participants, and musicians do not want to play with others who have a much higher or lower pace. Since a dancing audience wants a high pace, and since most 'slow' players want

to play for listeners rather than for dancers, only 'fast' players play at formal sessions.

This difference in speed is combined with a difference in instruments used. At informal sessions fiddles are played, and occasionally whistles, concertinas and pipes. At formal sessions one hears loud instruments like accordions, drums, banjos and flutes. It is also the rule at dances that musicians play together; although this happens at informal sessions as well, a single instrumentalist is very common here.

Another, related difference concerns the style which is locally called 'sweet'. At informal sessions, the players have to play 'sweet' which means the use of dynamic contrasts, no vigorous accents or long notes, the occasional use of slided notes, ornamentations like rolls, triplets and grace-notes, and many melodic variations. At dance sessions the players play 'fast time' music in which dynamic contrasts are absent. At these sessions the fiddlers use a vigorous, stereotyped bowing style, and ornamentations are neglected in favour of accented 'long notes'. The accordion however, which is hardly if ever used at informal sessions and which cannot be played sweet, is at dances heard with many ornamentations and variations of the tunes.

The contrast between informal and **dance** sessions has become so strong that no accordionist will play at an informal session even if he is present and has brought his accordion. At the other hand even at a dance session no one will dance to the music of a fiddle unless the accordion joins in.

At concerts, shows and competitions the emphasis is on individual playing, which is often of the 'sweet' type. Even accordionists taking part in these activities play deliberately more slowly than at dance sessions. Since most competitors are young children, a large number of tinwhistles is heard, for many parents urge their children to start on this relatively cheap instrument. Local children, who have only been taught for a short period by a teacher who adheres strictly to printed or written versions of tunes, often play without variations or ornamentations. Those who have learnt to play by ear often excel in these techniques.

At the occasional large dances s.c. celli bands play. These are groups of six to eight players, among whom several play chords and rhythm. Many of the small groups which play at **dance** sessions are parts of these large bands.

It is interesting to notice that these styles have mainly been created during the last few decades although most of the tunes are much older. The rapid development of a variety of social genres coincided with a development of musical styles. Both developments result from musical and social choices. Since these choices result in observable patterns, we

must look for the processes which guide the choices. Of what nature are the constraints acting upon musical choices?

Processes of selection of meaningful musical behaviour.

The observations in Feakle support the hypothesis that in the experience of people certain styles of music and musical behaviour must be more valuable than others. One even could say that they are experienced as more meaningful. Indeed meaning may be a crucial factor involved in patterns of culture and, as we will see, in patterns of cultural change. Geertz (1972, p.5) writes about culture: 'I take...the analysis of it to be...not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning'. This task of the student of culture, he writes, involves incompleteness and uncertainty.

'There are a number of ways to escape this - turning culture into folklore and collecting it, turning it into traits and counting it, turning it into institutions and classifying it, turning it into structures and toying with it. But they are escapes' (Geertz 1972, p.29)

In my opinion a task of the student of musical behaviour is to try to identify the meanings of this behaviour for the people concerned in order to gain some understanding of their choices and preferences. Of course the danger of incompleteness and guesswork looms largely over such an exercise; yet the 'popular ethnomusicological escapes' of collecting music as folklore, or of counting musical traits, have not brought a better understanding of processes of selection of musical activities.

We may thus think of music as having specific meanings to specific groups of people. Members of these groups select adequate styles of music and of musical behaviour in relation to their backgrounds and social attitudes. I will not deal here with the general question: Why do people use music at all? Here I will confine myself to McAllester's statement: 'Music transforms experience' (McAllester 1971, p.379) without dealing in detail with the nature of this transformation. However, the evaluation of this change in experience may be a function of the meaning which the music concerned has for the person or persons who experience the change. We must contemplate the possibility that specific patterns of sound and of musical behaviour have universal meanings, i.e. meanings which do not result from cultural processes of learning but rather from an immediate relation between sound pattern and human body and mind. The diffusion of the specific needs for such meanings around the world might have caused the actual diffusion of musical styles. In that case sociological inquiries might reveal the cause of the actual distribution

of these 'needs for musical meanings' around the world; yet physiology and psychology would have to solve the question why specific sound patterns can satisfy specific 'needs for meaning'.

I think, however, that for a sociological inquiry at least, it may be more fruitful to think of the musical meanings themselves as results of historic processes of association. I will try to give a short account of some of these processes in Irish musical history; with the help of information gathered in this way it may be possible to understand the musical choices of the Feakle people better.

