

Introduction

Liz Doherty and Fintan Vallely

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Ón gCos go Cluas

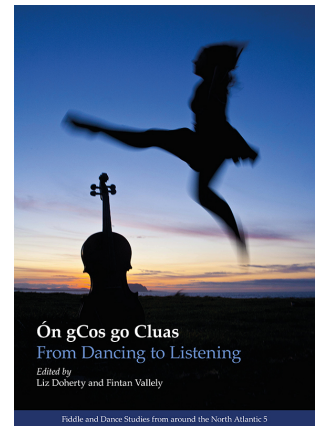
From Dancing to Listening

Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 5

Edited by Liz Doherty and Fintan Vallely

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About the authors:

Liz Doherty comes from Buncrana, Co. Donegal. She was taught fiddle by local music and dance master Dinny McLaughlin, and her 1996 PhD research was on the Cape Breton fiddle tradition. From 1994–2000 she lectured in Irish traditional music at University College Cork, and in 2007 was appointed Irish traditional music lecturer at the University of Ulster, Derry. She has also held visiting and guest lectureships at RSAMD, Scotland, La Coruna, Spain, and the National University of Australia, Canberra. In 2001 she was appointed Edwards Distinguished Visiting Professor of the Arts, Marshall University, West Virginia, USA. As a Traditional Arts consultant she has worked on projects with Irish local authorities and with European organisations. From 2005–2008 she was the Traditional Arts consultant with the Arts Council of Ireland, responsible for setting up funding schemes, was a member of the board of the Irish Traditional Music Archive 1994–1997 and of TG4's *Gradam Ceoil* panel (2005–2009). Elected chair of ICTM (Ireland) in 2009, her publications include *Dinny McLaughlin – From Barefoot Days: A Life of Music, Song and Dance in Inishowen* (2005); *Crosbhealach an Cheoil/The Crossroads Conference* (co-editor, 1999); *Companion to Irish Traditional Music* (major contributor, 1999 and 2011). As a fiddle player she has performed and recorded with Nomos, the Bumblebees and Fiddlesticks. Known for her strong Scottish and Cape Breton influences, she has two solo albums: *Last Orders* (1999) and *Quare Imagination* (2002). She took on the Directorship of NAFCo 2012 in 2010.

Fintan Vallely, the NAFCo 2012 conference convenor, is a musician, writer, lecturer and researcher on traditional music. He began to play traditional music on the flute in the early 1960s and compiled its first Irish-music tutor in 1986 (new edition, *Learn to Play the Irish Flute*, 2012). He later studied ethnomusicology at Queen's University Belfast, subsequently working as a traditional music journalist and reviewer and lecturing in it at university level. His books deal with people and place: *The Blooming Meadows* (essays on musicians with Charlie Piggott and photographer Nutan, 1998), *Together in Time* (on Antrim flute player John Kennedy, 2002), *Tuned Out: Traditional Music and Identity in Northern Ireland* (2008), *Ben Lennon – The Tailors' Twist*, a text and photo study of a Leitrim fiddler (2011). Compiler also of a satirical song collection – *Sing Up! Irish Comic Songs and Satires for Every Occasion* (2008) he was an instigator of *Crosbhealach an Cheoil* – The Crossroads Conference series in Irish music (1996 and 2003). His 2004 PhD research was 'Flute Routes to 21st Century Ireland', and his major publication is *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music* (1999 & 2011).

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Introduction

LIZ DOHERTY AND FINTAN VALLELY

Traditional music has moved from a primary purpose of servicing dance, to expressing artistic preference. This is particularly so for the fiddle, one of the most versatile, accessible and universal of acoustic instruments. The 2012 NAFCo conference set out to explore its current popularity in North Atlantic musics in terms of the shift of folk cultures' interest from social process to aesthetic product. The outer fringes of traditional melody-making now shade into other forms – jazz, contemporary classical, rock and pop – and indeed the antithesis of genre, so-called 'world' music. In 2012 we asked the questions: 'Is Alan Lomax's "cultural grey-out" to become reality?' and, 'Will traditional fiddling decompose into a cloud of intermeshed idioms and clichés expounded with fabulous but empty virtuosity?'

Ón gCos go Cluas addressed the process, product and the potential of this progression with eighty papers from all regions of the North Atlantic. Each had startling difference, not only confirming that each individual genre is set to preserve its boundaries and uniqueness, but showing or reminding us that the historical processes of revival, revitalisation, preservation and protection are no post-World War II phenomena, but have been active for more than a century in Europe.

The 32 papers in this volume relate to a broad sweep of geography, a range of depths of analysis, and, perhaps most interestingly, a spilling over of interest in the ethos of traditional musics into the visual art world. The rigid, methodical, precise written scholarship that grounds these papers is mediated to the aesthetic and artistic worlds by the tremendous imagination and esoteric fantasy of those engaging with painting and digital imaging, with healing, political survival and professional performance.

Most important, the timeliness of the conference topic is justified by the words in these pages. For it has been plain to see for a half-century that one-time popular dance (now 'traditional') is no longer the chosen social meeting ground for today's young people; the music instead has gone back into itself as an independent aesthetic form and re-emerges with astonishing virtuosity with all the hallmarks of a 'classical' form. This, in tandem with a softening of 'anti-folk' societal attitudes is producing wonderful new challenging music interfaces which are boosted by the possibility of 'mining' the notated resources from past centuries. It is the latter endeavour which underlines the fact that it is clear that there has always been intense application to the aesthetics of traditional musics at all times in all countries, and that those who are involved in them as 'classy' players and aficionados alike have – so to speak – been here before.

Ón gCos go Cluas – From Dancing to Listening

This volume ties up loose ends and throws light on many areas of speculation. The papers are refreshing in their enthusiasm, reportage and thinking, the product of writers who are in most cases musicians first. They are a stimulating platform from which to move on, in understanding the paradox of the survival and thriving of indigenous music forms in the twenty-first century. We hope that musicians and musicologists alike will appreciate their diversity in this light.