Around or shortly before 1800, attitudes towards courtship and marriage seem to have been temporarily more permissive than before in rural parts of Ireland. While the poet Merriman, who lived near Feakle around 1780, scrutinized his fellow parishioners for late marriage and neglect of courtship during their youth, early marriages were the rule rather than the exception in the decades before the famine of 1845-1850. The dances, which gained much of their popularity in this period, were opportunities for the young to meet and select possible partners, and these opportunities were tolerated and appreciated by the whole community, proof of which is the general esteem for the dancing masters. Of course the need for partner selection was not the only factor involved in shaping the dances and making them meaningful; yet we can hardly underestimate the importance of partner selection within the small agricultural communities.

After the famine, priests sought to reduce opportunities for courtship, and propagated late marriages. They reacted strongly against dances and musicians. An attempt to analyse the changing attitudes of the clergy has been made by K.E. Connell (1966, ch.5).

The meaning of sanctioned communication between people of opposite sexes became associated with the music in various settings, albeit in various disguises. As we have seen the older small farmers select big pubs for informal sessions, and this may be because these are the only pubs which attract younger people and women. Young people however are very reluctant to take part in local social genres of traditional dance-music exactly because the element of local social control. They do not like the music because it is the music of their parents, of the older generation and of the local community. This attitude, which is already manifested when the music is heard on the radio, becomes even stronger where the local sessions are concerned. The older small farmers are very reluctant to talk about the element of musical meaning mentioned, and simply state that the observation may be correct. The young people do not hesitate to make the analysis mentioned even before the observer has asked them to.

Strong farmers, who insist on a decent life for them and their children, send their children to the local music class, since traditional music is interpreted as a sanctioned activity which will safeguard the young from the temptation of 'illicit' courtship.

Related with the meaning of sanctioned communication between people of opposite sexes is the meaning of 'locality'. Traditional music was always played by local musicians; it was homemade, as opposed to imported musical activities, such as the ballroom dances in the early 1930's. Since musical communication has not always been as easy as it is now, with the advance of broadcasting and recording, and with the improved transport facilities, each village and area could develop its own musical style. Even at present, traditional music played by non-locals is not appreciated as much as the playing of local musicians, although some of the local players have imitated and emulated the styles of others who live hundreds of miles from Feakle. At dance sessions the importance of the 'locality' element is also very obvious. Those who start off the dancing always live in the parish, even if many people from outside are present. If a publican has no strong custom from the area, dance sessions will not be successful although he may have customers from miles around on other nights. The meaning of locality is also manifest at the yearly dance festival in the parish. While on showband nights, with rock music, people may come from as far as Limerick or Ennis (25 miles from the parish) the ceili band nights always attract a proportionally much bigger local group. Within emigrant communities in Britain and the USA small revivals had a strong regional flavour, and the same happens nowadays, when musicians from east Clare, who have migrated to Dublin or London, flock together in their new environment, to play their native music.

Traditional music is also considered to be a valuable product of the Irish race, and this meaning originated in the 19th century. As mentioned above, Irish traditional music, including dance-music, was used by urban middle classes after 1850. These classes wanted to stress their cultural independence from Britain, and they used collections of tunes gathered in the west of the country, where traditional music was still strong even after the famine. This association of the music with the idea of intrinsic cultural value probably did not exist within these rural areas before the famine; but towards the end of the century both urban and rural musicians took part in the revival in which the music was presented as a reason for pride in every Irishman. This meaning became the main propaganda tool within the second revival.

The cultural value of the music is stressed at local competitions in Feakle, which have become a major tourist event in the area. The same meaning seems to have a much stronger recruiting power in relation to the

strong farmers than to people of other social backgrounds.

I have already mentioned the association between music and drink. According to description of years gone by, there was never a dance without 'half a barrel of stout'. When the large dances started in the 1930's, partly under pressure of priests who wanted to centralize and control musical activities, alcoholic drink was not allowed in the dance hall except for a fair amount for the musicians. Strong farmers often express their preference for other types of traditional music, especially the so called slow airs, and say that dance-music has too much to do with noisy crowds of drunken people.

These then are some of the meanings which have come to stay with the music as the result of previous use of this music. *These meanings probably* do not determine exactly the way in which the music 'transforms the experience' of the social groups concerned. Yet we may partly explain the selection of musical behaviour by members of particular social groups from these associated meanings. When we observe the choices of the various groups, as listed in fig.1, we may recognize the relation with some of the meanings mentioned, like sanctioned communication between the sexes, locality, cultural value and drink.

For the small farmers (and to a certain extent the worker-farmers), it is both the communication between the sexes and the drink that matter.

These people, who include in their number many bachelors, select big pubs for their informal sessions, although the small pubs are exclusively small farmers' pubs. Girls and women only visit the big ones. The relation between drink and music should be studied carefully. Small farmers, who usually drink within small drink exchange circles, often give drink as a token of respect and gratitude for the musicians. This is highly valued by the players. There seems to be a reciprocity involved, based on an equivalence of drink and music. Apart from the meanings of communication between the sexes and drink, the meaning of locality is involved most strongly in the behaviour of the small farmers and worker-farmers.

The meanings of communication between the sexes and of drink are of less importance for the strong farmers. They avoid all musical occasions where drink takes an important place. They share however in the occasional large dances, since these are 'dry'; indeed in these dances everybody takes part, and in participating the successful farmers show that they are still involved in the local community.

In this social group there is a strong emphasis on music as a cultural value, on the 'Irishness' of the music. To understand this, one must be familiar with the outlook of these farmers, which focusses on self-reliance, self-confidence and family life. The stress on cultural value

in music adds to this outlook. The historic meaning of 'Irish culture' from the 18th century is one of self-reliance in relation to other cultures. At the same time Irish culture means Roman Catholicism and morality, two factors which are very important in the strong farmers' concept of family life and children's education. For this social group the main social genres of Irish traditional music are shows and competitions. These are partly organized to attract visitors to the community, who are catered for mainly by the strong farmers. On the other hand the main participants in these shows and competitions are strong farmers' children, and the interest which the parents take in musical education of their children is also caused by the disciplining influence which they ascribe to the music. This the element of social control, of sanctioned entertainment. Local teaching of traditional music was started in 1971 by a local musician. The number of pupils, which has been very high, has dropped steadily over the years, due to lack of perseverance of the pupils and lack of adequate teaching. What matters however is that many strong farmers want to see their children educated in traditional music, since as they say it keeps the children away from courtship and vandalism.

As may be recognized, the meaning of 'locality' is still very important for the strong farmers, and this is manifested in their participation in the large community dances, and in their organization of the local shows and competitions. Yet their refusal to take part in the local sessions sets them apart from the other agricultural classes.

The attitudes of the young people are much less in favour of traditional music. They try to break away from the element of local social control which is embodied in the genres. They prefer to go to Scariff or Ennis, where they can court without being watched by locals.

Here we see how the same element of meaning, that of sanctioned communication between the sexes, leads to a positive choice by small farmers, and a negative choice by young people. This is expressed quite dramatically when an informal session starts in a big pub, where usually young people are present. The session sometimes starts in the bar, where the small farmers drink. Both players and listeners hope to be invited to the lounge, either by the publican or by the youngsters who are present inside the lounge. Usually however the young people move out en bloc whenever a session starts in the lounge.

Together with the element of social control of courtship it is the element of locality which keeps the young people away from traditional music. Although the attitudes of the young towards the community seem to be less negative than during the 1960's when emigration was at its highest point, many youngsters think of the parish as a backwater not fit for

modern people.

The selection of favourite radio broadcasts by young people indicates that they do not only reject actual musical occasions where controlling elders are present, but also the music itself. While musical meaning may originate in the use of the music in particular situations, it becomes associated with the music itself.

The young people form the social group in the parish which most strongly rejects the traditional dance-music. Other social groups which have not yet been discussed are the business people and the large landowners.

The shopkeepers and publicans usually adhere to the strong farmers' attitudes. Yet some of them patronize sessions, since these take place in their pubs. There are eight pubs within the parish, four of which are big enough to attract sessions. Only three of the six shops are not owned by publicans.

The number of large landowners is even smaller, and it would be difficult to describe their musical attitudes as those of a social group.

Thus, musical meanings act as constraints on the musical choices of the members of various social groups. People accept musical style and musical behaviour when its meanings are acceptable in relation to their attitudes. These meanings, if accepted, are expressed both in the musical occasions at large, (including time and place, and the specific behaviour in relation to the music); and in the musical sound itself. In the case of Heakle we have seen not only that specific groups take part in specific genres, according to the meanings experienced, but also that the differences between the meanings within the various local social genres coincide with audible musical differences, of which some have been explained.

Of course the account has been rather superficial. How was the music of the various genres communicated to users in past and present? How did these channels of communication operate? Did they in any way affect the music itself, or its use or meanings? An example may be found in the activities of the collectors of music in the 19th century. Acting as communication channels, these collectors adapted the music to 19th century 'classical' staff notation; they did not transmit the use of the music in rural areas to the new users but allowed for performances of this music in chamber music settings, and they added the meaning of cultural value.

Although this historical study may have produced some explanatory evidence for the present situation, it takes a more detailed study of musical development to understand how music and musical behaviour may change.

### Processes of musical change

Of all social genres of music in Feakle most are genres of traditional dance-music. I have already given some evidence of the musical variety within these genres; as we have seen the music in these genres is recognized by the Feakle people as basically 'the same', i.e. of the same stock or consisting of the same tunes. It is this very sameness which allows us to think of the various meanings discussed above as meanings associated with this music in many of its different genres.

When this music was first used in Feakle I do not know yet. Theoretically the music may either have originated locally, or may have been 'channeled' to the area from somewhere outside. Such channeling has been involved in the case of the ballroom dances in the 1930's, and of modern pop and country & western music. Here main channels have been returning migrants, and media such as radio and record. In these cases it must be understood that such genres could not have been accepted and developed within the area without an internal change in attitudes towards culture. The genres mentioned seem to embody a strong meaning of modernity, of leaving the backwaters in order to be connected to the world's big streams of culture. They are related to changing attitudes of the younger generations during the 1930's and during the 1950's and 60's. Yet the musical element was first developed outside the area. The same may have been the case with traditional dance-music. In this case the dancing masters of the closing decades of the 18th century may have been the main channel. Only a more intensive historical study may reveal if this has been the case, and what related changes in social attitudes made acceptance of the new genres possible.

While study of those social changes which enable the acceptance of 'foreign' genres is a necessary part of the study of musical change, I will concentrate on those musical changes which may have originated locally. Some of these are reflected in the audible musical differences between the various local genres of traditional dance-music.

I have pointed out before that these differences are manifested as differences in performing style between various musicians, since musicians with similar styles tend to be found within the same genre. To understand local developments in Irish traditional music in Feakle we have to start with studying the relative freedom of performance which Irish musicians enjoy, and relate this to processes of selection which originate and operate within the local community. Rather than studying a number of such developments in an extensive way it seems useful to concentrate intensively on one such development, the one which resulted in the present contrast between the vigorous style of playing which is usually heard at dancing sessions, and the 'sweet' style of playing which is paramount at informal sessions but is often heard at concerts as well.

A musician trained in the 'classical' western tradition has learnt to adhere strictly to a printed score of a composition. Yet he may use a very small margin, his 'freedom of interpretation'; this margin is hardly ever pointed out verbally, but all concerned experience its limits when listening to various performances, some of which may be intolerable because of the amount of freedom which the player permits himself. Although printed scores of traditional Irish music are still not very important except for some recent developments in teaching, a same margin of performance freedom exists in relation to the tunes. But this margin is much wider than that available to the 'classical' player. Tempo, rhythmical structure, tone quality, articulation, use of dynamics and stresses and of ornamentations and variations may all vary widely, both between players and between different performances by one player. Most tunes exist in several versions, which even broadens the margin. In the case of fiddlers the use of variations in tone and melody, together with the use of dynamic contrast and of a quite deliberate pace, have been developed into the sweet style which originated around the turn of the century.

Most Irish musicians display a certain pride in relation to their musical skills. They like to be praised by the audience. Indeed a player who does not experience overt signs of approval during his performance is quick to pack his instrument and leave. On the other hand many people enjoy the music as only one element of occasions of dance. During the 19th century musicians became increasingly scarce. After the famine many traditional pastime activities experienced a severe social devaluation; there was an increasing emphasis put on sober, hard work and a decent life. During this period the importance of the meaning of cultural value rose. Musicians started to develop their musical skills without confining themselves to occasions of dance. In a sense they inherited the artistic attitudes of those musicians who had served the Irish upper classes until the seventeenth century, and who during the eighteenth century had experienced a revival of the interest for their arts in circles of the British gentry and urban middle and upper classes. While this revival died away around 1830, traditional music continued to be played in many of the more isolated rural parts of the country, and here it was that the collectors of the mid-19th century 'discovered' the music which later became esteemed as valuable product of Irish culture. . Yet for the time being the main local employment of musicians was at occasions of dance, and although they may have practised those skills which are characteristic for the 'sweet style, there was no sign yet of clearly contrasted local styles.

In the beginning of the present century some Peakle players are said to have 'grown a bit odd'. They often turned down invitations to play at dances, and would only come when they expected a carefully listening and approving audience.

Fiddlers started to change their style of playing: while Paddy Mac (+1820 - +1900) had a vigorous though skillful way of playing, his pupil Johnnie Allen (+1870 - +1950) 'could not be heard behind a cob's web'. This is not to say that Johnnie's playing was not appreciated: people are told to have crept through hedges and ditches to listen secretly to his playing.

Johnnie Allen's behaviour may be related to the Gaelic revival which affected musical life around 1900. According to old local people he started to change after the visit of O'Neill around 1910. O'Neill, who collected music in the area considered Allen to be one of his main informants.

Developments like this one may have occurred in many different areas in Ireland; yet Allen's use of the sweet style, and his manifestations of shyness and pride may have been his unique translations of new attitudes towards music making.

People continued their small scale dances until +1940. Around this date the 'house dances' were practically brought to an end by licence acts of the government, by priests' sermons and by the arrival of new genres such as ball-room dances. Developments in this period are complex and fascinating, and deserve a more detailed description than can be allowed for within the framework of this article. Anyhow, while on the one hand dances became centralized within the school of the nuclear village, and in the school of the second nucleus of Kilclaran, another part of the population organized large, long lasting dances in country houses, which were under constant threat of police action. Both developments finally resulted in a concentration of musicians in the 'ceili bands' of the next period, some of which originated in or near Feakle. Originally created to foster the music within a protective milieu, these bands became more and more dance-oriented, since large scale dances were their main employment opportunities. But while playing together in a large band may perhaps impress a dancing audience, and as such was a good remedy to overcome the musicians' shyness, it does not give the individual player a great opportunity to show his skills. Between 1940 and 1960 several local fiddlers and other musicians left the local and regional ceili band movement, and returned to the sweet style of playing. None of them had been taught by former sweet players.

In relation to the perfection of the sweet style of some of these younger players the informal sessions were developed. The players preferred a quiet, attentive audience which they found in the older small farmers, and especially in the generation which at that time was around 40 years of age. This generation had grown up in the time when house dances were still common practice. Although no dances were allowed in pubs, quiet sessions were not disturbed by police or priest. Here the old relation between music, drink and conviviality was restored.

During the same period public dances with traditional music became more frequent again, and after 1965 entered the large pubs. At that time, at the peak

of the new revival, both sessions of dance and sessions for listeners could take place in pubs. But the two did not merge: for both types separate styles of performance had been created during the years before. The sweet players did occasionally play for dances, but both in their opinion and in the opinion of the dancers this was not successful. At present nobody dances to the music of the fiddle; and whenever a fiddle plays together with the accordion, the main dance instrument, its music is fast and vigorous. Two musical styles had become two social styles, each with their own performers and audiences.

The main audience at informal sessions nowadays belongs to the group of older small farmers, who grew up in the time of the house dances and adhered to these dances when government and clergy tried to oust them. The dancers at the dance sessions grew up with the large scale school and hall dances. Indeed the types of dances, the 'sets', are similar to those danced in the halls, and quite different from the older 'plain set' and 'reelset' which used to be danced in the houses,

It is quite possible that the sweet style will not last very long in Peakle. In a sense it is a fiddler's reaction against the powerful melodeons and accordions, the main instruments for loud, fast time dance music. The sweet musicians created an alternative for this loud and fast music. Similarly the informal sessions ~~act as~~ alternative ~~for~~ the packed, noisy dance nights. But among the younger people the fiddle becomes less popular. Informal sessions become increasingly rare, and audiences grow smaller and older. It seems that the present decline of the revival affects the informal sessions more strongly than the dance nights, since the revival gave the music a central place at musical occasions, as at the informal sessions; at dances the music has to share this place with the dance.

The sweet style carries meanings which are related to its origin. All or most elements which characterize the style have been present in former performances; in the development of the new style they were emphasized. For players and audience they gave the music its distinct flavour of skillfulness and personal style; as we have seen the style was developed when some musicians preferred to be listened to instead of functioning in a group as producers of dance-music. When through processes of selection by players and audiences the style became more pronounced and got its place in a distinct social genre, meanings from the use within this genre became associated with the musical style: slow soft music with skillful handling of dynamics and variations became the symbol of quiet gatherings of quiet people, and of resignation of those who saw the decline of the old, small scale social structure, in which the older small farmers once had taken part.

However, the sound scape of the music cannot be explained completely by referring only to the reaction ~~against~~ the ceilidh band practices and the fast

time dance-music. While this reaction may account for the moderate speed, the soft clear tone and the skillful variations, the audience often recognizes an element of 'plaintiveness' in the music of the sweet type. In various discussions amongst musicians, in which I participated, it was discovered that this plaintiveness was at least partly due to a subtle use of dynamics, and of specific melodic elements (like the use of a whole tone instead of a semitone under that tone which functions as tonal centre). I wonder if these elements have a particular emotive power of their own. 'Plaintiveness' is a recurring theme in discussions of Irish music, and its appreciation seems to be related to the feeling of increasing loneliness of those who stayed in Ireland when emigration was at its highest, and with their subsequent isolation following the collapse of the social structure of the small hamlets within the parishes. What is important is that this feeling is associated with specific elements of the music, like the dynamic subtleties, melodic elements, and also with specific aspects of articulation.

While the study of developments of element in the sweet style, and of the related meanings, could be pursued much further, and many other elements remain to be studied as well, I will stop the discussion of music in Feakle at this point. I hope to have given sufficient evidence both of the social complexity of music and of the possibility of a sociological approach of this complexity.

1). Many tunes are performed with different melodies according to their use at different occasions. Variants with semitones immediately below the tonal centre occur frequently at dance sessions, while variants with a whole tone step are typical for informal sessions. I have observed actual processes of changes of tunes involving this difference. It is partly related to instrumental technique: for many fiddlers f' is more easy to play than f' sharp, while most accordionists use instruments on which the f' sharp is more easy to play. But what matters is that the difference is appreciated in terms of plainfulness. I can not explain this appreciation, yet I have noticed that I do experience the difference in the same way, with the same connotation. This may be the result of a process of enculturation during the fieldwork. but I doubt if it really is. The case is related to that of the emotive contrast between music in major and minor keys. The latter is often experienced as 'sad' at least by those who have grown up with western music. We may wonder <sup>whether</sup> this emotive quality is inherent within the structure of the music or not.

I observed that apart from this matter of plaintiveness, differences between tunes are usually discussed in technical terms. Tunes are more or less difficult; they use specific keys, they have two parts or more, etc.

Some concluding remarks on musical values, choices and changes

As the Feakle study makes clear, and as we all know from everyday experience, sets of rules governing musical behaviour may be experienced as systems, i.e. as something more than a sheer coincidence of rules. It is this experience which enables us to think and talk about specific kinds of music. The music of such a category is structured according to coherent sets of norms.

In this paper musical life and musical development have been related to prevalent social attitudes of those social groups that use the music concerned. A main emphasis has been on musical choices by players and audiences. These choices result from social attitudes. Musical meaning has been presented as a correlating element between musical choices and social attitudes. Actual musical events have their meanings only within the context of musical systems.

Irish musical history suggests that there are some constant elements of meaning throughout the various social genres in which Irish traditional dance-music has its place. Yet in general a musical event, and a musical system, may have various meanings for various social groups. Since channels of communication are at work transmitting musical sound patterns and musical behaviour from one time and place to the other, we may partly attribute the stasis or change of sound patterns and meanings to 'technical aspects' of the communication circuit.

Yet there are other reasons why sound patterns and meanings may change. Musical meanings, and the music which carries these meanings, are sought and accepted or avoided and rejected by people according to their social attitudes. We may assume that changes in sound patterns or in meanings are related to changes in social attitudes. The rules governing musical systems may change. As a result, musical systems are in a constant state of flux, and this, together with the simultaneous availability of several musical systems at one time and place, may account for the kaleidoscopic qualities of present day musical life, in Ireland as well as elsewhere.

It is still very difficult to account for the form of music, the actual sound patterns, or for the direction of change in these patterns. In the case of Irish traditional dance-music, the analysis presented in this paper has taken the 'initial form' of the music for granted; indeed the origin of the music could not be traced, and even may have to be looked for outside Ireland. As to changes of musical patterns, the analysis has not been extended to channels of communication between Feakle and other areas, but has been restricted to a case study of the particular Feakle development of the 'sweet' style and of the social genres in which this style is used. Even within the framework of this case study no complete explanation of the audible forms of 'sweet' and 'fast time' music could be given.

In my opinion we have to do with a restriction caused by assumptions which underlay several anthropological methods. Anthropological method, be it 'functionalist', 'marxist' or 'methodological individualist' is based on the assumption that there is a level on which behaviour makes sense, i.e. on which this behaviour can be understood. The investigator may try to discover this sense by communicating with his informants, or in a process of 'verstehen'. It is assumed that the investigator is able to interpret and understand human acts since like the actor he himself is a human being. This assumption, simple as it is, is hardly if ever discussed. The musical problem mentioned asks for a reconsideration of this assumption, if we want to study musical behaviour as a specific category of social behaviour. In order to make this more clear I will dwell on that particular anthropological method that concentrates on the human possibility to choose between alternative types of behaviour, and on the constraints acting upon these choices. This method has been used in the present paper as well.

One of the starting points of the anthropologists who are sometimes clumsily called methodological individualists is the idea that often, if not in general, several courses of action are open to participants in a society. Firth remarks that

'...the genetics of value systems both for individuals and societies provide diverse sets of values' (Firth 1964, p.221)

and

'Structural units are created and maintained through organization in which the exercise of individual choice is of basic importance'. (ib. p.46).

Yet he is not very clear about the origins of value systems, nor has he concentrated on the question how exactly choice results in change.

Barth, in his models based on 'transactions', presents the broker, the innovator of value transactions hitherto unknown as the one responsible for changes in systems of social behaviour (Barth 1966). Paine (1974) has already pointed out some weak points in this approach. Barth only deals with quantitative values which may figure in an assumed personal administration of gains and losses. The change of social forms which Barth predicts is to an all-embracing standard value to measure the merits of various forms of social behaviour. This does not help us much. Although it may be possible to calculate the (economic) value of a certain musical item at a certain time and place we do not know why certain social groups of people enter in transactions involving specific musical sound patterns. Barth reduces social forms to one assumed fundamental human need, the need to make profit. He interprets actual social processes in terms of moneymaking or other types of such profits, but he does not predict the actual form of these processes. And although even musical developments may be seen as resulting from wants to maximize profits, it seems hard

to predict or even interpret its actual musical forms. And certainly, musical brokers do exist. But what moves them musically? Of what nature is the profit they try to make, and why do they make such profits within the context of specific musical styles?

Boissevain (1974) holds social groups of underdogs responsible for the drafting of alternative value systems. He tries to interpret these alternative rules as more helpful to the underdogs, as enabling them to escape from their underdog position. But there are areas of social behaviour where it is less easy to see what makes one an underdog, or how the change of certain rules helps him to escape from his underdog position. Although musical changes may be related to attempts of musicians to gain esteem, or to attempts of audiences to improve their status, we cannot predict or interpret actual musical changes only with the help of these assumptions.

The main problem: why does music appear in, or change to, this particular (audible) form, can hardly be solved in general terms, as long as we do not know what moves people in music. We do understand man's obvious physical needs. We assume that we understand his desire to wield power in any form, to be accepted, to be esteemed, to be feared or adored. We try to understand how people communicate, and we may come a long way in learning to interpret those systems of behaviour which explicitly fulfil a communication function. Anyone can see that music is socially not much less important than these other types of need and behaviour. Yet although the phenomenon of music appears in so many different shapes, and although all or most types of musical behaviour can be observed by anyone who dedicates his attention to it, we can not yet cope with it as anthropologists. We cannot interpret or understand the musical experience of our informants, and we can not communicate our own musical experiences.

The case of music may show that the assumption that anthropologists may find levels on which social behaviour of others will make sense to them, is altogether too optimistic. Yet we should not reject the assumption, for without it there would be no anthropology. But neither should we accept the idea that some areas of human social behaviour must necessarily fall outside the scope of anthropology. The knowledge that all people are at several stages of their life socialized into musical systems and social genres of music may be the starting point for a search for adequate methods and techniques of research into musical behaviour. This search, I think, will include case studies like the one I have tried to make of Feakle. In order to understand a specific kind of music the first step must be to become socialized into social genres of this music. After many attempts to try to understand social genres 'from within' we may discover what the next step will have to be.

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